

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT

Agata KIELESIŃSKA

The Management Faculty, Czestochowa University of Technology; agata.kielesinska@pcz.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0001-9974-7961

Purpose: Significant progress has been made in recent decades regarding the position of women in business management, but much remains to be done to achieve true gender equality. In such a context, this study focuses on women's professional activity and motivational factors associated with returning to work after maternity leave.

Design/methodology/approach: In order to achieve the stated goal in the study, a survey was conducted among 500 professionally active women.

Findings: The results obtained helped to answer three main research questions: what factors determine the professional position of women-mothers?; what contributes to the exclusion of women-mothers from roles and responsibilities in the workplace?; what motives influence women-mothers to return to work?

Originality/value: The study confirmed that there are still unequal opportunities for women and men in management. In addition, the study made it possible to assess women managers in management, as well as to identify important aspects related to the professional work of women-mothers. However, this study has limitations and should be expanded to include the opinion of men, employers, the size of companies and the industry in which women-mothers are professionally active.

Keywords: gender inequality, sustainable development, woman.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The social and economic changes that have taken place in recent times have created a favourable atmosphere and provide a good argument for the need for greater participation of women in management (Silva, Silva, Fontana, 2023). Modern women, by being active, combine many roles at the same time, including those of leaders, partners and mothers. And while the same set of roles can be attributed to men, it is women who face more challenges in both their private and professional lives (Hardoy, Schöne, Østbakken, 2017). Despite long-standing discussions on this topic (e.g., research by Webber, Williams, 2008; Kadoglou, Sarri, 2013; Bogren et al., 2013; Heikkinen, Lämsä, Hiillos, 2014; Chui, Wong, 2016 or Mohaidin, Jauhar,

Kaur, 2019), the position of women in work, their role in business and their road to taking up a managerial position is still difficult. This is the case regardless of culture, country or social context, and women face a variety of challenges, which are often the result of gender inequality. At social level, gender equality is seen as one of the most relevant aspects in the sustainability debate, which is becoming a priority for policymakers (Torchia et al., 2018). Achieving gender equality and empowering women in social and economic life is an integral part of sustainable development in the world. For this reason, the United Nations has identified this issue as a priority in the UN Global Compact. Among the 17 SDGs (UN Global Compact), SDG 5 has been dedicated entirely to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by combatting all forms of discrimination they face. It is important to underline that gender equality is essential for the success of all 17 SDGs (Sertyesilisik, 2023; Beloskar, Haldar, Gupta, 2024).

Nowadays, in the field of equal opportunities for women and men in management, there are three characteristic positions. The first is that women have already gained equal rights and do not see discrimination in organisations. The second is that inequalities for women are recognised, especially in the number of people employed in managerial positions, lower pay for the same work and difficult promotion. The third is the view that men will certainly not voluntarily give up positions that will give them access to power, money and prestige for many years to come (Kupczyk, 2009). In practice, the dominant role of the second position is noticed, where a slight improvement is noted, but this area requires further research and analysis. This is particularly important for women who return to the labour market after having a child. Despite the difficulty of access to managerial positions, gender equality must still be promoted so as not to waste the potential of women. In this context, it is important to examine the picture of women's labour force participation and the motivational factors associated with returning to work after parental leave. On the other hand, this study will determine the role of women mothers in the management of the company.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

Over the past decades, women have made significant progress on the labour market, which has led to a convergence of investment in human capital, employment opportunities and wages compared to men (Olivetti, Petrongolo, 2016). This phenomenon is particularly visible in highly developed countries. However, it cannot be assumed that the pace of change in this area is satisfactory. It is still men who dominate managerial positions in large enterprises and corporations. Despite progress in this area, women, especially mothers, still face many challenges in the labour market. This fact is emphasised by Piterman (2008), who argues that the structure of work, based on standard working hours, and the lack of flexibility that does not

meet the needs of mothers, contributes to their exclusion from key positions and projects. Therefore, they are often forced to choose between career and parenthood or have to rely on external childcare, which comes with additional costs and stress. Hakim (2006) argues that most mothers are not heavily involved in paid work or careers after having children. According to the author, the majority of women who take up professional work are adaptive. In practice, this means that they choose professions that allow them to match their work to their domestic role, and not the other way around. Heikkinen, Lämsä, Hiillos (2014) suggest that career and family are not separate from each other and that the relationship between them is multidimensional: not only do women's experiences and career outcomes influence their experience of family life but also vice versa. During his research, Krause (2016) pointed out that despite the continuous progress of gender equality and changes in society, there is still a certain division of gender roles that affects the functioning of women. A woman, acting both as a mother and as an employee-manager, faces a number of problems. These problems are mainly due to:

