

DETERMINANTS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET AND STEREOTYPES IN THE PERCEPTION OF THEIR SOCIAL ROLES

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Purpose: This article aims to verify the areas affected by discrimination against women in labour market and, at a later stage, also to assess whether these areas are correlated with each other.

Design/methodology/approach: The first part of the article refers to the theoretical assumptions of discrimination. In turn, the empirical part presents the results of a preliminary survey conducted in early 2024. In this respect, an attempt was made to build a logit model based on the ordinary least squares (OLS) method. Only the responses given by women, who accounted for 64.19% of the total respondents, were used for the analysis.

Findings: Based on the research conducted, it was proven that there is a significant relationship between the explained variable and the explanatory variables. According to the respondents, women who are discriminated against in such areas as employment conditions, salary and access to high-level positions, as well as because of their choice to have and raise children, simultaneously believe that they are discriminated against because of their choice of jobs. Further, according to the same respondents, there should be no work-life balance in women's lives. It was also found that employers do not take any measures to encourage women to return to the workforce, which reinforces feelings of discrimination.

Research limitations/implications: Based on the results of the analysis conducted, it was assumed that further research would assess the solutions promoted by employers to encourage women to return to the labour market. The limitations of the research conducted were taken to be its concentration on one region only.

Social implications: The results of the research carried out prove the need for solutions to eliminate it completely. Dissemination of good practices in this area may significantly contribute to the professional development of women while positively influencing their willingness to return to the labour market and, consequently, changing social attitudes and suppressing stereotypes.

Originality/value: The article presents new original empirical research that confirms the existence of discrimination against women in the labour market. These considerations are primarily directed at women remaining in or re-entering the labour market, as well as employers.

Keywords: Discrimination, discrimination of women in the labour market, ordinary least squares method (OLS).

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

According to the definition in the Public Information Bulletin of the Commissioner for Human Rights, discrimination occurs when persons — due to their gender, nationality, religion, belief or disability — are treated worse than they would be if they did not stand out from others in terms of the aforementioned characteristics (Public Information Bulletin of the ROP, 2014).

The obligation of equal treatment of citizens by public authorities, including with particular emphasis on gender equality, is regulated by the Polish Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Poland, Art. 32., Art. 33. Chapter II. The Freedoms, Rights and Obligations of Persons and Citizens. General Principles, 2009). Notably, additional provisions have been established to guarantee that these standards will be respected, including: the Act of 3 December 2010 on the implementation of some regulations of the European Union regarding equal treatment (Labour Code, Art. 112–113., Art. 183c., 2023).

Regardless of the area it concerns, discrimination is recognised as a widespread problem, present at many levels of socio-economic life. Generally, this phenomenon is the subject of numerous scientific considerations, with one of the most frequently addressed being the issue of discrimination against women in the labour market.

In this regard, discrimination is the inferior treatment of women in relation to men, even though — from a work-oriented standpoint — these individuals do not differ in terms of social, demographic or economic characteristics (Niedziński, 2022). The unequal treatment of women results from using different criteria to verify the work of individuals, which, in practice, creates unequal conditions for their individual development. At this point, it is worth mentioning the prevailing social patterns according to which a woman is obliged to take care of children. It must be noted that motherhood negatively affects women's professional development and their ability to generate income (Yopo Díaz, 2022). Labour market discrimination occurs in spite of the fact that women and men are characterised by similar competencies, comparable experience and the same productivity (Dziuk, 2020; Fernandes et al., 2023).

The main forms of discrimination include direct (intentional) discrimination (Aislinn Bohren et al., 2023) and indirect discrimination, i.e. in the area of wage policy (Lindholm et al., 2022). The former occurs when the inferior treatment of employees is due to their gender. The latter, on the other hand, stems from forcing a particular group of employees to meet demands that they are unable to cope with. This results in a disparity between positions in the labour market (Dziuk, 2020; Niedziński, 2022; Wilk, 2018).

Another, more detailed, classification of discrimination considers the relationship that exists between a person and the labour market. This classification is included in Table 1.

