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**Psychological and pedagogical help as well as
educational and vocational counseling in schools
as necessary elements of universal prophylaxis.
Research examples and recommendations for the
design of educational and preventive activities.
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Abstract: The aim of the article is to present the results of surveys conducted among male and female students of primary and secondary schools in Poznań in the context of their opinions and views on psychological and pedagogical assistance as well as educational and

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vocational guidance. Analyzing the results of the study and referring to the theoretical solutions and found data, the authors of the article also try to indicate the important needs for systemic and organizational changes that may contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of the provided support, educational and preventive activities at schools.

Key words: psychological and pedagogical assistance, career guidance, prevention.

About opportunities and challenges for prevention – that is, what is the place of educational-vocational counseling and psychological-pedagogical guidance in Polish educational policy and in Polish school?

The basic directions for the implementation of the state's educational policy determine how schools operate. Based on the main directions set by the Ministry of Education and Science, both leading entities (local governments) and principals prepare documents and plan activities, which they then implement in their teams of teachers and specialists. On the other hand, at the level of local governments, strategies related to education are being developed, as cities, municipalities or counties are the governing body of schools, depending on the level of education. One of the key elements in the implementation of educational policy is the school's prevention and education program. Among other things, it is important to provide psychological and pedagogical support or develop professional skills in formal education. In the 2021/2022 school year, the ministry also paid special attention to student emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Education and Science, 2021, p.1). The basic directions of educational policy as well as school prevention and education programs are part of the social and cultural diagnosis of the functioning of modern adolescents, who have come to live in a time of countless opportunities and threats.

The mental condition and educational, social and family situation of children and adolescents has recently become an important topic in both the social sciences and public opinion. Emerging reports on the state of child and adolescent psychiatry and the inefficiency of the health care system which is a result of, i.a., the deteriorating mental condition of school students, are prompting policymakers to work on improving the capacity of the health care system, with emerging ideas for changes in the education system to support the health care system and ultimately improve the situation of children and adolescents. As A. Lewandowska, national consultant in child and adolescent psychiatry, points out, it should be borne in mind that there would be far fewer children in psychiatric wards, by up to 80%, if aid had been provided earlier and at appropriate levels. Referring to the thesis presented in this way, it is also worth recalling the concept of public health, which shows that carrying out prevention and health promotion is one of the best ways to improve the level of health of the population and optimize

health care expenditure (Woolf, Husten, et al., 2009). This argument seems to be getting through to policymakers who, at both the education and mental health levels, recognize the problem. Work is underway at the Ministry of Education and Science on increasing number of hours of psychological and pedagogical support in schools. Whereas, at the level of the Ministry of Health, a three-tier reform of mental health care for children and adolescents is underway, introducing the so-called Reference Level I within which Centers for Community Psychological and Psychotherapeutic Care for Children and Adolescents have been established. At the same time, and this should be viewed negatively, legislative work is being carried out on limiting the autonomy of schools in terms of, i.a., cooperation with the NGO sector, which performs the important function of implementing preventive activities in schools.

Also, in the field of career counseling (which is one of the areas of psychological and pedagogical assistance), major reforms have been underway in recent years. One of the most significant changes made in this area is the obligation of educational institutions to carry out the process of preorientation and professional orientation at all educational stages during compulsory classes in general education and within the framework of professional visits aimed at familiarizing both male and female students with the working environment in selected professions (from 1 September 2018), as well as to conduct compulsory classes related to the choice of education and profession by career counselors (or persons with relevant authorizations) starting from the seventh grade of elementary school (from 1 September 2017). This means that the educational and professional counseling organized by schools within the framework of the intra-school system of career counseling, has been further strengthened by career counseling classes specified in the educational framework plan for public schools, which is one of their basic forms of educational activities. The number of hours of these classes assigned to the seventh and eighth grades of elementary school is a minimum of ten hours per school year, while in secondary schools — a minimum of 10 hours over the entire education cycle (Regulation of the Ministry of Education on framework teaching plans...). In addition, the Ministry of Education signed a regulation on career counseling (Regulation of the Ministry of Education on Career Counseling...) (effective 1 September 2019), which specifies the curriculum content of career counseling, the manner of its implementation, and the tasks of a career counselor at all educational levels starting with preschool education and ending with secondary education. According to its provisions, children and adolescents gain knowledge about themselves and their resources, the world of professions and the labor market, the concept of lifelong learning, planning their own careers as well as making educational and professional decisions. In addition, schools within the framework of the intra-school system of career counseling are required to develop a program for each school year, which in its assumptions provides an opportunity for consistent and effective counseling activities by the school (the

document is approved by the management after consultation with the educational counseling) and update its content depending on the needs of both its male and female students, taking into account the possibility of cooperation with the school's socio-economic environment.

