



PROFESSIONAL CAREER OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF FULFILLING CAREGIVING ROLES

Ewa Krause

Faculty of Pedagogy at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz

ORCID: 0000-0002-6639-2639

e-mail address: ekrause@ukw.edu.pl

Keywords: woman, professional career, caregiving roles, combining roles

Abstract. Combining professional work with caring responsibilities is a common phenomenon. In Poland, the role of women is perceived as those obliged to care for children or dependent persons and therefore they are definitely more burdened with such obligations than men. Hence, combining professional life and care tasks clearly limits women's career opportunities more than men's. The aim of this article is to show the perception of combining work and care responsibilities by working people, including the impact of caregiving roles on the professional careers of women and solutions favouring reconciliation of these two areas of activity. The study uses the *desk research* method, but also refers to selected results of own research relating to the combination of professional and family roles, especially motherhood by women pursuing careers in science, as well as presents the theoretical context for the undertaken issues, for which the widest frame is created by the theory of social role. It is important to emphasize the existence of a strong link between women's absence from the labour market and weaknesses in systemic solutions supporting the fulfilment of caregiving responsibilities. This, together with the influence of cultural patterns attributing caring roles to women, significantly determines their professional careers. It is therefore important for employers (supported by the state) to meet the expectations of employees-caregivers and implement solutions which are particularly useful and attractive for them.

KARIERA ZAWODOWA Kobiet W KONTEKŚCIE PEŁNIENIA RÓL OPIEKUŃCZYCH

Słowa kluczowe: kobieta, kariera zawodowa, role opiekuńcze, łączenie ról

Streszczenie. Łączenie pracy zawodowej z obowiązkami opiekuńczymi jest zjawiskiem powszechnym. W Polsce rola kobiet postrzegana jest jako tych zobligowanych do opieki nad dziećmi czy osobami zależnymi/niesamodzielnymi i w związku z tym to one zdecydowanie bardziej niż mężczyźni są takimi zobowiązaniami obciążone. Stąd też łączenie życia zawodowego i zadań opiekuńczych w wyraźny sposób bardziej ogranicza możliwości rozwoju kariery zawodowej kobiet niż mężczyzn. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie postrzegania łączenia obowiązków zawodowych i opiekuńczych przez pracujące osoby, w tym oddziaływania pełnienia ról opiekuńczych na karierę zawodową kobiet oraz rozwiązań sprzyjających godzeniu tych dwóch obszarów aktywności. W opracowaniu zastosowano metodę badawczą *desk research*, ale również przywołano wybrane wyniki badań własnych odnoszące się do łączenia ról: zawodowej i rodzinnej, zwłaszcza macierzyństwa przez kobiety realizujące karierę naukową, a także zaprezentowano kontekst teoretyczny dotyczący podjętej problematyki, dla której najszerszą ramę tworzy teoria roli społecznej. Należy podkreślić istnienie silnego związku między nieobecnością kobiet na rynku pracy a słabościami w zakresie rozwiązań systemowych wspierających wypełnianie obowiązków opiekuńczych. To wraz z wpływem wzorców kulturowych przypisujących role opiekuńcze właśnie kobietom, istotnie determinuje ich karierę zawodową. Ważne jest więc wychodzenie pracodawców (wspomaganych przez państwo) naprzeciw oczekiwaniom pracowników-opiekunów i wdrażanie rozwiązań są dla nich szczególnie przydatnych i atrakcyjnych.

Introduction

Increasingly, careers and career opportunities are highly valued by modern women. It is also noticeable that their importance in the labour market is growing. A survey conducted by CubeResearch¹ shows that the vast majority (83%) of respondents agreed that the role of women in this regard is increasing [Gajewski 2022, p. 2]. The Hays Poland report² also confirmed that work for women in Poland – and more specifically, the Polish labour market, is an increasingly accessible and friendly place for them³ [Hays Poland 2021, pp. 25–26].

¹ CubeResearch study „Growing Power of Women – Women in the labour Market,” commissioned by Bigram and THINKTANK; conducted in November and December 2021, N=204.

² This report is based on responses collected in March-May 2021; N= nearly 4,000.

³ This opinion is shared by the vast majority (92%) of men, but only less than half (45%) of women [Hays Poland 2021, pp. 25-26].

