

# An Assessment of the Situation of Women in the Labour Market in Poland

Manuela Ingaldi

Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Management, Institute of Production Engineering,  
al. Armii Krajowej 19b p.309z, 42-200 Czestochowa, Poland

---

**ABSTRACT**— *In the paper the role of women in society and the labour market was presented. The aim of this paper was to describe the situation of women in the Polish labour market related mainly to the issue of gender discrimination and stereotypes. The article was based on the literature research and own studies. On the basis of the available literature the problem of gender stereotypes and discrimination against women was described. The contemporary model of the family was also presented. Own study were focused on main statistics in the labour market in Poland by gender. Due to the research it was shown that apart from the problems faced by women in the labour market, employers in Polish market are not willing to pursue family-friendly policies. The author believes that to change the situation the image of the woman in the family should be changed, for example by the advertising campaign or a positive discrimination, that is quotas on the number of positions taken by both genders in the companies, should be introduced.*

**Keywords**— labour market, women, stereotypes, discrimination

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years an interest in gender issues and equal opportunities for women and men is growing. On the one hand, because the Polish accession to the European Union resulted in a change of laws in the area of anti-discrimination, and therefore required new responsibilities from the institutions of the labour market. On the other hand, the horizontal force principle of equal opportunities works in the Structural Funds used by the labour market institutions, and therefore the activities, that meet this rule, are required from the project promoters [1].

Unfortunately, in Poland as well as in other countries, the phenomenon of the gender discrimination can be found. The role that the woman performs in the family, the mother and wife, is a main reason. According to Elizabeth Martinez, who developed the expertise for the U.S. National Institutes of Health [2], a maternity shall not be considered to be an obstacle in the women career, but assists women to reconcile career with the mothers' life. If the employee is worth it, must be supported in the most important moments of her/his life.

Often in the press and in the media it can be heard about another case of women problems in the labour market, mainly related to their discrimination. These problems occur regardless of the profession or employee position. The frequent occurrence of phenomenon associated with gender discrimination meant that the author has decided to present the issue more broadly on the example of her country.

The aim of this paper was to describe the situation of women in the Polish labour market related mainly to the issue of gender discrimination and stereotypes. The author began with the revision of available literature connected with the research subject. At the beginning a problem of the gender stereotypes and discrimination against women was presented. Then the contemporary model of family was also described.

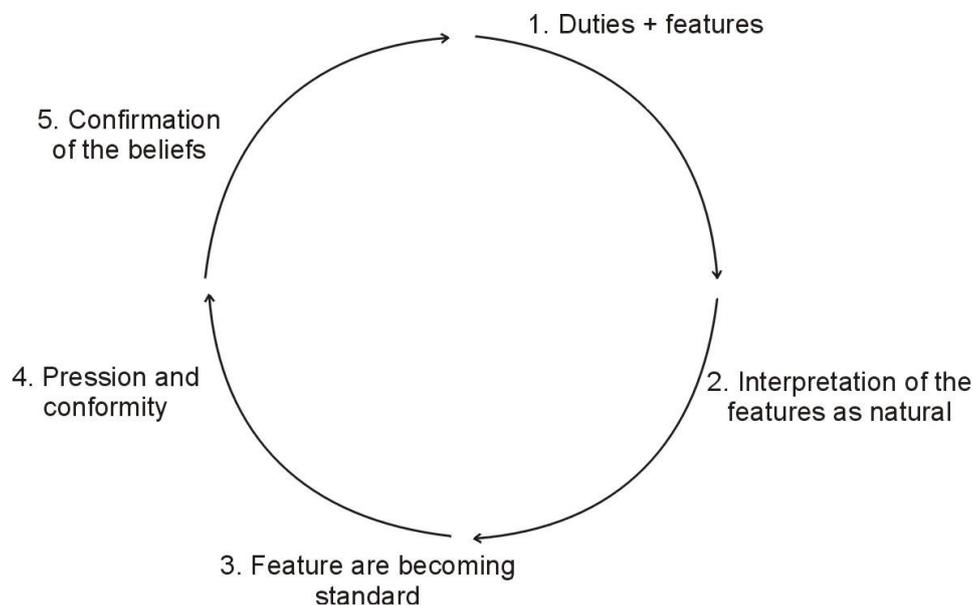
Main statistics in the labour market in Poland by gender were shown as well. The working time arrangements of women and men were presented. It was shown, that many employees, regardless of gender, do not have flexible working day, it means that they can not decide about when to start and end the working day, and also they can not take a day off without using holidays for family reason. This means no family-friendly policy in Polish enterprises.