These modifications allow career counseling to be viewed in terms of a process that continues throughout compulsory education. In turn, compulsory classes supporting children and adolescents in monitoring their career paths not only emphasize the need for the educational system to provide a special kind of support in this area, but also draw attention to the momentous role of professional activity in the life of individuals, who, in order to consciously and responsibly manage their professional development and cope with the process of transition from education to the labor market should have the knowledge and skills to do so. Other challenges the Polish system of career counseling faces are its adaptation to EU recommendations, the internationalization of diagnostics and basing its assumptions on concepts of career development that analyze it in terms of a lifelong process and in accordance with sociodynamic approaches (Nawój-Połochańska 2021), ensuring consistency between legal recommendations and the actual state of career planning support provided by schools (Kukla 2016), as well as popularizing such methods as coaching (Koziełska 2015), tutoring, mentoring, gamification, or adapting it to the requirements of multicultural and intercultural education.

The need to create positions for specialists in psychological and pedagogical help and career counselors in Polish schools is dictated not only by legal regulations obliging educational institutions to carry out tasks related to supporting children and adolescents in career planning. It also stems from the need to provide professional assistance aimed at the subject of its influence — adolescents facing the challenge of making life-significant decisions about their own future, in such a way as to maximize their accuracy and effectiveness and minimize psychological costs (including dissatisfaction with the choices made, school failures, lowered self-esteem and sense of agency, lack of knowledge of one's own resources), health (including depressive states caused by unsatisfactory work, failure to meet the psycho-physical requirements associated with a particular profession) and economic costs (e.g., dropping out of school/work, commuting to professional consultations, unemployment) as a consequence of inappropriate choices, the effects of which also translate into other areas of an individual's functioning in a world of permanent and dynamic changes (Lukaszewicz, Soltysinska 2013, p. 2; Leszczynska 2012, p. 83). Given the fact that the first educational and career choices are made by adolescents relatively early (most often before the age of 16) (Myszka-Strychalska, 2016), providing them with adequate and optimal counseling is of significant preventive importance. In addition, properly provided career counseling ensures support for the entire school environment — students, parents, teaching staff and cooperating entities.

The school, while remaining a strong environment for socialization and upbringing, undoubtedly serves as an entity that implements the most important preventive measures at the elementary level (primary level) (Gas 2006) while referring to the concept of universality (Flannery et al., 2016, Ostaszewski 2005). From this perspective, we understand prevention as activities aimed at all students of a certain age regardless of the level of risk factors for problem behavior or mental disorders (Szempruch, 2021, p. 48). Such a broad model of influence goes beyond a narrow (negative, defensive) understanding of prevention, and moves toward creative and positive prevention (Liu, Wang, Ren, Liu, 2017, Karmolińska, Marciniak 2015). Activities in primary prevention are aimed at, i.a., diagnosis of potential hazards both individually and in groups, promotion of positive forms of activity, healthy lifestyles (Wawryk, 2015, p.42), delaying initiation, preventing or reducing the extent of risky behavior, but also, in the context of the topic undertaken, support both in the difficulties of the individual student, their school and personal problems, and support in the choice of further educational path. Attention to these elements on the part of teachers and specialists (pedagogues, psychologists, speech therapists, career counselors, support teachers) is a way of realizing the main objectives of prevention, which is to shape healthy individuals, willing and ready to make decisions, adapting to the situation found or able to influence a change in the situation, active, creative and maintaining their own autonomy. General prevention implemented at school is aimed at activities shaping the life and social skills of students necessary both to assume various roles, but also, as J. Surzykiewicz writes, to fully participate in social life (2019, p. 998). "This promotes the empowerment of the individual, their internal integration and the reduction of socially undesirable attitudes and behaviors. Necessary for effective impact on the individual, however, is the systemic combination of all participating forces in education and prevention" (Surzykiewicz, 2019, p. 998). The areas of psychological and pedagogical assistance and career counseling identified in the article are considered here to be two key preventive activities that take place at the school, and the role of teachers in the success of the activities carried out seems crucial. In view of the above findings, it is worthwhile to analyze whose help at school students are most likely to use and how they evaluate the activities carried out.

The methodology and course of the study, as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of the group of adolescent respondents. The issues and objectives of the research

The research was carried out for the project "Educational Policy of the City of Poznań 2030", coordinated by the city's Department of Education. The author

of the research concept and the tool was an expert team from the Department of Educational Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The data presented in herein represent only a portion of the extensive empirical material collected as a result of the ongoing project.

The aim of the research was to learn about the experiences of male and female students in Poznań schools in several areas of school functioning, and to determine to what extent these experiences are developmentally favorable, and well examine what factors differentiate these experiences. The practical purpose of the research was to diagnose the problems, needs of children and adolescents functioning in the school context. The areas of students' school experience, determining the research problems posed, are as follows: lessons; teacher/male & female student relations; form periods; peer relations; extracurricular activities offered; learning conditions – infrastructure; discrimination – unequal treatment; safety; kindness; psychological and pedagogical assistance; educational and vocational orientation or environmental/climate education.

The main research problem: to what extent do Poznań schools provide students with a context and a source of experiences that support their development? was detailed based on the aforementioned subfields of the school.

Thus, it was assumed that in the area of lessons, form periods, relations with peers or teachers, the school can create a good or bad development environment for students.

The text features an analysis of issues related to the field of psychological and pedagogical assistance and educational and career counseling from the perspective of the concept of universal prevention. Thus, the goal is to indicate the positive changes that are taking place at the school in both areas, but also to identify the deficits that are revealed in the implementation of assistance and counseling at the school, with a particular focus on the opinions of both male and female students in this regard. As the literature on the subject and the authors' own experience indicates, properly and effectively implemented assistance and counseling is an important source of psychological well-being and the proper development of students' emotional, social and professional competencies.