Table 1.*Discrimination according to the relationship between the employee and the labour market*

Discrimination by relationship between the individual and the labour market	Pre-employment discrimination, including: – employment-related (when an employer selects an employee based on the characteristics of a particular group of people) – competencies- and occupation-related (related to the existence of top-down educational restrictions, e.g. assumptions that women should not work in certain professions) – human capital (related to the inhibition of certain groups of people who seek to increase their work efficiency, e.g. access to training) – self-discrimination (involves fighting each other to defeat an "opponent" instead of fostering cooperation and mutual assistance)
	Work-related discrimination
	Wage discrimination (occurs when wage disparities are due to arguments other than labour productivity indicators)

Source: own elaboration based on (Kalinowska-Nawrotek, 2004; Dziuk, 2020).

D. Witkowska notes that, despite successive efforts to eliminate gender inequalities in the labour market, gender-based disparities and resulting discrimination against women are still observed. In this regard, she draws attention to discrimination against women, which can take such forms as (Witkowska et al., 2019):

- discrimination in terms of choosing specific fields of education,
- discrimination in terms of the salary received,
- discrimination with regard to terms and conditions of employment,
- forcing women into low-paid industries and professions, indicating low social standing,
- limited opportunities for promotion and enhancement of competencies to achieve a better professional position.

The first of the above types of discrimination is indirectly linked to the labour market and concerns people who are at the "pre-entry" stage. In contrast, the next four types are directly linked to it (Witkowska et al., 2019)

The literature contains scientific studies focused on the search for the causes of discrimination against women in the labour market (Wilk, 2018). In this respect, it is often noted that women are less committed and lack proper skills towards negotiating a higher salary or have a low tolerance for risk, among other things. The considerations undertaken in this area generally involve assessing the level of discrimination against women in the labour market in statistical terms, while taking into account prevailing stereotypes. It is worth noting that such an approach conceals the real conditions that directly influence the unequal treatment of women and men in the labour market. These factors include things like background, ascribed social status and any prejudices or stereotypes acquired during the socialisation process, etc. (Adamus, 2015).

Citing E. Lisowska's research, D. Witkowska notes that what lies at the root of women's discrimination in the labour market is their historical legacy, and more specifically, the barriers that existed in the past in terms of access to education, which contributed to the lowering of women's standing. Women's discrimination in the labour market is observed as early as the recruitment process, which is sometimes expanded to include questions regarding marital status

and future plans (Lisowska, 2009). It is worth mentioning that women have always been viewed as kind-hearted and highly committed to the community, whereas men have always been perceived as decisive and characterised by a high level of commitment but without a sense of community (Manzi et al., 2024). Accordingly, the entry of women into the workforce was treated as the arrival of cheaper labour, while the work they performed was considered less demanding than that performed by men. It is vital to emphasise that there is still a belief in society regarding the division of occupations into "typical for women and characteristic for men" (Witkowska et al., 2019).

In practice, the influence of stereotypes on women's labour market situation is noticeable, including in terms of employment conditions, salary levels and the acquisition of new competencies. Still, the approach of women themselves to their professional development cannot be overlooked either. Due to the desire to balance their professional and private lives, they often lose their determination and decide to work in jobs requiring much less commitment and, therefore, accountability, resulting in a lower salary. In EU countries, discrimination against women in the labour market is most often associated with (Witkowska et al., 2019):

- earning lower wages than men working the same job,
- inhibiting the development of competencies and the pursuit of career advancement,
- limiting access to high-level positions,
- women's achievements being appropriated by men.

Recently, many attempts have been made to eliminate these stereotypes from society. These include:

- legislation to eliminate discriminatory practices affecting women's professional development,
- promoting women's employment in managerial positions, which translates into faster economic growth.

It is worth mentioning that the percentage of women occupying high-level positions is at an all-time low (28% in EU countries) (Maheshwari, Lenka, 2022). It is assumed that this is mainly due to society's beliefs about women's commonly accepted social roles, which are overwhelmingly reduced to childbearing and childrearing.

The so-called glass barriers preventing women from achieving leadership positions are particularly highlighted in the literature. They are described in Table 2.