## 2. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION

Many women in the labour market meet two types of phenomenon. They are gender stereotypes and discrimination. Both of them are illegal, but unfortunately it is a daily practice of many employers. Therefore, the author decided to explain what the gender stereotype and what the discrimination mean.

The stereotype, according to Teresa Kupczyk, is understood as “a system of simplistic, generalized beliefs about groups or individuals that are shared by the community” [3]. So the stereotype can be treated as generalizations related to the large groups of people. The term “stereotype” has a Greek root. “Stereos” means firm, solid; while “typos” means the impression – solid impression [4]. The stereotype usually concerns gender, age, race or skin colour. It is very durable and, unfortunately, difficult to change [5].

Dorota Pankowska write: „according to the stereotypes the femininity is tied to the sphere of domestic life, focused on relationships and family, and motherhood as the most important form of the life mission. Stereotypically the main features of the female psyche are those that facilitate compliance with expressive features, namely: emotionality, intuition, interest in people and empathy, caring, gentleness, willingness to sacrifice, kindness, submission, passivity, dependence on others. At the same time the femininity is associated with immaturity, because it is connected with the characteristics attributed to children, like: irrationality, inconsistency, inability to objectivity, giddiness, limited pragmatism, weakness and helplessness. While a masculinity is associated with work, power, public activities at different levels of the social hierarchy, with interest of things, not people, with a focus on gaining positions in the social hierarchy, and not on building relationships. Men are attributed to such features (...), as: independence, domination, ambitious pursuit of purpose, autonomy, rationality and logic, restraint and self-control, abstraction of thought, activity, firmness and ease of decision-making and efficiency in action, emotional coldness, aggression, callousness” [6]. The stereotyped approach to the gender results in so-called vicious circle of stereotyping (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The vicious circle of stereotyping [6]

Women and men are assigned to different attributes and roles (1). The woman, as mentioned before, is gentle, caring, while the man is rational, brave, and therefore more likely to get management positions. These features are treated in society as natural (2), and therefore the belief in the division of roles between genders gets stronger. Therefore, it is expected that men and women will act in accordance with the stereotypical image, it becomes the norm (3). Besides, both women and men feel pressure from the operating standards and submit to anything to avoid losing social acceptance (4). This behaviour confirms the role of women and men in the society (5). In this way, a vicious circle of stereotyping closes.

The discrimination, according to Magdalena Tabernacka, is “unfair treatment of certain groups or individuals, conditioned by their membership in a group. The risk of discrimination is related to the fact that stereotypes generally distort perception” [7].

The phenomenon of the gender discrimination in the labour market is, unfortunately, very common. Here there are the most discriminatory practices based on gender [1]:

- Harmful stereotypes – mostly against women: on the low potential as workers and the belief that being a mother negatively affects the quality of her work (the role of father for employers does not matter).
- Refusal of the employment only on the grounds of gender (and not qualifications) – selection of the desired gender in job advertisements, use of a disguised restriction on the recruitment – officially gender does not matter, in practice

is an important criterion (e.g. nurse or director).

- Vertical segregation – hindered advancement of women.
- Differentiated salary for equal work or work of equal value – in Poland is about 20% in favour of men.
- Violence based on gender – sexual harassment, which often affects women.

To equalize opportunities for women and men in the labour market, the gender discrimination and stereotypes should be eliminated. An important starting point is the publicity of such cases in the media, public discussion, and heavy penalties for the companies committing such practices.

