

THE PERCEPTION OF GENDER EQUALITY ON THE LABOUR MARKET IN POLAND

Michał DZIADKIEWICZ^{1*}, Paulina BANASIK²

¹ Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Management; michal.dziadkiewicz@pcz.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0001-5450-1669

² Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Management; paulina.banasik@pcz.pl,
ORCID: 0009-0001-2855-262X

* Correspondence author

Purpose: The article aims to analyse the society's perception of gender equality, with particular emphasis on opinions on women's and men's access to equal professional, educational and career development opportunities in the context of management. It also addresses the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices and the perception of the roles of women and men in organisations, particularly in relation to personnel decisions, promotion and management structure. The study aims to identify potential barriers and challenges in the field of gender equality in organisations and to suggest actions that may contribute to their elimination.

Design/methodology/approach: The first part of the article included a literature review, which introduced the concept of stereotype and the aspect of unequal gender perception in professional and private life. At a further stage, the answers obtained from respondents, related to the perception of roles and equality between women and men, were analysed. For this purpose, the results of a survey carried out at the end of 2024 were used.

Findings: The conducted study revealed that the Polish society still notices gender inequalities on the labour market, especially in the context of access to high-level positions and remuneration. The respondents note persisting gender stereotypes that affect the perception of women's role in professional and family spheres, especially in the context of maternal responsibilities. Despite these challenges, the study also shows a growing awareness of the need for gender equality, including expectations for a more balanced division of work and parenting responsibilities.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis of the study results indicates that gender inequalities and stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men still pose a challenge in human resources management. The respondents notice inequalities in the access to positions, remuneration and promotions, which affects management efficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to implement diversity management strategies that promote the equality of opportunities. The study should be extended to include analyses of management policies and should also take into account the perspective of employers and managers. The study was a pilot one, therefore no limitations were identified during its implementation.

Social implications: The results of the conducted research indicate that the phenomenon of gender inequality is a common problem that causes negative emotions in society. This situation demonstrates the need to develop a strategy that could prevent such practices and at the same time reduce prejudice.

Originality/value: The considerations contained in the paper emphasise the problem of gender inequality on the labour market, including discrimination of women and men in various professional aspects. This work is addressed to employees, employers and people involved in management, who have a key role in eliminating stereotypes and implementing gender equality policies in the workplace.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, professional roles, family roles, equal opportunities for women and men.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Stereotypes can be defined as thought patterns common in a given social group, which result from a simplified perception of reality - both in relation to social and cultural phenomena, as well as specific groups of people. They are often associated with value judgments based on prejudices and incomplete knowledge (Warszewska-Makuch, Mockało, 2019, pp. 15-19). Among all stereotypes, we can distinguish those that are beliefs and prejudices about the characteristics, roles and behaviours that society assigns to women and men. These opinions shape the way we perceive and evaluate people depending on their gender, and they also influence expectations regarding their social, professional and family roles (Wolak-Libuszowska, 2024, pp. 263-271). In the context of gender equality and stereotypical perceptions of women and men in the labour market, the literature on the subject widely discusses phenomena such as discrimination, differences in pay and limited opportunities for promotion (Dudak, 2019, pp. 33-38).

An important issue related to the stereotypical role assignment is the division of professions into "typically female" and "typically male" (Andraszcyk, Szymczak, 2017, pp. 433-437). This phenomenon is manifested by occupational segregation, i.e. the tendency to overrepresent or underrepresent women or men in specific industries or occupational groups. This also frequently applies to specific positions in organisational structures (Coron, Clotilde, 2025). As noted by Coron and Clitilde (2025), women are more likely to choose professions that are less prestigious, less well-paid, do not require high qualifications, and offer limited opportunities for advancement and low requirements in terms of time availability and further education. The research conducted by Heilman and Okimoto (2007, pp. 81-92) shows that women who achieve success in fields perceived as masculine, such as technology or engineering, often encounter scepticism and their achievements are less appreciated than men's successes in the same fields. On the other hand, in professions considered "feminine" (e.g. teachers or nurses), men encounter similar difficulties in gaining recognition and professional respect. Women in managerial positions often face higher requirements and a more stringent evaluation of their competences compared to men (Flood et al., 2021, pp. 593-608). Many organisations still prefer a "masculine" leadership style based on authority, dominance