Table 2.
Barriers hindering women's professional development

Glass ceiling	It is regarded as an invisible barrier that hinders women's professional development in terms of taking up high-level positions, which is the case in both politics and business (Babic, Hansez, 2021; Espinosa, Ferreira, 2022; Maheshwari, Lenka, 2022). Notably, this also applies to professions commonly dominated by women (Góral, 2021). The glass ceiling phenomenon refers to persons with tertiary education and extensive white-collar competencies (Witkowska et al., 2019). According to researchers, women occupy inferior positions to men in the area of management (Czajka, 2016). Glass ceilings are also referred to as glass doors (Kräft, 2022).
Glass wall	It occurs when women in managerial positions are not fully accepted by their colleagues (Góral, 2021; Shatilova et al., 2021).
Glass cliff	It involves appointing a woman to a managerial position with the presumption that she will not be able to handle the undertaking to which this promotion relates. In such cases, women-led projects are doomed to fail (Góral, 2021). This approach is intended to show that women do not perform well in management positions, especially in "no-win" situations. The term "glass cliff" also refers to constantly judging and criticising women in high-level positions (Witkowska et al., 2019). Often, it also refers to appointing a woman to a position of power when the company is about to collapse (Grangeiro et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).
Glass escalator	Refers to cases where men obtain managerial positions in jobs typically held by women, while limiting women's opportunities for advancement (Dziuk, 2020).

Source: Own elaboration.

With respect to the above barriers, the following notions should be mentioned as well:

- sticky floor — refers to hindering the professional development of employees with lower education and qualifications, who are employed in low social status "pink collar" positions (Ciminelli et al., 2021; Dziuk, 2020; Witkowska et al., 2019);
- Matilda effect — relates to the continued ignoring of women in the context of their research and scientific activities and the appropriation of their successes by men (Song et al., 2024; (Witkowska et al., 2019);
- velvet ghetto — refers to the continued dissemination of stereotypes according to which a woman's place is at home and her role is reduced to caring for the home and family. In practice, this approach generates difficulties for women's employment and inhibits their further professional development (Dziuk, 2020; Zeler, Bridgen, 2024);
- Leaky pipeline effect — implies a gradual reduction in the share of women at subsequent career levels. This phenomenon is observed within different specialisations, particularly affecting women working in STEM, as well as those holding judicial or managerial positions (Witkowska et al., 2019; Witteveen, Attewell, 2020).
- Queen Bee — occurs when, despite male dominance, a woman gains access to a managerial position while at the same time inhibiting the professional development of other women (Grangeiro et al., 2022).

As the literature shows, women's discrimination in the labour market is a broad problem, manifested through such things as barriers that prevent women from pursuing their professional development. Regardless of social expectations regarding women's place in the labour market, a question arises whether these expectations coincide with commonly held views, often dictated by stereotypes, which in effect generate prejudice and, at a later stage, discriminatory behaviour. The analysis of the literature presented above proves the relevance of the

considerations undertaken. The issue of discrimination against women in the labour market is a widespread problem, which in practice can negatively affect socio-economic development. Discriminatory behaviour against women demotivates them to self-development, return to the labour market and also discourages family enlargement. In accordance with the above, the purpose of this article was to analyse the areas in which discrimination against women in the labour market is observed, and at a further stage also to assess whether there is a relationship between these areas. In this regard, the following research questions were posed:

- Do women feel discriminated against in the labour market, and if so, what do they think this discrimination is about?
- Are there solutions that can reduce women's feelings toward their discrimination in the labour market?

The research conducted in the next section is current and new, moreover, it confirms the existence of the problem in question in society. They should be considered an important contribution to further scientific analysis, including both the assessment of the determinants of the occurrence of discriminatory behavior and measures aimed at eliminating it.

2. Methods

To answer the above questions, this section of the paper attempts to verify the relationship between the selected variables. In this regard, the results of a preliminary survey, which was conducted in early 2024 on a group of 310 respondents, were used. It must be noted that its purpose was to assess the public's views on the roles women play in different areas of the socio-economic environment, with particular emphasis on the labour market and private life.

The survey was a pilot study, and the responses obtained were intended to show whether society considers the phenomenon under analysis to be a problem and whether it should be explored further. As part of the research, only responses from women, who accounted for 64.19% of all respondents (199 people), were analysed. Table 3 presents their breakdown by age.

Table 3.