The research was carried out in two stages (the second round of research was motivated by the desire to delve deeper into selected issues), and the material presented in the article concerns the results of the second one, conducted in the second half of 2021. The method used in the study is a diagnostic survey. The survey with students was carried out using a survey technique posted on the Internet — CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). The Google Drive platform and Google Forms program were used to conduct the study. Due to the nature of the pandemic situation, this was the only possible way to conduct the study. The questionnaires were distributed through the principle's offices of Poznań schools, who distributed them to male and female students 18 years of age or older and parents of underage male and female students, and they, after their child agreed

to fill it out, provided them with a link to the questionnaire. Great emphasis was placed on ensuring respondents' anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they provided, as well as the voluntariness of taking part in the survey.

The survey covered male and female students of Poznań elementary schools (8th class) and secondary schools: general high schools (3rd class III), technical schools (4th class IV) and trade schools (3rd class). Excluding special schools.

Due to the volume of the research material obtained, the article presents the results of the research collected only in the second round, the purpose of which was to deepen, supplement or verify selected issues analyzed in the first round of research, and the subject of analysis was made fragments of research on the area of psychological and pedagogical assistance and educational and career counseling. The survey included 172 male and female 8th-graders from Poznań elementary schools and 3rd- and 4th-graders from Poznań secondary schools (general high schools, technical schools and trade schools). Adolescents studying in elementary schools accounted for 25.3% of respondents, 4.2% in trade schools, 34.9% in general high schools, and 35.5% in technical schools. Among the male and female participants in the survey, 52.9% were 18 years of age or older, while 47.1% were minors. More than half of them were female (63.3%), while male students accounted for 31.9% of the respondents, 4.8% declared their gender identity as other than those. A quarter of the surveyed male and female students reside in a rural area (25.3%), a similar percentage in a city outside of Poznań (23.5%), while more than half of them live in Poznań (51.2%). The survey also included a small percentage of people with disabilities (2.4%) and chronic diseases (4.8%).

The vast majority of respondents declared that they had average educational success, as indicated by the average score they obtained last school year (in the range of 3.5–4.74 — 55.4%), those scoring below 3.5 accounted for 9.6%, and above 4.75 — 34.9%. Not all surveyed male and female students are aware of their parents' education (19.3% — father's education; 13.9% — mother's education). Most of the fathers of the surveyed adolescents have trade school education (25.9%), while mothers have secondary school education (31.9%). In contrast, one in five (22.3%) of the respondents' fathers had secondary school education, and 17.5% of the mothers had trade school education. In contrast, 17.5% of the respondents' fathers and 27.1% of mothers had university degrees. A small percentage of the parents of students participating in the survey are marked by an academic title or degree (7.8% of fathers and 9.0% of mothers) or primary education (7.2% of fathers and 0.6% of mothers). In the quantitative research highlighted in the article, procedures were used to capture relationships between variables to determine whether a relationship exists between two variables. The analysis assumes that results for which the significance level (p) ≤ 0.05 will be considered. A chi-squared test (χ^2) was used to determine the relationship between the variables. The SPSS program (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to build the database, and for its quantitative analysis.

Student as a subject of preventive interventions – opinions of children and adolescents on the support, assistance and counseling provided – research exemplifications from the Poznań study and comparison with previous studies

The questions analyzed in the article from the part of the survey devoted to educational and career counseling concerned preparing adolescents to make decisions about their careers and the support provided to them by schools in this area. In contrast, questions about the organization of psychological and pedagogical assistance were particularly concerned with its availability in the pre-pandemic period. It was also important to obtain information on who students go to for help in crisis situations. In the first part of the subsection, the results on educational and career counseling will be transferred, followed by psychological and pedagogical assistance.

Educational and career counseling in the experience of female and male students

Figure 1 shows the results of the male and female students' responses to the question "To what extent do you feel prepared by your school to make decisions about your future education and career?". They were asked to determine their position on the issue by indicating their place on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 meant "I don't feel at all prepared to make decisions about my future education and career", and 10 meant "I feel fully prepared to make decisions about my future education and career". The empirical material obtained proves that adolescents from Poznań schools feel, that the educational institutions they attend prepared them to make decisions about their careers in an average degree. This is evidenced by the arithmetic mean obtained from their responses, which is 5.16 points on a scale of 0 to 10. It should also be noted that 37.9% of adolescents feel prepared to plan their careers to a below-average degree, while 44.6% — above-average.

The variable that statistically significantly differentiates the answers given by respondents is "age". Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=0.177$; $p=0.022$) indicated that there was a weak, positive correlation between the age of the subjects and their sense of being prepared by their school to decide on their future career. It indicates that the older the male and female students surveyed were, the more prepared they felt by the school to make choices related to their careers. No other statistically significant differences were found between the independent variables and the answers given by the respondents, i.e., gender, type of school, parents' education, place of residence and educational achievements.

