

## Professional activity of Polish peri- and postmenopausal women

Dorota Żołnierczuk-Kieliszek<sup>1</sup>, Mariola Janiszewska<sup>1</sup>, Agata Mielniczuk<sup>2</sup>, Małgorzata A. Dziedzic<sup>1</sup>, Ewelina Firlej<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chair of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Lublin, Poland

<sup>2</sup>Graduate of the Medical University of Lublin, Faculty of Health Sciences, Poland

### Abstract

**Introduction:** The menopausal transition as one of the stages in women's life can bring many ailments which complicate the accomplishment of professional duties. The situation of women on the Polish job market is determined by many barriers and stereotypes which impede women's access to jobs and professional promotions.

**Material and methods:** The aim of the study was to estimate the professional status and job satisfaction of women aged 40-65. The research was carried out by a survey method, a poll technique in the period from January to March 2016. An original questionnaire consisting of 35 questions was used as a research tool.

**Results:** The analysis of obtained results shows that the arithmetic mean of the age of women in full-time employment was 51.84 years whereas the arithmetic mean of the age of women in part-time or seasonal employment was 52.64. Women aged 45-60 were characterised by a significantly lower job satisfaction than women over 60 years of age. The highest percentage of women in full-time employment lived in large cities. The financial situation of working women determined their job satisfaction. Well-off respondents were more pleased with their jobs than women in a worse financial situation.

**Conclusions:** There is a strong need of education about counteraction of gender and age discrimination on the Polish labour market. The struggle against discrimination requires support on each level of the state administration through the implementation of numerous regulations facilitating the final period and resumption of women's professional activity.

**Key words:** menopause, women, professional activity, labour market.

### Introduction

Present socio-economical changes in our society require its members to play many roles and tasks. A good state of health and effective functioning are important not only for individual needs, but also for group needs. Middle-aged people constitute a considerable part of our modern society and middle-aged women have to perform family, professional and social duties, which leads to time pressure and overburden of role duties.

It is recognized that the mechanism of taking the responsibility for the social role performed is stronger in women than in men. Karren Haas attributes more responsibility bound with home duties to women than to men [1]. This is why contemporary women have to combine professional tasks with a family life. Their knowledge and life experience make them undertake social activity eagerly. At the same time middle-aged women experience hormonal changes of menopausal transition.

The menopausal transition as one of the stages in women's life can bring many physical and psychological

ailments which complicate the accomplishment of family, professional and social tasks. Climacteric symptoms can lessen women's psychophysical skills and cause worse role functioning and eventually a decline in quality of life [2].

The average lifespan of a Polish woman is 80 years and the last menstrual period occurs on average in the 50<sup>th</sup> year of age. So almost one third of a woman's life occurs after menopause. By any means it is not the twilight of the life, but a subsequent stage of existence, to which every woman should prepare herself earlier and pass through in good health [3].

The menopausal transition is a physiological stage in women's life and affects all women. Climacteric disorders can last for a few years [4] and can lead to disorders in family relations and occupational disturbances.

The International Menopause Day is celebrated on 18 October. It recalls that this stage does not have to be a period of suffering and renunciations, but thanks to contemporary medicine achievements the menopausal ailments can be easily alleviated and some of

Corresponding author:

Dorota Żołnierczuk-Kieliszek, Medical University of Lublin, Chair of Public Health, 1 Chodźki St., 20-093 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: dorota.zolnierczuk@gmail.com

Submitted: 31.07.2016

Accepted: 21.09.2016

them even eliminated completely. Especially on that day we should emphasise that regular check-ups, well-balanced diet and active lifestyle are very important for maintaining women's good health and well-being [3].

Nowadays women occupy job positions which require taking responsibility and the ability of taking important decisions quickly. Unfortunately these tasks may be difficult to perform by peri- and postmenopausal women as these women may be suffering from memory or concentration disorders. For these reasons it is very important to help peri- and postmenopausal women in their professional functioning [5].