- stereotypical perception of women,
- unequal distribution of household chores,
- the dilemma of choosing between work/career or family,
- reluctance of employers to employ women,
- problems returning to work after a break caused by the birth of a child,
- difficulties in providing childcare during working hours.

Christoph, Krause (2019), on the other hand, point to the essence of the so-called invisible barriers that hinder women's career development in organisations. These barriers are mainly related to discrimination (professional, vertical), bringing men to higher levels of their careers, assigning women to the group of less prestigious and lower-paid professions, lack of solidarity among women and not allowing women to hold managerial and decision-making positions. According to Kolasińska (2012), two worlds dominate in Polish enterprises. The first is male, in which men are the beneficiaries of prestigious jobs and privileges, and the second is female, where women are "social actresses", receiving job offers below their competences and ambitions, often discriminated against. Women, being aware that limiting their professional involvement has a negative impact on their position on the labour market (resulting in a reduction in current income and future pension and impoverishment of human capital), take up work after a short break after the birth of a child, even before the child reaches the age of three (Rekas, 2013). There are also short- and long-term goals, identification of priorities, focus on tasks, delegation of responsibilities, effective time management, communication and negotiation skills, welded problem solving, quick decision-making, stimulation of motivation of subordinate staff, commitment, strong personality and other things that make them competitive in the labour market (Glăveanu, 2013; Özmutaf et al., 2015). Holska (2017), citing research by Eagly, Carli (2003) and Powell et al. (2004), points out that women and men use different techniques to influence their subordinates. Women are more likely than men to use

democratic leadership as they are focused on interpersonal relationships, while men are more likely than women to use authoritarian leadership and are task-oriented.

Taking into account the above, the following research questions have been identified, which this study seeks to answer:

- (A) What factors determine the professional position of mothers?
- (B) What contributes to the exclusion of mothers from roles and responsibilities in the workplace?
- (C) What motivates mothers to return to work?

3. Research Methodology and Research Sample

In order to achieve the main objective of the article, the empirical study was conducted using two different questionnaires, making it possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of the position of women in management and the motivational factors related to the return to work after parental leave. The first questionnaire (A) was of a general nature and concerned the professional activity of the women surveyed, while the second questionnaire (B) was a specific questionnaire concerning the motivation level of women returning to work after parental leave.

A five-point Likert scale was used to assess individual aspects.

The study involved 500 women who answered both the first and second questionnaires. The research sample was selected in a deliberate manner, taking into account the professional diversity of women. The aim of this approach was to obtain representative data that would allow the analysis of both general aspects of labour force participation and specific motivational factors.

The characteristics of the environment being studied indicate that the largest group of respondents are:

- Married women, who represent 68% of the entire research sample,
 - People aged between 25 and 40, who represent 66% of respondents,
 - Women with higher education constitute 52% of the respondents,
- People living in the city account for 64% of respondents.

4. Results and discussions

Currently, there is a growing interest in women returning to work after a break related to motherhood. The increase in women's labour force participation represents a significant change in social dynamics, contributing to a more sustainable society and strengthening the role of women in a professional sphere. The development of women's participation in the labour force is essential both for individuals and for society as a whole. For many years, women have often been limited in their career opportunities due to the traditional roles assigned to them in society. However, with social, educational and economic progress, there is a growing awareness of the importance of gender equality and the need to unleash women's professional potential.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, a general assessment of the perception of women - mothers in the role of a manager was first made. The results of the analyses are presented in Figure 1.