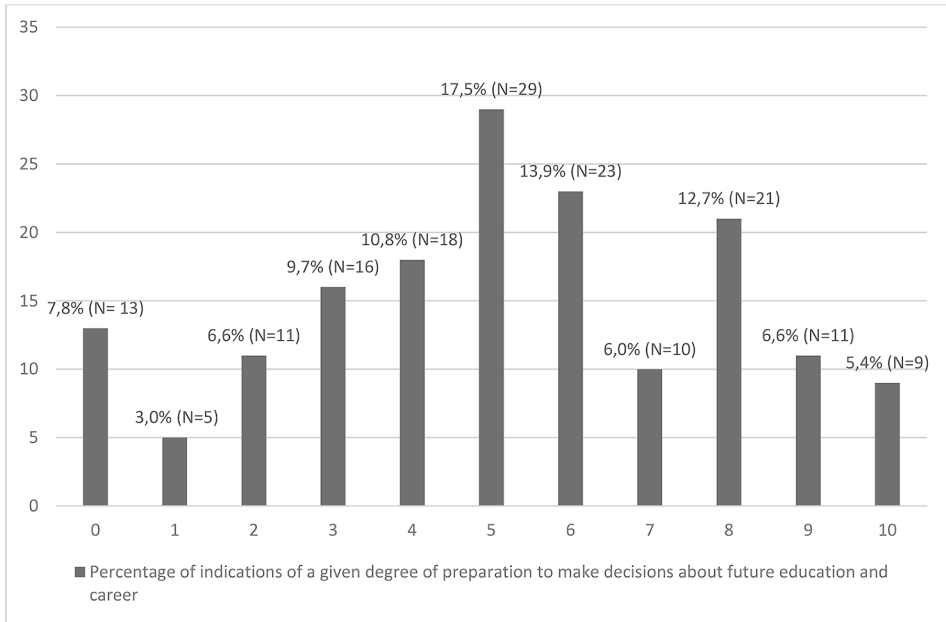


Chart 1. The degree the surveyed adolescents feel prepared by their schools to make decisions about future education and career.

Source: results of research carried out under the project "Strategy for the Development of Education of the City of Poznań 2030."

It is worth mentioning that a similar question was asked to career counselors by the Institute of Educational Research (Podwójcic [2015]). This is because they determined on a 10-point scale, to what extent they believe the school where they work prepares students to make decisions about their future education and career. The arithmetic average of the responses obtained was 7.58 points.

Table 1 presents a quantitative summary of the surveyed adolescent's responses to the question: "Does your school support you in planning your educational and professional future?" It turns out that the surveyed male and female students feel supported by their schools in the process of planning their educational and professional future, rather than unsupported in this regard. This is evidenced by the fact that almost half (43.4%) of them chose the answer "generally yes" from among the available answers. However, it is not insignificant that one in five surveyed male or female students indicate that their school does not support them in this area (21.0%) or has difficulty (22.9%) in explicitly addressing this issue.

Table 1. Support provided by the school to the surveyed adolescents in planning their educational and professional future

Does your school support you in planning your educational and professional future?		
Response categories	N	%
Definitely not	15	9.0
Not really	20	12.0
Hard to say	38	22.9
Generally, yes	72	43.4
Definitely yes	21	12.7
Total	166	100.0

Source: results of research carried out under the project "Strategy for the Development of Education of the City of Poznań 2030."

Cognitively interesting data on the surveyed group of male and female students is provided by statistical analysis of the collected empirical material in terms of independent variables. It proves the existence of a correlation between their sense of support by the educational establishment in planning their careers and the education of their fathers ($\chi^2 = 32.74$; $df=20$; $p=0.036$) and mothers ($\chi^2 = 32.11$; $df=20$; $p=0.042$). It turns out that the least help from the school on the above issue in their opinion is received by adolescents whose fathers have an academic title or degree (definitely no — 38.5%, not really — 23.1%), what is more interesting is that no person from this group chose the answer "definitely yes". In contrast, male and female students whose fathers have trade school education were the most often expressed their approval for this response option (definitely yes — 23.3%), and the least often for "definitely no" (2.3%). A similar observation applies to the education of the respondents' mothers, as adolescents whose parents hold an academic title or degree most often chose the "definitely not" answer (40.0%), while the least often — "definitely yes" (6.7%), when it came to feeling supported by their school in the process of planning their educational and professional future. On the other hand, respondents whose mothers finished their education at trade school level were the most likely to opine that the school's support in this area was definitely satisfactory (17.2%). There were no statistically significant differences between the respondents' answers and their gender, type of school, place of residence and school grade point average.

Another study on the organization of career counseling services in schools conducted in the Wielkopolska region (*Stan doradztwa...*) shows that one in three participating students (29.0%) declare the absence of career orientation classes in their school, while only half of the respondents (53.0%) notices them, and according to the majority of them (54.0%) they take place irregularly, while 60.0% found them useful. The low effectiveness of educational and career counseling

classes in schools is recognized by career counselors working in Wielkopolska poviát labor offices, who mostly (44.1%) share the view that it has unsatisfactory functionality. Similar data is provided by Anna Suchorab's (Suchorab 2012) analysis of Olsztyn students, by whom the activities of the schools (which they attended before college) in supporting them in career planning were rated as moderately helpful (32.7%), of little help (24.4%) or not helpful at all (23.8%). On the other hand, Joanna Kozielska's inquiries (Kozielska 2018) signal a low degree of knowledge among adolescents from Gniezno poviát about the support provided to them by schools in the career field. This is evidenced by the fact that almost one in three people taking part in its diagnostic survey (31.1%) had no knowledge of whether a career counselor works at the school they attend. Also in the surveys conducted by the authors of this article, as many as 47% of students said they did not know if they could get help from a career counselor at their school. The question was part of an analysis of the availability of specialist assistance in Poznań schools and of psychological and pedagogical assistance.