Professionally active climacteric women can have a difficult time performing their jobs. Typical climacteric signs as heavy sweating, hot flashes, vertigo, mood swings, irritability can obstruct fulfilling professional tasks. The stereotype of an old, snappish female clerk is well known to all of us. Stereotypes and ideas have their reasons. The menopause symptoms are some of them. It happens that women, who were feisty and self-confident, start to doubt their skills during the menopausal transition. Simultaneously occupational burnout and the feeling of routine may appear.

Women start to lose their professional stability and to be afraid of losing their jobs. They feel the breaths of younger colleagues on their backs. One cannot allow to be overcome by depressing mood, especially when working. Stress-free atmosphere in the office is very important.

Offices and company premises are often not adjusted to mature women's needs. They lack air conditioning and adequate ventilation. There are no separated areas where older employees could have some rest and relax when a crisis situation occurs. This is why women are afraid to admit they suffer from menopausal ailments. Although they do not feel comfortable in their jobs they do not inform their employers about it. Menopausal women are ashamed to acknowledge experiencing these bothersome symptoms. It leads to a vicious cycle mechanism and worsens the situation. It may be worth starting an open discussion about menopausal women's problems at their working place and create optimal working conditions for them as it has been done for pregnant and breastfeeding women [6].

An attempt to evaluate peri- and postmenopausal women's professional status and job satisfaction is very important from a medical and psychological point of view [5].

Women often work in different professions than men, they differ from men in terms of salary and working hours. These differences result from education, pre-occupation with family life or even life expectations.

The level of economical activity is lower in women than in men. In 2013, in Poland we had 554 economically passive men per 1000 economically active women, whereas 1060 economically passive women for 1000

economically active men. We can observe feminization of economically inactive population – women constitute over 61% of that population.

The distribution of professional activity according to age is different among men and women. The highest percentage of professionally active women is in the 40-44 age group, whereas among men in the 35-39 age group.

There are clear differences in the structure of the population of working men and women according to their education. The majority of working women have higher education, then secondary education. On the contrary, men with secondary and vocational education dominate in the population of working men. The unemployment rate is higher among women than among men. It is difficult to find a job especially for women coming back to a labour market after a longer break or seeking for their first job. In Poland in every age group except the age group over 55 years, the unemployment rate is higher among women than among men.

In every occupational group men earn more than women. In October 2012, the biggest differences in average gross salary between men and women were noted in the group of industrial workers and craftsmen. The average women's salary constituted 66.3% of the average men's salary. The smallest differences were spotted in the occupational group of office workers, where the average women's salary constituted 98.1% of the average men's salary.

It is more difficult for women to compete on the labour market because some employers estimate women's work as less valuable. The lower level of seniority may be the consequence of this disparity [7].

The occupational situation of mature women is determined by many barriers and stereotypes, which impede women's access to work and professional promotion. These barriers involve many spheres of life: mental, institutional and individual. They refer both to women and other participants of the labour market: the state, employers and co-workers.

An extremely important aspect of women's presence on the job market is the mentality and a lot of gender stereotypes which women have to face and which mainly determine the position of women on the labour market. The promotion of equality in politics, business and social life will have a positive influence on equal perception and equal treatment. More women in politics or business means better understanding of women's needs and also better quality of law created and solutions implemented, because the point of view of both sexes is taken into consideration.

Women have to continue their education, struggle for better treatment at work only because the stereotype of "the weaker sex" still exists in our mentality.

The aim of the study was to estimate the professional status and job satisfaction of Polish women aged 40-65.

## Material and methods

The research was carried out by means of a survey method, a poll technique. The research was conducted between January and March 2016. 90 women aged 45-65 (arithmetic mean 51.93, standard deviation 5.47), inhabitants of the Lublin Voivodeship constituted the studied group. An original questionnaire consisting of 35 questions was used as a research tool. The questionnaire included closed questions, multiple choice questions and some open questions. All respondents were asked about their age, marital status, education and having children.