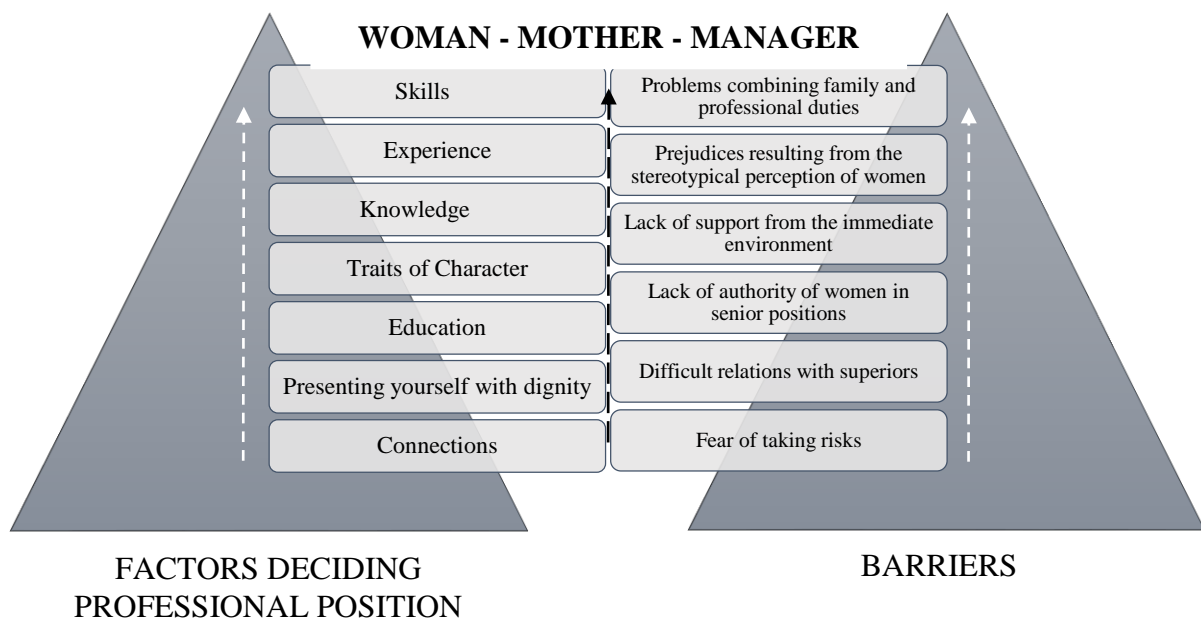


Figure 1. Overall assessment of the perception of mothers as managers

Source: Author's Own Elaboration.

The study confirmed that inequalities of management opportunities between women and men continue to be identified (Figure 2). Discrimination against women in management has negative effects both on women themselves and on organisations and society as a whole. It limits diversity and prospects in management, which in turn can lead to poorer financial performance and a loss of innovation. In addition, it contributes to the maintenance of social and economic inequalities between the sexes in the long term (Lewicka, Wziętek-Staśko, 2009).