and competition, while female managers more often use a transformational style based on cooperation, empathy and relationship building (Gurung, 2025, pp. 147-159). Although the transformational style is increasingly recognised as more effective in managing modern organisations, women often encounter the so-called double standard effect – they are criticised for both being too decisive (when they behave like a stereotypical male leader) and for being indecisive (when they display traits stereotypically attributed to women) (Grunow et al., 2018, pp. 42-60).

Gender stereotypes also influence educational choices. Boys and girls are often guided into different areas of study based on stereotypical beliefs about their “natural” abilities. Studies show that girls are less likely to choose technical and scientific fields, which are seen as the domain of men, and men are less likely to choose fields related to care and education, which are seen as "feminine" (Sax, 2008).

Despite strong stereotypes, a gradual change in the perception of gender roles has been visible in recent years. Women and men are increasingly questioning traditional roles (Yu, 2025, pp. 165-171). More and more men are involved in raising children and sharing household responsibilities, which contributes to a change in the perception of a man's role in the family (Hochschild, Machung, 2012). Similarly, the influence of gender stereotypes in the workplace is decreasing, especially in the context of recruitment and performance appraisals. A research on gender equality policies in organisations shows that greater awareness of stereotypes and their impact on staffing decisions leads to more equitable treatment of employees (Koch et al., 2015, pp. 989-1014).

Modern organisations are increasingly taking steps to eliminate barriers resulting from gender stereotypes by implementing diversity management strategies (Sukiennik, Dziadkiewicz, 2024, pp. 527-541). One of the key solutions is the introduction of transparent promotion and remuneration procedures, which allows to minimise the impact of subjective assessments and biases, and thus increase fairness in making personnel decisions (Kabus et al., 2024, pp. 307-309). Mentoring and development programmes also play an important role, supporting women in acquiring leadership skills and helping them overcome barriers to advancement. Thanks to them, the number of women in managerial positions increases, which has a positive impact on the gender balance in management structures (Koch et al., 2015, pp. 989-1014). Another important aspect is the work-life balance policy, which enables both women and men to combine their professional and private lives in a more flexible way. Conveniences such as flexible working hours, the possibility of remote work or parental leave mean that professional and family responsibilities can be shared more fairly, which helps to equalise opportunities on the labour market (Pfeffer et al., 2016, pp. 652-672). An important element of activities for gender equality are also trainings in the field of unconscious biases, which increase managers' awareness of stereotypes and their impact on decisions regarding recruitment, promotion and remuneration of employees. Thanks to this type of initiatives,

organisations can more effectively eliminate barriers that hinder the professional development of both women and men (Koch et al., 2015, pp. 989-1014).

These activities show that contemporary companies increasingly recognise the need to implement strategies that support gender equality and minimise the impact of stereotypes on the functioning of an organisation (Sukiennik, Dziadkiewicz, 2024, pp. 489-503). As a result, they contribute not only to greater fairness in the workplace, but also to improving the efficiency and innovation of the entire company. Promoting equality and informing about the harmfulness of stereotypes also translates into the awareness of the entire society (Stewart et al., 2021).

2. Methods

In order to analyse the perception of gender equality in the labour market in Poland, with particular emphasis on social opinions regarding education, discrimination and professional roles, a survey was conducted in 2024. The survey questionnaire consisted of a main part, including 6 questions, and a personal data part. The answers to the questions were constructed according to a Likert scale, to which appropriate values were assigned, namely:

- I strongly disagree – 1.
- I tend to disagree – 2.
- I have no opinion – 3.
- I tend to agree – 4.
- I strongly agree – 5.