The momentousness of the importance of career counseling in the educational process is accentuated by a variety of research findings indicating that adolescents making decisions related to their future do not always feel prepared to do so (Skłodowski 2007; Mysior 2015; Czepiel 2013). This is evidenced by data on her faint consideration of the information received from career counselors when planning their own future and not confronting their plans with the current needs of the labor market (Wiśniewski 2013). In addition, a significant group of secondary graduates do not plan to pursue an occupation in line with their education profile or are not convinced that the occupation in which they are trying to gain qualifications will suit them in the future or declare the spontaneity of their career choices (Myszka-Strychalska 2016). Similarly, academic youth do not always show satisfaction with their chosen field of study or nourish conviction about the rightness of their decision in this area (as high percentage as 38.0%) (Czerw, Bielas 2020). The source of knowledge about the labor market for adolescents is primarily the Internet and conversations with persons significant to them, the use of experience and knowledge of career counselors is negligible for them (*Stan doradztwa...*). The experience of difficulties in professional development by graduates of different types of schools is evidenced, for example, by the existence of NEET (*neither in employment nor in education and training*) groups (*Glossary: Young people...*) — adolescents who are not employed, do not study and do not further their education and are members of the recariat (Standing 2014) (the term was coined from a combination of two words precarious and proletariat) — people who are deprived of basic forms of job security. The changes brought to the labor market situation by the COVID-19 pandemic do not inspire optimism about the professional future of adolescents as well. Analysis by the International Labor Organization (ILO) showed that in May 2020, 17.4% of 18- to 29-year-olds worldwide had lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Similarly, a report by the Institute

of Student Employers, shows that the number of jobs for adolescents during this period has decreased significantly compared to the years prior (*ISE Reports...*).

Analyses by the Institute of Educational Research (Podwójcic [2015]) raise concern as to the condition of educational and career counseling in Polish schools. According to its contents, the principals of more than half of the schools participating in the survey (58.3%) declare the lack of Intra-school Counseling System at their institutions. In addition, only 15.4% of schools employ a “full-time” counselor (it should be noted that very often they work only part-time or the fulfillment of counseling duties is only a slice of their full-time job), in 78.6% the implementation of tasks related to supporting children and adolescents in planning their own careers is handled by a person occupying another position (e.g., psychologist, teacher, subject teacher), while 5.4% do not fulfill ministerial obligations related to this area at all. In addition, in almost every tenth educational institution (7.3%), less than one hour of counseling per class unit per year is devoted to this activity during the school year, while only half of the schools provide this activity at a rate of no more than 8.1 hours per class (it is worth noting that due to the type of school, the least amount of time representing 6 hours per class unit per school year is allocated to this purpose in general secondary schools). There is also some concern about the formal preparation of those who serve as career counselors in educational institutions. It turns out that one in three of them (34.2%) has not even completed any course or training in career counseling, and therefore does not have the necessary qualifications, while only one in ten (10.0%) has a degree and underwent other forms of professional development in the field of counseling (having a degree alone is indicated by 32.7%, while completing courses/training or having a career counselor license is indicated by 23.1% of the surveyed school counselors). This research took place before the introduction of mandatory career counseling classes at all stages of education. However, it showed significant variation in the quality of implementation, the reasons for which include the different substantive preparation of career counselors to perform their duties, or the principals’ approach to the importance of this area for the development of adolescents. The persistence of a low rate of employment of people professionally prepared to carry out tasks related to school career counseling is evidenced by the information available on the Open Data Portal of the Ministry of Education and Science, according to which classes related to the choice of direction of education and profession in the Wielkopolska voivodeship are conducted by 210 teachers employed at 30.47 FTE (*Nauczyciele wg obowiązków...* [2021]), resulting in 0.15 FTE per teacher. On the other hand, the duties of “non-subject” teachers in schools and educational institutions in the position of professional counselor are performed by 792 teachers, employed at 11.53 FTE (*Nauczyciele wg obowiązków...* [2021]), which results overall in 0.014 FTE per teacher. Confronting these data with the number of public schools for children and adolescents in the Wielkopolska voivodeship in the 2020/2021 school year (*Szkoły i uczniowie...*

[2021]) (elementary school, general secondary schools, technical schools, first and second degree trade schools), the total of which is 1599, it means that per one institution there is only 0.13 (0.019 FTE) teacher conducting classes related to the choice of education and career, 0.5 (0.007 FTE) career counselor. Considering the number of students 447558 (*Szkoły i uczniowie... [2021]*) attending this type of educational institution — there are 0.002 career counselors per student.

