

## THE EMERGENCE OF EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCES: THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON KAZAKHSTANIS

*<sup>1</sup>Sarsenbekov Nursultan, <sup>2</sup>Sagatova Assem*

*<sup>1</sup>nsarsenbekov@bk.ru, <sup>2</sup>asem.sagatova@list.ru*

*<sup>1</sup>L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National university*

*(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

*<sup>2</sup>Karaganda Buketov University*

*(Karaganda, Kazakhstan)*

*<sup>1</sup>Сарсенбеков Нурсултан Жумабекович, <sup>2</sup>Сагатова Асем Сериковна*

*<sup>1</sup>nsarsenbekov@bk.ru, <sup>2</sup>asem.sagatova@list.ru*

*<sup>1</sup>Евразийский Национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева*

*(Нур-Султан, Казахстан)*

*<sup>2</sup>Карагандинский университет им. академика Е.А. Букетова*

*(Караганда, Казахстан)*

**Abstract.** The consequences of the pandemic caused by the spread of the COVID-19 virus have led to existential concerns. As a result, the human race, realizing the brevity of life, began to pay attention to existential issues. In order to identify this problem, a survey was conducted as part of the research project “The Emergence of Existential Experiences in the Worldview of Kazakhstanis in Connection with the Pandemic”. This is a way to take an empirical view of human existential considerations in order to conduct a deep epistemological and axiological analysis of the meaning and content of human life during a pandemic. The abstract presents the existential reflections of modern people, based on the results of the survey. Thus, the relevance of the study of the problem of a person and the meaning of his life appears as a need, which is significant not only in social, but in personal terms as well.

**Key words:** existential experience, pandemic, life, humanity, responsibility, COVID-19.

### *Introduction*

If we count the statistics of 12.08.2021, the number of COVID-19 infected people in Kazakhstan is 664524, cured-548362, fatal outcomes-7208 [1]. This is not a small indicator. Taking into account these indicators, we conducted a survey “The Emergence of Existential Experiences in the Worldview of Kazakhstanis in Connection with the Pandemic”. A total of 1,209 respondents participated in the survey, including 722 women, 487 men. Research data was obtained in the course of online survey conducted from 01.03. to 12.08.2021. Survey participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire through the Internet platform GoogleForms, which on average took about 15 minutes

(The questionnaire was deployed through messenger Whats App and in the social networks Vkontakte, Facebook). In terms of age, the majority is between 18 and 19 years, i.e. 69.6%. According to the level of education, the number of respondents with higher education is 77%, which leads to a responsible answer to these vital questions.

The scale, speed, and impact of COVID-19 is an event that has rarely been witnessed in our history. What began as an outbreak in one part of the world quickly evolved into a global pandemic affecting the entire world population.

Amid the immediate response to the health crisis and the looming economic crisis, there is a simultaneous global impact of the pandemic on an entire generation of students, as well as on how teachers have coped and continued to manage the sudden and unexpected shift to online work and education. As a result, there was a gap between people.

The problem of the meaning of life at the current global level concerns every person living in a pandemic situation. From this point of view, this article can help the general public, including young people, who are experiencing life-related problems.

The ability to master the problem of the meaning of life at the level of higher consciousness is one of the necessary conditions for moral perfection. The essence of human life is to serve the country and sacrifice your life to protect it from the enemy, to put these goals above the personal interests of a person, to strive not only for ambitious honor and courage, but also for unbridled humanity, to avoid the horrors that torment the human soul before death. Consequently, as a result of the pandemic, we began to pay more attention to existential issues like this.

Hypothesis: psychological reactions of the population bound with the spread of pandemic COVID-19 are specifically associated with the behavior in the process of anti-epidemic measures.

### ***Methodology***

In order to explain the existential concerns caused by the pandemic, an analysis was conducted with a survey “the emergence of existential concerns in the worldview of Kazakhstanis in connection with the pandemic”. This is because it is difficult to understand the existential reflections of the human worldview without known research. In the transition from abstraction to reality, the empirical result of the survey is the only help in obtaining information about existential crises and reflections of Kazakhstanis. On the one hand, the phenomenological questions were deduced by deductive method (which is known from a combination of several points of view). Also, the hermeneutic analysis of the views of well-known thinkers and scientists in order to discuss existential considerations did not go unnoticed.

