

## ETHICALLY RELEVANT VALUES AND BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES IN SERBIA DURING THE COVID-19

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### Abstract

The subject of research in this paper is the analysis of ethically relevant values and behavior in Serbia after the end of the state of emergency in March 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research is aimed at examining the attitudes of employees in Serbia to determine whether the attitudes of respondents can be grouped into three mutually independent ethical dimensions: a) attitude towards themselves and others, b) economy and existence and c) science and knowledge. We were also interested in whether these ethical values were perceived differently by male and female respondents. These three elements were analyzed since Serbia is a country that has gone, and to some extent is still going, through socio-economic changes, which are especially reflected in non-standard social circumstances when ethical values, principles and beliefs are expressed. In a sample of 640 respondents, surveyed via social networks, the results show that the pronounced correlation groups the attitudes of employees into three mutually independent ethical dimensions, and that gender does not affect ethically relevant values and behaviors in the domain of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Key words:** COVID-19, ethics, values, behavior, Serbia.

## ЕТИЧКИ РЕЛЕВАНТНЕ ВРЕДНОСТИ И ПОНАШАЊЕ ЗАПОСЛЕНИХ У СРБИЈИ ТОКОМ COVID-19 ПАНДЕМИЈЕ

### Апстракт

Предмет истраживања у овом раду јесте анализа етички релевантних вредности и понашања у Србији након завршетка ванредног стања изазваног пандемијом COVID-19 у марту 2020. године. Истраживање је усмерено на испитивање ставова запослених у Србији како би се утврдило да ли се ставови испитаника могу груписати у три међусобно независне етичке димензије: а) однос према себи и другима, б) економија и егзистенција и в) наука и знање. Исто тако, занимало нас је да ли су

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ове етичке вредности перципиране другачије од стране мушкараца и жена. Ова три елемента су анализирана из разлога што је Србија као земља прошла, и у одређеној мери још увек пролази, кроз друштвено-економске промене које се посебно огледају у нестандартним друштвеним околностима где до изражаја долазе етичке вредности, принципи и уверења. На узорку од 640 испитаника, а на основу истраживања спроведеног путем друштвених мрежа, резултати показују да изражена корелација групише ставове запослених у три међусобно независне етичке димензије, као и да пол не утиче на етички релевантне вредности и понашања у домену кризе изазване пандемијом *COVID-19*.

**Кључне речи:** *COVID 19*, етика, вредности, понашање, Србија.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The crisis frequency is rapidly increasing in a progressively volatile world (Robert and Lajtha, 2002). The global financial crisis in 2008 was a painful lesson about a multifarious character that crises can have (Claessens and Ayhan Kose, 2013). Another such reminder came in the form of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 that has caused global changes in different aspects of contemporary existence. It imposed lockdowns in many countries in the world, which put economy out of action immediately, caused socioeconomic instability and imposed social distance as a condition for the survival of an individual as a social being. All these factors will constitute, as noticed by He and Harris (2020), a cultural legacy which will long be remembered by our contemporaries and the future generations.

Generally speaking, every crisis imposes certain social concerns which include security, transparency, value distortion, justice/equity and authority (Robert and Lajtha, 2002). In the case of COVID-19, it involves all these concerns because it is not just a health crisis, but can create devastating social, economic and political crises that will leave deep scars (<https://www.undp.org>). With that in mind, we wanted to explore human behavior during the crisis because in cases of infectious diseases people demand predictability in terms of creating epidemic models, forgetting the key social parameter: human behavior (Ferguson, 2007).

It is common and rational for people to intuitively search for solutions that are most favorable and most useful for them when making decisions (Sućeska, 2019). Viewed in this way, the main question is whether the crisis affects the re-examination and change of attitudes and values of each individual and society, in terms of valuing life and health, solidarity and science as an unavoidable framework of ethical thinking and behavior of each individual? In considering this issue, it must also be considered that challenges concerning ethical and normative values vary greatly between and within countries where the political context of a country has an intensive effect (Narasimhan et al., 2004).

In that context, the focus of this research is on Serbia because the population of this country inherits cultural patterns that follow the tradition of social responsibility and solidarity, in the extended family and the local community (Videnović, 2014). Also, Serbia is a former communist country strongly influenced by collectivism, but also a country which experienced economic, humanitarian, institutional and cultural crises caused by the disintegration of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. All these processes have brought the society to the state that Golubović et al. (1995) call the “psychology of survival”. Accordingly, it is important to analyze whether in the new circumstances ethical norms rely on the usual context or whether elements of cultural tradition are rejected under the influence of changes in the practical behavior of individuals in crisis.

Namely, the pandemic showed that a man's position can no longer be viewed as a gap between economic demands for profit and humane demands for preserving his integrity, but the respect for a man as a purpose, not a means must be highlighted (Hanić, 2017a). In other words, ethics can be observed as an inherent dimension of human action (Mele et al., 2011). In that aspect, Kohlberg (1981) suggested that ethical behavior is determined by the sophistication of a person's moral reasoning which means that ethics is important so we can “improve how we live” (LaFollette, 2007).

