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SOCIAL PREJUDICES AND THEIR IMPACT ON LIMITING WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The considerations contained in this article relate to the broad issue of discrimination against women in the labour market. In this respect, the aim of the study is to verify the areas in which women feel discriminated against in the labour market and which impact on the inhibition of their professional development. In the first part, a review of the literature is carried out, where the terms stereotype, prejudice and discrimination are defined. In this respect, the types of discrimination occurring in the labour market are also indicated. The empirical part presents the results of own research. Following on from the above, a preliminary survey was conducted with 310 respondents from Poland at the beginning of 2024. It concerned an assessment of society's views on the role of women in various dimensions of the socio-economic environment. Based on the respondents' answers, a verification of the employment areas in which women feel discriminated against was carried out. Furthermore, using the econometric package GRET, an Ordinary Least Squares method (OLS) was used to assess the relationship between these areas. The final section presents detailed conclusions and identifies limitations and recommendations for further research.

Keywords: stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, discrimination against women, GRET.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's career development is continuously at the centre of research, regardless of the aspect under consideration at any given time. In this



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respect, it concerns both issues related to women's return to the labour market, e.g. after maternity leave or long-term illness, and those related to their career development, including those directed towards obtaining managerial positions.

The promotion of women's professional development plays a key role in the context of wider socio-economic development. It is generally assumed to have a positive impact on economic growth and, in the longer term, may also contribute to changing social attitudes. It is worth noting that the biggest problem here is social prejudice, according to which women are perceived according to certain categories. It should be mentioned that prejudice is justified by prevailing stereotypes, which in turn initiate discriminatory behaviour that directly affects women's careers.

In order to confirm the timeliness of the problem discussed, a preliminary survey was carried out at the beginning of 2024 to assess whether the topic addressed is valid within a specific social group. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to verify the areas within which women feel discriminated against in the labour market and which, at the same time, contribute to limiting their professional development.

In this respect, the following research questions were defined:

RQ1: In which areas are women feeling discriminated against in the labour market?

RQ2: Is there a correlation between these areas?

RQ3: Do social prejudices affect discrimination against women in the labour market?

RQ4: Can discrimination against women in the labour market limit their career development?

The answers obtained to the above questions will make it possible to verify the research problem undertaken. Given the pilot nature of this study, the conclusions obtained in this respect will allow it to be further specified with additional aspects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With reference to the subject matter of the present study, it is first worthwhile to refer to three key, intertwining concepts, namely: stereotype, prejudice and discrimination (Figure 1)(Abrams, 2010, 42).

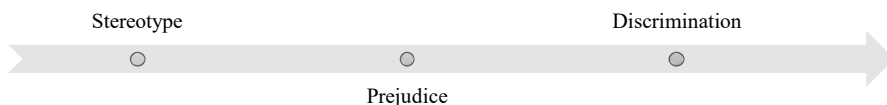


Figure 1 From stereotype to prejudice

Source: Prepared on the basis of (Chrzanowska, 2023).

A stereotype is a non-conforming, inaccurate and usually unfavourable perception of a particular social group. A stereotype has a cultural basis and is therefore usually permanently inscribed in people's mentality. As a result, many people do not undertake their own reliable analysis of a particular phenomenon, but assume the truth of the prevailing stereotype. Undoubtedly, the stereotype speeds up the decision-making process (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2021).

Białopiotrowicz and Kojkoł cite Aronson's definition of a stereotype, according to which a stereotype is a generalisation of a whole group, characterised by the same features, regardless of the differences between its individual members. A stereotype should be seen in four aspects, i.e. as (Białopiotrowicz & Kojkoł, 2010, 185):

- trivial, devoid of emotion,
- serving to generalise, emphasising the lack of differences between group members,
- not susceptible to change,
- rooted in culture.

