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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – RISK FACTORS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY*

Introduction: Mental well-being of children and young people is an important indicator of their proper psychosocial functioning. In the face of contemporary global and social challenges, such as the pandemic and its effects, economic instability and warfare abroad, young people are at increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. Analysing risk factors and protective mechanisms allows for a better understanding of the conditions conducive to maintaining mental well-being in times of uncertainty.

Research Aim: The aim of this article is to identify and discuss the key risk and protective factors that determine the mental safety of children and young people in the face of current social challenges.

Evidence based-Facts: This approach enabled a synthetic overview of current risk and protective factors and highlighted the challenges related to the mental safety of children and young people in the context of contemporary social changes.

Summary: The article analyses the mental safety of children and young people from an ecological perspective, using Bronfenbrenner's concept. The analysis revealed that risk and protective factors in times of uncertainty are present in key developmental contexts, including the family, peer group, school and digital environment. Social support and health education are important for protecting the mental health of children and young people, as they create health resources that enable young people to maintain their mental well-being despite the current threats.

Keywords: psychological safety, children, young people, protection, uncertainty

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the issue of mental health in children and young people is increasingly being raised. Undoubtedly, this issue is one of the key factors that determine the harmonious emotional, social, and cognitive development of young people. Rapid social, technological, and cultural changes currently taking place have a significant impact on the psychosocial functioning of the younger generation. The COVID-19 pandemic, global armed conflicts, and climate change create a reality characterised by uncertainty and tension (UNICEF, 2021). There is also an increasingly noticeable decline in the well-being of young people, manifested, among other things, by an increase in the number of cases of depression, adjustment disorders, anxiety, and self-harming behaviour (WHO, 2022). Mental security in relation to children and young people is understood as a sense of inner emotional stability and building trust in oneself and one's surroundings (Kuczabski, 2020; Marciniak, 2009). It undoubtedly enables the pursuit of activities, establishing relationships, and shaping a positive self-image in safe psychosocial conditions. In difficult situations, it is associated with the possibility of obtaining support. Parents, teachers, educators, and psychologists in particular play an important role in building and maintaining this psychological security. Creating relationships based on trust, acceptance, and consistency provides young people with conditions conducive to freely expressing their emotions, taking on challenges and learning from their mistakes without the fear of rejection. Cooperation between all adults involved in the upbringing and education of children and young people is essential for creating a coherent, safe environment in which young people can develop.

Nowadays, there are noticeable crisis situations that affect the functioning of individuals and society. Current events undoubtedly contribute to increased uncertainty and deterioration in the mental and relational functioning of people of all ages. The COVID-19 pandemic is considered one of the most stressful events of the early 21st century. In addition to its health consequences, it has undoubtedly contributed to social and psychological difficulties. It has led to increased social isolation, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future. Brooks et al. (2020) showed that prolonged isolation, quarantine, and fear of infection contributed to increased levels of stress, depression, and anxiety disorders. Since the pandemic began, there has been a noticeable deterioration in the mental health of young people around the world (Botha et al., 2023; Dacka & Sokołowska, 2024; Thiagarajan & Newson, 2023).

Armed conflicts, including the war in Ukraine, cause trauma, migration, and political destabilisation, and their effects, visible at regional and global levels, include energy, food, and refugee crises (Długosz, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Contemporary conflicts, referred to as 'new hybrid wars,' affect not only those involved in the fighting, but entire societies (Kaldor, 2012). At the same time, climate change (including extreme weather events, droughts, and fires) poses a significant challenge



to contemporary societies, threatening ecosystems, the economy, and human health, as well as causing migration (IPCC, 2023). The phenomenon of climate anxiety is increasingly noticeable among young people who fear for the future of the planet and experience a sense of helplessness in the face of the climate crisis (Clayton, 2020; Hickman et al., 2021).