Nevertheless, manifestations of their unequal treatment compared to men, resulting from stereotypes, are still present. A factor still hindering women's career advancement is the social habit that it is generally men who occupy the high or highest positions in the professional hierarchy, and the role of women is perceived as those obliged to care for children or dependants. The above is related to the patriarchal family model still dominant in Poland.

The performance of caregiving roles by women is therefore a widespread phenomenon, and in the coming years, the issue of caring for seniors will become particularly important – in view of the ageing population. In a particularly difficult situation, therefore, are economically active women combining career development with caring responsibilities. Hence, the purpose of this article is to show the perception of combining career and caregiving responsibilities by working people, including the impact of fulfilling caregiving roles on women's careers, as well as solutions that promote the reconciliation of these two areas of activity. The author understands career as the process of the course of an individual's professional life, which includes promotions, achievements, successes and professional failures, while she considers caregiving roles in relation to caring for children and/or dependent adults who require regular care.

This paper uses the *desk research* method, but also cites selected results of our own research relating to the combination of professional and family roles, especially motherhood by women pursuing careers in science. Before that, however, the theoretical context for the issue addressed is presented, for which the broadest framework is provided by social role theory.

Combining roles: professional and caring – theoretical context

Nowadays, professional work is the kind of activity that becomes, on the one hand, a space of emancipation and self-realization – especially for women, and on the other hand, a field of intersection and conflict of various social roles [Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2018, p. 168]. The accumulation of roles co-occurs with demographic, social and cultural changes associated with the increase in the rate of women's labour force participation; the percentage of families in which both spouses/partners are economically active; the number of single parents; the standards for performing professional and family roles, including caregiving; as well as with the ageing of the population and the increased need to care for seniors. These phenomena are associated with greater involvement of: women

in professional work; men in family life, including child care; and employers' interest in the quality of life of employees [Lachowska 2010, pp. 283–284].

In the scientific literature, the issue of social roles, including those related to the realization of career and caregiving responsibilities, is referred to, in particular, the concepts of *work-family fit*; *work-family balance*; or, more broadly, *work-life balance* [see Tomaszewska-Lipiec 2018, p. 194]. Thus, two main theoretical perspectives can be adopted in the analysis of the interplay between career and caregiving responsibilities: negative impacts and positive impacts [see Lipinska-Grobelny 2014]. After all, the fulfilment of professional roles, and within it, the realization of careers, is not without influence on family life, including caregiving roles, and vice versa – the fulfilment of non-work roles affects professional life. However, different life roles may or may not be mutually exclusive – role conflict may arise, as well as the phenomenon of facilitation.

The perspective of negative impacts, as Agnieszka Lipinska-Grobelny points out, is described using such terms as *conflict*, *role conflict*, *burden*, *overload*, *mismatch* or *negative radiation* [Lipinska-Grobelny 2014, p. 47]. This position is conceptualized on the basis of gender role theory, the theory of resource behaviour of Stevan E. Hobfoll [see Hobfoll 1989], and Robert Karasek's demands-control model [see Karasek 1979]. The forerunners of the issue of work-family conflict are considered to be Jeffrey H. Greenhaus and Nichals J. Beutell, who defined it as inconsistent demands at work and outside of work (at home), which, as a result, can lead to the impeded performance of one role by engaging in another. The cited researchers focused on the impact of work and career on an individual's functioning in the family, analyzing the conflict between the two areas in three dimensions:

- 1) time – which is spent fulfilling the requirements of one role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another (this applies both to the time pressure caused by the physical commitment to one role at the expense of another, and to the pressure associated with mental commitment, when the individual while fulfilling one role, thinks in another);
- 2) tension – referring to a situation in which the stress experienced while performing one role makes it difficult to function effectively in another;
- 3) behaviours – inconsistency of behavioural styles across roles [Greenhaus, N.J. Beutell 1985].

The second perspective – positive interactions – less often taken up in research, emphasizes the mutual reinforcement of roles, the possibility of improving functioning in one sphere through undertaking activity in another sphere.

The terms used in this case are *positive radiation; reinforcement; enrichment* or *facilitation*, meaning the facilitation of meeting the demands in a certain area of functioning, thanks to another activity, or the situation when the performance of one role becomes better (or easier) due to the performance of another [after Lipinska-Grobelyny 2014, p. 51]. Positive affect is based primarily on Sam D. Sieber's theory of role accumulation [see Sieber 1974] and Joän M. Patterson's concept of family resilience [see Patterson 2002]. This position counterbalances the conflict by emphasizing the social and psychological benefits derived from simultaneous participation in work and family life – it stresses that commitment to career development does not preclude involvement in family life and caregiving roles. The broadest theoretical framework for the present discussion is therefore social role theory [see Rostowska 2009].

