

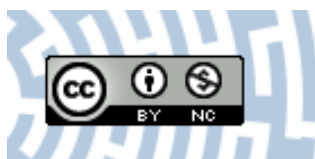


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Title: Polish women as managers - factors of professional succes : theoretical and diagnostic study

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Polish Women as Managers - Factors of Professional Success. Theoretical and Diagnostic Study

Abstract

In the article the authors present the theoretical and practical outline of professional success of Polish women.

The theoretical part of the article considers the latest research studies about being in charge. The authors pay special attention to social-psychological circumstances of women who are successful in their job.

The diagnostic part concentrates on the results of the questionnaire study, led on the sample of 69 female managers.

To conclude the article, the authors intend to present favourable factors of achieving managing success.

Key words: *Professional success, women managers, factors of success*

Introduction

Political and economical transformations over the last 15 years have contributed to changes in the labour market in Poland, which have advantaged women in several ways. Not only business expansion but also changes occurring across the law, education and institution have led to increased job opportunities for women.

In addition the feminist movement has opened doors for women to attain equality in many positions. Thus, women have more possibilities to be professionally active. Polish women have become more motivated to professional work and they expect job success and not only personal one. Nowadays more and more Polish women start work to have a career: to win prestige and become more independent. Although research results and psychological studies indicate women's "natural" talents such as communication skills, creativity, emotional intelligence (empathy, emotion recognition, interpersonal skills), top management positions, the best-paid jobs are dominated by men. It concerns even feminised professions such as education and medical care.

Sociologists point out another threat for job success of women. They are "a token group". They are in the minority, which in some cases might lead to underachievement, fear about social exposure and an inadequacy syndrome. In addition, working women are more strictly appraised by society, which still expects them to be mothers first of all. Nevertheless, the great majority of working women endeavour to combine career with parenting.

To above - described situation has recently inspired numerous gender studies in Poland. Parents give their daughters "roots" to establish families and have homes, on the other hand sons are given "wings" to face challenges (by J. Block). It turns out that successful women in Poland are given these "wings" as well. It is what inspired us in our research. We want to find out what are the psycho-sociological factors that create women's "wings", leading to achievements.

1. Theories Explaining Women's Behaviour

In sociology and Women's Studies or Gender Studies there are a lot of theories explaining women's behaviour. These concepts can be divided into:

- internal theories
 - a) *Sex Role Theories* focus on childhood experience and its influence on adult behaviour. Tradition, stereotypes (about men's and women's roles), parents upbringing philosophy determine life patterns and professional attitude of women.
 - b) *Human Capital Theory* indicates that the main aim of women's activities is to provide for the family, especially children. According to these theories young women resign from studies and afterwards job careers on purpose to devote their lives to their families.
- external theories.
 - a) *Life History Approach* - analyses the impact of events and circumstances

from the nearest environment on women's life. Professional decisions of women are verified by all experiences women encounter and their reactions to reality.

- b) *Institution and Organisation Barriers*, which explains inequalities between men and women referring to social policy of countries and social stereotypes connected with typical men's and women's jobs.

2. Research Review-Working Women in Polish Society

Some statistics and numbers are presented below to illustrate the trends of changes occurring in the area of women working professionally.

In social consciousness there is a myth of *three M* - *miłość, małżeństwo, macierzyństwo*, in English - *love, marriage and motherhood* that are or should be the most important for women. Not all Polish women accept and act in compliance with it. The proof might be some demographic changes in our country: the number of family members shrinks as women get married later, become pregnant later, want to have one child or not to have them at all and as a result the whole society is getting older. Sociologists are interested in a quite widespread phenomenon of DINKS (double income, no kids), where the partners are orientated towards success and not having children, The following results support the above observation, at least to some extent.

Women have increased their share of the labour force in Poland nowadays but one of the factors which still militates against women's successful participation in the paid labour market is their unequal responsibility for childcare and domestic commitments. The data shows that women shoulder disproportionate responsibility for childcare even if they are employed full-time. 95% of professionally working women take care of children, and household and only 47% of men help them (Duch-Krzystoszek, 1997). It means that women with dependent children find it difficult to work or just cannot afford to work as the childcare offered by the Polish state is relatively expensive.

However, married women's participation in the paid labour market is rising. What are their motives? In 1993 there was a survey in Polish society and its results are interesting. More than 60% of women declared that they would not resign from their jobs even if their husbands earned the living. It seems that for these women a job is not only a source of income but also a challenge and self-actualization (Duch-Krzystoszek, 1997). But still, the most important, declared job motive suggested by the statistics (GUS, 2001) is a financial one- Polish families simply need double income.

On the contrary, some sex role stereotypes are still vivid and present in peoples consciousness. According to further statistics from 1995, 40% of the respondents (female, male) declared that the main activity of Polish women is housework and childcare, while men are supposed to provide for the family working professionally. In addition, 45% of the enquired women consider men's career as a priority.