In recent years, the global economy has experienced such disturbing phenomena as recessions, inflation, and energy crises, which have particularly affected developing countries, hence increasing social inequalities and deepening poverty (IMF, 2023; Standing, 2011). At the same time, information overload, or the so-called ‘infodemic,’ hinders rational decision-making, reinforces anxiety, and reduces trust in science and public institutions (Pennycook & Rand, 2021; WHO, 2022). Prolonged stress, social isolation, and information overload have a negative impact on the mental health of children and young people, increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and problems with concentration and learning (Loades et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and economic instability have limited peer contact as well as access to education and psychological support, which has exacerbated feelings of helplessness and hindered the social and emotional development of young people (OECD, 2021; UNICEF, 2021).

Social media and digital technologies are an integral part of young people’s lives, offering access to knowledge and opportunities to develop skills and maintain social contacts (Green, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). At the same time, excessive use of social media can lead to addiction, sleep disorders, lower self-esteem, and exposure to cyberbullying and misinformation, which increases anxiety and reinforces false beliefs (Guess et al., 2019; Twenge et al., 2017). Contemporary societies are characterised by dynamic technological, economic and cultural changes that generate a sense of uncertainty and weaken traditional social support mechanisms (Bauman, 2006; Beck, 2002). In such conditions, it is crucial to accurately identify contemporary threats and challenges in the development of children and young people to effectively support their mental health and well-being.

The concept of mental safety is associated with a sense of safety and the ability to function without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). The concept of ‘mental safety’ does not have a single, universally accepted definition in the literature, but it most commonly refers to an individual’s mental well-being in the broadest sense, encompassing both the absence of significant threats to mental health and the presence of resources that enable effective functioning. In this sense, this concept aligns with the view of mental health as a state of well-being in which an individual realises their potential, copes with everyday stressors, and participates in social life (WHO, 2022).

Protective and risk factors in building mental safety can be described using Bronfrener’s ecological model of development (see Liberska, 2011; Newman & Newman, 2024; Schaffer & Kipp, 2015; Vasta et al., 2001). The model consists



of five key systems: 1. microsystem (e.g., family, school, peer group), 2. mesosystem (cooperation and relationships between e.g., home, school, scouting, or sports organisation); 3. exosystem (which means that children and young people do not participate in a system that indirectly affects their development, e.g., the working conditions of their parents and their friends or classmates of older siblings who do not visit the family home); 4. macrosystem (the broadest and most overarching social or even global systems, e.g., decisions made by the government, international, and national politics); 5. chronosystem (where time and changes occurring in a person are important, i.e., their emotional, cognitive, and social maturity as they grow older, as well as historical changes that accompany a person; on a macro scale, these include, for example, times of war, pandemics, and the global warming crisis).

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

To understand the essence of psychological well-being, it is important to consider both risk factors and protective factors. The first group includes, among others, lack of emotional support in the family, peer violence, school pressure, and excessive exposure to social media (Zoellner et al., 2024). Protective factors include stable relationships with caregivers, a sense of belonging to a group, development of emotional competence, and positive educational experiences (Werner & Smith, 2001). Understanding the interactions between these areas is the basis for effective preventive measures and support for the mental well-being of the younger generation. The aim of this article is to analyse selected risk and protective factors that affect the mental safety of children and young people in the context of contemporary social challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This article is theoretical in nature. It was prepared based on an analysis and critical synthesis of the literature on the mental health of children and young people, considering contemporary social conditions. The aim of the article is to identify and present risk and protective factors that shape the sense of security of children and young people in the context of increasing economic, social, and cultural uncertainty.