Combining professional and caring responsibilities – perceptions of interaction

The issue of combining work with caregiving responsibilities is estimated to affect about 37% of all households in Poland (it concerns about 6.2 million people working under contract) [FOB 2020, p. 5]. The results of Puzzle Research⁴ indicate that 39% of households of contract workers have a child under 14 years of age, and 22%– have a dependent adult who requires regular care. Taking into account CSO data, the number of employed people in the national economy in Poland at the end of 2020 was 16 million [CSO, *Employed...*], and in 2019 there were 16.6 million people working (13.3 million of them on employment contracts), this gives a figure of 5.2 million people combining work with the duty of caring for a child under 14, and 3 million people who have a dependent adult in the family who requires regular care [after FOB 2020, p. 7]. The caregiving responsibilities of employees surveyed in the Forum for Responsible Business (FOB) study, *Professional Work and the Performance of Caregiving Roles by Women and Men in Poland*⁵ are mainly concerned with caring for a healthy child (88%), and only a small percentage (4%) care for offspring with disabilities. Most often, respondents have responsibilities for one (55%) or two (35%) children. Responsibility for caring for dependent parents applies to 10% of those with

⁴ Online statistical survey of a representative sample of Internet users N=1000, Puzzle Research, December 2019.

⁵ FOB Survey N=3376.

caregiving responsibilities, and this care usually involves one parent (79%) [FOB 2020, p. 7].

The burden of caregiving responsibilities carries all sorts of consequences for career development – especially for women. This is confirmed by the results of the cited FOB survey – almost half (46%) of women agree with the statement that, as a result of their caregiving roles and related responsibilities, they have lost professional opportunities and opportunities to advance their careers, compared to less than a third (29%) of men with such obligations. However, both women and men are more likely to indicate that it is work that negatively affects caregiving responsibilities than these roles affect career development [FOB 2020, pp. 19–20].

Similar results were obtained in terms of our own research on combining family life and career among female scientists employed at academic institutions in Poland⁶. Respondents asked about the impact of their career on their family (towards which they also perform caregiving roles) indicate in almost half (46.1%) that it is positive. However, a sizable percentage of respondents – more than a third (34%) – declare that the impact of the career on their families is negative, and some (19.9%) find it difficult to determine. The impact of the family on their career development is perceived more favourably by female scientists than vice versa, as the majority (66.9%) of female scientists say it is positive. A small percentage (16.5%) declare that the family's influence on their career development is negative. A similar percentage (16.6%), as in the case of the previously indicated reverse impact, cannot comment on it [Krause 2022].

The results of our own research also confirm the negative perception of the impact of performing care roles for offspring on the career development of female scientists, as the majority of them (58.7%) agree that *motherhood means reduced mobility, and lack of time for professional development and career fulfilment*. This judgment is not shared by some of them (28.9%). A small percentage (12.4%) has no opinion on this issue. That *motherhood, however, is the factor that effectively derails women's careers* is not supported by the majority of respondents (69.6%). Few (10.3%) think otherwise – that motherhood is such a factor. Slightly more than a fifth (20.1%) do not specify their position in this regard. The statement that *career women do not have time to give birth and raise children, because*

⁶ The survey was conducted between January and March 2020; N=453, including: 53 M.Sc., 248 Ph.D., 124 Ph.D.; 28 Prof. Almost 3/4 of the respondents (73.7%) are mothers, while the remaining – more than 1/4 (26.3%) are childless [see E. Krause, *Motherhood and scientific careers* (typescript), Bydgoszcz 2022].

the more successful they are, the more time they work disagrees with almost half of the respondents (47.9%). Nearly a third (32%), however, support this position. The remaining respondents (20.1%) have no opinion on this issue [Krause 2022].