Share of female respondents by age (%)

Age (years)	<18	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	>65
Share of women of a specific age in the total structure of female respondents (%)	8.54	5.53	24.62	20.60	19.10	13.07	8.04

Source: Own elaboration.

The data in Table 3 shows that most of the women interviewed were aged 26-35 (24.62%), 36-45 (20.60%), 46-55 years (19.10%) and 56-65 years (13.07%), which accounted for 77.39% of the analysed group of respondents. Based on the responses of the female respondents, an attempt was made at a later stage to build a logit model, which made it possible to verify the relationships between the explained variable and the explanatory variables. It was assumed that the variables would be the responses given by respondents to specific survey questions, which were captured on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree: 1, somewhat disagree: 2, no opinion: 3, somewhat agree: 4, strongly agree: 5). Accordingly, the dependent variable was the responses of the female respondents to the following topic:

- Do you think women are discriminated against when it comes to their choice of jobs? (A).

In turn, the results for the following questions were selected as independent variables:

- Do you think that women are discriminated against when it comes to the terms and conditions of employment (e.g. working time standards, annual leave, applicable notice period, etc.)? (B).
- Do you think that women are discriminated against when it comes to their remuneration for work? (C).
- Do you think women are discriminated against when it comes to access to high-level positions? (D).
- Do you think that employers encourage women to return to the labour market, e.g. after a long-term illness or after childbirth and childrearing period? (G).
- Do you think that women are discriminated against in the labour market with regard to their choice of giving birth to and bringing up children? (I).
- Do you think there should be a work-life balance in women's lives? (L).
- Do you think that a partnership-based family model should be promoted, i.e. one with a fair division of household chores between partners? (M).

The parameters of an ordered logit model were defined at a further stage using the variables indicated above and the Ordinary Least Squares method. The Gretl econometric package (Kufel, 2013; Adkins, 2018; Cotrell, 2021) was used for this purpose. The results obtained in this respect are included in the next section of the paper.

3. Results

Table 4 shows the parameters of the ordered logit model for the dependent variable A.

Table 4.

Model: OLS, using observations 1-199. Dependent variable: A

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>t-ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	
const.	0.173219	0.302470	0.5727	0.5675	
B	0.380940	0.0641216	5.941	<0.0001	***
C	0.193381	0.0698595	2.768	0.0062	***
D	0.301752	0.0643409	4.690	<0.0001	***
G	-0.0988430	0.0538864	-1.834	0.0682	*
I	0.112976	0.0589960	1.915	0.0570	*
L	-0.114042	0.0668172	-1.707	0.0895	*
M	0.164088	0.0650919	2.521	0.0125	**
Mean dependent var.	2.989950	S.D. dependent var.	1.477064		
Sum squared resid.	128.1358	S.E. of regression	0.819065		
R-squared	0.703376	Adjusted R-squared	0.692505		
F(7, 191)	64.70170	P-value(F)	4.64e-47		
Log-likelihood	-238.5674	Akaike criterion	493.1349		
Schwarz criterion	519.4813	Hannan-Quinn	503.7980		

Source: Own elaboration.

The data in Table 4 proves the significant relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. As indicated by the p-value, the explanatory variables' significance levels range from $p < 0.1$ (variables: G, I, L) to $p < 0.05$ (variable M) up to $p < 0.01$ (variables: B, C, D). The signs of the individual parameters show that variables: B, C, D, I and M are stimulants, while variables G and L are destimulants. At this point, it is worth mentioning that an increase in the value of stimulant variables determines an increase in the dependent variable's value, while a decrease in the value of stimulants results in a decrease in the explained variable's value. The situation is different for the destimulants, where a decrease in their value contributes to an increase in the value of the complex phenomenon, while an increase in the value of this type of variable affects the decrease in the value of the dependent variable. The analysis of the parameters of the logit model in question shows that respondents (women), who expressly confirm that women are discriminated against in such areas as:

- terms and conditions of employment,
- remuneration for work,
- access to management positions, and
- individual choices regarding childbirth and childrearing,
- also believe that they are discriminated against when it comes to their choice of jobs.