In reasoning with the role of the individual, the way in which he, as a human being, faces the crises that, to the greatest extent, arise precisely through his actions, must be emphasized. In that context, crises change the established patterns of behavior and people's attitudes about solving certain problems are formed from a completely different point of view than in normal circumstances. Crisis behavior can be observed at the individual level, collectively, but also as a link between these levels (Provitolo et al., 2011). Based on this, individuals experience both productive and unproductive responses to crises. The time spent in homes because of COVID-19 gave most people the opportunity to think well about their lives. Due to the changed circumstances in which they found themselves, they became aware of the crisis impact, as well as the need to protect themselves, their health and everything around them. Although we can autonomously make decisions about what is most appropriate, our choices are dependent on our social environment (Rego and Palacios, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that the absence of ethical norms causes not only great harm to individuals and companies, which has been the case so far, but to society.

Taking into account the fact that pandemics change the pattern of individual behavior and cause disruption of societies (Taylor, 2019; El Zowalaty et al., 2020), leave economic consequences that cannot be quickly remedied resulting in an “atypical” recession (Gans, 2020) and making science “popular” again in terms of focusing on the relationship

between science and society (Metcalfe, 2020), the research in this paper is divided into examining attitudes towards: a) one's own life and other people, b) economy and existence and c) science, knowledge and society in the case of Serbia. These three groups were taken for analysis because, as noticed by Sjoberg (2000), "risk perception is all about thoughts, beliefs and constructs." In other words, a crisis can trigger strong risk-awareness and have great influence on behavior (Plapp and Werner, 2006). Thus, circumstances can favor the development of virtues and make people avoid unethical behavior, while the same opportunities can negatively affect individuals and groups in terms of moral stumbling because ethical principles are tested in times of great crises.

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Pandemics are global epidemics that are often associated with a high morbidity and mortality burden (Del Valle et al., 2012) that shape economic, political, and social aspects of human civilization (Huremović, 2019). As currently experienced with the pandemic of COVID-19, infections spread around the world in just a few months with the growing number of death cases. Although population's average age, country's testing capacity and government responses can influence the death rate, vaccinations, if available, and significant changes in the behavior of the community are the most important methods for reducing morbidity and mortality (Del Valle, 2012; Taylor, 2019). Beside these factors, another that is very important is the emotional disturbance that is associated with any pandemics (Taylor, 2019), because "pandemics are marked by uncertainty, confusion and sense of urgency" (WHO, 2005). Accordingly, in this section human behavior is discussed regarding one's own life and relationship to other people, the economy and existence and nature and health.

### 2.1. Attitude towards one's own life and other people

According to Taylor (2019), pandemics are associated with several psychosocial stressors. For instance, Wang et al., (2020) conducted a research based on 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China with the aim of analyzing the psychological impact of the pandemics. The result shows that, in total, 53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe. In that aspect, pandemics have a huge impact on human behavior especially because they involve intolerance of uncertainty, perceived vulnerability to disease, and anxiety (worry) proneness (Taylor, 2019).

Guided by this, in this research we started from the basic assumption that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the review and change of attitudes and values of each individual in Serbia and society as a whole, i.e.

the values of human life and health, solidarity and human environment as the basis for ethical thoughts and behaviors. This starting point is defined by the fact that values are the basis for the development of attitudes that lead to specific decision-making behavior (Bonczek et al., 1980). However, it is evident that we notice values when we experience what is known as *value clash* (Dolan et al., 2006).

When the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared in March 2020, the world's reaction was mostly in the form of panicky purchases of food and hygiene items, which according to Sim et al., (2020) can be:

- a) “manifestation of underlying conflict between desire to maintain regular routines versus uncertainty of duration of the pandemic limiting access to daily necessities,
- b) a way of coping with a stressful unmet situation and a reaction in response to one's loss of control about the future and social pressures to conform to similar behaviors.”

Yet, in addition to caring for one's own life, the issue of community also became evident. Namely, Van Bavel et al., (2020) notes that coordinated efforts across communities can send strong signals of cooperation and shared values. For instance, during the debt crisis in Europe in 2011, in countries like Portugal and Greece, there was an increase of informal social networks and self-organized cultural centers which became active in exchange and distribution of goods and services, healthcare, education, etc. (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, 2014; Baumgarten, 2017).

In the case of Serbia during the pandemic of COVID-19, people posted notices in public places and through social networks, offering help in buying the necessities in shops and walking pets for elderly neighbors who were affected by the ban on movement (<https://www.rs.undp.org>), as well as accepting the global campaign of the “Applause at 8pm” for medical staff. This view is confirmed in a study conducted by The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) entitled *The Western Balkans in Times of the Global Pandemic*, as well as in a research made by Centre for International Public Policy (2020) about the opinions of the citizens of Serbia on the COVID-19 epidemic. On a sample of 5,989 respondents, results indicate a high level of solidarity where 60% of the respondents are of the opinion that solidarity is somewhat higher than usual and 85% of the respondents believe that global issues, such as the pandemic, are most efficiently resolved through international cooperation.

