

# WORK AND MENTAL CRISIS. BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES ABOUT WORK, ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

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NCN OPUS 19 "COV-WORK: Socio-economic consciousness, work experiences and coping strategies of Poles in the context of the post-pandemic crisis"

IDUB "The experience of a mental crisis in the precariat and in the narratives of experts"



# SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

❖ the analysis of data from autobiographical narrative interviews conducted with representatives of:

1. essential workers (education, health care, social care, and logistics)
2. experience of mental crises

❖ case study with elements of the biographical method (Fritz Schütze) of material from both projects in terms of the relationship between experiencing crises processes and building coping strategies through work.

❖ this presentation is prepared within the project NCN OPUS 19 "COV-WORK: Socio-economic consciousness, work experiences and coping strategies of Poles in the context of the post-pandemic crisis" funded by the National Science Center in Poland, the NCN project number UMO-2020/37/B/HS6/00479 and IDUB "The experience of a mental crisis in the precariat and in the narratives of experts" (BPIDUB.4610.715.2021).

# QUESTIONS

- ❖ Whether recovery takes place within the framework of trust in institutionalized forms of recovery or are there more individualized forms of coping (distrust of institutions)?
- ❖ How employees deal with mental crisis ?
- ❖ What strategies do they have for dealing with mental crisis?
- ❖ What is the role of work in overcoming the crisis, and what are the relationships with other people?
- ❖ Whether and to what extent work (biographical, gainful and reproductive) heals and helps overcome a mental crisis?

# CRISIS

- ❖ Crisis is a breakthrough experience.
- ❖ A crisis (regardless of its scope, scale, depth or duration) is a moment of change and transition from one state to another (Kosseleck, Richter 2006).
- ❖ A crisis is a state when "the boundary that separates one's own world from the surrounding world, the subjective from the objective, and which could be compared to a cell membrane, separating a living being from its environment and which gives man a sense of his own separateness, is (...) interrupted (Kępiński 2000: 222).
- ❖ A mental crisis is a person's reaction to a difficult situation in which he or she cannot use his or her resources and problem-solving skills because they are insufficient. This is a difficult transition in life.
- ❖ This is a turning point in biography adequate to who we later become.

# RECOVERY CAPITAL (RC)

- ❖ Robert Granfield i William Cloud (1999: 28, 2001, 2004, 2009).
- ❖ Initially, the concept was used in the treatment of addictions, but the term can be extended to include individuals with a variety of psychiatric clinical diagnoses.
- ❖ RC is based on a model that refers to all the internal and external resources that a person can access to support the healing process.
- ❖ The resource-based definition focuses on the strengths of the individual. In general, RC research and modeling address factors at the individual level, often referred to as “personal RC” or “human and physical RC,” and at the inter-individual level as “social RC” and the broader environmental context—“community RC” (Best, Hennesy 2021: 1140). In other words, RC are resources that lead to recovery.

# COPING CRISIS, WORK, BIOGRAPHY, RC

## WORK

### **Biographical:**

as a process in which an individual reflects on and evaluates his or her past with regard to his or her current situation and anticipated future (Strauss 2012)

### **Gainful:**

arising from the employment relationship;

Substantial work activity;