The research group consisted of both women (52.22%) and men (47.22%). The subjects of the study (i.e. the respondents) represented various levels of education – most people had secondary education (43.89%), followed by primary education (31.39%). 28.33% of the respondents had higher education, and 20.83% had vocational education.

In terms of age, the majority of participants were at the age of 36-45 (30.56%) and 46-55 (25.83%). The group also included younger people – 18.33% were aged 26 to 35, and 6.11% were aged 18-25. People over 56 years of age constituted a smaller percentage, and the least numerous group were people under 18 years of age (1.11%).

Taking into account the place of residence, 58.33% of respondents indicated an urban commune, 23.33% an urban-rural commune, and 14.17% a rural commune.

The subjects of the study were selected randomly. 370 people took part in the research. The research group was diverse in terms of gender, age and level of education, which allowed for a broad perspective on the analysed issues.

3. Results and discussion

The issue of gender equality in the labour market represents a significant area of research in the context of contemporary challenges in human resource management and the implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies within organizations. This study aimed to assess public opinions on equal professional opportunities for women and men. The collected data provide valuable insights into how this phenomenon is perceived by respondents. The analysis and interpretation of the findings are presented in the following sections of the article.

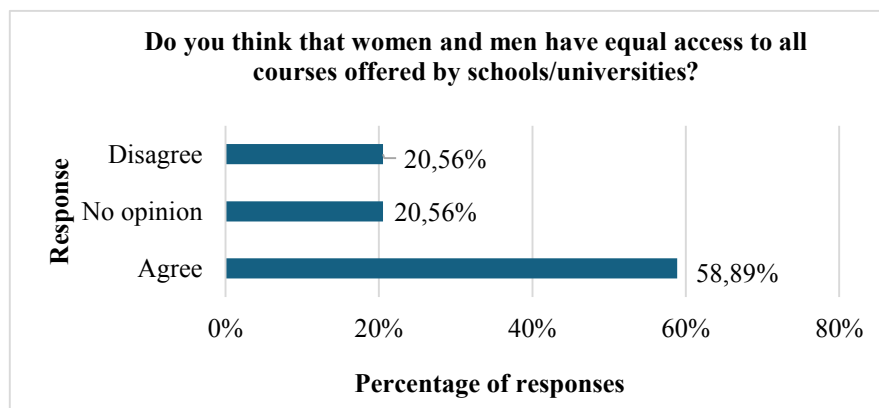


Figure 1. Assessment of equal access to courses offered by universities.

Source: Own study.

The analysis of the perception of the issue of equal access for women and men to all courses or fields of study offered by schools and universities presents an interesting picture of the perceived state of educational reality. The majority of respondents (58.89% in total) expressed the opinion that women and men have equal opportunities to pursue studies in any field. 42.50% of the respondents answered "I tend to agree" and 16.39% "I strongly agree", which indicates faith in an education system that does not place barriers for any gender, regardless of whether it is in fields traditionally considered to be male, such as science of technology, or professions within uniformed schools.

However, the survey results also show that 20.55% of respondents (14.44% "I tend to disagree" and 6.11% "I strongly disagree") perceive some gender-related restrictions in access to education. This indicates that there are still stereotypes in society, which can affect the educational choices of women and men.

It is worth noting that 20.56% of the respondents had no clear opinion on this issue. Part of society may not perceive this problem as significant or does not notice it in their everyday lives. There may also be an insufficient level of awareness regarding the impact of gender stereotypes on educational choices, especially in the context of less visible barriers. Additionally, some respondents may perceive the education system as already balanced, which leads them to overlook the existing challenges related to gender equality.