### ***Experiencing as an Existential Experience***

The decisions we may face already provoke great uncertainty, and as a species, we humans do not tolerate uncertainty well. It is Sometimes helpful if we can at least articulate the source of our anxiety in order to discuss it. This is one area where philosophy can help give a name to what we are feeling [2].

The desire for survival has become a factor of socio-cultural changes. The fear of a pandemic is caused by the fear of death. The nature of civilization and culture as a whole determines its attitude to death. To die means to lose everything, and to lose material goods means to die. The pandemic of the new coronavirus has led to a pandemic of panic, i.e. a special mass fear and xenophobia [3, p. 75].

The questions in the questionnaire prove that respondents have metaphysical searches with a predictable definition of existential concepts. That is, at the moment, due to the pandemic, existential reflections have formed in the minds of people. And the questionnaire, taking these phenomena into account, helped to identify such existences as “human existence”, “human meaning”, “value”, and “human meaning-life orientations”. In particular, the ambiguous reflection of a person manifests itself in the irreplaceable state of his consciousness. Nowadays, it has become as an “experience”. Experience can be considered as initial element in existential experience notion, which reflects the contact of the subject with the world in all human life’s situations. Experiencing is an invariable attribute of the subject’s intentional orientation in all situations of human life. Our research shows that experience is a mediating link in the interrelations of existential states and processes, it arises at the boundary of intersections between the internal and external worlds.

Any major epidemic outbreak has negative consequences both for individuals and for society as a whole, covering almost all aspects of life at the macro and individual levels.

For example, question 7 of the survey raises such a question as “have relations between people become closer since COVID-19 or on the contrary have they become divergent?”. 38.5% of respondents said that “as relationships with loved ones have become separated, we began to appreciate them”, and 34.2% said that “in connection with quarantine, the type of activities and learning process was online”. In the Kazakh worldview there is humanistic tradition of communication between people on a human level, the perception of a person as a guest. And therefore, quarantine as a reason to comprehend the essence of forgotten tradition...

Question 10 sounds like “Will there be life-threatening questions as a result of the Pandemic? The vast majority chose the answer “I was impressed, I felt that life was temporary, and I was committed to having a good relationship with everyone” (46.7%), while 19.4% of respondents preferred the answer “began to learn to treat any person as a “person””. In fact, as a result of the pandemic, the vast majority of people have the opportunity to reflect and analyze what they have done, realizing that every moment of life is a given as an opportunity.

In the comprehension of a person’s own life, the principle of causality must take into account the “anthropocentric orientation” (M. Weber), i.e., the fact that it asks the question of the causal meaning of human actions, there are inevitably many subjective moments (philosophical, ethical, religious values). These are the ones that can largely change the meaning of categorical distinctions in establishing causal relations. The life’s meaning is a motive-determinant of human activity. And therefore the life’s meaning as the highest level of self-manifestation of human essence. The subject of person’s comprehension of his life as a process of cognition and self-knowledge is culturally significant individual reality. That’s why, the emphasis on the individual, the unique, the singular, the culturally significant, but on the basis of universal consideration is a

characteristic feature of cognition. The ability to comprehend life is the highest mode of the essential self-realization of person.

The essence of question 12, which expresses the existential concerns of people in the current situation: “what life problems did you understand as a result of the pandemic?” 54.3% of respondents chose the answer “I realized that every moment of my life is an opportunity that was given to me”. This is not a surrender to inaction, assuming that it will be written by fate, but rather a positive attitude that adheres to the optimistic principle of achieving the goal set for it. Moreover, in the question “feelings that often overwhelm you when you think about your future?” 56.2% of respondents indicated ‘calmly meet’ and 53.2% chose “Hope”. For example, no matter how many tragedies befell the Kazakh population, especially if you look at the twentieth century, there were several difficult events. Twice famine (1922, 1932), which resulted in the resettlement to another country, repressions (1937 repression), and during the Great Patriotic War Kazakhs lost a significant portion of their congeners. How many infants became invalids or were stillborn because of the explosion of the landfill, the collapse of the USSR... Nevertheless, the desire to live, the passion has not died out! “Hope” was the main traffic light of a great nation that lived in good health.

However, the respondents’ number with a predominant feeling of “fear and panic” as a pandemic result is 15.7%. Let’s try to consider how we behave in relation to this pandemic and how people behaved during the epidemic. In much the same way: the only protection we can offer is isolation, because despite all our progress, this sudden appearance of a new, unknown virus is such that even the most advanced technology we have is not helping us. So, this experience as isolation shows us that in the most fundamental situations, such as surviving a particularly severe illness, we cannot respond much more effectively than to hide, isolate, or defend ourselves, as our ancient ancestors did.