Gainful work activity

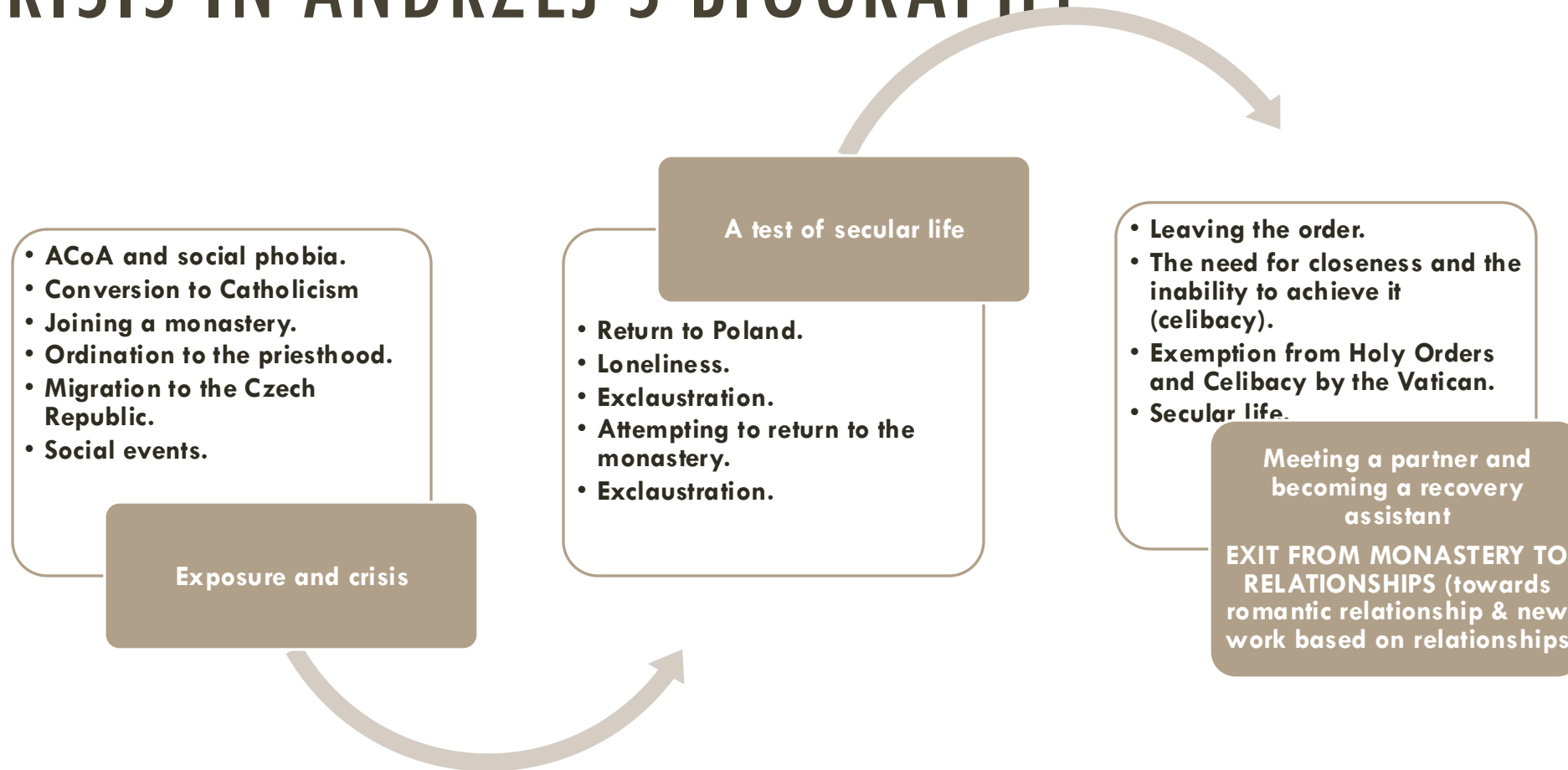
Work is what a particular society considers to be work, determines to be work, and accordingly recognizes (whether through wages or in some other form) as work (Honneth 2023)

### **Reproductive:**

‘reproduction’ as the analytic category best fit to think a complex web of social and gender relations (Federici 2018);

maintenance of social and family structures

# BIOGRAPHICAL WORK: THE COURSE OF THE CRISIS IN ANDRZEJ'S BIOGRAPHY



# ANDRZEJ — THE LEGACY OF THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

*when it comes to my **childhood, where this mental crisis began.** It started with such constant stress, yes, such tension, that **my house was not a safe place, there was this violence.** And I think that's where **neurosis, anxiety disorder and social phobia were generated.** And later I experienced this psychological violence at school. Some nicknames, some ridicule during classes.*