The desk research method was used, including analysis of peer-reviewed scientific articles, reports by international organisations (OECD, UNICEF, WHO), studies by research institutions, as well as classical and contemporary psychological theories. Selection of source materials was purposeful and based on the following criteria:



(a) temporal criterion – publications from 2010 to 2025 were included, which allows us to capture the current circumstances that affect the lives of children and young people in a context of growing uncertainty; older publications were included solely on account of their theoretical significance for the research issues under analysis;

(b) quality criterion – the analysis focused primarily on articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals in the fields of psychology, education, and the social sciences;

(c) thematic criterion – the analysis included publications that are directly related to the issues of mental health, well-being, and risk, as well as protective factors in children and young people;

(d) source criterion – reports from reputable international organisations (OECD, UNICEF, WHO) and research institutions were also taken into account. Textbooks and classic theoretical works were used to organise the conceptual issues under analysis and to ground the analyses within a well-established theoretical framework.

Analysis of the collected data was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, definitions and theoretical approaches to the concept of psychological safety were identified and compared, which enabled the conceptual framework to be organised. In the second stage, content analysis of selected publications was carried out to identify risk factors and protective factors, considering various developmental contexts (individual, family, school, social, and economic). In the third stage, the results were synthesised, leading to identifying the main categories of risk factors and resources that support the mental well-being of children and young people in the context of contemporary uncertainty.

EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS

What is Mental Safety?

Wanless (2016) defines psychological safety as “the degree to which individuals feel comfortable taking positive interpersonal risks (such as trying something new)” (p. 6). Safety plays an important role for children and young people because it allows individuals to exercise their agency (make choices that are important for their development). Safety, especially emotional safety, in children and young people is the foundation of their mental health, proper social development, and ability to cope with difficulties (Kuczabski, 2020). For young people, it means feeling accepted, loved, and understood in their relationships with loved ones, teachers, and peers (Curyło-Sikora, 2022).

A sense of security is associated with feeling accepted, respected, and free from emotional threats in a given environment. It allows individuals to express their



thoughts and feelings and act without fear of possible consequences (Mori et al., 2021). When analysing the psychological safety of children and young people, reference should be made to the environment in which they experience protection from exclusion and violence, which promotes their proper emotional and social development (Mori et al., 2021). A sense of psychological security is crucial for building positive interpersonal relationships and promotes effective functioning within a group. A lack of experience of security can contribute to anxiety, stress, and mental health disorders (Dolgova et al., 2022; Marciniak, 2009). Psychological safety is a state that allows for free expression of thoughts, emotions, and concerns, while providing a sense of protection from threats such as violence, exclusion, or intimidation (Edmondson, 1999; Mori et al., 2021; Zhikhareva & Kolchik, 2019). It is the foundation of psychological well-being and an environment that provides psychological safety, supports development, and minimises the risk of psychosocial and emotional trauma (Mori et al., 2022).

A sense of psychological security is a key foundation for the emotional and social development of children and young people, enabling them to express their emotions, form relationships, and communicate effectively. A lack of security leads to anxiety disorders, difficulties in social relationships, and problems with emotion regulation (Mori et al., 2021). Therefore, strengthening it in basic educational environments – the family and school – should be a priority for preventive and health-promoting measures, especially in the context of social support provided by family, teachers and peers during the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2023).

Risk Factors for Mental Health

Risk factors are characteristics of the environment and individual resources that contribute to a lack of security or cause difficulties in this regard. Examples include the occurrence of problem behaviours or maximisation of their intensity (Łoś & Hawrot, 2017). Risk and protective factors – if we use Bronfenbrenner's (see Liberska, 2011; Newman & Newman, 2024; Schaffer & Kipp, 2015; Vasta et al., 2001). ecological model of development – can be linked to each of the five systems described briefly in Introduction and in detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Risk and protective factors using environments/developmental contexts drawn from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