Another similar study conducted in Serbia during the pandemic is *Psychological profile of the pandemic* (<https://www.fondacijahemofarm.org.rs>) which showed that the citizens of Serbia very quickly achieved a high level of self-protective behavior in terms of wearing gloves, masks and hand disinfectants. This attitude is confirmed in the previously mentioned research by Centre for International Public Policy (2020) stating that 70% of Serbian citizens will call the doctor if they feel virus symptoms. Based on that, we

can conclude that people show a high degree of responsibility towards their own lives, but also the lives of others in the context of responsibility. These results support the fact that in a crisis, people think about the long-term consequences of attitudes that motivate their actions, because coordinated action and collective responsibility are extremely important for successfully overcoming non-standard social circumstances.

## *2.2. Attitudes towards economy and existence*

A modern economy is a “complex web of interconnected parties where everyone is someone else’s employee, customer, lender,” etc. (Gourinchas, 2020), which means that change on one side of the economic balance has immediate affect on the other. According to the report “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19,” published by the UN (2020), COVID-19 has plunged the world economy into a recession with projections of job losses between 5 and 25 million which represent the deepest recession since the Second World War (<https://www.worldbank.org>). According to Gans (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic is a real crisis with elements of a natural disaster (it is purely focused on people) and a national holiday (lack of an economic activity due to social distancing). In other words, this crisis affects our ability to produce because an immense number of workers will get sick. Barro et al., (2020) analyzed mortality and economic contraction during the 1918-1920 Great Influenza Epidemic and concluded that in thde sample of 43 countries this pandemic caused the death of 2% of the world's population, implying 150 million deaths when applied to current population.

In the combination of the global economic downturn and the expressed concern for one's own health, the feeling of fear in an individual is especially expressed, which influences his behavior, but also his economic decisions. This is discussed in more detail in a meta-analysis by Witte and Allen (2000) who concluded that strong fear appeals produce high levels of perceived severity and susceptibility, and are more persuasive than low or weak fear appeals.

Regarding Serbia's experience with the economic consequences of the crises the country went through in the past, it can be said that the very turbulent period contributed to and accelerated the emergence of economic emigrants and the so-called “brain drain” (Petrovic-Randelović and Miletić, 2016). In addition, the transition period did not bring about positive changes that could have been hoped for, which was especially evident in the sphere of human capital (Zubović and Domazet, 2010). The restructuring of the Serbian economy has not yielded the expected effects in terms of increasing productivity and efficiency levels. The main feature which marked privatization and the transformation of state-owned and socially-owned enterprises into private ones is the high decline in em-

ployment. This whole process has led to a loss of trust in Serbian institutions. For example, Mičić (2011) points out that in the midst of the global economic crisis in 2008, the citizens of Serbia, scared for their money, withdrew about a billion euros in foreign currency savings in a very short time as a result of the lack of trust in the financial system.

Observed from the psychological aspect, the influence of COVID-19 on the behavior of the population of Serbia, on a sample of 6,000 citizens, a trend was identified that the population is first provided with food for everyday life, for the fear of being left without it. After that, the Government applied and implemented other measures. Generally speaking, it was not easy for people to "switch" to the *pandemic behavior* (Psychological profile of the pandemic in Serbia, 2020).

In order to overcome the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Serbian government has allocated 5.2 billion EUR in aid to the economy (11% of GDP) including the use of the helicopter-money method and 100 EUR to every adult Serbian citizen. However, research done by Centre for International Public Policy (2020) shows that 60% of the respondents believe that COVID-19 means the arrival of a new economic crisis while 48% of the respondents agree that Serbia has enough money to implement the economic stimulus package, but believe that there will be negative consequences.

### 2.3. Attitude towards science and knowledge

It is often the opinion of both individuals and policy makers that the solution to human problems should be sought in the application of science and technology. In that aspect, science became a very powerful "social institution", because many believe that "science, innovation and expertise are the moving forces of economic and social development" (Thorlindsson and Vilhjalmsson, 2003). In the case of COVID-19, it put the spotlight on science (Metcalf et al., 2020) and redefined the relationship between science and the society because issues like the pandemic raise the fundamental questions about what we as human beings value? This particularly concerns the social paradigm and its changes, because when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, a problem that was initially seen as "Chinese" and then "Italian," soon became "everyone's" (Baldwin and di Mauro, 2020).

Scientists' warnings about the outbreak of a pandemic like SARS have existed years before, but they have not been taken seriously. The report "A World at risk" (2019), states that during 2011-2018, the World Health Organization registered as many as 1,483 epidemics in 172 countries (Hanić, 2020). However, the specificity of this pandemic is that it presents an immediate threat where the goal is a unity to preserve life. In this regard, society is turning to science, seeking not only answers to the

cause of the pandemic, but also a solution in the form of vaccines that will bring us back to *life before the pandemic*.

In the case of Serbia, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia has opened a public call for scientific and research projects within the Special Research Program on COVID-19 with the aim “to finance projects that will contribute to the efficient scientific response to COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus and enable better preparedness and the timely reaction of the whole society to this pandemic.” A total of 14 projects were approved in the field of Biomedical science; Biomedical engineering and IT; Economics, sociological, psychological research, and the management of complex systems.