# ANDRZEJ — EXPOSURE TO STRESS AND LONELINESS

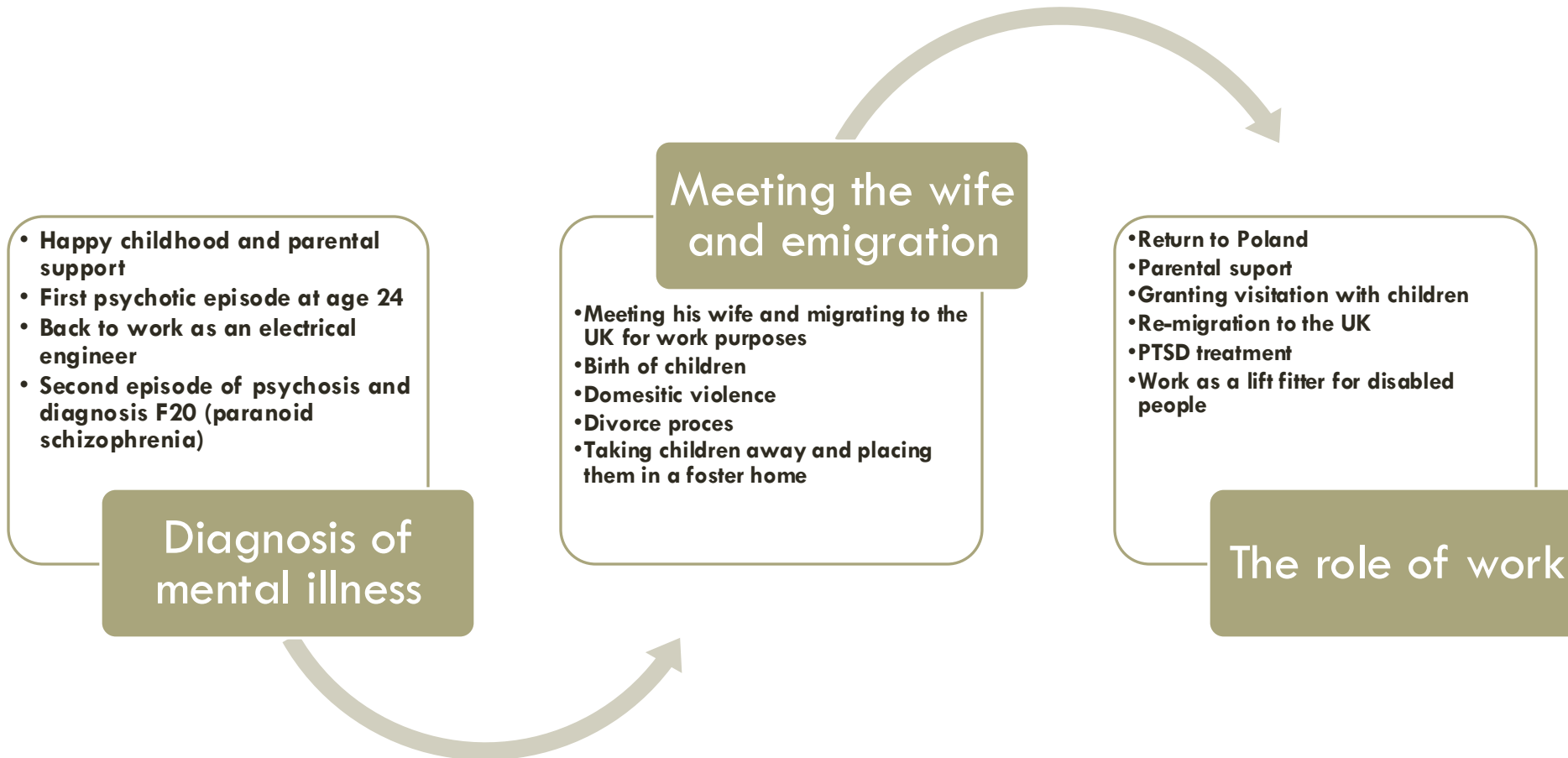
*And I realized that the life of **a priest is about speaking to people almost every day**. And I reported it, **I also started reporting my problems to some of my brothers**. At that time I didn't know at all, I wasn't aware that it was an anxiety disorder, yes. I didn't even know I was scared or anything. I only focused on the symptoms that I was sweating, that I was stressed, that my hands were shaking. But I talked about it. And **so I slowly started looking for help too**. But that was a little later. But first, I rather obtained information from my superiors that it would pass, so as not to worry about it, that I would get used to it. **And also from a more spiritual point of view, it was interpreted as a cross that you had to struggle with, that you had to accept in order to fight for your vocation.***