System	Risk factors	Protective factors
microsystem (pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by a person developing in their immediate environment)	-family: domestic violence and other forms of dysfunctional family environment (cf. Kuczabski, 2020; Newman & Newman, 2024; Zoellner et al., 2024), parental divorce, single parenthood (Zoellner et al., 2024), lack of emotional support, excessive pressure; -economic: poverty, financial instability of the family (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024; Sokołowska, 2015); -school-related: bullying, school stress, lack of understanding on the part of teachers, educational indifference/physical, and mental unavailability (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024); -peers: lack of support and acceptance from peers – exclusion, lack of belonging, online hate; rejection by the group, lack of opportunities to interact with others, or excessive peer pressure (engaging in behaviour, mainly risky behaviour, due to the expectations of others rather than one's own needs; cf. Racine et al., 2021; Sokołowska, 2015);	-family: relatively stable, close and warm contact with parents, family cohesion (cf. Dacka, 2023; Newman & Newman, 2024; Sokołowska, 2015; Zoellner et al., 2024); -economic: good financial situation of the family (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024); -school-related: a positive school climate based on cooperation (de Pedro et al., 2016; Katra, 2025; Kluczyńska and Sokołowska, 2023; Szymańska, 2014); a sense of self-efficacy among adult caregivers and close relationships with competent, well-informed, and caring adults and/or peers, effective schools (Botellero et al., 2023; Dvorsky et al., 2021; Predoiu et al., 2024; Pyżalski, 2021); -peers: involving them in joint activities to make the person feel safe and accepted (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024; Sokołowska, 2015; Wei et al., 2013);

**mesosystem
(interrelationships
between different
microsystems/
environments in
which a develop-
ing person actively
participates)**

-small communities: lack of or insufficient support provided to individuals or groups (e.g., religious groups), lack of involvement in helping others, and excessive anonymity (cf. Marciniak, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2024);

-the media as an environment/context for development has a negative impact when there are no restrictions on its use and when it is used to convey negative role models, when cyberbullying occurs (cf. Kuczabski, 2020; Newman & Newman, 2024; Pennycook & Rand, 2021; Twenge et al., 2017);

- lack of information exchange between school and home or other social networks, 'closing oneself off' within one's own community, and excluding others from it (cf. Ciszewska & Żyża, 2016; Marciniak, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2024; Panliliom, 2019);

- lack of intensive personal contact between the employee's family and their employer and/or lack of agreement on the approach to be taken by the mental health clinic and the group of friends (Sokołowska, 2015);

- minor material, instrumental and emotional support (Sokołowska, 2015);

-small communities: assistance provided to individuals by public services; an extensive and supportive social/peer/neighbourhood network/effective communities; individuals helping others and their own social activity (Dvorsky et al., 2021; Kuczabski, 2020; Marciniak, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2024);

-the media as a positive environment/benefits of social media and networking, when there is joint engagement with parents, teachers and/or doctors to provide reliable information about risks and ways to protect health and life, and when the media serve to maintain contact and/or receive support/feel part of a group, and to know that there are others to whom they can look for support (McManus et al., 2020; Newman & Newman, 2024; Pienov et al., 2025; mental health mobile applications);

- adapting the care/educational offer of the educational institution to the parenting style/educational practices of parents and close cooperation in this area (e.g., parental consent for health education or safety education at school; cf. Panliliom, 2019; Sarzała, 2013; Szymańska, 2014);

- adapting the school teaching style to the learning style/diversifying forms of education (i.e., adapting forms of education to the diverse needs of children, young people, parents, and the specific nature of the social environment; cf. Dacka, 2022; Sarzała, 2013; Sokołowska, 2015);

- consistency of information provided by parents, teachers, doctors, specialists in various disciplines and peers in terms of norms/lifestyle, life goals; an atmosphere of support for the activities of student councils, interest groups, or clubs/employee associations/non-governmental foundations (Ciszewska & Żyża, 2016; Sokołowska, 2015);

exosystem (the environment that influences a developing person, in which he or she does not participate directly)

- stressful working environment for parents, teachers, carers (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024);

- demands placed on family members – by their friends, employers, etc. – which adversely affect how they organise their time, create an atmosphere of tension, and reduce their cognitive abilities (Sokołowska, 2015);