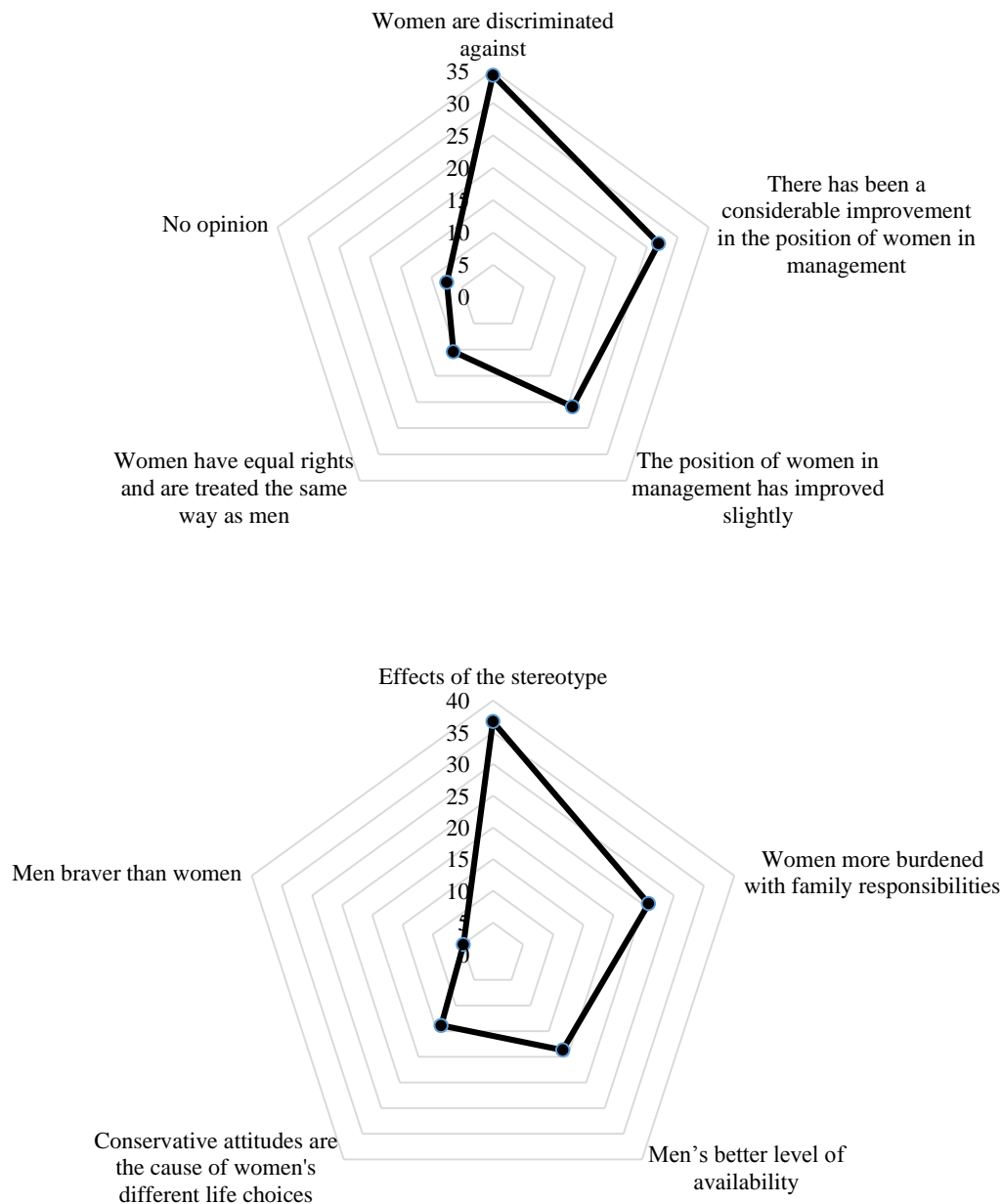


Figure 2. Assessment of the current situation of women in management

Source: Author's Own Elaboration.

During the research, an attempt was made to answer the second of the emerging research problems, i.e. what contributes to the exclusion of mothers from roles and responsibilities in the workplace? To this end, the following hypotheses were suggested:

H1. Professional work is of great importance in a woman's life as a mother

H2. The exclusion of women from working life leads to gender inequality, reducing women's chances of finding employment, promotion or access to balancing resources and benefits.

Table 1.

Determination of statistical independence between respondents' answers and exclusion of women from roles and responsibilities in the workplace

Independence Test χ^2	
Hypotheses	
H ⁰ : The variables under study are independent of each other: No relation	
H ¹ : The variables under study are not independent of each other: There is a relation	
H1	H2
$\chi^2 = 33,32$	$\chi^2 = 34,54$
Therefore, we reject Hypothesis H ⁰ in favour of Hypothesis H ¹	
T-Chuprov Meter Value	
$T_{xy} = 0,13$	$T_{xy} = 0,14$
The value that determines the area of rejection	
31,41	

Source: Author's Own Elaboration.

The independence test showed that the existence of dependencies in both H1 and H2 cases. In view of the above, it is confirmed that women as mothers are exposed to gender inequalities. These inequalities, which affect women in their role as mothers, have a significant impact on their professional, financial and social lives. They require action at social, institutional and individual levels to address these inequalities and create equal opportunities for all.

The analysis of the conducted research also made it possible to indicate important aspects related to the professional work of mothers. The most important factors are: salary (72% of responses), job satisfaction (60%) and working hours and flexibility (60%). These aspects reflect the need to achieve professional satisfaction and to adjust the work schedule to individual preferences and life commitments. It should be emphasised that the respondents also indicated other factors of lesser importance, including the possibility of promotion and career development, the opportunity to leave home and take a break from household duties, the opportunity to talk to other co-workers and the motivation to take care of oneself.

An analysis of the results shows that there was a variety of motivations that led women to return to work after maternity or parental leave. Respondents shared their personal beliefs and the factors that influenced their decision, as shown in Figure 3.