# ANDRZEJ - FROM LONELINESS TO FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

*Well, I'm currently in a relationship with a woman. And this relationship is going very well. I've been in a relationship for three years now. She's also been through a lot, so to speak. She is divorced and has also filed a declaration of invalidity of the marriage again on her part. He has children. Also a difficult situation, because there are two children there with Asperger's, Asperger's syndrome. I support her very much in this too.*

**Biographical reworking** of the crisis by therapy, building romantic relationships and taking steps towards fulfillment in the field of gainful employment.

# GAINFUL WORK: THE COURSE OF THE CRISIS IN KSAWERY'S (41 Y.O) BIOGRAPHY



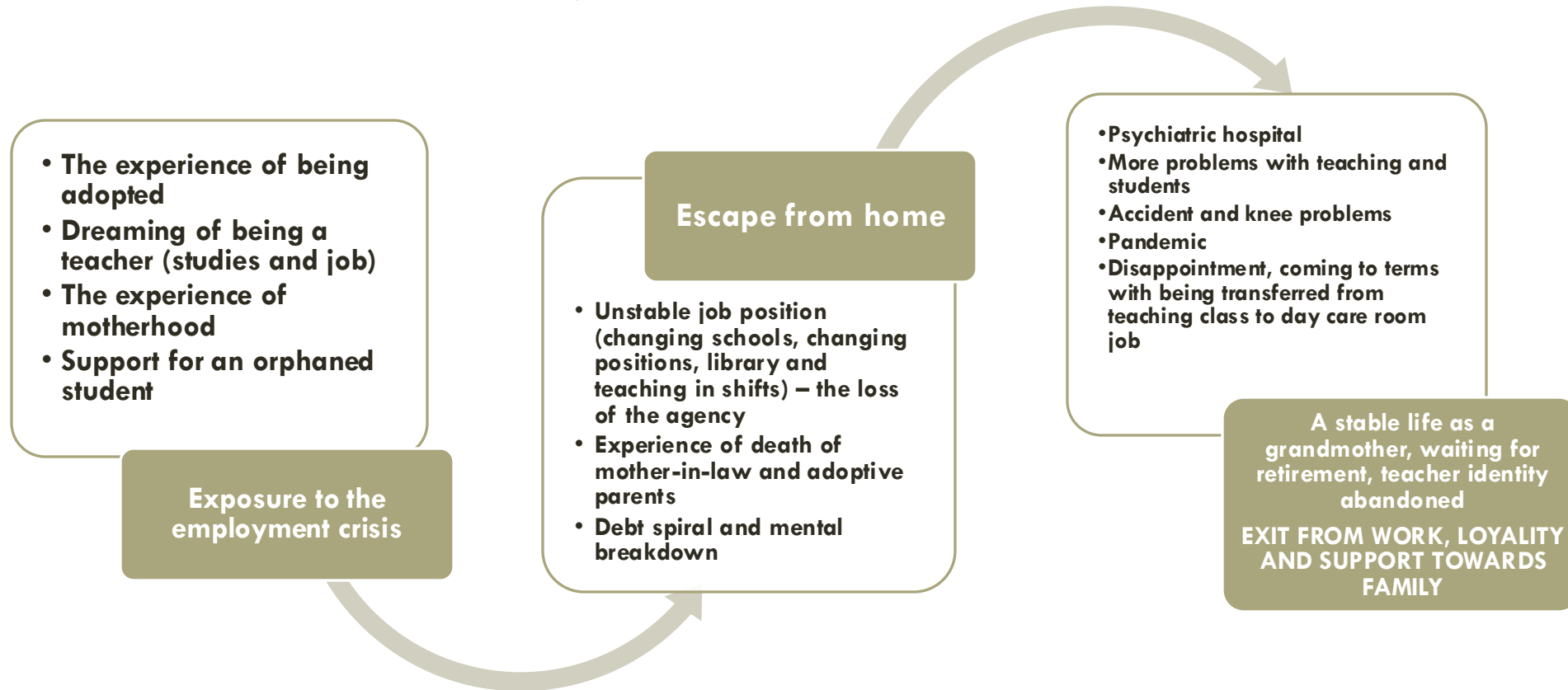
# KSAWERY - DECENT WORK HEALS

*I would like to give you some advice that helped me fight F20 [schizophrenia - A.K.] a dozen or so years ago. **Forget about all these pensions because it does not make you live independently.** What I would like to advise is to **find and go to work** as soon as possible. In my case, in 2014 I left for the UK and since then I have been working full-time and it's great... **I have been in remission for over 10 years...** I take medication and being here alone I cannot afford any episodes. Besides, work makes me not feel like an outcast. So from my side I recommend this form of existence.*

Resources of recovery capital contained in performing paid work that offers permanent, secure employment (contract), doing work that one likes, building social relationships at work, but also not admitting to mental illness in the workplace (chameleon resistance).

The assumption that work heals.

# REPRODUCTIVE WORK: THE COURSE OF THE CRISIS IN IWETA'S BIOGRAPHY (PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, DAY CARE ROOM, 59 Y.O.)