- unfavourable **microeconomic** factors (poor local labour market conditions, high unemployment in the area, lack of availability of council housing, local authorities not strictly enforcing air quality standards, etc. (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024; Vasta et al., 2001);

- availability of safe, relaxing places at work for parents, teachers, and carers where they can rest (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024);

- having adequate material, social, and organisational resources at work (Sokołowska, 2015);
- support for parents from their loved ones, domestic help, social services, paediatricians/doctors, neighbours, and colleagues (Ciszewska & Żyża, 2016; Sokołowska, 2015);

- favourable **microeconomic** factors (good condition of the local labour market, low unemployment in the area, availability of housing built from municipal resources, local authorities strictly enforcing air quality standards, etc.; (cf. Newman & Newman, 2024; Vasta et al., 2001);

macrosystem (social institutions, belief systems, and convictions present in society, forming culture/intergenerational communication, media communication)

- loss of social contacts/social isolation (Zoellner et al., 2024);

- loss of economic resources and deepening economic instability (Reczkowski et al., 2023);

- citizen poverty, financial instability of society; burdensome general economic conditions in the country (and even globally; cf. Sokołowska, 2015);

- low level of self-government, especially local, lack of organisational structures for assistance and intervention (Zoellner et al., 2024);

- economic crises and labour market difficulties (Ciszewska & Żyża, 2016; Sarzała, 2013);

- divisions and conflicts dividing the entire community, concerning health and safety issues (e.g., wearing masks or vaccinations; cf. Newman & Newman, 2024);

- broad social support (Zoellner et al., 2024);

- good overall economic conditions in the country; combating unemployment (Zoellner et al., 2024);

- order and good social organisation; concern for life safety; well-thought-out social policy, including a plan of action in crisis situations, social campaigns (e.g., Crisis Helpline. Call! Trust!; cf. Ciszewska & Żyża, 2016; Kuczabski, 2020; Paluchowski et al., 2023; Sarzała, 2013);

chronosystem (placing a developing person and their environment in time, assuming that everything changes)	-decline in social resources over time at each level (micro time – little time spent in the family playing together, reading, talking; meso time – little consistency and repeatability in “shared” care in different environments, few opportunities for information exchange, cooperation, agreement on procedures and care; macro time as a time of war, widespread disease; cf. Newman & Newman, 2024);	-increase in social resources over time (micro time – sufficient time spent in the family playing together, reading, talking about what builds security; meso time – significant consistency and repeatability in ‘shared’ care in different environments, many opportunities for information exchange, cooperation, agreeing on procedures and care; macro time as time for building peace/understanding how to cope with the presence of war outside Poland, widespread measures to reduce the number of diseases, always with an emphasis on forward thinking(i.e., life changes; cf. Newman & Newman, 2024; Paluchowski et al., 2023).
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There is a certain risk factor that is general and causes uncertainty. It can be linked to efforts to understand the situation at the state level or cooperation between sovereign states. The security environment can be described as a macrosystem (Reczkowski et al., 2023). In this context, individual security is linked to the security of the state (e.g., Poland) in terms of health and economic threats, threats related to modern technologies, and life-threatening military actions. The imbalance of power, loss of stability, and the need to develop new solutions cause anxiety. In fact, until the pandemic broke out, the war in Ukraine began, and significant climate change occurred, one could have had the impression that in Poland and around the world we were prepared to protect health, that there was protection for the economy, finances, life from military threats, etc. (see Reczkowski et al., 2004).

Currently, however, the uncertainty felt by children stems from the fact that there are no ready-made solutions that can be shared with them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to trust government and world authorities to rebuild, reorganise, and establish order. These threats relate to the apparent lack of economic stability (with the possibility of a global economic crisis), political stability, and social order and harmony (the possibility of serious disagreements and social conflicts), as well as the existence of military and health threats (the possibility of a world war and/or a global pandemic; see Reczkowski et al., 2023).