Carrying out caregiving roles, as the results of the FOB survey show, also clearly impacts the careers of the life partners with whom these responsibilities are shared. The impact is most often negative, and it affects women, who are also much more likely to expect their partners to take on a greater share of caregiving responsibilities than they currently do (47% of women *versus* 17% of men). Both genders agree that it is men's work that limits women's careers with caregiving responsibilities much more than women's work that hinders men's careers with such responsibilities [FOB 2020, pp. 19–20]. Opinions about equal career opportunities thus differ significantly by gender (even though women and men report similar ambitions, levels of satisfaction or ways to pursue career plans⁷). The majority of female participants (52%) in the Hays Poland survey have encountered gender-based career difficulties. In comparison, only one-fifth of men said they had faced obstacles of various kinds during their career development [Hays Poland 2021, p. 16].

Thus, in Poland, combining professional and caregiving responsibilities clearly limits women's career opportunities more than men's. This is again confirmed by the results of the FOB survey, according to which childcare is still heavily burdened by women – they are much more likely than men to describe themselves as the main person taking care of children (57% *versus* 15%). Differences also appear in the division of this care – the majority (61%) of men say they share childcare with their wife/partner equally, while less than a third (29%) of women hold the same view. Similarly, only one-fifth (19%) of men estimate that the wife/partner has the primary role in childcare, a role assigned by the majority of women (57%). These results show how huge the gap between the sexes is in the perception of their responsibilities. Indeed, what men consider an equal contribution in terms of offspring care responsibilities is not identically perceived by women. With regard to adult care, the gender gap is noticeably smaller – note the much higher percentage of those providing independent care in this aspect, and much less of that shared equally. The authors of the FOB study point out that „this is partly explained by the fact that most often the care involves parents and then the main role in care is taken by the son or daughter, rather than the son-in-law or daughter-in-law. This is important information for employers because

⁷ See Hays Poland reports, <https://www.hays.pl/kobiety>

it shows that people who take care of adults are less flexible and are less likely to be able to cough up support from a partner or female partner in emergencies. It is also worth noting that men are more likely to provide independent adult care than women. This shows that one cannot follow the stereotype that says that only women perform caregiving duties, because, as we can see, the practice looks different” [FOB 2020, p. 18].

An opportunity to change the perception of combining work and caregiving responsibilities as limiting women’s career opportunities is evident in the results of the FOB survey in the equivalent perception of roles and recognition of the possibility for men to enjoy caregiving responsibilities as well. However, in doing so it should be remembered that these are only (or as much as) declarations, which do not necessarily coincide (and often do not coincide) with realization. Public perception is dominated by the belief that men and women should be treated equally. The question of whether men should be involved in childcare to the same extent as women was answered in the affirmative by the vast majority (82%) of respondents, including slightly more within their respective groups of women (88%) than men (75%). There is even more support for the thesis that both men and women have the same right to take time off work for caregiving duties – it is supported by a huge percentage of women (90%) and the vast majority of men (82%). A greater variation in responses is seen with the statement that if men were more involved in caregiving, it would be easier for women to advance their own careers – a majority of respondents agree, although women are again far more numerous (81%) than men (64%). The need for change in this regard is thus apparent, but it is not yet widespread among men [FOB 2020, pp. 21–22].

The need for equal sharing of household work seems obvious, but this postulated equality is not borne out by statistics. It is still the case that most of the maintenance and family-home functioning, including caregiving roles, falls on women. This is confirmed by another THINKTANK and BIGRAM survey, according to which only 1/7 of those surveyed declared that they share responsibilities equally with their partner. The slow pace of change in the conservative customary model means, as Dagmara Sobolewska (HR Division Director at Erbud S.A.) notes, that „it is difficult to define any time horizon when equitable sharing of household responsibilities will become a reality” [Gajewski 2022, p. 8]. The vast majority of respondents to the cited survey (72%) again pointed to stereotypes – the social habit that it is men who hold the high/highest positions/positions – as a factor hindering women’s advancement. Thus, despite

„some social progress, stereotypes are still the biggest obstacle to women’s career advancement. This conclusion is reinforced by the next two most popular responses to the question about barriers: the dominance of high positions held by men (48%) and sexism and discrimination (46%). The existence of these stereotypes also reflects the belief of as many as 30% of respondents that women lack the right qualities characteristic of good leaders. More than two-fifths of respondents believe that the burden of additional domestic duties on women and the lack of help from employers in combining work and private life are also serious barriers” [Gajewski 2022, p. 4]. Thus, it should be emphasized that the personal and professional environment still does not facilitate career opportunities for women.