Possibility of obtaining psychological and pedagogical assistance in the experiences of female and male students

Analyzing the results on psychological and pedagogical assistance provided in schools, as the second important area of research under consideration in this article, it is worth noting that adolescents were asked directly in a closed question: Is there a psychologist/pedagogue at your school? Here, the results of the study proved optimistic for the research team on the one hand, while on the other hand they indicated some shortcomings in the area of child and adolescents support. The majority of respondents (89.2%) indicated that their school has a specialist providing psychological and pedagogical assistance. Although this percentage is high, there are still 10% of students who are deprived of or unaware of the existence of a psychologist/pedagogue at school. Considering the national statistics in this regard, the situation is not as positive as in the result of the research of the authors of this article. Although it can also be said that it has been improving in recent years. The results of the research carried out by the authors correspond with the results of the foundational research and analysis on the availability of assistance from specialists such as a psychologist or pedagogue in Polish educational institutions. For a number of years, there has been an observable gap between the availability of assistance (resulting from regulations, ministerial acts and needs reported by specialists) and the actual situation in Polish institutions and student experiences, which indicate limitations in the availability and opportunities for students to benefit from support among specialists, including staff available at school (Marciniak, 2015). A report by the Supreme Audit Office analyzing the years 2014–2016 indicates that nearly half of public schools of various types (more than 44%) did not employ either a separate pedagogue or a psychologist on full-time basis. The worst in this regard was the situation in technical schools, where 60% of the schools had no specialists, and in trade schools, where as many as 55% of these institutions did not employ psychologists and pedagogues (Prokopczyk, NIK, 2017). A later audit by the Supreme Audit Office also drew attention to the quality of the activities carried out. According to the Supreme Audit Office's assessment, in the 2020/2021 school year, in some schools psychological and pedagogical assistance classes were either organized inappropriately or were

not provided to all students who had such indications in opinions or decisions of psychological and pedagogical counseling centers. The problem of too few specialists employed in schools is also highlighted by the Foundation for Students' Rights, citing data showing that in 2020 nearly half of students did not have access to psychological assistance at school. In 2019, there were 10,874 people employed as psychologists in education, with the number of schools reaching more than 20,000. The Foundation called for the introduction of psychological care to all Polish schools for children and adolescents. Similar statistics are presented by the National Association of Psychologists. According to its reports, psychologists are employed in only 6 out of 10 schools (Lisowska 2021, p.1)

The very awareness of the presence of supportive adults at school is extremely important both from the perspective of educational processes (specific learning difficulties, school stress, educational crises) and from the developmental perspective (developmental tasks, adolescence). However, in the research conducted, it was also important to obtain information on whether and to what extent the students receive help from specialists. Respondents were asked to indicate: Did you ever use the support of a school psychologist in the time before the pandemic? (Table 2) and Did you use the help of a school pedagogue in the time before the pandemic? (Table 3). It was expedient to specify the period before the pandemic, because the authors of this article as a research team were aware that the period of remote education significantly changed the possibilities in this area, which did not remain the subject of research at this stage of recognition of the students' situation.

Table 2. Adolescents' use of school psychologist support

Did you ever use the support of a school psychologist in the time before the pandemic?		
Response categories	N	%
YES	29	17.5
NO	137	82.5
Total	166	100.0

Source: results of research carried out under the project "Strategy for the Development of Education of the City of Poznań 2030."

Table 3. Adolescents' use of school pedagogue support

Did you ever use the support of a school pedagogue in the time before the pandemic?		
Response categories	N	%
YES	35	21.1
NO	131	78.9
Total	166	100.0

Source: results of research carried out under the project "Strategy for the Development of Education of the City of Poznań 2030."

Cognitively interesting data on the use of support from a school psychologist and pedagogue of the surveyed group of male and female students is provided by statistical analysis of the collected empirical material in terms of independent variables. Interestingly, there is a correlation between father's education and use of pedagogue's help ($\chi^2=12.46$; $df=5$; $p=0.029$) and fathers education and use of psychologist's help ($\chi^2=14.87$; $df=5$; $p=0.011$). In contrast, there is no statistically significant difference between the mother's education and the use of specialist help. It is noteworthy that in the case of both a psychologist and a pedagogue, the children of fathers with trade school education are the least likely to benefit from their support. On the other hand, analysis of other independent variables such as place of residence (city of Poznań, rural area, city outside Poznań, disability of the student, chronic disease, did not statistically significantly differentiate responses.

The percentage of people receiving support from specialists appears to be not high. According to the survey, more students are receiving help from a school pedagogue. However, given that about 20% of the students use the help of a pedagogue/psychologist, high workload among specialists can be observed. This can be illustrated by simple examples relating the result obtained to a comparison with the number of students in a particular school and the specialists employed there. The school, which has about 150 students, employs a psychologist at 0.5 FTE and a pedagogue 0.5 FTE (a total of 22 hours working with students). It may therefore prove difficult, with such a small number of hours and other regular duties, to provide ongoing help and support to students who will need it. This is because on a monthly basis it comes out to about half an hour per student. The situation is even worse in much larger schools. A high school, which has 600 students, is staffed by a psychologist (1 FTE), a pedagogue (1.5 FTE). Resulting in approx. 220 hours worked per month. Per the number of students, this gives about 20 minutes of work with one person. This simplified scheme that does not take into account other responsibilities of specialists indicates the importance of the postulated need for an increase in the number of staff providing psychological and pedagogical assistance in schools. This is because there is a question about the quality of the assistance provided and the ability of specialists employed in schools to carry out the prevention program, as there may not be the capacity and time to carry out regular and systematic activities in important areas of prevention. Indeed, it should be noted that there are no specific regulations on how, or who is to implement the school's prevention and education program. A dispersion of responsibility in this area is observed in a number of schools. On the one hand, some of the issues are assigned to form teachers, while on the other hand, due to specialized training, it is expected that psychologists/pedagogues will be the ones to implement the program.