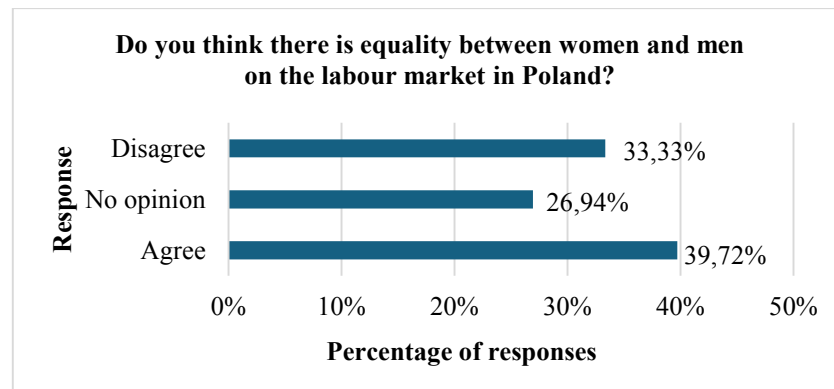


Figure 2. Perception of equality between women and men on the labour market.

Source: Own study.

The subjects' responses to question 2 indicate that despite ongoing social changes and growing awareness of gender equality issues, a significant part of society still perceives inequalities on the labour market. Only 39.73% of the respondents believe that women and men have equal opportunities in their professional lives.

More than 33% of the respondents indicate that equality has not yet been achieved. These results confirm that many people notice persistent barriers for women in the professional sphere.

It is worth emphasising that these inequalities may result not only from structural factors, such as a lack of transparency in promotions and remuneration systems, but also from deeply rooted gender stereotypes. Heilman and Okimoto's research (2007, pp. 81–92) shows that women who achieve success in professions traditionally perceived as "masculine" often face more scepticism and harsher judgment than their male counterparts. Moreover, the mechanisms related to the so-called "glass ceiling" (Flood et al., 2021, p. 593-608) make it difficult for women to achieve the highest career levels, which contributes to the maintenance of the gender-based professional hierarchy. At the same time, studies show that women are more likely to work in sectors with lower prestige and lower salaries, which additionally affects the perception of their position in the labour market (Otterbach et al., 2021).

In the context of gender equality policies, more and more organisations are implementing diversity management strategies such as mentoring programmes, transparent promotion systems or trainings in the field of unconscious bias (Koch et al., 2015, pp. 989-1014). Their purpose is not only to eliminate the existing inequalities, but also to change the social perception of gender roles. Nevertheless, as the study results show, these actions have not yet led to full equality, and beliefs still play a significant role in shaping women's situation in the labour market.

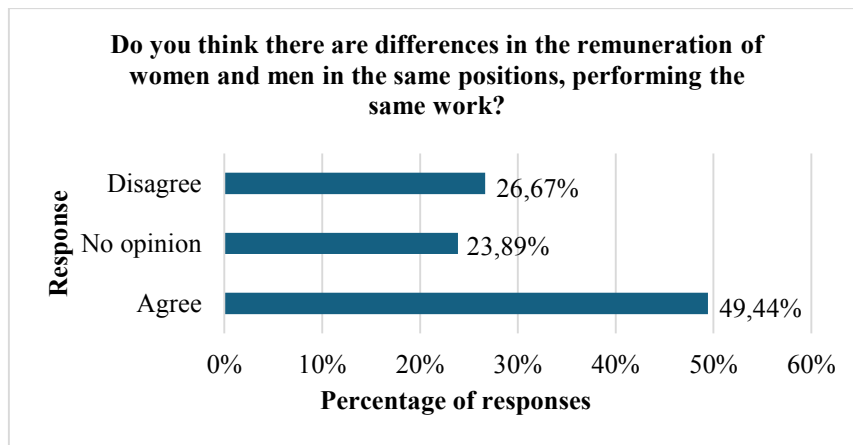


Figure 3. Perception of the gender pay gap.

Source: Own study.

The analysis of the study results shows that 49.44% of the respondents see differences in the remuneration of women and men holding the same positions (i.e. pay gap), which is an important signal about the continuing problem of pay inequality in Poland. However, only 29.17% of the subjects believe that salaries are equal, which suggests that the belief in actual pay equalisation is still not widespread.