It is also worth noting that during the Covid – 19 pandemic, the situation of economically active women relative to men worsened, and gender inequality was reinforced. Thus, the effects of the pandemic have been felt more by women than men in terms of their career development. Hence, all forms of professional and personal support will now gain/experience importance. Actions from both employers and state solutions are important. In this difficult period, greater openness on the part of superiors and their flexibility in the presence of difficulties in reconciling women’s various social roles is also particularly important.

Solutions to foster the reconciliation of professional and caring roles

Women in the FOB survey, when asked about situations and actions that would encourage them to make greater use of the facilities created in the workplace to reconcile work and caregiving duties, overwhelmingly indicated a question related to the certainty that this would not affect their careers. A significant proportion (42%) would be very encouraged by a sense of support from their immediate supervisor to use these facilities. However, the surveyed employees who care for children lack knowledge about the types of rights they are entitled to in this aspect. Only more than half of them (54%) were informed about leave rights related to having offspring. Women are informed more often than men (60% *versus* 47%). Employees surveyed believe (81% of women and 75% of men) that it is the employer who should inform on its own about their rights, and not only when the employee asks [FOB 2020, p. 28]. Even one in three employee-parent participants in the Hays Poland survey also have no knowledge of available benefits for working parents occurring in their current workplace. However,

if the employer provides assistance in this area, the lack of such awareness on the part of employees is a big loss. This is because the belief that an organization cares about the family life of its employee translates into a more favourable perception and promotion of the image of one's workplace as family-friendly [Hays Poland 2019, p. 30]. It is therefore important for employers to reach out to their employees in the context of informing them about the solutions offered to support the combining of roles.

Despite the fact that the surveyed employees-caregivers, participants in the FOB survey, overwhelmingly (80%) declared that employers meet their expectations by offering an average of 2–3 different types of solutions conducive to the reconciliation of professional and caregiving roles, it is crucial to properly match the available facilities to their expectations and needs. This is because there is a significant group of activities that do not attract the interest of potential recipients. The most common facilities offered by organizations are the ability to leave work on demand for a short time during the day, with the possibility to make up the absence without losing vacation (36% of employers), flexible working hours (22%) and part-time positions (19%). These amenities are used by as many as 81% of care workers. The most commonly used are the ability to leave work for a short time during the day (28% of those who use it out of 77% of those who have it at work); flexible working hours (16% of those who use it out of 72% who have it) and the ability to work from home (11% out of 69% who use it). The FOB report also highlighted solutions that are very popular among employees but are offered by only a few employers. These include mainly the abolition of annual/periodic contracts – the second contract is concluded immediately for an indefinite period – this solution is used by 53% of those with this option and is offered by only 8% of employers. Another convenience is a card with points for entertainment (the number of points awarded depends on the size of the family), which is used by nearly half (46%) of those with access to this solution and is offered by only 5% of employers. In contrast, part-time jobs, which are one of the most frequently offered amenities (19% of employers), are used by only 16% of employee-caregivers. While this is likely related „to a reluctance to reduce their income, it shows that before implementing new solutions, it is worthwhile to thoroughly understand the needs of employees so that they benefit as much as possible from the available solutions.” [FOB 2020, p. 13].

For employee-caregivers of FOB survey participants, „it is crucial to take into account such issues as more flexible working hours, pay, type of contract, and the possibility of using company-based childcare facilities” [FOB 2020, p. 15].

The most expected in terms of combining roles, but offered by only a handful of companies, are:

- Employer subsidization of nurseries, kindergartens (attractive to 56%, available to only 6% of employees);
- A decentralized kindergarten, nursery (attractive to 53%, available to only 3% of employees);
- Subsidized care services – vouchers for care services (attractive to 51%, available to only 5% of employees);
- additional days off for adult care (attractive to 48%, available to only 5%) and child care (attractive to 54%, available to only 12%).

Women are more likely than men to find each of these activities more appealing, especially the following:

- Kindergarten, nursery at the workplace;
- Shorter working hours for employees with caregiving responsibilities;
- The possibility of covering seniors with a paid medical package from the company;
- A shorter (4-day) workweek for those with caregiving responsibilities;
- Not using shift work for those with caregiving responsibilities [FOB 2020, p. 15].