Uncertain times invite chaos and there are no ready-made guidelines or established courses of action. What is more, people have died and continue to die – the threat is therefore tangible and immediate, (i.e., it is global in nature). It is impossible not to know that these are truly dangerous times (Dymecka, 2021).

Paluchowski and colleagues (2023) show that a risk factor that is more individual or typical of specific social groups that share similar concerns (subjectively perceived social consensus) is, on the one hand, downplaying the risks, not follow-

ing guidelines (e.g., isolation during illness, wearing masks, maintaining distance during a pandemic), and exposing oneself to risk, and on the other hand, exaggerating dangers and thinking catastrophically. According to the authors, another individualised division includes a temporal focus on the present and a lack of forward thinking – associated with reluctance to change or the so-called Peltzman effect – where one's behaviour is adapted to the subjectively perceived level of risk. If someone feels safe or protected by others, by appropriate legal regulations, technological achievements or security measures, they are able to behave riskily. According to the principle that if others, for example, get vaccinated or wear masks, or serve in the army, or do not burn rubbish or throw it away in the forest – then I do not have to. At the individual level, this is thinking along the lines of: I am exempt from the obligation and therefore sufficiently protected and safe. However, this is a false sense of security that poses a real threat to both others and the individual themselves, exposing them to disease, the effects of environmental pollution, and other negative consequences.

Protective Factors that Support Mental Health

Protective factors in uncertain times (turbulent and unstable, to be precise) include information campaigns that calm public sentiment and signal ways of cooperating on health and safety issues (e.g., at school, in local communities, and in family life; see Heitzman, 2020). Simply put, trust that actions at each level will bring about improvement and/or optimal functioning are right. Individual feelings of security are enhanced by procedures, guidelines, and instructions that are clear and accepted (no conflicting information that causes discomfort and confusion). The knowledge passed on to children and young people – by parents, doctors, teachers, clergy, lawyers, police officers, and other persons of public trust – must be verified, easy to assimilate, adapted to their intellectual abilities and emotional needs without information overload (preliminary information support is described in Table 1).

Similarly, supporting a sense of security, like the absence of chaos in information, is the absence of chaos in action. Coordination of actions, the possibility of efficient use of medical assistance or the assistance of the aforementioned services (in the event of a threat of war, terrorist attack, etc.) ensures a rapid and effective response to emergency situations. It is about awareness of what we are entitled to, what we are obliged to do, and what the consequences are if we do not follow the recommendations. Where are the evacuation points, what tests should we take, what does the obligation to vaccinate and care for the health of others mean?

It is worth arguing that security is not solely an individual matter (Kuczabski, 2020) – it must also be built at a general, national, and even global level. The author indicates that security also describes the reality in which people live. International, national, and local issues build an environment that can be stable and work proactively on certain issues, providing security. It is even possible to build – alongside

individual resilience (Seery et al., 2010). Social resilience to threats can be built by ensuring clear media coverage of the economic, environmental, health, and other situations. This means realistically assessing threats and developing alliances and solutions that address mental and health security issues, as well as border stability and climate.

As indicated in Table 1, school factors are also among the protective factors that enable coping with threats. These include support provided by peers who cope with stress and uncertainty (Szymańska, 2014). A positive school climate is based, among other things, on community spirit and sharing experiences in a safe and accepting atmosphere. Sensitivity to anxiety and a pro-social group of peers, friends, and colleagues can, of course, also exist outside school. Existing bonds with family and peers are the strongest protective factors, even in situations of more global crises. However, the most important thing is decisive and conscious action on the part of school staff, including teachers, educators, pedagogues, and psychologists, who recognise doubts and uncertainties and try to explain and talk about them – not downplay them. This care also includes health issues – pointing out the arguments in favour of vaccination, how to maintain hygiene, how to care for others when ill so that they do not become infected. The point is that adults, despite their own fears, should be able to talk to young people – without downplaying or exaggerating the risks. Schools can create conditions for health education, procedures for responding to security threats (military or terrorist actions), and discuss such issues as the energy crisis, financial crisis, economic weakness, and climate threats. Reliable information is treated as the basis for prevention and promotion of both health and safety. The emphasis is on active and participatory teaching. Proactive action is the protective factor here; it informs about the procedures that can be implemented when a threat arises. Health education and safety education at school (Szymańska, 2014) are the implemented strategies.