And if we accept the assumption of the important role of prevention in counteracting many destructive behaviors of children and adolescents (risky behaviors, behavioral disorders, addictions, eating disorders), then the inclusion of prevention

classes in the school schedule seems particularly important. As K. Ostaszewski points out, it is not only the “overloaded” timetable that can be an obstacle. The author also notes the poor preparation of teachers and the lack of verification of the implementation of the prevention program (Ostaszewski 2017, pp. 49–50). All of these obstacles, coupled with staff shortages, should provide room for discussion of educational strategy both locally and in a broader systemic context.

When analyzing the situation of male and female students and their knowledge of the functioning of psychological and pedagogical assistance in the schools they attend, an important aspect was also to obtain information: to whom do students most often turn for help? The largest number of male and female students surveyed said they could use the help of the form teacher in situations that were difficult for them (78.9%). Respondents equally often point to the school pedagogue (71.1%) and school psychologist (69.9%). Obtaining this information indicates the special relationship that students have with their form teacher. Girls are statistically significantly more likely to indicate that they can get help from a school psychologist ($\chi^2=24.060$, $df=8$, $p<0.05$). In contrast, there are no statistically significant differences between girls and boys in their choice of: pedagogue, career counselor, nurse, form teacher, teacher or principal. When the respondents are distinguished by school type (elementary school, high school), there is a statistically significant difference when indicating teachers as people from whom help can be obtained. Elementary school students are statistically significantly more likely to indicate that they can get help from teachers ($\chi^2=15.104$, $df=4$, $p<0.05$). However, it should be made clear that all the people that can be named, for the most part, are selected as potentially providing assistance in difficult situations. The surveys conducted did not indicate significantly statistical differences by school type (elementary and secondary schools), both in questions about the employment of a school pedagogue/psychologist and in questions about the choice of support persons. The results of our research in the field of psychological and pedagogical assistance indicate the persistence of certain phenomena. Professional (formal) assistance, in the opinions of most male and female students, seems to be available in schools (although not always), while at the same time male and female students mostly do not use it. The reasons for this may be ignorance (about the possibility of getting help), reluctance (as a result of, for example, stereotypes about psychological help), or lack of need for such help (Marciniak, 2015). Children and adolescents may be more likely to choose informal help — from “little helpers” (acquaintances, friends, online forums, chat rooms, news channels), but this is not always a means tailored to the recipient (Egan 2002). The results of nationwide diagnoses indicate that children and adolescents first use the help of family (parents, siblings), friends, sympathizers, and at the very end they mention members of the educational community as a source of support: form teachers, teacher or school pedagogue (Czapinski, 2009).

It is worth noting that the questions analyzed are a prelude to further consideration of the quality of assistance activities carried out in schools. From the researcher's perspective, it would also be interesting to deepen the analyzed research with questions on the type of support received and forms of assistance provided by specialists, teachers and form teachers. In part, the authors of this article as a research team obtained this information during in-depth focuses with adolescents from Poznań secondary schools. During extremely inspiring conversations, it was also attempted to find out what is lacking in the area of career counseling as well as psychological and pedagogical assistance for adolescents studying in Poznań schools. An in-depth analysis of these threads is yet to come, in the context of further work on the education policy of the city of Poznań.

Instead of conclusion — What should be considered when designing preventive and educational activities?

The results of the research conducted within the framework of the “2030 Strategy for the Development of Education in the City of Poznań” indicate that the dominant group of students surveyed feel that the schools they attend prepared them to make educational and professional decisions to an average degree. On the other hand, in the area of psychological and pedagogical assistance provided, most students declare that they can use from it. In contrast, the opinions of the surveyed male and female students on the support provided to them by educational institutions in the process of career orientation are divided. The declarations of the surveyed male and female students and the foundational data presented in this article indicate the possibility and necessity of improving the quality and effectiveness of schools' activities in the area of both career counseling as well as psychological and pedagogical support. This demand assumes particular importance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left a strong mark on both the well-being of children and adolescents and the necessity and strategies for using specialized assistance at school and its supporting institutions (Golberstein, Wen, Miller, 2020, Jankowiak, Jaskulska, Marciniak, Klichowski, 2022, Pyżalski, 2021).