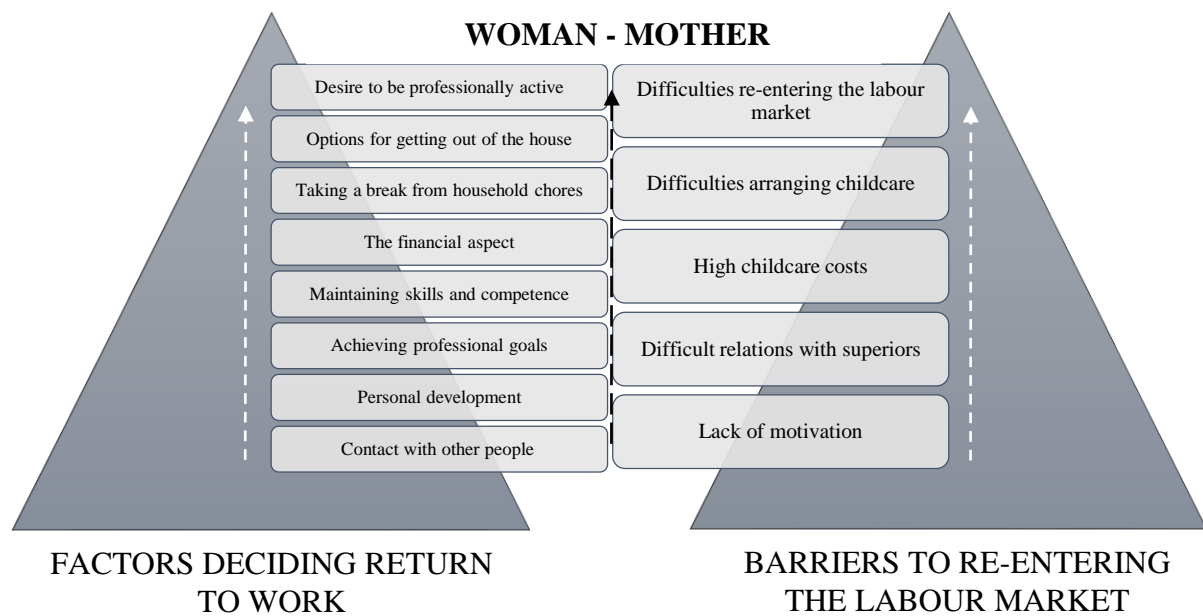


Figure 3. Aspects related to mothers' returning to work.

Source: Author's Own Elaboration.

Due to the subject matter of the study, it was important to answer the question: do women-mothers feel difficulties in fulfilling their parental and professional duties at the same time? An analysis of the material collected showed that for 71% of respondents, combining these two areas of their activity is not a problem.

Summary

To sum up, the topic of the position of women in management is relevant and important from the perspective of gender equality and business efficiency. Raising awareness of this issue and introducing concrete actions are key to achieving full equality in this area. Despite the increasing number of women working in management positions, there is still a huge amount of gender inequality in this area. Women are still a significant minority on the boards and boards of directors of large companies. This is particularly evident in the case of mothers who were the subject of the study. Properly positioning women in management is not only a matter of social justice, but also an opportunity to harness the full potential of women's talents and skills. Gender equality in management contributes to business growth, innovation, and building better teams. However, this study has some limitations. Firstly, they should be broadened to include the opinion of men as well as employers. Secondly, it would be necessary to take into account the size of companies or the industry in which mothers are professionally active. These limitations may be due to the fact that the survey is based only on data collected from

one group of respondents, which may not reflect the full picture. Additionally, there may be some distortion in the results due to measurement errors or the subjective assessments of respondents. Ultimately, it should be taken into account that this study does not take into account other factors.