### 3. RESEARCH

#### 3.1. Defining variables

Because this study aims to analyze the ethically relevant values and behavior of employees in Serbia, under the influence of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, three variables were formed:

#### **I. One's own life and other people (5 items)**

The crisis puts to the strongest and most reliable test both the value and ethical principles of everyone in relation to their own concept of life, and the principles that include the relationship with others, and above all the ethical principle of solidarity and social justice. In this context, a necessary condition for overcoming the crisis is moral renewal (Marinković et al., 2013). It implies that each individual re-examines his moral attitudes and the strength to fight for them in the environment, the attitude towards fundamental life values, as well as the attitude towards others and their needs and rights:

1. “People will become more conscientious, responsible and willing to help because it’s good to be good” (Post, 2005; Akinin et al., 2012), which is closely related to the fact that a higher degree of social interaction between people leads to people feeling more desire and willingness to help others (Cialdini et al. 1997);
2. Faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, *I have re-considered my views on life* because the difficulties we face in a pandemic result in the acceptance of the principle that life is a “gift” (Emmons and McCullough, 2003);
3. *Egoists will have to recognize that there are other people* who have their needs and rights because although people are sometimes unwilling to make sacrifices for others (Dana et al., 2007), still in this process including the economic aspect they should focus on the social economy of human solidarity (Rugina, 1984);



4. *After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity and*
5. *People will appreciate the value of "ordinary" life that requires "back to basics" or respect for a man as a purpose (Hanić, 2017a) and not a means of exploitation and commodification (Martin, 2020) imposed by the current consumer culture that Paul Samuelson, quoted in Iley and Lewis (2013) defined as "me, me, now, now, consume, consume." This also includes the issue of human dignity because we participate in it in the virtue of our common humanity (Martin 2018).*

## **II. Economy and science (5 items)**

The modern economy is a complex web of interconnected parties where everyone is someone else's employee, customer, lender, etc. (Gourinchas, 2020), which means that change on one side of the economic balance has immediate affect on the other. COVID-19 caused the deepest recession since the Second World War where 8.8 % of global working hours were lost (ILO, 2021). In the case of Serbia, the problem of work in the domain of the informal economy was especially expressed during the COVID-19 (Bradaš et al., 2020).

1. *We are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy (World Bank, 2020) which has a great impact on human and social wellbeing because it leads to increasing inequalities of income, security, health, nutrition, and educational outcomes (Mohseni-Cheraghloo, 2016);*
2. *It will be difficult for me to find / change job as the biggest fear during crises which, in general, leads to poor health and functioning (Price et al., 2020) and which according to Professor David Blustein in the case of COVID-19 will represent a "global pandemic of unemployment."*
3. *I have reduced unnecessary purchases and costs has the character of a psychological factor due to fear of contagion which leads to disruption in consumption which influences the economy considerably (Jung et al., 2016).*
4. *Many people will lose their jobs which has happened to a greater or lesser extent during and after great economic crises including the Great Depression.*
5. *In the future, financial institutions will be forced to reduce interest rates.*

## **III. Applied science (4 items)**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused permanent changes, but it gave the world an important lesson, so the issues related to the attitude towards the world after the crisis, nature and the environment, health and the individual's attitude towards scientific knowledge are something that should be considered:

1. *The world will never look the same again because life after the pandemic* has constantly been mentioned, with the aim of returning to *our way of life* implying that it will be different from the one we lived before because, generally speaking, emotional reactions to crises are triggered by environmental or social cues and shape behavior (Bangate et al., 2017).
2. *Now I care more about my health than before* which can be viewed primarily from the aspect of gratitude in the context of what we “take for granted” because according to Emmons and McCullough (2003) gratitude stems from the perception of a positive personal outcome,
3. *People will pay more attention to nature and the environment in the future* because as the IPBES study (The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) points out, one species responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic is humans and for that reason it is necessary to change an individual’s approach to the environment and recognize the complex relationships on the relation man-natural and animal world and
4. *I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts* because, as Siegrist and Zingg (2014) point out, trust in health agencies has positively influenced people’s willingness to adopt the recommended behavior.

### 3.2. Research process and sample structure

In order to examine the mentioned attitudes, a questionnaire was designed and was distributed via social networks (Facebook and Instagram) to anonymous users immediately after the lifting of the state of emergency, which in Serbia lasted from March 15 to May 6, 2020. The survey contained statements that express indicators of the researched phenomena and are assessed on a Likert-type scale. Out of the total of 1.579 respondents, 640 are employees, which is the final sample of our research. Regarding the sample structure, 246 were male and 395 were female.

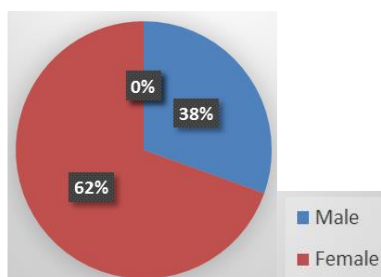


Figure 1. Gender structure

Based on the gender structure, it can be concluded that our sample is not, in a statistical sense, fully representative. However, the difference between males and females can be explained by considering different values in a gendered online environment (Smith, 2008). Also, given the gender structure of social network users, primarily in terms of the fact that women in Serbia use social networks more, especially Instagram (in May 2020 there were 2,283,000 Instagram users in Serbia and 52.7% were women), then the domain of an acceptable degree of representativeness of our sample can be accepted.