From the point of view of the issue addressed, the key importance is attributed to gender stereotypes, which create our approach to perceiving the position of women and men in society. They are generally understood as behavioural patterns that characterise women and men in relation to their cultural development. These behaviours are determined by gender role stereotypes, among which issues such as the sharing of domestic responsibilities or specific professional roles are indicated (Ellemers, 2018, 276),(Rebelo et al., 2024, 2). It is worth noting that there is still a perception in society that men are inherently predisposed to managerial roles or professions requiring physical involvement. Women, on the other hand, are much more suited to professions where they are expected to be caring, emotionally involved, understanding or able to communicate freely (Tomaszewska, 2024, 82),(Leong & Sung, 2024). This approach leads to the stigmatisation of women, i.e. labelling them according to which it is known in advance that they will not meet the expectations of others in specific areas (Hyewon et al., 2024). What is important is that research by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) shows that women are seen as one of the most undervalued assets, crucial for the development of entrepreneurship in the European Union (Nevi et al., 2025, 11).

As noted by Arceo-Gomez, Campos-Vazquez, Badillo, and Lopez-Araiza, men are seen through the prism of proficiency, and therefore as competent, highly skilled and assertive. Women, on the other hand, are characterised by communality, meaning that they are attributed qualities such as nobility, honesty or the need to function socially. According to the authors, there are many offers on the labour market that have been created using stereotypically female, i.e. communal, and stereotypically male, i.e. functional, characteristics. This indicates the existence of so-called 'hidden discrimination', which in practice shows unequal treatment of

women and men and at the same time generates a salary gap (Arceo-Gomez et al., 2022, 66).

Stereotypes condition the formation of prejudices. These, in turn, are understood as top-down beliefs based on perceptions rather than the actual state of affairs. Taking action against a particular social group in accordance with a prejudice constitutes discriminatory behaviour (Myślewski, 2021).

One of the main characteristics of prejudice is considered to be a belief in reliance on emotions. This means that we first rely on judgements, after which we make contact. In the literature, prejudice is defined as the subjective opinion of a certain social group that is aligned with its characteristics. In practice, prejudice can have both positive and negative dimensions. It can be captured by four key characteristics, namely (Białopiotrowicz & Kojkoł, 2010, 191-192):

- occurs between social groups,
- expresses a positive or negative judgment of a particular group,
- is subjective in nature,
- is grounded in real or imagined characteristics of a particular group.

It is worth noting that prejudices find their justification in objectives. Accordingly, they may arise from: hierarchisation, haughtiness, competition and bitterness (frustration) (Białopiotrowicz & Kojkoł, 2010, 191-192).

The last term cited, i.e. discrimination, refers to actions, methods or ways of behaving that relate to a specific social group in which the discriminated persons find themselves. It should be noted that due to active social involvement, these groups must be characterised by social relevance (Altman, 2020).

Discrimination against people therefore arises from their participation within a particular social group and, importantly, implies discriminatory behaviour manifested in the harm caused (Krieger, 2014).

Discriminatory behaviour takes the form of treating specific people less favourably than others, despite the fact that they share similar characteristics. Excluding people from a particular social group through discrimination is not justified in practice. It is worth noting that the prohibition of discrimination is included in both international and EU law, and involves the expression and propagation of the view that all are equal and subject to equal treatment (Łukasik, 2021, 142), (Alwago, 2024).

It should be mentioned that the concept of non-discrimination was introduced to eliminate inequalities between men and women in the labour market. However, the evolution of this phenomenon has meant that discrimination has been expanded to include additional criteria. In this respect, discrimination based on, among others, sexual orientation (homophobia), skin colour (racism), ageism, nationality (xenophobia), disability (handicapism) or political beliefs has been defined (Góral, 2021, 40). As the literature indicates, discrimination in the labour market takes two main forms, i.e. (Kamińska, 2015, 98-99):

- direct discrimination – involves treating a particular employee less favourably than other employees in a similar situation. It relates to the employer-employee relationship and can also occur in the course of applying for a job (Pacian et al., 2012, 82),
- indirect discrimination – occurs when there are unfavourable conditions for all or a significant proportion of employees in relation to: employment, improving their qualifications or applying for promotion. Disadvantageous circumstances are most often the result of a seemingly insignificant regulation, implemented assumption or possibly introduced conduct (Pacian et al., 2012, 85), (Jakuszewicz, 2009, 42-43), (Kryńska, 2017, 11; Maliszewska-Nienartowicz, 2014).