The results of our own research, also cited earlier, on the expectations of female scientists regarding selected legal and institutional solutions and cultural issues that support the combination of caregiving obligations arising from motherhood and career, indicate that the women surveyed expect (responses from the highest to lowest percentage):

- promoting a partnership model of sharing family responsibilities – 93.4% of indications. Assistance from the partner as a factor supporting the career development of mothers is indicated by a similar percentage (96.7%);
- promotion of flexible working hours and its organization according to the degree of family development – 90.1% of indications. Assistance from universities in the form of more flexible working hours as a factor supporting mothers' career development is also indicated by a similar percentage (87.6%), and opportunities to work from home or part-time while raising young children are expected by a similar percentage (84.9%);
- programs to facilitate a return to work after an absence due to maternity, parental or parental leave – 79% of indications;
- institutional support, i.e. the creation of a network of childcare centres – 78.4% of indications. The organization of a university system in this regard

- is expected by a similar percentage (75.5%), and the establishment of child-care institutions at universities as a factor supporting the career development of mothers is also indicated by a very similar percentage (76.8%);
- programs that enable child care which takes into account the specificity and work organization – 74.8% of indications;
 - a network of readily available services to reduce the burden of housework on women so that they can return to the labour market more quickly without compromising the child and family – 73.5% of indications [Krause 2022].

In the THINKTANK and BIGRAM survey, 3/4 of respondents (74%) believe that in order to support women in advancing their careers, stereotypes must be fought first and foremost. More than half (57%) also emphasize the need to combat toxic culture in workplaces, as well as take initiatives to promote equal sharing of family and home responsibilities between the sexes (52%) and help from the employer to combine work and private life (52%) [Gajewski 2022, p. 3].

Recommendations concerning the facilitation of combining work and care functions

As part of the referenced FOB study, recommendations were developed to support the combination and reconciliation of careers and caregiving obligations. These were divided into **3 groups of recommendations**: 1) **for employers**, 2) **for legislators**, and 3) **for local governments** [see FOB 2020, pp. 35–36].

Recommendations for employers are divided into two key areas:

- 1) Taking care in the organization of the atmosphere and culture of the organization conducive to the understanding of female employees and male employees with caring responsibilities, including:
 - **Empathy and understanding** for difficult (including unplanned) care situations,
 - **Showing in company practice that care responsibilities are not and need not be a barrier to employees' careers**, encouraging the exercise of their rights, proving that the use of facilities will not affect further careers or salary levels,
 - **The provision by the immediate supervisor of support and understanding** that gives female employees the feeling that exercising their vacation and care rights is natural and normal and fully acceptable,

- **Taking care of full and easily accessible information** about the rights and facilities available to female and male employees (ideally, such information should come out of the employer’s initiative, as this is perceived as an assurance that exercising one’s labour rights is natural for the company),
 - **Ensure duplication of competencies and sufficiently large human resources** (this is important because employees want to feel that their absence will not overburden their co-workers and that their duties will not „wait” for them to return, which would involve making up and overtime);
- 2) Dissemination of solutions most often used by employees (as long as they have access to them at work):
- **the ability to leave work on demand** (for a short time) during the day, with the possibility of making up the absence without loss of leave, i.e. without so-called „punishment” (this is what these actions are often called by employees),
 - **Flexible working hours** (no fixed hours) are highly desired by employees, but still available to a few (this is a very attractive option for many employees with caregiving responsibilities),
 - **The possibility of working from home** (it is not always recognized as a solution, but in many cases applicable) without losing the quality of work, while benefiting the employee (in the form of additional time spent at home and saving time for commuting to and from work),
 - **Additional days off due to child care**, that is, the so-called „extra” days from the employer over and above those already entitled by law (this solution already occurring in some companies, but still in very few),
 - **Days off to care for dependent adults** (on the same basis as for care of the children under 14);
 - **Not reducing premiums** for used sick leave, including care-related sick leave (this type of reduction seems to be common practice),
 - **Abolishing annual/periodic contracts** along with offering a second contract for an indefinite period (this would allow a greater sense of stability for employees with care commitments);
 - **Subsidizing institutional child care and its organization** – nurseries and kindergartens, including daycare centres at organizations (these are solutions with so-called high potential – expected by employees

and directly related to the challenge of every practically working parent),

- **Subsidized care services** (e.g., vouchers for care services),
- **Shorter working hours for employees with care commitments**,
- **The possibility of covering** not only the employees themselves but also their family members, with a **paid medical care package** [FOB 2020, p. 35].