### 3.3. Hypothesis

In order to examine appropriately the ethically relevant values and behavior of the employed in Serbia during the COVID-19, the basic research hypothesis has been defined as follows:

Due to accentuated correlation, the respondents' attitudes can be grouped into three independent ethical dimensions.

In addition to this basic hypothesis, one more has been defined:

There are no significant differences in male or female attitudes towards one's own life and other people's lives, economy and existence, and scientific knowledge, i.e. the respondents' statistically significant answers, which show their points of view, are independent of their gender.

### 3.4. Methods

In addition to the methods of descriptive statistical analysis, correlation and factor analysis techniques were used in the data analysis, while the Bartlett test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to test the fulfillment of assumptions for the application of factor analysis, and the t-test was used to test the hypothesis of no differences in attitudes of men and women. Statistical analysis was performed on the IBM SPSS 21 program.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistical parameters of the arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

In order to present the obtained results in a simpler way, we analyzed Table 1 by ranges. More specifically, if the range of 2.9-3.1 is designated to indicate the average neutral attitude of the respondents, it can be concluded that the respondents expressed a neutral attitude towards the following statements: *The world will never look the same again*, *It will be difficult for me to find / change jobs* and *People will appreciate the value of ordinary life more*.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical parameters

| Statements  | Mean (M) | Standard deviation (SD) |
|---|----------|-------------------------|
| 1. The world will never look the same again.  | 3.08     | 1.270                   |
| 2. We are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy  | 3.62     | 1.080                   |
| 3. It will be difficult for me to find / change jobs  | 2.92     | 1.423                   |
| 4. People will become more conscientious, responsible and ready to help.                          | 2.18     | 1.146                   |
| 5. Now I care more about my health than before.   | 3.02     | 1.310                   |
| 6. In the future, people will pay more attention to nature and the environment.                   | 2.15     | 1.147                   |
| 7. I reduced unnecessary purchases and expenses.  | 3.31     | 1.309                   |
| 8. Many people will lose their jobs.  | 3.87     | 1.034                   |
| 9. Financial institutions will be forced to reduce interest rates in the future.                  | 2.72     | 1.201                   |
| 10. Faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, I have reconsidered my views on life. | 3.18     | 1.370                   |
| 11. Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights.     | 2.67     | 1.441                   |
| 12. After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity                                    | 3.29     | 1.330                   |
| 13. People will appreciate the value of ordinary life more.                                       | 3.09     | 1.331                   |
| 14. I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts.                          | 3.24     | 1.289                   |

Source: Authors

The respondents agreed with six statements, since the average value of agreement was expressed in the range of 3.1 - 3.6, which comprise the following: *I reduced unnecessary purchases and expenses; Faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, I have reconsidered my views on life; I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts; After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity; After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity.*

A higher level of agreement was attached to the following two statements: *Many people will lose their jobs* and *We are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy*, with the average value over 3.6 marked on the Likert scale.

As for the statements to which the respondents expressed disagreement, their value amounted to less than 2.2. These comprise the following: *People will become more conscientious, responsible and ready to help* and *In the future, people will pay more attention to nature and the environment*. The respondents expressed a moderate, that is, partial disagreement in the range of 2.2 – 2.9 which refer to the following statements: *Financial institutions will be forced to reduce interest rates in the future* and *Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights*.

The second column of Table 1 shows data on the standard deviation that reflects the degree of concentration of the respondents' answers around a typical and/or average answer and, in a way, represent an indicator of non-volatility of individual attitudes, expressing the degree of variation of the respondents' answers on a 5-Point Likert Scale. By analyzing the data in the Column 2, we have noticed the dispersion of the respondents' answers in relation to the average or typical answer that is approximately equal for all 14 examined statements.

A high degree of consent of the respondents to reconsider their attitudes about life after the crisis can also be noticed. The fear of losing a job, and thus of existential security, as well as professional identity, is not surprising because all major crises so far have caused such consequences, with greater or lesser intensity, so that these results can be understood as a collective memory or a well-learned lesson.

In order to test the hypothesis of statistical identity between the attitudes of male and female respondents, we applied the t-test. The calculated mean values and stated standard errors, together with the corresponding empirical (statistically realized) levels of significance (p - value) are shown in Table 2.

Based on the data shown in the last column of Table 2 (p - value), we can conclude that no significant differences appeared between the attitudes of the employed men and women in Serbia pertaining to the impact of COVID-19 on the ethically relevant values and behavior, except with the statement that the *Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights* ( $p < 0.002$ ). This confirmed the statistical hypothesis that the answers of respondents reflecting their attitudes as to the impact of COVID-19 on the ethically relevant values and behavior, do not, to a statistically significant extent, depend on whether the respondent is male or female.