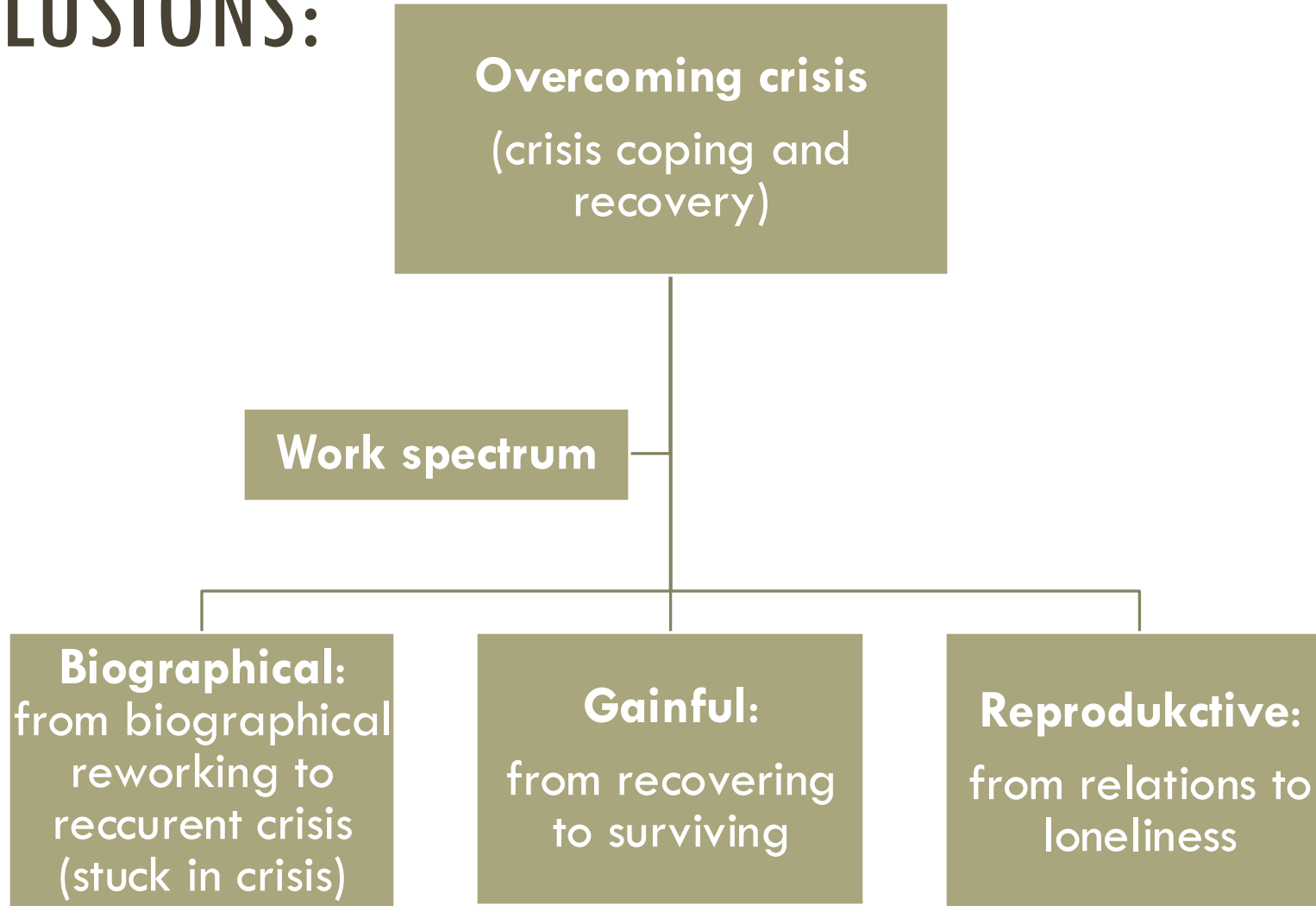
# IWETA - EXPOSURE TO EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL CRISIS

*I also had a very unpleasant incident... I don't know, emotional helplessness, all this pressure caused me to fall into debt. It started so gently, delicately, and then suddenly, here, and here, and here, and so on in a loop. And this loop caused some perturbations for me, because yes, I was a bit afraid of the responsibility for what I had done, no. (...) I ran away from home out of fear. I was gone for five days. But my son works in the police, so he ran all possible routes there, and eventually I was found. [I was] in a mental hospital for two weeks. But everything's fine. Because the moment they found out and all that, they didn't leave me. We did everything, we sold the apartment, I had to move out of D. [big city], but that's not the worst thing. Because in the apartment in D. where I lived, it was my father... I mean, he was sick for a long, long time while I was helping him.*

*Besides, I have two wonderful sons, grandchildren, a grandson and a granddaughter, now they will be one year old in July, one and then the other in August, because they come from one and the other son. Somehow life works out.*

Reproductive work in the form of building relationships with family as a resource that helps overcome the crisis.

# CONCLUSIONS:



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- The double entanglement of life and work in crisis - endogenous (process structures of biography, suffering, trajectory, biographical breakthroughs) and exogenous (social changes, great social crises, multi-crises – ex. pandemic, the crisis of public institutions as education) - possible to interpret and understand thanks to the biographical perspective
- Interviewees struggling with a mental crisis rarely use institutionalized forms of help. Most often, they overcome it by working on themselves in privately financed therapies (biographical work), taking up paid work (gainful work) and relying on relationships (reproductive work), although they often experience loneliness.
- Getting out of the crisis: from chronic mental crisis to coping strategies through work (as the answer on chronic mental crisis with endogenous and exogenous nature) (Iweta and Andrzej – mental and institutional crisis (from school and monastery to relationality))
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# THANK YOU 😊

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