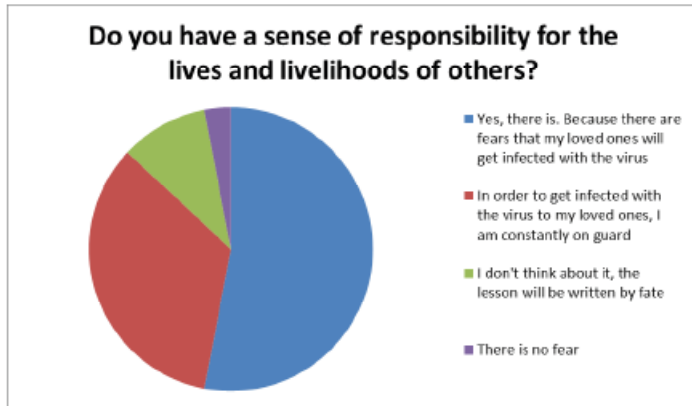
Existential experience can be seen as the individual’s knowledge of the tragic element of existence associated with death, illness, anxiety about life, human freedom and responsibility for it. The position of the individual in the face of insurmountable dichotomies requires him to develop his own strategy for coping with them. The fundamental anxiety, longing, and restlessness of the individual are experiences related to the finite givenness that accompanies existence, through which the individual discovers the possibilities of his own being.

### *Ethical Analysis*

The study of the existential turmoil caused by a pandemic is a complex phenomenon. Still, the unique combination of empirical and theoretical components of value cognition allows us to discuss this issue. The reality of the human life meaning is not only cognized theoretically by scientific means, but vitally and practically experienced by the individual as well. These include the forms of ethical meditation that we encounter in everyday life. In this regard, the definition of an ethical worldview is not left out of the research object. For example, the survey’s 3rd question “Does it calm your mind to understand that COVID-19 is caused not only in Kazakhstan, but also in the world?”. The number of those who chose the option “I am worried as a test for humanity as a whole, regardless of nationality, race” is 79.1%. This is a huge

indicator. This means “love all mankind, brother”. On the one hand, it corresponds to the humanistic principle of F. Dostoevsky “beauty saves the world”. Because this slogan seeks to promote universal (common humanity) interests.

And in question 6: “Do you have a sense of responsibility for life, for the lives of others?” the question at the ethical level “yes, I do. Because there is a fear that I might infect my loved ones with the virus” - 53%, and 33.7% hold the viewpoint of “I am always worry not to infect my loved ones with the virus”.



*Table 1 - Do you have a sense of responsibility for life, for the lives of others*

All people need to take care of their loved ones before they become sick. From the moment disharmony, hatred, backbiting, jealousy, and aggression begin to penetrate a person, the disease will already have time to establish itself in them. Disease is a violation of the universe laws; it is disorder in the human body, feelings and thoughts. When there is harmony in a person, no disorder can penetrate him. This is the law of the universe. Harmony is the best remedy for the disease of the body and mind. If a person is sick, it means that he does not adhere to the universe laws; he “feeds” in himself those feelings and thoughts that are harmful not only for his health, but for the life of society as well. If a person wants to recover, he must bring his life way into harmony with life, with the universe life. This is true harmony.

The German existentialist scholar M. Heidegger, in his work “Being and Time”, describes “the Call of the human race”, i.e., as the embodiment of human existence. “Conscience evokes the self-presence of presence out of loss in human beings” [4, p. 230]. A person’s shame in the inner world leads to ethical considerations. That’s why the principle is formed in people’s minds that I won’t let others catch the virus. Based on the survey, we see that in the minds of people are formed responsibility not only for themselves, but for others as well. Obviously, such an empathic stance is exciting.