The Role of Adults in Building Mental Safety

Parents, teachers and carers have a significant impact on the mental health of children and young people by creating a supportive environment based on acceptance and trust (Sokołowska & Kluczyńska, 2024). Psychological security, understood as a sense of acceptance and emotional stability in family and school relationships, is largely shaped by the parenting style – an approach that combines warmth, clearly defined boundaries, and support for autonomy promotes development, while an authoritarian or neglectful style is associated with an increased risk of emotional difficulties (Edmondson, 1999; Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011; Zhikhareva & Kolchik, 2019).

In the school environment, students' psychological safety increases thanks to an atmosphere of trust, respect, and openness, which encourages self-expression, taking on challenges, and better coping with stress (Baumrind, 1991; Edmondson, 1999; Masten, 2014). The emotional support of adults, their sensitivity and



availability protect children from the effects of stress and trauma (Siegel & Bryson, 2012). It is also important to be able to recognise early signs of emotional or mental difficulties, such as withdrawal, low mood, changes in behaviour, problems with sleep and appetite, or decline in school performance (Mayo Clinic, 2023). Systematic observation of children in different environments – home, school, and peer groups – enables early intervention to support their development and mental well-being (UNICEF, 2023).

Education and conversation are key tools for mental health prevention in children and adolescents; they support development of emotional awareness, coping skills, and early detection of mental health risks (Wei et al., 2013). Psychoeducation, combined with empathetic and open communication, promotes trust building, reduces tension, and develops social and emotional competencies that can protect against risky behaviours in the future (Houston et al., 2024; Mayo Clinic, 2023). Effectiveness of these measures depends on the preparation of adults and safe environment, which is why integrating emotional education in schools and promoting open conversation at home is fundamental to the prevention of mental disorders and the support of young people's mental health.

Early recognition of warning signs and cooperation between psychologists, educators, families, teachers, and the local community are crucial for protecting the mental health of children and young people (Skrabacz, 2019). Through relationships based on trust and acceptance, school specialists strengthen students' self-esteem, emotional competence, and mental resilience, which then promotes better functioning in stressful situations (Curyło-Sikora, 2022). These activities include individual support, prevention, and emotional and social education focused on developing interpersonal skills and creating a safe psychosocial climate in schools (Kluczyńska & Sokołowska, 2023).

SUMMARY

Schaffer and Kipp (2015) consider three important contexts for human development in which psychological security develops (i.e., family, see Chapter 14), peers, school, and technology (see Chapter 15). These are the contexts referred to in various sections of this article. In conclusion, it is worth emphasising once again the systemic approach to development emphasised by these authors, which is based, among other things, on Bronfenbrenner's views.

At the broadest level – the entire community – there is hope for building health education and social solidarity, as well as awareness that in dangerous times it is necessary to provide reliable information about how the country is being protected and what effective procedures are being implemented to ensure the safety of its citizens. This includes how to cope in the digital world, where reflection and



careful selection of information about threats is needed (development of media literacy concerns both adults and the children in their care).

At the level of small communities and cooperation between them, procedures developed in schools and educational centres, and the care provided to peer groups are the most important factors; they strengthen trust rather than support competition or violence. The support and knowledge of adults in various environments in which the child directly participates, as well as the building of peer resources, provide an opportunity to ensure systemic security, where the individual has a sense of security based on social resources (Kuczabski, 2020). These can be called health resources because they allow mental health and overall psychophysical well-being to be maintained despite the presence of risk factors, stressors and susceptibility to stress.