The factor structure of the questionnaire was determined by the analysis of the main components for 14 items. First, two tests of justification for the applications of factor analysis were evaluated: the Bartlett test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicator of sample adequacy. In the first iteration of the carried out factor analysis, the value of the KMO amounted to 0.826 which exceeds the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ( $< 0.05$ ), which confirmed the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Having analyzed the Communalities table, we determined that the items titled *Financial institutions will be forced to reduce interest rates in the future* (0.313) and *I reduced unnecessary purchases and expenses* (0.279) accounted for a value less than the recommended 0.4, which is considered to be useless and should be removed from the model (Verma, 2012). Based on that, we repeated the procedure of factor analysis to

check the adequacy of its use again. The value of the KMO indicator amounted to 0.808, whereas the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ( $<0.05$ ). The analysis of major components revealed the presence of three components with characteristic values over 1, which explain the 29.432%, 16.556% and 8.740% variances. Accordingly, we confirmed the factorability of the correlation matrix as presented below.

*Table 2. Independent Samples Test; Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (t-test for Equality of Means)*

|   |        | N   | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | p value |
|---|--------|-----|------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| 1. The world will never look the same again.  | male   | 246 | 3.10 | 1.324          | 0.084           | 0.911   |
|   | female | 395 | 3.09 | 1.229          | 0.062           |         |
| 2. We are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy  | male   | 246 | 3.57 | 1.150          | 0.073           | 0.384   |
|   | female | 394 | 3.65 | 1.036          | 0.052           |         |
| 3. It will be difficult for me to find / change jobs.   | male   | 246 | 2.81 | 1.442          | 0.092           | 0.132   |
|   | female | 394 | 2.99 | 1.410          | 0.071           |         |
| 4. People will become more conscientious, responsible and ready to help.                          | male   | 246 | 2.16 | 1.215          | 0.077           | 0.786   |
|   | female | 394 | 2.19 | 1.096          | 0.055           |         |
| 5. Now I care more about my health than before.   | male   | 246 | 2.93 | 1.373          | 0.088           | 0.18    |
|   | female | 395 | 3.07 | 1.267          | 0.064           |         |
| 6. In the future, people will pay more attention to nature and the environment.                   | male   | 245 | 2.18 | 1.173          | 0.075           | 0.825   |
|   | female | 394 | 2.15 | 1.136          | 0.057           |         |
| 7. I reduced unnecessary purchases and expenses.  | male   | 246 | 3.33 | 1.294          | 0.083           | 0.792   |
|   | female | 395 | 3.30 | 1.313          | 0.066           |         |
| 8. Many people will lose their jobs.  | male   | 246 | 3.84 | 1.086          | 0.069           | 0.514   |
|   | female | 395 | 3.90 | .998           | 0.050           |         |
| 9. Financial institutions will be forced to reduce interest rates in the future.                  | male   | 246 | 2.70 | 1.287          | 0.082           | 0.608   |
|   | female | 395 | 2.75 | 1.151          | 0.058           |         |
| 10. Faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, I have reconsidered my views on life. | male   | 246 | 3.06 | 1.417          | 0.090           | 0.084   |
|   | female | 394 | 3.25 | 1.339          | 0.067           |         |
| 11. Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights.     | male   | 246 | 2.45 | 1.415          | 0.090           | 0.002   |
|   | female | 395 | 2.81 | 1.444          | 0.073           |         |
| 12. After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity                                    | male   | 246 | 3.19 | 1.322          | 0.084           | 0.14    |
|   | female | 394 | 3.35 | 1.327          | 0.067           |         |
| 13. People will appreciate the value of ordinary life more.                                       | male   | 245 | 3.02 | 1.361          | 0.087           | 0.3     |
|   | female | 395 | 3.14 | 1.310          | 0.066           |         |
| 14. I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts.                          | male   | 246 | 3.14 | 1.328          | 0.085           | 0.142   |
|   | female | 395 | 3.30 | 1.263          | 0.064           |         |

*Source: Authors*

Table 3. Correlation matrix

| X1 | X2    | X3    | X4    | X5    | X6    | X7     | X8    | X9    | X10   | X11   | X12   |
|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1  | 0.432 | 0.257 | 0.196 | 0.261 | 0.189 | 0.203  | 0.296 | 0.205 | 0.235 | 0.267 | 0.082 |
|    | 1     | 0.393 | 0.038 | 0.168 | 0.021 | 0.486  | 0.202 | 0.111 | 0.129 | 0.085 | 0.032 |
|    |       | 1     | 0.009 | 0.148 | 0.073 | 0.378  | 0.151 | 0.044 | 0.033 | 0.025 | 0.039 |
|    |       |       | 1     | 0.287 | 0.545 | -0.116 | 0.232 | 0.349 | 0.313 | 0.466 | 0.195 |
|    |       |       |       | 1     | 0.324 | 0.023  | 0.412 | 0.285 | 0.343 | 0.297 | 0.272 |
|    |       |       |       |       | 1     | -0.07  | 0.246 | 0.362 | 0.305 | 0.462 | 0.218 |
|    |       |       |       |       |       | 1      | 0.135 | 0.008 | 0.068 | 0.06  | 0.016 |
|    |       |       |       |       |       |        | 1     | 0.335 | 0.419 | 0.331 | 0.07  |
|    |       |       |       |       |       |        |       | 1     | 0.353 | 0.465 | 0.127 |
|    |       |       |       |       |       |        |       |       | 1     | 0.43  | 0.06  |
|    |       |       |       |       |       |        |       |       |       | 1     | 0.186 |
|    |       |       |       |       |       |        |       |       |       |       | 1     |