Zwiech, in analysing the problem of discrimination against women in the labour market, points to the following types of discrimination (Zwiech, 2010, 277):

- professional-discrimination, which points to career choices and employment conditions. It occurs when absolute restrictions are applied on access to specific professions. This situation results in significant differences in employment conditions between men and women. In extreme cases, certain professions are 'reserved' for men in advance,
- employment discrimination – in practice assumes equal rights for women and men in terms of employment opportunities. This type of discrimination indicates limited employment opportunities for those discriminated against. It occurs when, despite similar qualifications and demographic characteristics, those discriminated against make up a larger proportion of the unemployed,
- position discrimination – is related to the possibility of obtaining a promotion. It is connected with the deliberate restriction of women's access to higher-level positions. The use of position discrimination affects the lower percentage of women (compared to men) in managerial positions,
- pay discrimination, which is reflected in significant differences in the amount of salary for work received by women and men,
- discrimination in the area of training – the percentage of women taking part in training is lower than the percentage of men.

According to research conducted by Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper and Singer, discriminated women have limited needs in terms of owning, managing, controlling and accumulating assets, which may significantly affect their development (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2013, 26).

Extensive considerations presented in the literature on the subject and the amendment of legal regulations concerning discrimination of women in the labour market prove that this issue is a current and widespread problem. As noted above, the main causes of its occurrence include stereotypes and social prejudices, which ultimately take the form of discriminatory behaviours. The next part of the article

presents the results of the author's own research. Their aim was to verify the areas in which women feel discriminated against in the labour market. In this respect, the issue of stereotypes and social prejudices was also addressed.

3. RESEARCH

In order to verify the assessment of society's views on the role of women in various dimensions of the socio-economic environment, including showing the impact of social prejudices on limiting broadly understood professional development, a preliminary survey was conducted at the beginning of 2024, which covered 310 respondents from Poland. In this case, women constituted 64.61% of all respondents, while men the remaining 35.39%. The share of respondents by specific age groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Structure of respondents by age.

Age of the respondent (in years)	<18	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	>65
Share of respondents in the total structure of respondents (in %)	6.82	6.17	21.75	21.10	22.40	12.66	9.09

Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 1, the largest group of respondents, i.e. 22.40%, were people aged 46-55. Next came respondents aged 26-35 (21.75%) and 36-45 (21.10%). It can be assumed that professionally active people (18-65 years old), i.e. those directly related to the labour market, comprised almost 85% of all respondents.

The survey questionnaire used in the study was divided into three parts. The first one referred to the place and role of women in the labour market. The second part of the survey addressed the aspect of women's private lives. The third part included a metric allowing to determine the gender, age, education, place of residence and source of income of the respondent. As part of this study, the following issues were verified:

- discrimination against women in terms of their choice of jobs, employment conditions and the amount of salary for work,
- encouraging women by employers to return to the labour market,
- discrimination against women on the labour market due to the choice of having and raising a child,
- perception of women through the prism of the stereotype according to which they are assigned the role of taking care of the home and children,
- promotion of the partnership model of the family.

The survey responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the Ordinary Least Squares method (OLS) (available within the GRETL

software)(Adkins, 2018; Cotrell, 2021; Kufel, 2013; Mixon Jr & Smith, 2006), an attempt was made to develop an econometric model aimed at verifying the relationship between the explained variable and the explanatory variables. These variables were selected questions included in the survey questionnaire, and more precisely, the answers given in this respect by the respondents. They are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 The dependent variable used to build the econometric model.

I definitely disagree	I rather disagree	I have no opinion	I rather agree	I definitely agree
Do you think that women are discriminated against in terms of determining the terms and conditions of employment (for example, in terms of: working time standards, vacation entitlement, applicable notice period, etc.)? (Dependent variable: B)				
22.08%	35.71%	18.83%	12.99%	10.39%

Source: own elaboration.

From the information in Table 2, it can be concluded that over 57% of respondents do not agree with the statement that women are discriminated against in the context of employment conditions, with almost 19% of them having no opinion on this issue. Despite the solutions implemented to eliminate such practices, still over 23% of respondents perceive discrimination against women in this area.