In terms of the reconciliation of professional and caregiving roles, it is advisable to focus on measures that facilitate caregiving, encouraging men to take on greater involvement in this area. As a result, gender inequality in the labour market may decrease. These measures, which fit in with the **recommendations for lawmakers**, include:

- **Increasing the amount of time available** for employees with care commitments (such as a shorter workday, shorter workweek, additional days for care);
- **Introduce solutions to support people with care obligations to dependent adults** (e.g., caregiver leave);
- **Reducing gender disparities in access to caregiving leave** (e.g., introducing mandatory use of part of parental leave for men),
- **Simplifying the system of leave available to parents/guardians after the birth of a child**,
- **Flexibility in breaks from work enshrined in law**, allowing the employee to adjust start and end times to accommodate family obligations (this area also includes allowing work from home when it is feasible from a workstation perspective),
- **Financial support for care workers** (mainly benefits and subsidies, but also lower taxes or family-friendly taxes with caregiving responsibilities),
- **Effective enforcement of existing laws**, including with employers (as employee-guardians are not always able to enjoy their due rights and facilities) [FOB 2020, p. 36].

In the area of **recommendations for local governments**, it is indicated that their main role is to support workers in carrying out care responsibilities through the development of appropriate care infrastructure, including in particular:

- **Ensuring the right to care points for children** (such as, e.g.: nurseries, kindergartens) and dependent adults (e.g.: daycare centres, hospices);
- **Subsidized services and facilities** (subsidized or free, e.g., nurseries and kindergartens, cheaper or free public transportation)

- **Organization of nursing care and counselling**, including for dependent adults – it is also important to take into account the expected support in this regard (e.g., regarding the transportation of adults and elderly to and from points of residence or care, which would be an important relief for care workers) [FOB 2020, p. 36].

Solutions to support women in their career development are also included in recommendations for companies, which were developed by Hays Poland based on the report: *Women on the Labour Market 2021*. The recommendations were divided into short-term and long-term actions. The former include 1) the opportunity to work flexibly, allowing time and place of work to fit in with other commitments, such as caregiving; 2) communication and education – taking steps to level the playing field; 3) mentoring – creating spaces to share knowledge and experience that will support each employee's professional development. Among the latter were listed: 1) development of an official diversity policy, defining measures to guarantee equal opportunities in the workplace; 2) establishment of transparent pay rules by employers and legislators – such a measure can ultimately reduce the gender wage gap; 3) creation of a program for professional activation of women who have given up their jobs out of necessity, as it were, such as those related to fulfilling care obligations [Hays Poland 2021, p. 28]. This is important because as many as 3/4 of the surveyed employees in the FOB survey can point to examples in their environment of people resigning or interrupting work for a while due to caregiving duties. The most common case is that of women resigning due to child care (62%). However, the second most common case is women resigning from or interrupting work due to the need to care for a dependent adult (30%). Men resigning from work due to caregiving duties is rare. Only one in ten people surveyed knows someone like this in their circle [FOB 2020, p. 11].

A number of goals and recommendations are being developed to level the playing field in terms of career advancement for women and men, for example, aimed at policymakers. For example, the report *Gender Equality in the Workplace Measuring What Matters For Transformative Change* makes the following suggestions:

- in terms of the gender pay gap, it should be brought to a point where it is less than 3% (every year the gender pay gap should decrease by more than 3%);
- in terms of women's representation, quotas should be introduced – especially in higher professional positions, where workers earn higher wages;

- care, a wide range of measures should be created to support working women who are responsible for caring for dependents (UNRISD 2020, p. 3).

The solutions presented are characterized by a variety of measures to improve the situation of active women with care responsibilities and develop their careers.

Conclusions

Combining work with care responsibilities is a common phenomenon, and it is necessary for the employer (assisted by the state) to implement measures to support those combining these roles, especially women, who are definitely more burdened by care obligations. However, the employer, before introducing new solutions, should check which of them are particularly attractive – the most expected by employees and which they will use, and adapt them to the specifics of the company. It is therefore important to meet their expectations, which „can prevent the withdrawal of people of value to employers from the labour market and will help reduce employee stress, which inevitably translates into efficiency at work.” [FOB 2020, p. 17] and career development. This is both a benefit for the employee and the employer. Solutions are therefore needed to reconcile work and caregiving responsibilities. Indeed, the biggest threat to the labour market is that people who are unable to reconcile their professional work and caregiving responsibilities leave it [FOB 2020, p. 17].