In a situation where necessary epidemiological measures are being introduced, the community of mental health professionals tries to identify the various causes and factors most responsible for people’s adjustment disorders in order to mobilize public health resources to provide adequate and personalized care to the population. At the

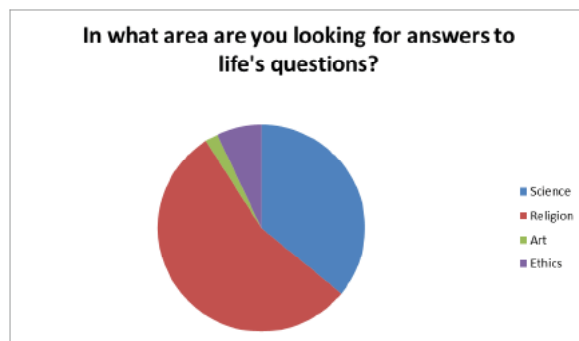
same time, anxiety can play both the role of a stressful and a distressing factor. In the first case, anxiety fears contribute to the formation of adaptive behavior related to the observance of measures in order to prevent infection.

What is the value for us: strict respect for human rights and freedoms, human responsibilities, or reducing the number of preventable deaths? Any intervention in public health requires the surrender of some personal freedoms in order to improve public health. Should we give up our personal freedoms in times of crisis? During the current COVID-19 pandemic, epidemiologists have shown that social distance is an effective measure to reduce the virus spread. For this reason, I. Kant advanced his famous principle of “indomitable duty” (categorical imperative). We can use this principle to guide our own behavior in any situation that threatens public health. “Indomitable duty” is the transformation of all our actions and behavior into a common interest for all mankind.

### ***Religious Analysis***

In his formation, a person experiences a constant conflict, caused by his basic tension and determines the ability to social and existential forms of faith. The animal experiences conflict with its environment, but not with itself. An animal cannot distance and substantiate objective reality. Person, being capable of transcendence, abstract thinking, goes beyond his immediate practice and existence, where the human attitude to the world is manifested, characterizing the acquisition of a metaphysical basis for existence. The human subjective world as an expanding and only partially conscious whole leads to the formation of its own mechanisms to ordering reality and experience, which include the conceptual thinking and faith along with the language phenomena.

The Kazakhs, have a is a proverb “The head of a person, the ball of Allah”. Because a person’s life depends on Allah destiny. See, what written on the forehead. The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus requires us not only to change our personal behavior through our moral principles, but to implement religious norms as well. Because the questionnaire “What area do you find answers to life questions? the diagram for Question 15” is given below:



***Table 2 - In what area are you looking for answers to life's questions?***

What phenomena do we observe in this diagram? It is known that every time a person gets a test on his head, he seeks solace. Often there is a request for help from the creator, as a result of which religious norms are often followed. In other words, the results of the questionnaire showed that 49.5% of respondents believe that religion is responsible for vital issues. This is one of the aspects of human weakness. Human powerlessness during a pandemic means being in a state of inability to do anything significant. Naturally, people are looking for answers to complex issues in religion.

“Has your faith in God increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic?” on question 14, the majority, i.e. 23.5%, indicated that “when the new wave of the pandemic came, my faith in God increased.” The Holy Qur’an of the Islamic world says: “We will test you with the slightest danger, hunger and deprivation of your property, (close) souls, and products...” (Sura “Bakara”, ayat 155). “...Famine and disease came to them...” (Surah “Bakara”, ayat 214). Nevertheless, Surah Sharh, in verses 5-6, is described as follows: “In fact, along with difficulty there is always relief”.

Life is given to man as something that does not depend on him. To dwell on its negative aspects (death, illness, sorrow) is to suppress and deny life. The wise man should strive to know life and say an unconditional “yes” to life and all that life consists of—death, illness and sorrow. The coronavirus pandemic sweeping the earth is a cause of fear, dread, and even panic. However, there are also optimistic attitudes that can reflect existential crises. The Kazakhs, in a worldview with philosophical equanimity, perceived death as a legitimate point of transient life. Denial of life, what is death, fear of death is not so often found in the worldview of nomads. On the contrary, death awe and confusion were overcome by the Kazakh people, deeply penetrating into the essence of the problem and forming a serious attitude: “be healthy!” (Бар бол!), “Live in your pleasure!”, (“Жалғанды жалпағынан басы”) “the main thing is that we are unharmed!” (Бас аман болсын!) or “a living person creates life” (Тірі адам тіршілігін жасайды), as well as the reason for high estimation of life in the existential motif.

In his “Confession”, St. Augustine exclaims: “I have become for myself a tangible problem, a big question, “magna quaestio”, “I am not aware of all that I am... I call You, my God, “my mercy”; you created me and you have not forgotten you. I call thee into my soul, which thou preparest to receive thee: thou hast compelled it to desire it. Now do not forsake the one who calls; Thou hast warned my call: persistently, more and more often and in different ways Thou hast spoken to me: may I hear Thee from afar, and turn and call Thee who calls me” [5, p. 335].