Table 3 Explanatory variables used to build the econometric model.

I definitely disagree	I rather disagree	I have no opinion	I rather agree	I definitely agree
Do you think that women are discriminated against in terms of their choice of jobs? (Independent variable: A)				
22.90%	24.52%	17.74%	19.68%	15.16%
Do you think that women are discriminated against in terms of the amount of salary? (Independent variable: C)				
19.16%	27.92%	18.83%	18.83%	15.26%
Do you think that employers encourage women to return to the labor market, e.g. after a long-term illness, time spent giving birth and raising a child? (Independent variable: G)				
8.06%	19.35%	30.65%	26.77%	15.16%
Do you think that women are discriminated in the labor market because of their choice to give birth and raise a child? (Independent variable: I)				
12.99%	20.78%	21.43%	30.19%	14.61%
In your opinion, are women perceived through the perspective of a stereotype, according to which their role is reduced to raising and caring for children? (Independent variable: K)				
15.48%	22.90%	20.97%	25.48%	15.16%
Do you think that a partnership model of the family should be promoted, i.e. where there is an equal division of household work between partners? (Independent variable: M)				
7.12%	6.15%	17.48%	22.98%	46.28%

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the responses provided within the independent variables indicates that:

- in the opinion of almost 35% of the respondents, women are discriminated against in the choice of work they perform, which constitutes a significant percentage of all respondents and at the same time confirms the existence of the analysed research problem,
- about 48% of the respondents completely or rather disagree with the statement that women are discriminated against in the area of salary for work, while 34% of them confirm this assumption,
- 30.65% of the respondents have no opinion on whether employers encourage women to return to the labour market, with almost 42% of them believing that such incentives do take place,
- according to as many as 45% of the respondents, women are discriminated against on the labour market due to the choice of giving birth and raising a child,
- 40.64% of the respondents rather or completely agree with the opinion that women are perceived through the prism of the stereotype, according to which their role is reduced to caring for children and the home. Almost 21% of respondents have no opinion on this matter, and slightly over 38% of respondents disagree with this statement,
- as many as 70% of respondents believe that a partnership-based family model should be promoted, which assumes an equal division of household duties between partners. Only 13% of respondents are against such an assumption, while 17% of them did not express an opinion in this area.

Based on the above variables, a logit model was constructed, the parameters of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Ordinary Least Squares method (OLS). Dependent variable: B

	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	0.386516	0.196517	1.967	0.0501	*
A	0.378776	0.0515348	7.350	<0.0001	***
C	0.318691	0.0503498	6.330	<0.0001	***
G	0.109281	0.0412259	2.651	0.0085	***
I	0.111134	0.0492720	2.256	0.0248	**
K	0.0892725	0.0457265	1.952	0.0518	*
M	-0.197063	0.0415470	-4.743	<0.0001	***
Mean dependent var		2.534653	S.D. dependent var		1.257278
Sum squared resid		177.1781	S.E. of regression		0.773676
R-squared		0.628858	Adjusted R-squared		0.621335
F(6, 296)		83.58967	P-value(F)		8.72e-61
Log-likelihood		-348.6469	Akaike criterion		711.2939
Schwarz criterion		737.2900	Hannan-Quinn		721.6941

Source: own elaboration.

The parameters of the ordered logit model included in Table 4 indicate a significant relationship between the explained variable and the explanatory variables, as evidenced by the p value. The significance level of individual variables is:

- $p < 0.1$ – variable K,
- $p < 0.05$ – variable I,
- $p < 0.01$ – variables: A, C, G, M.

The signs of the parameter estimates prove that variables: A, C, G, I, K are stimulants, while variable M is a destimulant. In the first case, an increase in the value of these variables causes an increase in the value of the explained variable B, while a decrease in the value of these variables causes an analogous decrease in the value of the dependent variable.