References

1. Beloskar, V.D., Haldar, A., Gupta, A. (2024). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A bibliometric review of the literature on SDG 5 through the management lens. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 172. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114442
2. Bogren, M., von Friedrichs, Y., Rennemo, Ø., Widdingy, Ø. (2013). Networking women entrepreneurs: fruitful for business growth? *Int. J. Gender Entrepren.*, 5(1), <https://doi.org/10.1108/17566261311305210>
3. Christoph, M., Krause, E. (2019). Kariera zawodowa kobiet we współczesnych organizacjach. *Studia Edukacyjne*, 53, <https://doi.org/10.14746/se.2019.53.11>
4. Chui, W.H., Wong, M.Y.H. (2016). Gender differences in happiness and life satisfaction among adolescents in Hong Kong: relationships and self-concept. *Soc. Indic. Res.*, 125. DOI: 10.1007/s11205-015-0867-z
5. Eagly, A.H., Carli, L.L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.004>
6. Glăveanu, S.M. (2013). Parental Competence of Women Managers from Romania. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 78, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.04.277>
7. Hakim, C. (2006). Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 45-61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880600769118>
8. Hardoy, I., Schøne P., Østbakken, K.M. (2017). Children and the gender gap in management. *Labour Economics*, Vol. 47, DOI: 10.1016/j.labeco.2017.05.009
9. Heikkinen, S., Lämsä, A.M., Hiillos, M. (2014). Narratives by women managers about spousal support for their careers. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 30, Iss. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2013.04.004>
10. Holska, A. (2017). Kobięce przywództwo w zarządzaniu organizacją: szansa czy zagrożenie? *Zarządzanie. Teoria i Praktyka*, no. 1(19).
11. Kadoglou, T., Sarri, K. (2013). Women, motherhood and work. *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 29.
12. Kolasińska, E. (2012). Deprecjacja kompetencji kobiet w polskich organizacjach. *Kobięta i Biznes*, no. 1-4.
13. Krause, E. (2016). Macierzyństwo kobiet-naukowców – o konflikcie roli rodzicielskiej

- i zawodowej. *Szkoła – Zawód – Praca*, 12.
14. Kupczyk, T. (2009). *Kobiety w zarządzaniu i czynniki ich sukcesów*. Wrocław: Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa.
 15. Lewicka, D., Wziątek-Staśko, A. (2009). Discrimination at work – unfortunately not only in theory. *Management and Sustainable Development*, 2(23).
 16. Mohaidin, Z., Jauhar, J., Kaur, M. (2019). Factors Impede Mothers Achieving Top Management Positions: The Contemporary Business Organisations. In: C. Tze Haw, C. Richardson, F. Johara (Eds.), *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural - Sciences Business Sustainability and Innovation*, vol 65.
 17. Olivetti, C., Petrongol, B. (2016). The evolution of gender gaps in industrialized countries. *NBER Working Paper*, No. 21887. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115329>
 18. Özmutaf, N.M., Aktekin, E., Ergani, B., Çıta, K. (2015). The Effects of Innovative Features of Women Managers on their Business Performance: The Food Exporter Companies in Aegean Region Sample. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 195, doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.353
 19. Piterman, H. (2008). *Women in management: The leadership challenge*. Hannah Piterman.
 20. Powell, G.N., Butterfield, D.A., Alves, J.C., Bartol, K.M. (2004). *Sex effects in evaluations of transformational and transactional ladders*. Academy of Management Proceedings. DOI: 10.5465/AMBPP.2004.13863020
 21. Rękas, M. (2013). Kobiety-matki i ich powrót na rynek pracy po urodzeniu dziecka w wynikach badań. *Studia Ekonomiczne*, 161. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Katowicach.
 22. Sertyesilisik, B. (2023). Women Empowerment as a Key to Support Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Sustainable Development. In: C. Chakraborty, D. Pal (Eds.), *Gender Inequality and its Implications on Education and Health*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited.
 23. Silva, D.N., Silva, W.D.O., Fontana, E.M. (2023). A gendered perspective of challenges women in engineering careers face to reach leadership positions: A innovative theoretical model from Brazilian students' perceptions. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102712>
 24. Torchia, M., Calabro, A., Gabaldon, P., Kanadli, S.B. (2018). Women directors contribution to organizational innovation: a behavioral approach. *Scand. J. Manag.*, 34(2), pp. 215-224, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2018.02.001>
 25. *UN Global Compact. UN Sustainable Development Goals*. Available online: <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/sustainable-development/sdgs/17-global-goals>
 26. Webber, G., Williams, C. (2008). Mothers in “good” and “bad” part-time jobs: Different Problems, Same Results. *Gender and Society*, 22(6), pp. 752-777. DOI: 10.1177/0891243208325698