The support provided to male and female students by schools in the area of educational and career counseling, on the one hand, should focus on developing their knowledge of their own professional predispositions and the world of professions (in accordance with the pillars of the process of career orientation and the recommendations of the Ministry of National Education), as well as practical knowledge and skills relevant to the modern labor market (e.g., behavior at a job interview, preparation of application documents, knowledge of possible development paths). In this context, it is worth looking at the field of career counseling as a non-autonomous entity, which is the result of

a network of cooperation between various entities (including those external to the school). Supporting adolescents in career planning in this manner fits the model of overlapping spheres of socialization influence by J.L. Epstein (Epstein et al. 2002), based on a dialog between the educational institution, the student's family home (often a priority source of vocational knowledge) and the socio-economic environment, at the center of which are the students themselves who are participants in all activities (including primary and secondary prevention). This approach requires the creation of numerous situations (in and out of the school environment) in which adolescents will be, as it were, obliged to undertake self-reflection about themselves, make evaluations on their skills and knowledge useful during professional activity and during goal-setting and on the way to their realization.

Effective support for adolescents in the process of career orientation requires the development of a stable career counseling system, adapted to their psychophysical capabilities, as well as the current requirements of the labor market, with special attention to the needs of all actors involved in its implementation. To achieve these goals, it will be helpful not only to increase funding for schools to conduct career counseling activities and hire professionals to implement them, but also to improve the quality of their substantive and methodological workshops. Career counseling classes should be held regularly, in accordance with the plan previously established and presented to adolescents, since any other way of organizing them may not send a clear signal to students regarding the significant importance of the content presented at them and promotes their treatment as secondary in the curriculum.

The results of the study *Working time and conditions of teachers* (orig. *Czas pracy i warunki pracy nauczycieli*) (Federowicz et al. 2013) found that only 4.4% of teachers declared that educational and career counseling was among the list of 53 activities they perform at school. Therefore, popularization of knowledge about career counseling and its educational importance in the school environment, can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the career orientation process. This is because an intra-school career counseling system requires the active participation of the entire teaching staff in its implementation (in cooperation with the family home and local entrepreneurs and the students themselves also involved in the process of its conceptualization), not just the person performing the duties of a career counselor. It is worth emphasizing that the development of a program that is a practical tool in the implementation of preventive activities is based on a reliable (conducted annually) diagnosis of the school's needs and their confrontation with theoretical recommendations and the results of scientific research (*evidence-based practice*) (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2013).

According to Augustyn Bańka, "one of the most basic developmental tasks of an individual concerns the preparation for a career, and one of the basic tasks of life — the performance of work and professional activity" (Bańka 1995, p. 10)

— educational and career counseling as support for children and adolescents in dealing with this challenge is among the most important areas of upbringing and education. However, in view of the fact that “it is difficult to speak of a final choice of profession, a lifelong choice, but rather of a career, understood as a biographical process of taking up and changing work, a process in which both reflection and unexpected coincidence take place” (Kargulova 2005, p. 84) — an individual’s professional activity becomes a kind of project, rather than an act based on a single choice. A helpful way to implement such an approach to career development among students may be to change the nomenclature of educational and career counseling to, for example, career guidance or career counseling (Suchar 2010, p. 9), career management support (Amstrong 2005) or career orientation (Dobrzyniak 2017). The term “educational and career counseling” in its layer of meaning contains a complex range of content, referring to related problem areas. However, its superficial understanding carries important connotations for the recipients, because making a specific choice about the future path of education, or a related professional activity, often does not pose as significant a challenge for adolescents as planning, monitoring and managing their own careers, which requires not only specific knowledge and skills, but also decision-making based on the analysis of complex factors and circumstances internal and external to the individual. Also, in the implementation of psychological and pedagogical assistance at school, it is worth noting several important elements that can significantly improve the quality of functioning of male and female students, as well as specialists and teachers involved in the process of education and socialization. When designing a school’s prevention and education program, it is worthwhile, first of all, to provide space for the implementation of these activities. In view of the challenges associated with the deteriorating mental well-being of children and adolescents, both educational counseling as well as professional psychological and pedagogical support should be given more prominence through systemic changes (e.g., additional psychology classes promoted by the *Psychology at School* social campaign) or carrying out project and prevention activities with the character of systematic classes included in the curriculum. We should take great care of teachers and specialists who, motivated to work at school, will want to acquire new competencies and qualifications to support adolescents in the difficult transition from education to the labor market and from adolescence to adulthood. In this area, there is a need for systemic changes related to the professional promotion of teachers and the manner of their remuneration, but it is also important to build a friendly environment within the organization, where a supportive environment could work together to improve their own skills. Particularly useful in terms of educational and preventive work could be regular teacher supervision, which, using the experience of more qualified and innovative teachers, would foster the development of the rest of the teaching staff. Finally, referring to the study of male and female students of Poznań schools, it would

be appropriate to ensure comprehensive development and appreciation of the role of form teachers, since it is to them that adolescents experiencing difficulties most often want to turn for help. Increasing the staffing of both career counseling and psychological-educational counseling specialists can bring positive results for male and female students, but only if policymakers and school administrators understand that space and time are needed to conduct preventive and educational activities, which is hard to come by today in a timetable that is already stretched to the limit and an exam race that has been nurtured for years, unfortunately, both by policymakers and often by teachers themselves. The need, therefore, is to change the way of thinking about the goals of education and implement new solutions.

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