Accordingly, respondents who believe that:

- women are discriminated against in terms of the choice of work they perform, in terms of salary for work, as well as in terms of the choice of giving birth and raising a child,
- employers encourage women to return to the labour market,
- women are perceived through the prism of a stereotype according to which their role is limited to caring for children and home,
- also believe that women are discriminated against in terms of employment conditions

In turn, the less respondents agree with the above assumptions, the less they express the view that women are discriminated against in terms of employment conditions.

The values of destimulants are shaped differently. Their increase affects the decrease in the value of the dependent variable, while the decrease of this value is associated with the increase of the complex phenomenon. In practice, this means that the higher the percentage of respondents who believe that an equal division of duties between partners should be promoted, the smaller the share of respondents expressing the opinion that women are discriminated against in the context of employment conditions. The opposite situation shows that the less respondents agree with the promotion of the partnership family model, the more of them perceive discrimination against women in the area of employment conditions.

The value of the R square indicates a satisfactory fit of the variables to the model. On this basis, it should be assumed that the dependent variable was explained by the independent variable in 63%. The p value for the F test is lower than 0.01 in this case, which proves that all variables in the estimated model should be considered significant.

4. DISCUSSION

Obtaining answers to the above-mentioned research questions enabled the achievement of the set goal. The empirical analysis conducted in the previous part of the article allowed for the verification of the areas in which women feel discriminated against on the labour market. The obtained results show that 35-45% of respondents rather or completely agree with the assumption that women are discriminated against on the labour market in terms of choice of profession, salary for work, or due to giving birth and raising a child. Additionally, they believe that employers encourage women to return to the labour market. Almost 70% of respondents believe that the partnership family model should be promoted, in which there is an equal division of duties between partners. All of these areas showed a significant relationship with the explained variable, i.e. discrimination of women on the labour market from the point of view of employment conditions. It should be noted that in most cases, the more the respondents notice discrimination against women on the labour market in the previously mentioned areas, the stronger their feelings about discrimination against women in terms of employment conditions. In turn, the greater in their opinion the need to promote the partnership family model, the smaller the impression about this type of discrimination. It is worth noting that regardless of the nature and prevalence of this problem and the actions taken to eliminate it (including legal regulations), discrimination against women is still present in the labour market.

Discrimination results from prejudices against a specific social group. This is related to the fact that in the opinion of society, women are perceived through the prism of community, deeply rooted in human consciousness, i.e. as emotional, delicate people, with a sense of social belonging. The fact that there is a need to promote the partnership model of the family indicates the need to introduce changes in society that could contribute to changing social attitudes and mutual taking over of some roles. As a result, women could become more active, and men more communal. The presence of prejudices is evidenced by, among others, the opinion of the respondents regarding the perception of women through the prism of the stereotype that they should take care of the family and home. In this respect, their presence on the labour market and professional development are of secondary importance. It is assumed that the role of a man is to work for a living and, consequently, to maintain the home. In addition, there is a view that they have individual predispositions to pursue their own professional career.

It should be assumed that the fundamental problem in this case is the opinions and beliefs that determine specific social behaviours.

Discrimination against women in the labour market undoubtedly inhibits their professional development. It causes restrictions in the form of choosing a profession, especially in the case of professions that are intended for men from the outset (Nidogon Višnjić et al., 2018), and the lack of women in managerial positions negatively affects the financial results of enterprises (Drmać et al., 2017). In addition, discrimination in terms of salary leads to a pay gap, which on the one

hand has a demotivating effect, and on the other hand reduces the possibility of investing in oneself (Mateljak, 2024). Discrimination on the basis of giving birth and raising a child is associated with long-term absence of women from the labour market, as well as the potential risk of its recurrence. Therefore, there are situations in which employers prefer to counteract such situations and not employ women. It is also worth paying attention to the perception of women through the prism of the stereotype, according to which their role is reduced to taking care of the family and home, which eliminates their chances of developing a professional career from the outset.