A number of studies confirm the existence of a strong link between women’s absence from the labour market and weaknesses in systemic solutions to support the fulfilment of caregiving responsibilities. Their results also point to the influence of cultural patterns assigning caregiving roles specifically to women. Both of these factors have a significant impact on women’s careers in Poland. The point is, as Marzena Strzelczak (president of FOB) rightly emphasizes, that „fulfilling caregiving roles does not entail quitting work, and women’s professional inactivity is the result of their conscious decisions, not the result of a lack of solutions or stereotypical beliefs about the role of women in society. The times of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the experience of previous crises shows, are not conducive to women in the labour market. This makes it all the more urgent to take measures that can undermine these disadvantages” [FOB 2020, p.4]. Educating society on this issue is essential. In addition, it is important to have such a culture and organization of work that women (with their specific role as the „nucleus” of the family) can actively participate in work life and support them in fulfilling their caregiving roles.

References

- FOB, *Praca zawodowa a pełnienie ról opiekuńczych przez kobiety i mężczyzn w Polsce*, R. Bazsun, A. Zamęcki, T. Joniewicz (eds.), Lipiec 2020, https://odpowiedzialnybiznes.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FOB_Praca-zawodowa-a-pełnienie-ról-opiekuńczych-przez-kobiety-i-mężczyzn-w-Polsce.pdf (9.02.2021).
- Gajewski, Z. (ed.). (2022). *Raport: Rosnąca siła kobiet – kobiety na rynku pracy*. Warszawa, https://think-tank.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ROSNACA-SILA-KOBIET-FINAL_raport.pdf (18.03.2022).
- Greenhaus, J.H., Beutell, N.J. *Sources of conflict between work and family roles*. *Academy of Management Review*, 1 (10). (1985).
- GUS, *Pracujący i wynagrodzenia w gospodarce narodowej (dane ostateczne) w 2020 r.*, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/pracujacy-zatrudnieni-wynagrodzenia-koszty-pracy/pracujacy-i-wynagrodzenia-w-gospodarce-narodowej-dane-ostateczne-w-2020-r-,17,5.html> (10.03.2022).
- Hays Poland, *Kobiety na rynku pracy 2021*.
- Hays Poland, *Kobiety na rynku pracy. Kompetencje i różnorodność, Raport 2019*.
- Hobfoll, S., *Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress*. *American Psychologist*, 3 (44). (1989).
- Karasek, R., *Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain. Implications for job redesign*. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 2 (24). (1979).
- Krause, E. (2022). *Kariera naukowa a macierzyństwo. Sytuacja naukowcyń w Polsce* (masyzynopsis). Bydgoszcz: UKW.
- Lachowska, B. (2010). *Konflikt i facylitacja jako mechanizmy wzajemnych oddziaływań pracy i rodziny – analiza różnic płciowych*. [In:] T. Rostowska, A. Peplińska (eds.), *Psychospołeczne aspekty życia rodzinnego*. Warszawa: Difin.
- Lipińska-Grobelny, A. (2014). *Od konfliktu do równowagi, czyli ewolucja poglądów na relację między życiem zawodowym i pozazawodowym*. [In:] R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec (ed.), *Równowaga praca – życie pozazawodowe drogą do zrównoważonego rozwoju jednostki*. Bydgoszcz: UKW.
- Patterson, J. *Integrating family resilience and family stress theory*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2 (64). (2002).
- Rostowska, T. (2009). *Małżeństwo, rodzina, praca a jakość życia*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Siebert, S.D. *Toward a theory of role accumulation*. *American Sociological Review*, 4 (39). (1974).
- Tomaszewska-Lipiec, R. (2018). *Praca zawodowa – życie osobiste. Dysonans czy synergia?* Bydgoszcz: UKW.
- UNRISD, *Gender Equality in the Workplace Measuring What Matters For Transformative Change*, September 2020, [https://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=8A95199052AD4419802585EB0052FCE2&parentdoctype=brief&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/8A95199052AD4419802585EB0052FCE2/\\$file/RPB29---SDPI-Gender-Equality-Workplace.pdf](https://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=8A95199052AD4419802585EB0052FCE2&parentdoctype=brief&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/8A95199052AD4419802585EB0052FCE2/$file/RPB29---SDPI-Gender-Equality-Workplace.pdf) (18.01.2021).