### **3. CONTEMPORARY MODEL OF FAMILY**

The problem of gender discrimination, as previously stated, is primarily related to role of the woman in the family and thereby to the accepted model of family. Therefore, the author decided also to describe this issue and problem of barriers to career of women.

The model of family changes, it is quite different from that which was in force a few hundred or a few decades ago. In ancient times, the division of roles in the family was clearly defined. The task of women was to do housework and raise children. While, men had to work to earn for their families.

Nowadays, more and more women begin to fulfil themselves both at home and in their working lives and are able to perfectly combine all these responsibilities. In many professions they are appreciated and occupy high positions. There are many examples of women working as managers, directors and presidents of the large corporations. More and more often they also take part in political life, which is still dominated by men. Women have the perfect conditions to achieve success. They are balanced, well-organized, and more resistant to stress, in the majority of cases, better educated. Their persistence and consistency make that they cope perfectly even with the biggest problems better than men [8].

Nowadays, there are several models of family [9]:

- “Both at work” – this group includes women who would not abandon the work, if the husband/partner, respectively, earned, and does not want her husband/partner to quit his work if she is well-earned, they both should work – regardless of the level incomes.
- “Reverse/revolutionary” – this group includes women who would abandon the job if the husband/partner, respectively, earned, and expects the same decision from him, if she respectively earned.
- “Traditional” – this group includes women who would abandon the job if the husband/partner properly earned, but does not want her husband/partner to quit his work, if she respectively earned.
- “Workaholic” – this group includes women who would not abandon the work, if the husband/partner, respectively, earned, but does want her husband/partner to quit his work, if she respectively earned.
- „Indeterminate”.

Traditional model of the family is the most popular in Poland. There are many barriers to career of women connected with this model and tradition beliefs.

The main barrier to career of women is a natural barrier, which source is the family life, the function of the wife and mother, or caring for the family. According to prof. Bogdan Wojciszek, Director of the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences and prof. Mieczysław Mąkosz Director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry, Polish Academy of Sciences [2], women in this way, in addition to professional work, are additionally loaded with domestic duties, while men have more time to develop their careers. According to Joan Steitz [10] women work harder than men.

Our culture has different expectations for women and men. That is why, for example, there are more man-scientists. According to prof. Elżbieta Oleksy from the Universities of Łódź women are attributed to the role of wife and mother. They have to realize themselves in a home, not at work. Such views lead to mechanisms that block the advancement of women [2].

The family life would require treatment of women as special workers, with additional privileges. Unfortunately, there are no actions in this direction on the side of the employers. A large number of women decides for a more standardized working time. In addition, the studies of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences [11] have demonstrated that there are so-called “glass ceilings”, that means the creation of the barriers by male for women who wish to pursue a career.

According to Anna Ledin from The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm [2] the situation of women in the labour market is linked to the cultural privilege of men. Her research suggested that women not only have less time for professional work, but also more frequently were employed part-time and paid much less. Half of the surveyed

women have moved at least once because of the her husband's career. Only one in five men changed his place of residence because of the career of his wife.

Often, for a professional career, women sacrifice their family life and very often in such situations they are single. Again according to Anna Ledin [2] the woman who wants to be successful, has to chose: totally dedicate to her career or family. Men rarely are forced to such a choice. The man can be at the top without sacrificing a successful family life.

A similar situation was observed 20 - 30 years ago. Only then the research position was dominated by men with white colour of skin [10].

#### 4. WOMEN IN THE POLISH LABOUR MARKET ACCORDING TO STATISTICS

The gender discrimination, as mentioned before, is a problem for many countries, including European countries. Therefore, the author decided to assess the situation of women in the labour market on the basis of her own country.

The output data are the official data published on pages of Polish Central Statistical Office. They will allow specify the structure of the labour market, divided into gender. In the Table 1 the employment in Poland and its gender structure were shown.