While several legislative changes have guaranteed equal rights to Polish women with relation to men, the latter have maintained their comparative advantage. As outlined above, Polish women still constitute the majority of those engaged in unpaid housework. Thus, they are far less likely to be employers, and those who are employees tend to earn less than their male colleagues. At the managerial level, Polish women are generally underrepresented in all sectors of administration, private sector, industry, not to mention politics. Male predominance is also visible at the highest managerial levels of education, which is a sector in which women occupy the most posts. The statistical data from 2001 gathered by the National Institute of Statistics (GUS) show that 80% of working women are employed in typical women's professions which are less paid - it means less prestigious. Moreover, women in top management or high state positions earn about a quarter less than men doing the same job (GUS, 2001). These figures are not encouraging but they prove that a *glass ceiling* exists in Poland. The term defines an invisible barrier preventing women from taking top management positions.

For a long time in Polish mentality womanhood and motherhood have been synonymous. But it seems no longer to be the case as another "stereotype" has been replacing it. Polish women are expected to be not only mothers but "superwomen"-a super employee, super wife, super mother. The new stereotype might be motivating or challenging but in Polish reality (probably not only) it creates a great deal of obstacles. Women who want to cope with all these expectations experience a lot of stress, illnesses, addictions or more generally burn-out. The situation is sometimes defined as "women hell-emancipation entrapment" (Wojtasiński, 2002). Are there super women in Poland? What has helped them to achieve success? Do they experience the glass ceiling? These are the questions that are intended to be answered in subsequent paragraphs.

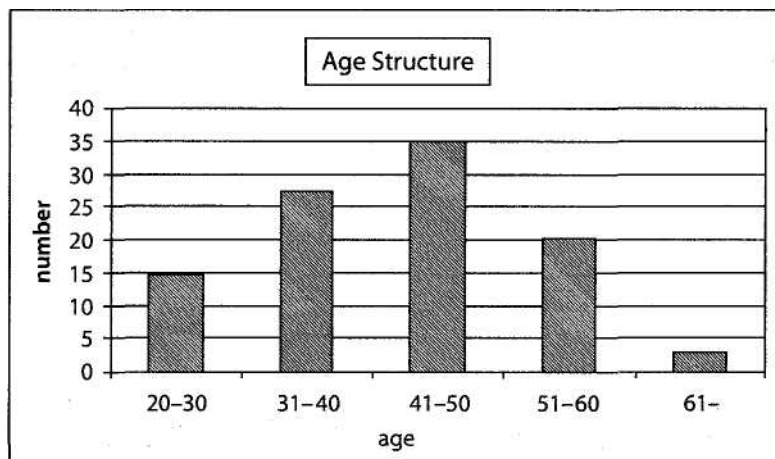
3. Authors Research Project-Results¹

The presented research is a diagnostic study based on a quantity methodology. The main aim is to enquire about the conditions of achieving professional success by Polish women. The main research method is a questionnaire, which was designed ad hoc. 69 females were questioned and their answers created some kind of "background" for women's success in Poland.

The representative sample was chosen taking into consideration the age and accomplishments. The choice was intentional to outline different areas of job success: medicine, education, law, show business, media, art, politics and economy. As examples of positions we can enumerate: a headmaster, managing director, financial manager, ward head, actor, newsreader, singer-composer, members of Parliament, judge, legal adviser, notary, academic teacher, scientist, and small business owner.

The structure of the sample is shown in the diagrams below.

Diagram 1.



¹ The data was collected from the unpublished M. A. dissertations of I. M i g d a ł: *Psychologiczne i socjologiczne uwarunkowania sukcesu zawodowego Polek*. Katowice, 2003; B. H e p p a: *Srodowisko wychowawcze a osiaganie sukcesu zawodowego przez kobiety w Polsce*. Katowice, 2003- which were written under dr B. Dyrda's supervision.

Diagram 2.

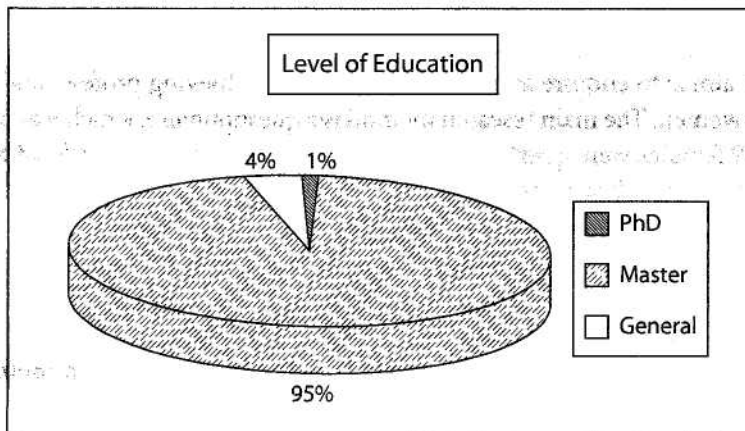
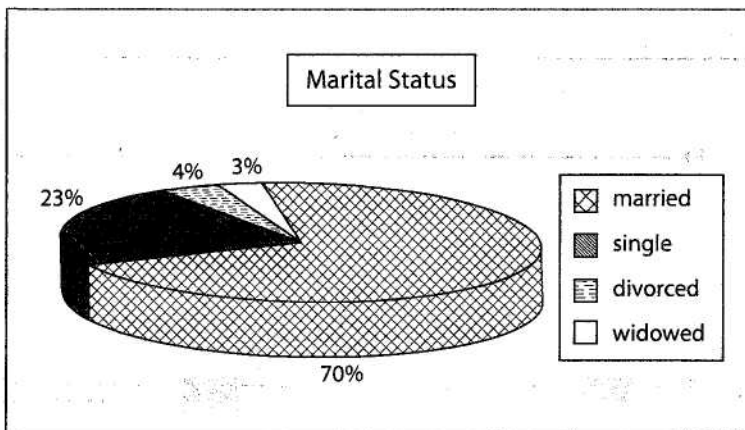


Diagram 3.