Source: Authors

The analysis of the main components in which 12 items were reduced to three latent factors indicates the results shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Eigenvalues of factors obtained by analysis of the main components of 12 items of the questionnaire on the sample.

| Component | Total Variance Explained |               |              |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
|           | Initial Eigenvalues      |               |              | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              |
|           | Total                    | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                             | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1         | 3.532                    | 29.432        | 29.432       | 3.532                               | 29.432        | 29.432       | 3.045                             | 25.378        | 25.378       |
| 2         | 1.987                    | 16.556        | 45.988       | 1.987                               | 16.556        | 45.988       | 2.148                             | 17.897        | 43.274       |
| 3         | 1.049                    | 8.740         | 54.728       | 1.049                               | 8.740         | 54.728       | 1.374                             | 11.454        | 54.728       |
| 4         | 0.899                    | 7.496         | 62.224       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 5         | 0.765                    | 6.377         | 68.600       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 6         | 0.729                    | 6.074         | 74.675       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 7         | 0.639                    | 5.325         | 80.000       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 8         | 0.540                    | 4.500         | 84.500       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 9         | 0.535                    | 4.459         | 88.959       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 10        | 0.488                    | 4.063         | 93.022       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 11        | 0.447                    | 3.728         | 96.750       |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |
| 12        | 0.390                    | 3.250         | 100.000      |                                     |               |              |                                   |               |              |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Authors

Table 5. KMO

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy | 0.808              |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                   | Approx. Chi-Square |
|   | df                 |
|   | Sig.               |
|   | 1785.814           |
|   | 66                 |
|   | 0.000              |

Source: Authors

According to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, only those factors that best explain variability are considered. It can be seen from Table 4 that this criterion in this case satisfies the first three components that cumulatively explain 54.728% of the variance. In Table 6, the correlations of variables and values obtained by factor analysis were presented.

*Table 6. Correlations of 14 items and factors extracted from them*

| Items  | Ordinal number of factors |              |              |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | 1                         | 2            | 3            |
| 1. The world will never look the same again.   | 0.376                     | <b>0.54</b>  | 0.067        |
| 2. We are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy                                       | 0.112                     | <b>0.803</b> | -0.013       |
| 3. It will be difficult for me to find / change jobs   | -0.022                    | <b>0.705</b> | 0.144        |
| 4. People will become more conscientious, responsible and ready to help.                         | <b>0.598</b>              | -0.12        | 0.421        |
| 5. Now I care more about my health than before.  | <b>0.495</b>              | 0.205        | 0.364        |
| 6. In the future, people will pay more attention to nature and the environment.                  | <b>0.581</b>              | -0.073       | 0.473        |
| 7. Many people will lose their jobs.   | -0.044                    | <b>0.753</b> | -0.09        |
| 8. Faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, I have reconsidered my views on life. | <b>0.652</b>              | 0.268        | -0.103       |
| 9. Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights.     | <b>0.677</b>              | 0.02         | 0.087        |
| 10. After this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity                                   | <b>0.74</b>               | 0.081        | -0.124       |
| 11. People will appreciate the value of ordinary life more.                                      | <b>0.72</b>               | 0.018        | 0.213        |
| 12. I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts.                         | 0.005                     | 0.073        | <b>0.854</b> |

*Source: Authors*

The factor structure was obtained depending on the nature of the respondents' responses and reflects their perception regarding the perspectives of changes in values and behavior after the crisis:

#### **One's own life and other people:**

- people will become more conscientious, responsible and ready to help,
- now I care more about my health than before,
- in the future, people will pay more attention to nature and the environment,
- faced with a crisis that has paralyzed the whole world, I have reconsidered my views on life,
- egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights,
- after this crisis, I feel stronger to fight for my dignity,
- people will appreciate the value of ordinary life more.



**Economic perspective:**

- the world will never look the same again,
- we are facing an unprecedented recession in the economy,
- It will be difficult for me to find / change jobs,
- many people will lose their jobs.

**Faith in science:**

- I believe in scientific knowledge and I respect the word of experts.

Factor analysis shows that the greatest load lies on the first factor, which has the highest value in the explanation of manifest variables, while each subsequent one explains a smaller share in the total variance. The intrinsic value of the first factor is 29.432%, the second 16.556 and finally of the third one 8.740%.

The first factor is much broader in the number of items than the variable defined as the relationship to one's own life and other people. Essentially, this factor with all its internal characteristics speaks of the need for changes to occur primarily on a personal level, because although it has grouped certain statements from the other two variables, each of them depends solely on changes in values and ethical attitudes of individuals. It is about the areas that we have classified as caring for the preservation of nature and health or the attitude towards the economy and existence.

The second factor speaks of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemics. Judging by the attitudes of the respondents, the items comprising the second factor will affect every individual, both directly and indirectly.