**Table 1:** Employees in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Total [in thousands]</i>	
Employees	12220	
including:	Males	Females
	6459	5761

According to Statistical Yearbook: Reconciliation between work and family life in 2010 of the Central Statistical Office, there was over 12 million employees in Poland. In the labour market there were almost 53% of men (almost 6.5. million) and slightly over 47% of women (over 5.7 million). It should be noted one important fact. According to the Central Statistical Office men accounted only 48.4% of the population (women 51.6%). This means that many women were without work, dedicated themselves to housework.

An analysis of the structure of employees by working time arrangements was conducted (Table 2). The percentages for both genders were calculated.

**Table 2:** Percentage of the both genders employees by working time arrangements in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
have fixed start and end of working day or varying working time as decided by the employer	86.00	89.32
have daily number of hours fixed with some flexibility within the day	6.32	5.03
have flexitime (working time banking)	5.19	3.92
determine their own work schedule	1.84	1.39
have other working time arrangements	0.63	0.35

The structure of employees by working time arrangements for both genders is similar. 86% of men and over 89% of women had fixed start and end of working day or varying working time as decided by the employer. This means that the organization of their working time was not flexible, it can not be customized. It is especially difficult in the case of families with small children. Only over 5% of men and almost 4% of women had flexitime, with working time banking. And less than 2% in both cases has a the full flexibility of working time arrangements.

Another part of the analysis concerned the education. The percentages of employment for both genders were presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Percentage of the both genders employees by level of education in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
Tertiary	22.20	38.27
Post-secondary and vocational secondary	28.08	29.09
General secondary	7.56	11.16

Basic vocational	35.13	17.20
Lower secondary, primary and incomplete primary	7.03	4.27

From Table 3 it results that Polish women were better educated than Polish men. More than 38% of working women declared tertiary education and over 29% the post-secondary and vocational secondary. While among working men most often mentioned was the basic vocational education (over 35%). It should be noted, however, that despite the better education of women, as shown in Table 1, they were less active on the labour market. This means, unfortunately, that education is not reflected in the labour market.

An analysis of the structure of employment for both genders by selected occupational groups was also conducted (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Percentage of the both genders employees by selected occupational groups in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
Public government representatives, senior officials and managers	5.85	4.72
Professionals	11.66	27.95
Technicians and associate professionals	11.29	15.67
Clerical support workers.	5.59	13.14
Service and sales workers	7.51	18.30
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0.68	0.21
Craft and related trades workers	28.72	5.38
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	19.23	3.44
Elementary occupations	8.08	11.02

From the analyses of the structure of selected occupational groups (Table 4) it can be seen certain trends in case of both genders. Nearly 29% of men worked as craft and related trades workers, and over 19% of the position of plant and machine operators and assemblers. Among women dominated professionals (almost 28%) and service and sales workers (over 18%). It is related with the specific nature of the job and stereotypes. Heavier work (labourer, machine operator) should be performed by men and women should do lighter work (e.g. service and sales workers).

In Table 5 percentages for men and women by working time and sector, in which they work, were presented.

**Table 5:** Percentage of the both genders employees by working time and sector in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
working:		
full-time	96.07	90.78
part-time	3.93	9.23
in:		
public sector	26.26	42.74
private sector	73.74	57.26

From the analysis of the labour market based on gender (Table 5) it results that over 96% of men and almost 91% worked full-time job. The proportion of part-time work was higher for women. This may be related to the need to reconcile paid work and the role of mothers of young children. The structure of the labour market by sector is particularly noteworthy. In case of men the private sector dominated (almost 74%), while in the case of women there was no clear advantage of one of the sectors. It is certainly related to the work performed by the employees of both genders. In Poland, most manufacturing companies, where employees are workers, operators, assemblers, are private companies. Women working as professionals are employed primarily in public companies or state organizations.