Referring to the above diagrams about 35% of successful women in population are in their forties, and approximately 30% - in their thirties.. It tallies with the periods of human and professional growth proposed by psychology and profes-siology- people achieve their creative level of functioning and consequently are the most successful between 30 and 45(Harwas-Napierała, 2003).

Almost all the women (96%) are well educated. Only three of them finished their education at the general level- they finished secondary school. Apparently good education seems to contribute to women's success. Moreover, also parents' education is an important motivator for their children: it influences their children's educational needs and aspirations. 26% of the mothers and 20% of the fathers of

the diagnosed females gained tertiary education (master degree); 42% of the fathers and 32% of the mothers- secondary education.

Furthermore, the great majority of women are married (70%). The second most numerous group are single women: living alone or in informal relationships. Referring to what was said in the previous chapter- marriage and domestic commitments do not seem to prevent those women from high-standard accomplishments.

The authors found it interesting to review personal opinions on professional success and its definitions (what does success mean for Polish women). According to their explanations they designate professional success as: a job that is interesting, financially attractive, satisfactory, connected with a high social position, self-fulfilment, competition with men, and independence. The questioned women appointed themselves as thriving in their work environment and the following expressions support it: they manage to deal with house and work duties, they have reached a high professional position, broad experience and knowledge, finally they perceive their work as an opportunity for personal growth and professional development. 80% of the enquired females perceived themselves as successful women. Nevertheless, they emphasised how demanding, time and energy consuming has been their "way up" (success) had been.

The subsequent aim of the carried out sample survey was to outline, to estimate childhood experiences of the diagnosed women. Undoubtedly, childhood determines human life in all areas, professional activity seems to be remarkably influenced also by our earliest experiences. The opinions of women implicitly suggested that their parents had motivated their learning persistence, engagement and independence. They declared that the democratic attitude, reasonable discipline and support from their parents, had contributed to their later success. Similar conclusions can be found in the research results by S. Rimm (2001).

It must be noticed that the financial situation of families where the women grew up was estimated as good (70%) and very good in 13% of cases. The remaining 17% of the females said that their families had encountered financial problems.

The most successful women grew up in families with a sibling. Approximately 45% of the respondents have one sibling, 29%- two, 12.9% -more than two. What is important is that the women stated that their parents had paid attention to siblings relationship for example: they had distinguished between them, treated them equally, helped to mediate in conflicts.

Moreover, according to the questionnaire the authors viewed personal opinion on how the females perceived their personality features in childhood. About 35% of the respondents characterised themselves as sensitive, a bit fewer (30%) as ambitious. In further positions pointed out by the women there were the following features: stubborn, methodical, active and independent, cunning, persistent, and

shy. Compared with the American survey by S. Rimm (2001) American women consider themselves as sensitive, perfect, self-critical, and shy. As can be seen, our research only to some extent corresponds with the American study.

In addition, the surveyed women declared that they had had a lot of interests and hobbies as teenagers. The most popular were: scouting (appointed by 25%), sport activity, drama, music, languages and religious activity. Besides, the women underlined their house commitments: most often baby sitting and cleaning.

At the final stage of our research we were seeking values which the women preferred as adults. Among the values that appeared most often, according to the rate given by the women, there were: family happiness (80%), an interesting job, respect, professional success, God, love, friendship, faith, being helpful and finally money (1.5%).

Summary

In accordance with the presented data, the surveyed females admitted that they really are women of success, in addition they are aware and proud of it. The analyses of family environment supported the thesis that family experiences are essential and they have influenced the women's private and professional life. Most importantly, however, our research confirms that Polish women are success-orientated and they are able to cope with both domestic duties and demanding job responsibilities.

It appears that better understanding of parenting and educating teenagers is needed to promote successful women. Taking into consideration the theoretical and empirical findings, a few pieces of advice for upbringing girls can be articulated. They could be an answer to the question "How can today's girls become tomorrows successful women?":

- encourage your daughters to enjoy a subject even if they do not like it;
- it is worth the effort and time to drive your daughters to extracurricular activities (music, art, sports, Scouts);
- insist on quiet time alone for girls to learn to entertain themselves
- teach being competitive,
- avoid pressurizing them to be popular at all costs;
- teach your daughters to value the three C s: challenge, contribution and creativity, encourage them to problem-solve and do new experiments.

These pieces of advice have their source in American studies conducted by S. Rimm (2001) but according to our research and intuition they are adequate in Polish reality, as well.

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