The gathered material was subjected to descriptive and statistical analysis.  $\chi^2$  test, *U* Mann-Whitney test, Kruskal-Wallis test and Spearman correlation coefficient were used. A statistical significance level was set as  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

Almost a half of the respondents (48%) lived in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, 30% of women lived in towns inhabited by fewer than 100,000 people. The remaining 22% of respondents were country dwellers. Married women constituted the majority of the studied group (57%). 17% of the polled women were widows and 12% were divorced. The percentages of unmarried women and respondents currently in an informal relationship were equal (both 6%). Women presently in separation constituted the smallest group (3% of the respondents). More than one third of the examined women (34%) had secondary education. In turn,

women with a master's degree constituted 22% of the polled group, women with a bachelor's degree 18% of the examined and 21% of respondents had vocational education. 43% of the polled group were mothers of adult children, who had already left the family home, 41% of the women still lived with their children. The percentage of childless women was 16%.

## Results

The differences between the respondents' age and their professional status are visible. The arithmetic mean of the age of women in full-time employment was 51.84 years whereas the arithmetic mean of the age of women in part-time or seasonal employment was 52.64.

No statistically significant differences were found between full-time employees and part-time or seasonal employees according to the age. These data are displayed in Table I.

There was no linear correlation between age and job satisfaction found ( $p$  Spearman = 0.000,  $p = 0.997$ ). It turned out that women aged 45-60 years showed statistically lower job satisfaction ( $M = 6.41$ ) than women aged above 60 ( $M = 7.30$ ). These data are shown in Table II.

The permanent place of residence influenced professional status. The highest percentage of respondents in full-time employment lived in large cities. On the other hand, the smallest number of full-time employees lived in the country. In the studied group there was only one woman living in a small town and working part time or performing seasonal work. These data are presented in Table III.

We have found no statistical differences between the respondents' permanent place of residence and their job satisfaction, what is depicted in Table IV.

Tab. I. The respondents' age and employment status

The main source of support	M	Me	SD
Full-time employees	51.84	51.00	5.35
Part-time employees, seasonal workers	52.64	52.00	6.55

*U* Mann-Whitney Test:  $Z = -0.259$ ,  $p = 0.795$

Tab. II. The respondents' age and job satisfaction

Age	M	Me	SD
45-60 years	6.41	7.00	2.37
Over 60 years	7.30	7.00	0.95

*U* Mann-Whitney Test:  $Z = -5.151$ ,  $p = -0.000^{**}$

Tab. III. The respondents' place of residence and professional status

Place of residence	Professional status	
	Full-time employment	Part-time or seasonal employment
Cities with above 100,000 inhabitants	42%	6%
Towns with up to 100,000 inhabitants	29%	1%
Countryside	16%	6%

$\chi^2$  test proved that the relation between the permanent place of residence and professional status was close to statistical significance ( $\chi^2 = 4.958$ ,  $p = 0.084$ ).

Tab. IV. The respondents' permanent place of residence and job satisfaction

Place of residence	M	Me	SD
Cities with above 100,000 inhabitants	6.74	7.00	2.32
Towns with up to 100,000 inhabitants	6.11	6.00	2.15
Countryside	6.55	6.50	2.35

Kruskal-Wallis Test:  $H = 2.143$ ,  $p = 0.343$

Tab. V. Professional status and material situation of the examined women

Professional status	Financial situation				
	Very good	Good	Average	Bad	It is difficult to say
Full-time employment	10%	32%	36%	3%	2%
Part-time or seasonal employment	0%	3%	9%	1%	0%

It is interesting that only 10% of women in a very good financial situation were full-time employees and 32% of women who had estimated their financial situation as 'good' worked full time. 36% of examined women in an average financial situation worked full time and only 9% worked part time or performed seasonal work. These results show that professional status affects the women's financial situation because full-time employees estimated their financial situation as better than women working part time or from time to time. These relations are depicted in Table V. However, no statistical differences were found between the examined women's professional status and their financial situation ( $\chi^2 = 2.354$ ,  $p = 0.671$ ).

The financial situation of working women determined their job satisfaction. Well-off respondents were more pleased with their jobs than women in a worse financial situation.