Some employees have flexible work system, that is, they have the ability to change the start and end of the working day. This is especially important for people who take care of small children. The percentage structure by possibility to vary start/or end of working day is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Percentage of the both genders employees by possibility to vary start/or end of working day in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
generally have the possibility to vary start and/or end of working day	21.09	21.32
rarely have the possibility to vary start and/or end of working day	37.06	39.68
can not have vary start and/or end of working day	41.83	39.00

The structure of the labour market by possibility to vary start/or end of working day (Table 6) was similar for both genders. This means that men and women as parents were treated equally by employers. Over 20% of women and men, if necessary, can ask for such a change. This means that employers fully accept the family life of their employees and want to be helpful. In 37-39% the employees can ask for change of start or end of working day only in exceptional cases. Approximately 40% did not have this possibility. In this case, they have to use so-called Polish “grandma and grandpa” institution.

Child care, in particular his illness or accident, is often associated with a fast decision about the day off. Some employers do not makes the employees, in this situation, use their holidays. The analysis of such possibility is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Percentage of the both genders employees by possibility to take a day off for family reasons without using holidays in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [%]</i>	<i>Females [%]</i>
generally have the possibility to take a day off without using holidays	13.98	14.03
rarely have the possibility to take a day off without using holidays	25.47	24.58
can not take a day off without using holidays	60.57	61.40

As in the case of possibility to vary start and/or end of working day, also the structure of the labour market by the possibility to take a day off for family reasons for both genders was similar. About 14% of people (both women and men) can take advantage of such day, without using holidays. About 25% of them can do this only in exceptional cases. However, more than 60% in order take a day off for family reasons must ask for holidays. It should be noted that, according to the statistics, the sector does not have an influence on the decisions of the employers.

An analysis of the structure of the employed people and those who finished their work after 2001, who had at least one child under the age of 8 by the use of parental leave for minimum one month was conducted. The results of this analysis were presented in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Percentage of the both genders employees by the use of parental leave for minimum one month in 2010 [own study based on 12]

<i>Specification</i>	<i>Males [in thousands]</i>	<i>Females [in thousands]</i>
The employed and persons who stopped working after 2001 with at least one child up to 8 years old	2429	2425
up to 3 months	6	134
more than 3 months and up to 6 months	0	142
more than 6 months and up to 1 year	5	147
more than 1 year	7	315
leave is still ongoing	8	192
Persons who did not take full-time parental leave for the youngest child	2402	1494

In the case of longer child custody, i.e., child care leave, a huge disproportion can be seen. Nearly 2.5 million men and women were entitled to such leave. However, very few men have benefited from such leave. Often it was due to the

fact that these men did not work or it was easier for them, for financial or organizational reasons, to give up work. In case of women in 2010 around 1 million women decided to benefit from such privilege. It can be concluded that stereotypes about the role of both parents exist. The duty of the father is to make money to support the family, and duty of the mother to take care of children. What of course is related to the resignation of women from their careers.

## 5. SUMMARY

In the paper the problems of women in the Polish labour market was presented. First of all, limits of access to that market because of stereotyping and discrimination were identified.

In Poland, as in other countries, the primary role of women is to care for children, family, home, and their career should be in the second place. The man should be responsible for making money and that to his career the woman should be subordinated. It is also believed that women are weaker than men, more committed to the house, because of this employers more frequently hire men. The woman alone often decides to stay at home for the sake of the children.

Through the analysis of the labour market in Poland it was shown that women are better educated, but they are less active in the labour market. They are more often employed in the public sector, as professionals and service and sales workers.

It is worth noticing that both women and men have the problem with flexible working arrangements. They can not change start and/or end of working day, or to take the day off without using holidays for family reasons. Unfortunately, the Polish labour market is not set to focus on the family, what often results in discouraging workers, lack of motivation to work. However, the research results in papers [8, 14-15] show, that family-friendly policies such as company's nursery, flexible working hours will increase productivity of employees. This should prompt employers to change.

The Polish Government should take the appropriate steps to force employers to change their approach. Appropriate family policies is needed due to the rapid aging of the population. The recent changes of the family policies are mainly connected with the extended maternity leave, the introduction of paternity leave, building nurseries, kindergartens, refunds in vitro. This is a certain help for the young parents. Unfortunately nobody says anything about the measures that should eliminate gender discrimination in the labour market.