Although based on one attitude of the respondents, the third factor is of vital significance having in mind that we eagerly wait for a scientific solution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**CONCLUSION**

Although ethical values have faltered over the years before the onslaught of material values, the COVID - 19 pandemic has led to the reexamination of the priorities not only of individuals, but of society, because major health crises teach us that our destinies are connected. What has proven to be a *conditio sine qua non* during all major crises is that there is no change or successful response to a crisis without moral responsibility.

The subject of research in this paper comprises the analysis of ethically relevant values and behaviour in Serbia following the end of the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemics, in March 2020. The starting point of this paper was that, following the expressed correlation, the attitudes of the respondents can be grouped into three mutually

independent ethical dimensions. Having analysed the answers provided by the respondents, we concluded that there were no significant differences in the attitudes of the employed men and women in Serbia concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the ethically relevant values and behaviour, except with the statement that the *Egoists will have to respect that there are other people who have their needs and rights*, which, moreover, confirms the hypothesis that the answers of the respondents reflecting their attitudes on the impact of COVID 19 on ethically relevant values and behaviour, do not, to a statistically significant extent, depend on whether the respondent is male or female. Such a conclusion also leads us away from the traditional or stereotypical beliefs about different ways of male and female social performance.

Likewise, the results show that the respondents agree the crisis is a destructive element that will affect economic prosperity; however, although they believe that the crisis will have impact on the daily lives of us all, the respondents still think that this will neither awake empathy in human relations, nor the sense of responsibility for the environment. This indirectly leads to the conclusion that the attitudes and behaviour are emerging in Serbia that deviate from the inherent ethical cultural patterns steaming from the care for other people and solidarity. Therefore, we can conclude that it is only possible that people got tired of the "psychology of survival" that prevailed in Serbia during the 1990s.

The factor analysis of the main components reduced significant factors, thus completing the descriptive analysis applied to construe the elements of the research as a result of examining particular aspects. This leads to the conclusion that, following the expressed correlation, respondents' attitudes can be grouped into three mutually independent ethical dimensions. By a more detailed data analysis via the analysis of factors, we found that three components explain the 54.728% of variance, which confirmed the factorability of the sample. Based on the common characteristics, we singled out three factors that we called *One's Own Life and Other People*, *Economic Perspective* and *Faith in Science*. However, since this is the first comprehensive research of the kind in Serbia, it has a special role since it examines the causality of individuals' attitudes towards particular matters that appear important for the understanding of the overall issue of behaviour in a crisis.

This research has certain limitations, primarily due to the size and characteristics of the sample. However, it should be noted that these results are an expression of the attitudes of the respondents immediately after the state of emergency and the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is certain that it would be challenging to test our assumptions in different circumstances and populations.

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## РЕЛЕВАНТНЕ ВРЕДНОСТИ И ПОНАШАЊЕ ЗАПОСЛЕНИХ У СРБИЈИ ТОКОМ COVID-19 ПАНДЕМИЈЕ

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### Резиме

Предмет истраживања у овом раду укључује анализу етички релевантних вредности и понашања у Србији након завршетка ванредног стања изазваног пандемијом КОВИД-19, марта 2020. Полазиште овог рада, базирано на узорку од 640 испитаника, било је да се ставови истих могу груписати у три међусобно независне етичке димензије. Анализирајући одговоре испитаника, закључили смо да није било значајних разлика у ставовима запослених мушкараца и жена у Србији у вези са утицајем КОВИД-19 на етички релевантне вредности и понашање, осим за изјаву да ће егоисти морати поштовати да постоје и други људи који имају своје потребе и права. Исто тако, резултати показују да се испитаници слажу да је криза деструктивни елемент који ће утицати на економски просперитет; међутим, иако верују да ће криза утицати на свакодневни живот свих нас, испитаници и даље мисле да то неће пробудити емпатију у људским односима, нити осећај одговорности за животну средину. То индиректно доводи до закључка да се у Србији појављују ставови и понашање који одступају од урођених етичких културних образаца у домену бриге за друге људе и солидарности. Одатле можемо закључити да је једино могуће да су се људи уморили од "психологије преживљавања" која је владала у Србији током деведесетих година прошлог века.

Факторска анализа главних компонената смањила је значајне факторе, чиме је употпуњена дескриптивна анализа примењена за тумачење елемената истраживања као резултат испитивања одређених аспеката. То доводи до закључка да се, након изражене корелације, ставови испитаника могу груписати у три међусобно независне етичке димензије. Детаљнијом анализом података, анализом фактора, открили смо да три компоненте објашњавају 54,728% варијансе, што је потврдило чињеничност узорка. На основу заједничких карактеристика издвојили смо три фактора која смо назвали *властити живот и други људи*, *економска перспектива* и *вера у науку*. Међутим, с обзиром на то да је ово прво свеобухватно истраживање такве врсте у Србији, оно има посебну улогу јер испитује узрочност ставова појединаца према одређеним питањима која су важна за разумевање целокупног питања понашања у кризи.

Ово истраживање има одређена ограничења, првенствено због величине и карактеристика узорка. Међутим, треба напоменути да су ови резултати израз ставова испитаника непосредно након ванредног стања и избијања пандемије КОВИД-19. Сигурно је да би било изазовно тестирати наше претпоставке у различитим околностима и популацијама.