Rho Spearman correlation coefficient showed a highly statistically significant, moderately strong correlation between the respondents' financial situation and their job satisfaction. The better the financial situation the higher job satisfaction. Apart from that, it turned out that group 1 that is the respondents with a very good financial situation were characterised by a statistically higher level of job satisfaction ( $M = 8.50$ ) than women from group 3 and 4 that is with an average ( $M = 6.00$ ) and bad ( $M = 4.00$ ) financial situation. These data are shown in Table VI.

We found no statistical differences between the respondents in full-time employment and respondents in part-time or seasonal employment in terms of self-estimation of the health status ( $U$  Mann-Whitney Test:  $Z = -0.358$ ,  $p = 0.721$ ), what is presented in Table VII.

The respondents' education affected their self-estimation of the health status. Women with vocational and secondary education evaluated their health status as 'good' (13% of both women with vocational and secondary education) and 'I experience some minor ailments from time to time' (7% and 16%, respectively). These results are presented in Table VIII. There is no statistically significant linear correlation ( $p = 0.320$ , Spearman's  $\rho = 0.106$ ) between self-assessment of the health status and the level of education.

## Discussion

Menopause is a very difficult period of time for each woman. In these years women experience not only physical changes in their body, but also changes in their psyche, which can influence their professional and family life [8]. Many doctors emphasize that professional activity, fulfilling everyday duties and meeting friends may alleviate the symptoms of menopause. Some women do not even notice the symptoms of menopause [9]. The symptoms may be also reduced

**Tab. VI.** Job satisfaction and financial situation of the examined women

Financial situation	M	Me	SD
very good (1)	8.50	8.50	1.18
good (2)	7.07	7.00	1.72
average (3)	6.00	6.00	2.32
bad (4)	4.00	4.00	1.83

Kruskal-Wallis Test:  $H = 18.267$ ,  $p = 0.000^{**}$ , 1/3, 1/4 Spearman's  $\rho = 0.431$ ,  $p = 0.000^{**}$

**Tab. VII.** The respondents' professional status and self-assessment of the health status

Professional status	Self-assessment of the health status			
	Very good	Good	I experience some minor ailments from time to time	I suffer from chronic diseases
Full-time employment	8%	37%	31%	10%
Part-time or seasonal employment	2%	5%	6%	1%

**Tab. VIII.** The respondents' education and self-assessment of the health status

Education	Self-assessment of the health status			
	Very good	Good	I experience some minor ailments from time to time	I suffer from chronic diseases
Primary	1%	0%	0%	0%
Gymnasium	0%	1%	0%	0%
Vocational	0%	13%	7%	1%
Secondary	0%	13%	16%	5%
Bachelor's degree	3%	3%	9%	2%
Master's degree	3%	11%	6%	1%
Postgraduate education	1%	0%	2%	0%

by a healthy lifestyle, a healthy diet, regular exercise, maintaining the appropriate body mass and prevention measures [10].

In our study we estimated the professional activity and work satisfaction of women aged 45-65.

The Eurostat statistical data from 2014 concerning the employment in the European Union show there are differences in the number of working hours between genders. In 2014, almost one third of women aged 15-65 were working part time. The employment rates are lower for women and for the elderly [11].

Our data suggest that the arithmetic mean of the age of women in full-time employment was 51.84 years whereas the arithmetic mean of the age of women in part-time or seasonal employment was 52.64. The discrimination in the job market because of gender and age still exists in social mentality.

The results obtained by Schulz and co-authors prove that job satisfaction increases with age. Older employees were more pleased with their jobs than younger ones, who just had started their professional activity [12]. Results of our studies indicate that women aged 45-60 presented significantly lower job satisfaction than respondents over 60 years of age. So we can draw a conclusion that the job satisfaction depends on the age of the employees.

The 2013 CBOS research revealed that general work satisfaction was affected by non-financial factors, whereas the level of remuneration and the feeling of professional stability played a lesser role [13]. On the other hand, our results proved that the financial situation of working women determined their job satisfaction. Well-off respondents were more pleased with their jobs than women in a worse financial situation.