Some changes can be observed in Polish politics. At the end of 2010, the Polish Parliament adopted a law guaranteeing men and women at least 35 percent of places on electoral lists to the Parliament, the European Parliament, local councils and the Regional Assembly.

But it is not enough. Perhaps a good idea would be an advertising campaign widely carried out in the media, which would propagate partnership approach to the role of the family and would build a new image of women. It would be also important to change the roles of men and women in adverts of products or services shown on TV. Another good idea would be positive discrimination, that is, to reserve a certain number of places for both genders in a company. This system has been widely promoted in the Nordic countries, where works flawlessly.

## 6. REFERENCES

- [1] Ed. Borkowska M., Branka M. (Ed.), *Równość szans kobiet i mężczyzn a rynek pracy. Poradnik dla instytucji rynku pracy.* Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich, Warszawa, Poland 2012
- [2] Hołdys A., "PAN nie dla pań". *Polityka*, <http://www.polityka.pl/pan-nie-dla-pan/Text01,936,251042,18/> (19.07.08)
- [3] Kupezyk T., *Kobiety w zarządzaniu i czynniki ich sukcesów*, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa, Wrocław, Poland 2009
- [4] Olędzki J., *Komunikowanie w świecie. Narzędzia, teorie, unormowania*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA, Warszawa, Poland 1998
- [5] Molęda-Zdziech M., *Komunikowanie w perspektywie ekonomicznej i społecznej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Szkoły Głównej Handlowej, Warszawa, Poland 2001
- [6] Pankowska D., *Wychowanie a role płciowe*, GWP, Gdańsk, Poland 2005
- [7] Tabernacka M., *Negocjacje i mediacje w sferze publicznej*, Oficyna, Warszawa, Poland 2009
- [8] Kardas E., Konstanciak M., „Sytuacja kobiet w edukacji i na rynku pracy w Polsce”. *Genderové stereotypy v technice, Sbornik z odborného semináře ve spolupráci s Akademií věd ČR, VŠB-TU Ostrava, Czech Republic*, 2008, pp. 5-10.
- [9] *Równościowa polityka zatrudnienia szansą kobiet na rynku pracy województwa mazowieckiego. Kobiety na rynku pracy województwa mazowieckiego. Raport z badań przeprowadzonych w ramach projektu. Projekt realizowany przez Fundację Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.*
- [10] Miłuszko W., "Mężczyźni nie są lepsi – rozmowa z prof. Joan Steitz". *Przekrój* 23/2008: [http://www.przekroj.pl/cywilizacja\\_nauka\\_artykul,2132.html](http://www.przekroj.pl/cywilizacja_nauka_artykul,2132.html) (19.07.08)
- [11] Poros J., *Artykuł w dziale sonda redakcyjna. Wydanie: 12/2003 – Kobiety w nauce* *Biuletyn Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego* [http://www.sprawynauki.waw.pl/?section=article&art\\_id=646](http://www.sprawynauki.waw.pl/?section=article&art_id=646) (19.07.08)
- [12] *Praca a obowiązki rodzinne w 2010 roku (Reconciliation between work and family life in 2010). Informacje i opracowania statystyczne (Statistical Information and Elaborations)*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny (Central Statistical Office), Warszawa, Poland 2012.

- [13] Narodowy spis powszechny ludności i mieszkań 2011. Raport Wyników. Główny Urząd Statystyczny (Central Statistical Office), Warszawa, Poland 2012.
- [14] Pustějovská P., Brožová S., Věda, technika a ženy-ambivalence uplatnění. Monografie. VŠB-TU Ostrava, Czech Republic 2008.
- [15] Brožová S., Pustějovská P., Juchelková D., Bilík J. “The increasing integration of young worker’s rate, especially woman, into research of complex environment protection”. In PROCEEDINGS of ICEE2008 New Challenges in Engineering Education. 2008, Maďarsko.