And those who believe in the power of science are 31.4%. The area of science that plays a decisive role during a pandemic is medicine. The key aspect of this pandemic that got us thinking was the constant presence of death. Modern society has tried to marginalize death. Conversely, during these months, death was constantly under our close attention, and this also led us to gain the most accurate sense of medicine. Traditionally, the goal of medicine was to heal and restore health, since it was obvious that death was an inevitable natural fact.

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has aroused the interest of the scientific community, which has immediately filled online repositories with research conducted in the most diverse disciplines: medicine, biology, chemistry, psychology, and so on.

However, although all of them are valuable, in none is there separately or added a holistic and fundamental explanation of the phenomenon [6].

How necessary is a philosophical worldview in a time of pandemic? To reach the level of “absolute spirit” indicated by the German classical philosopher G.Hegel, it is also necessary to master philosophy, ethics, and religion. In order to form the absolute spirit, the study and the maximum mastery of the sciences of philosophy, ethics should always be a sacred principle. Because in a pandemic period when it becomes increasingly difficult to find solutions to contextual questions, philosophical science, especially the Existentialist trend in philosophy, is the right solution to find answers to contextual questions.

In Europe, existentialism came to prominence after WWII, as the continent went through a long period of recovery. Not merely economic recovery. People experienced confusion and disillusionment. Perhaps that is inextricably connected to economic recovery - note our prospects today are of U-shaped or even an L-shaped economic recovery. In any case, existentialism provided direction for individual life then, and perhaps it will do so again [7].

Famous French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre answered this question in his work “Existentialism Is Humanism”: “Existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions from a consistently atheistic position. Its intention is not in the least that of plunging men into despair. And if by despair one means as the Christians do – any attitude of unbelief, the despair of the existentialists is something different. Existentialism is not atheist in the sense that it would exhaust itself in demonstrations of the non-existence of God. It declares, rather, that even if God existed that would make no difference from its point of view. Not that we believe God does exist, but we think that the real problem is not that of His existence; what man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God. In this sense existentialism is optimistic” [8].

The disease that is raging in connection with the pandemic, perhaps this is the reason for the beginning of a productive attitude towards humanity. The most important thing is that humanity does not lose its existential-humanistic attitude to itself.

Philosophy does not offer tools for solving practical problems, but looks for a sense of concrete situations through a rational reflection [9, p. 92].

Consequently, a proper understanding of contextual problems, their acceptance, comprehension, the ability to use them properly in everyday life-all this becomes a requirement of today. The existentialist trend in philosophy, which can play a decisive role in this matter, is of great importance.

### ***Conclusion***

Conjugation: the existential thoughts of Kazakhstanis are associated with the study of empirical methods of responding to the pandemic caused by the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The survey of existential fillings formed in the worldview of Kazakhstanis during the pandemic allows us to draw the following conclusions, i.e. as a result of the pandemic there is a tendency to understand:



- philosophical, including existential;
- ethical;
- religious;
- axiological principles.

The meaning of life, playing a leading role in the process of interpreting a person's essence, is what one plays a decisive role in shaping one's human essence. Therefore, the meaning of life can be characterized as the ultimate foundation of human essence. Obviously, in every society there is a constant process of new values, some kinds of values weaken and new ones begin to appear, while others may disappear immediately. The Pandemic is now becoming the main object of reflection and evaluation of the meaning of life.

If we try to briefly identify the reason for the sharply increased the phenomenon importance of reflection for philosophy, we can say that this fact is due to the qualitatively new role of the human factor in all areas of knowledge and spiritual and educational activities. Practical activities. Reflection as a unique multidimensional phenomenon inherent in each person should become the object of special philosophical analysis and as a complex philosophical problem of studying the essence of a person during a pandemic.

Obviously, reflection as a special multidimensional phenomenon inherent in every human being, should become an object of special philosophical analysis as a complex philosophical problem to study the essence of man during the pandemic.

Therefore, our article is based on the reflexive reflections of people striving to cognize themselves or others.

A person goes through a lot of trials before the birth of a child. But, as the Renaissance concept shows, man is a titan, everything is possible for a person. No matter what difficulties arise, we should not forget that the human race is always inclined to find solutions. Therefore, in the midst of a pandemic, let's find a way not to get sick until we are looking for a cure!