However, while security is largely objective in nature – its specific elements can be identified and built. Mental security is also subjective and individual factors influence the way threats and uncertainties are understood and experienced (Pienov et al., 2025). That is why it is so important to develop critical and reflective thinking, empathy, assertiveness, and stress management skills.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the review, psychological well-being of children and young people is crucial for their health and proper development. In times of uncertainty, understanding risk and protective factors allows us to effectively support the well-being of younger generations. It is important to understand:

1. The importance of mental safety – it is the foundation of mental health, social development, and agency in children and young people, providing a sense of acceptance, understanding, and freedom to express emotions;
2. The impact of crises – events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, and global crises increase uncertainty, isolation, and the risk of emotional disorders in young people;
3. Risk factors – these can occur at various levels of a child's environment (micro-, meso-, exo, macro-, and chronosystem) and include lack of support, violence, socio-economic uncertainty, and sudden historical changes;
4. Protective factors – these include clear and consistent information, coordination of institutional activities, access to assistance, emotional support and education tailored to the capabilities of children and young people; and
5. The importance of a supportive environment – creating a climate of trust, acceptance, and cooperation in the family, school, and local community is crucial for maintaining young people's sense of security and well-being in times of uncertainty.



Issues of individual psychological safety are crucial and require ongoing discussion and attention across all developmental contexts. Ideally, planned activities, such as those involving schools, family, and government, would be integrated.

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BEZPIECZEŃSTWO PSYCHICZNE DZIECI I MŁODZIEŻY – CZYNNIKI RYZYKA I CZYNNIKI OCHRONNE W CZASACH NIEPEWNOŚCI

Wprowadzenie: Bezpieczeństwo psychiczne dzieci i młodzieży jest ważnym wskaźnikiem ich prawidłowego funkcjonowania psychospołecznego. W obliczu współczesnych wyzwań globalnych oraz społecznych, takich jak pandemia i jej skutki, niestabilność ekonomiczna i działania wojenne za granicą, młodzi ludzie są narażeni na zwiększone doświadczanie trudności ze zdrowiem psychicznym. Analiza czynników ryzyka oraz mechanizmów ochronnych pozwala lepiej zrozumieć warunki sprzyjające zachowaniu dobrostanu psychicznego w okresie niepewności.



Cel badań: Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja i omówienie kluczowych czynników ryzyka oraz ochronnych determinujących bezpieczeństwo psychiczne dzieci i młodzieży wobec aktualnych wyzwań społecznych.

Stan wiedzy: W badaniu uwzględniono zarówno klasyczne, jak i współczesne koncepcje psychologiczne, a dobór źródeł miał charakter celowy, koncentrując się na publikacjach z lat 2010–2025. Podejście to umożliwiło syntetyczne ujęcie aktualnych czynników ryzyka i ochronnych oraz ukazanie wyzwań związanych z bezpieczeństwem psychicznym dzieci i młodzieży w kontekście współczesnych przemian społecznych.

Podsumowanie: W artykule dokonano analizy bezpieczeństwa psychicznego dzieci i młodzieży uwzględniając perspektywę ekologiczną z użyciem koncepcji Bronfenbrennera. Dokonana analiza pozwoliła dostrzec, że czynniki ryzyka i ochronne w czasach niepewności obecne są w kluczowych kontekstach rozwoju m. in. rodzinie, grupie rówieśniczej, szkole i środowisku cyfrowym. Istotne znaczenie dla ochrony bezpieczeństwa psychicznego dzieci i młodzieży ma wsparcie społeczne i edukacja prozdrowotna, która tworzy zasoby zdrowotne umożliwiające młodym ludziom utrzymanie dobrostanu psychicznego mimo obecnych zagrożeń.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo psychiczne, dzieci, młodzież, ochrona, niepewność