Based on the above conclusions, it should be noted that the issue of discrimination against women in the labour market is a common social problem and emphasizes its importance. Both theoretical and practical considerations show that it is global in nature, which means that it affects all women, regardless of their place of residence. The results of the conducted analysis constitute an added value, providing primarily information on the need to introduce changes, including both on the labour market and in society. In this respect, it seems necessary to promote the employment and professional development of women, which has a positive impact on the socio-economic environment. It is worth paying attention to the role of employers who, by promoting this type of solutions, have the opportunity to introduce positive changes in the area of social perception, and thus eliminate stereotypes and prejudices. This issue is the basis for further theoretical considerations, within which it seems crucial to indicate actions aimed at changes in the perception of women in the labour market by society.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study was conducted as a pilot study, and its aim was to verify the occurrence of the analysed phenomenon.

Gender discrimination affects both women and men. Unfortunately, it cannot be denied that women are more often the victims of unfair treatment. Although the legal status of women has improved significantly over the years, the deeply rooted nature of society means that men take over key positions in companies. In practice, women are better educated than men and are more willing to improve their qualifications. They are ready for constant learning, and yet they face rejection. At the same time, they are more professionally passive. Women are definitely less often entrusted with managerial positions than men.

On this basis, a strong relationship should be noted between the explained variable and the explanatory variables, i.e. discrimination against women in the context of employment conditions and their discrimination in the choice of work, salary, employers encouraging women to return to the labour market, as well as discrimination against women on the labour market due to giving birth to and raising a child, perceiving women through the prism of the stereotype according to

which their role is reduced to that of a mother and the emphasis on the promotion of a partnership-based family model.

The issues presented show that women are discriminated against in the labour market in many respects. Despite the successive actions and legal regulations, this phenomenon is still a broadly understood problem. The main argument for introducing discriminatory behaviours should be considered the occurrence of stereotypes and social prejudices. They impose a specific way of perceiving women, i.e. stigmatizing their role, which is often limited to household duties. In this case, women are treated as "weak" and therefore it is believed that they are unable to cope with the challenges posed to them and do not find their way in crisis situations.

This study confirms and indicates the need for further analyses. In this respect, it is worth paying attention to the approach of employers to discrimination against women and, on this basis, assessing the role that women, in their opinion, play in the labour market. It also seems reasonable to verify the opinions of professionally active women, especially those who were facing returning to the labour market, e.g. after giving birth to a child. It should be assumed that these issues will be the subject of further considerations.

As noted above, the conducted study was of a pilot nature, and therefore its aim was to verify the existence of a specific relationship. Nevertheless, its main limitation was considered to be the limitation of the research to one region and, at the same time, the labour market. In addition, the respondents were people of pre-productive, productive and post-productive age, and therefore to a large extent a professionally inactive society - before or after professional experience.

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**DRUŠTVENE PREDRASUDE I NJIHOV UTJECAJ NA
OGRAIČAVANJE PROFESIONALNOG RAZVOJA
ŽENA – EMPIRIJSKI PRISTUP*****Sažetak***

Razmatranja sadržana u ovom članku odnose se na široko pitanje diskriminacije žena na tržištu rada. S tim u vezi, cilj je istraživanja provjeriti područja u kojima se žene osjećaju diskriminiranim na tržištu rada i koja utječu na inhibiciju njihova profesionalnog razvoja. U prvom dijelu donosi se pregled literature, gdje se definiraju pojmovi stereotipa, predrasuda i diskriminacije. U tom smislu također su naznačene vrste diskriminacije koje se javljaju na tržištu rada. Empirijski dio predstavlja rezultate vlastitog istraživanja. Nastavno na navedeno, početkom 2024. godine provedeno je preliminarno istraživanje s 310 ispitanika iz Poljske. Odnosilo se na procjenu stavova društva o ulozi žena u različitim dimenzijama socioekonomskog okruženja. Na temelju odgovora ispitanica provedena je provjera područja zapošljavanja u kojima se žene osjećaju diskriminiranim. Nadalje, primjenom ekonometrijskog paketa GRETL, metoda običnih najmanjih kvadrata (OLS) korištena je za procjenu odnosa između ovih područja. Posljednji dio predstavlja detaljne zaključke i identificira ograničenja i preporuke za daljnja istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: stereotip, predrasude, diskriminacija, diskriminacija žena, GRETL.

JEL klasifikacija: M54, J16, J21.