According to Gojdz and co-workers' study describing the quality of life in Polish perimenopausal female doctors, there is a relationship between the self-estimation of the health status and having regular meals or the frequency of physical exercise [14]. So we can see the relationship between the health behaviours and self-estimation of the health status. In our studies no significant differences were found between the respondents' education and professional activity and their self-estimation of the health status.

It is worth pointing out that perimenopausal women's professional activity has a positive influence on their self-esteem. It was confirmed by Czarnecka-Iwańczuk *et al.* who reported that perimenopausal women active on the job market had higher self-esteem than women receiving the benefits for the disabled or old age pensioners [15].

The 2015 CBOS research proved the relationship between the place of residence and the level of satisfaction from professional career. The smaller town dwellers were less satisfied with their career than inhabitants of larger cities. Moreover, the studies suggest that respondents from the 55-64 age group manifest dissatisfaction with their financial situation more often [16]. Our findings proved no relationship between the respondents' place of residence and their job satisfaction.

As we can see from the above-mentioned data, professional status and job satisfaction of peri- and postmenopausal women are affected by various factors. Both our results and the review of the literature prove that the topic is very important. Current demographic statistics inform us about the rising percentage of the elderly in the society. The number of peri- and postmenopausal

women in the society also increases constantly. The existing discrimination of women on the Polish job market and the 'weaker sex' stereotype lessen the role of women. Further research on the situation of mature Polish women on the labour market is necessary.

## Conclusions

1. The differences between the respondents' age and professional status were visible. The arithmetic mean of the age of women in full-time employment was 51.84 years whereas the arithmetic mean of the age of women in part-time or seasonal employment was 52.64.
2. The respondents' place of residence affected their professional status. The highest percentage of women in full-time employment lived in large cities. The relation was close to statistical significance.
3. The financial situation of working women determined their job satisfaction. Well-off respondents were more pleased with their jobs than women in a worse financial situation.

## Disclosure

Authors report no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Haas L. Structural dimensions of the work-family interface. In: The work family interface: Families in focus series. Bowen G, Pittman J (eds.). National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis 1995; 113-116.
2. Lewiński A. Menopauza bez tajemnic. Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, Warszawa 2006; 16.
3. Davis S. Zdrowie kobiety – menopauza. Via Medica, Gdańsk 1996; 10-11.
4. Wells RG, Wells MC. Menopauza środek życia. Oficyna Wydawnicza Vocatio, Warszawa 2005; 83-84.
5. Francis C. Pierwsze kroki do... przejścia przez menopauzę. Wydawnictwo Jedność 2013; 38.
6. Lewiński A. Menopauza bez tajemnic. Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, Warszawa 2006; 45-46.
7. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy. Warszawa 2012.
8. Lewiński A. Menopauza. Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, Warszawa 2008; 34.
9. Bromley D. Psychologia starzenia się. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1969; 24.
10. Carr C. Menopauza Poradnik nowoczesnej kobiety. Wydawnictwo Vesper 2011; 132.
11. Eurostat. Dane statystyczne dotyczące zatrudnienia; [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment\\_statistics/pl#Umowy\\_o\\_prac.C4.99\\_w\\_niepe.C5.82nym\\_wymiarze\\_czasu\\_pracy\\_i\\_na\\_czas\\_okre.C5.9Blony](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment_statistics/pl#Umowy_o_prac.C4.99_w_niepe.C5.82nym_wymiarze_czasu_pracy_i_na_czas_okre.C5.9Blony).
12. Schulz DP, Schulz SE. Psychologia a wyzwania dzisiejszej pracy. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002.
13. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2013. Zadowolenie z pracy i jej oceny; [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K\\_010\\_13.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_010_13.PDF).
14. Gojdz K, Bąk-Sosnowska M, Kołodziej S, et al. Quality of life of female physicians aged 45-55 years. *Prz Menopauz* 2013; 3: 213.
15. Czarnecka-Iwańczuk M, Stanisławska-Kubiak M, Mojs E, et al. Menopause symptoms versus life satisfaction and self-esteem among women. *Prz Menopauz* 2012; 6: 468.
16. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2015. Zadowolenie z życia; [http://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K\\_003\\_15.PDF](http://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_003_15.PDF).