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects in the study.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the students for their participation in the study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

### *List of references*

- 1 Current statistics on coronavirus (Kazakhstan). [Electronic resource]. URL <https://index.minfin.com.ua/reference/coronavirus/geography/kazakhstan/> (accessed 15.08.2021).
- 2 Garret Riggs. «Philosophy in a Time of Pandemic». [Electronic resource]. URL <https://altruismmedicine.org/2018/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Philosophy-in-a-Time-of-Pandemic.pdf> (accessed 02.09.2021).
- 3 Pokhilko D., Shabashova N.M. Changes in public consciousness under the influence of a modern pandemic // Philosophy, ethics, religious studies. – 2020. – №2. – PP. 68-83.
- 4 Heidegger M. Being and Time. Translated from the German Sein und Zeit (seventh edition) by permission of Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tiibingen // This translation copyright© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1962.

5 Augustine Aurelius. Confession: Abelard P. The History of My Sorrows. – М., 1992. – 435 p.

6 Carabantes M. The Coronavirus as a Revenge Effect: The Pandemic from the Perspective of Philosophy of Technique. [Electronic resource]. URL <https://doi.org/10.1177/01622439211008595> (accessed 15.09.2021).

7 Vandekerckhove W. COVID, Existentialism and Crisis Philosophy. Published online: 2 June 2020. Philosophy of Management 19. 2020. [Electronic resource]. URL <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-020-00140-2> (accessed 10.09.2021).

8 Sartre Jean-Paul. Existentialism is Humanism. – Paris, 1946. – 37 p.

9 Velázquez L. The role of philosophy in the pandemic era. BIOETHICS UPdate 6.– 130 p.

**Сарсенбеков Н.Ж., Сағатова А.С.**

**Экзистенциалды толғаныстардың туындауы: пандемияның қазақстандықтарға әсері**

*Аңдатпа.* COVID-19 вирусының таралуына байланысты орын алған пандемияның салдары экзистенциалдық толғаныстарға әкелді. Нәтижесінде, адамзат баласы өмірдің қысқалығын сезіне отырып, экзистенциалдық мәселелерге көңіл бөле бастады. Осы мәселені түбегейлі зерттеу мақсатында, «Пандемияға байланысты қазақстандықтардың дүниетанымындағы экзистенциалдық толғаныстардың туындауы» атты зерттеу жобасы аясында сауалнама жүргізілді. Бұл пандемия кезінде адам өмірінің мәні мен мазмұнына терең гносеологиялық және аксиологиялық талдау жасау үшін адамның экзистенциалдық толғаныстарын қарастырып, эмпирикалық тұрғыда түсініп, пайымдауға мүмкіндік алудың жолы. Мақалада сауалнаманың нәтижесіне сүйене отырып, қазіргі таңдағы адамдардың экзистенциалдық толғаныстары қарастырылды. Адам мен оның өмірінің мәнін зерттеу мәселелері әлеуметтік тұрғыда ғана маңызды емес, сонымен қатар философиялық талдауды қажет ететін үлкен мәселелер қатарына жатады.

*Түйін сөздер:* Экзистенциалдық толғаныстар, пандемия, өмір, адамгершілік, жауапкершілік, COVID-19.

**Сарсенбеков Н.Ж., Сағатова А.С.**

**Возникновение экзистенциальных переживаний: влияние пандемии на казахстанцев**

*Аннотация.* Последствия пандемии, вызванной распространением вируса COVID-19, привели к экзистенциальным проблемам. В результате человечество, осознав краткость жизни, стало обращать внимание на экзистенциальные проблемы. С целью выявления этой проблемы был проведен опрос в рамках исследовательского проекта “Возникновение экзистенциальных переживаний в мировоззрении казахстанцев в связи с пандемией”. Это способ получить эмпирическое понимание экзистенциальных проблем человека, чтобы провести глубокий эпистемологический и аксиологический анализ смысла и содержания человеческой жизни во время пандемии. В статье излагаются экзистенциальные переживания современных людей, исходя из результатов анкетирования. Актуальность изучения проблемы человека и смысла его жизни возникает как потребность, которая важна не только с социальной точки зрения, но и на философском уровне.

*Ключевые слова:* экзистенциальные переживания, пандемия, жизнь, мораль, ответственность, COVID-19.