In contrast, respondents who believe that women are not discriminated against in these areas disagree with the statement that they are discriminated against in relation to their choice of jobs. On the other hand, interpreting the destimulants allows us to conclude that the more respondents disagree that:

- employers encourage women to return to the workforce and
- there should be a work-life balance in women's lives,
- the more they agree with the view that women are discriminated against in their choice of jobs.

Coupled with an increase in the values of the destimulants, construed as the respondents' positive attitude to women being encouraged to return to the workforce by employers and approval for work-life balance, this shows that discrimination against women in terms of their choice of jobs does not occur. On this basis, it can be concluded that the involvement of employers in women's return to the workforce and their work-life balance can condition a positive perception of women's place and role in the labour market, effectively conditioning the absence of discrimination. The analysis of the R-squared value demonstrates a satisfactory fit of the variables to the model, with the variation of the explanatory variables explaining nearly 70% of the variation of the explained variable. Equally important, the p-value for the F-test was <0.01 , which indicates that the variables used in the model are significant.

4. Discussion

The issues outlined in this article indicate that discrimination against women in the labour market is still present and is a widespread problem. This is evidenced both by theoretical considerations, in which particular attention is focused on definitions and barriers limiting women's professional development, and by the results of the early 2024 survey. Significant importance in this regard is attributed to stereotypes, which largely shape society's opinions regarding the perception of women's role in the socio-economic environment.

Limiting the survey results to women's responses was intended to show the investigated problem only from their perspective; it is also worth emphasizing that about 80% of them were of working-age, and as such, were active in the labour market. Based on the parameters of the ordered logit model, it can be seen that women who are discriminated against because of their choice of jobs simultaneously feel discriminated against with regard to their employment conditions, remuneration for work, access to high-level positions or because of their choice to give birth to and raise a child. Those same women believe that a partnership-based family model should be promoted, i.e. one in which there is a fair division of domestic chores between partners; however, this does not mean that there should be a work-life balance in women's lives. According to respondents, women who are discriminated against in the areas indicated above are not encouraged by employers to return to the workforce. It is not difficult to see that women's discrimination in the labour market in a particular area is linked to their simultaneous discrimination in other respects, meaning that women are discriminated against for different reasons at the same time. Moreover, it can be assumed that the lower the involvement of their

employers in encouraging a return to the workforce, the more discriminated against the women feel in terms of their choice of jobs. By encouraging women to return to the labour market, employers may in turn reduce their impressions of discrimination. This conclusion highlights the need to implement new solutions to eliminate discriminatory behaviour against women, among which are, for example, the possibility of working from home or additional paid childcare days.

Based on the above considerations, it should be pointed out that the previously posed research questions have been answered, so that the purpose of the article has been fulfilled. Discrimination against women in the labour market can relate to many areas at the same time, i.e. ranging from the type of work to remuneration to discrimination based on the desire to start or expand one's family. Discrimination against women in the labour market is a widespread issue that is successively analysed in research. Its determinants include the stereotypes and prejudices held by society, especially in terms of the perception of women's roles in the social and economic environment. Notably, nearly half of the respondents (44%) believe that women are discriminated against in the labour market because of their choice of jobs, which is a substantial percentage and confirms the importance of the problem in question.

The conclusions obtained from the above research show, it seems necessary to implement measures that would make it possible to eliminate discriminatory practices used against women in the labour market. Despite the relevant legal regulations in force, including those introduced by the European Union, changing existing social prejudices and eliminating stereotypes in this context plays a key role here. Also noteworthy is the issue of employers encouraging women to return to the workforce. According to the research conducted, the dissemination of activities in this area determines the feelings of respondents concerning the lack of discrimination. As a result, this may contribute to increasing women's motivation to return to the labour market, as well as their striving for career development challenges. As a consequence, this will have a significant impact on broader social development and the dynamics of economic growth. Therefore, it is assumed that subsequent surveys will focus on the analysis of solutions encouraging women to return to the labour market, including as perceived by both employers and employees.

At this point, it should also be mentioned that the study was a pilot, and its purpose was to verify the occurrence of the adopted research problem. The justification for its occurrence implies the expansion of the research to include additional aspects. As part of the weaknesses of the implemented research, it was pointed out first of all that it was limited to one region.

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