The phenomenon of gender pay gap is well documented in the literature on the subject. Studies show that women still earn less than men, even after taking into account the level of education, professional experience and the nature of the job performed (Priyashantha et al., 2021). In Poland, according to the data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2023), the pay gap is approximately 10-20%, depending on the industry and the position level.

An important aspect of the problem is also pay discrimination, which may be a result of both unconscious biases and structural barriers in remuneration systems. As the research by Koch et al. (2015, pp. 989-1014) shows, decisions regarding pay and promotions are often based on subjective evaluations by superiors, which may lead to the perpetuation of inequality. Solving the problem of pay gap requires both legislative action and social change. Introducing transparent remuneration systems, such as the obligation for companies to report pay differences, can help identify and eliminate disparities (Kabus et al., 2024, pp. 307-309).

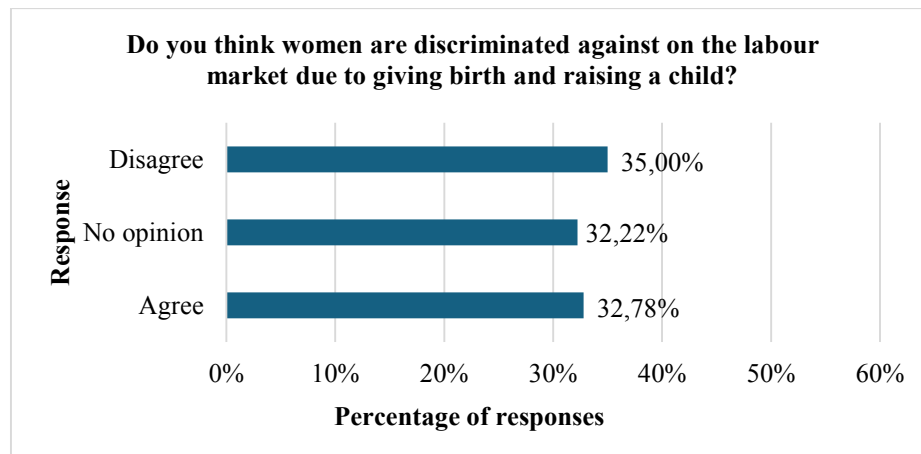


Figure 4. Perception of discrimination against women on the labour market due to having a child.

Source: Own study.

The results associated with the fourth question indicate varied attitudes towards the problem of discrimination against women on the labour market related to birth and raising a child. 32.78% of the respondents notice this problem, which indicates a significant number of people aware of the difficulties that women may encounter after giving birth. On the other hand, 35% of the respondents feel that they tend to disagree or strongly disagree with this statement, which suggests that for many people this topic is not an important issue in the context of gender equality in the labour market. A group that constitutes 32.22% has no opinion on this subject, which may result from a lack of personal experience in this matter, insufficient awareness of discrimination related to motherhood, as well as a lack of an educated view of the mechanisms of the labour market functioning from a gender perspective. Additionally, insufficient awareness of the problem may result from a lack of knowledge about the mechanisms of the labor market from a gender perspective and the impact of motherhood on women's career advancement. Some individuals may also not perceive this issue as significant, believing that legislative changes, such as maternity leave or flexible working hours, have resolved the problem of discrimination against mothers in the labor market.

Women who have become mothers often face negative professional consequences, both in terms of promotions and salaries (Steckermeier, Delhey, 2019, p. 143). Employers fear that women who have children may require more flexibility in their working hours or will be less available professionally, which affects their perceived value as employees (Salter, 2016, p. 73). The prejudice about women's limited availability after childbirth often leads to lower chances of promotion and fewer opportunities for professional development (Sax, 2008).

Despite the introduction of legal regulations granting flexible working hours or parental leave, many companies still do not offer sufficient support to employees who are raising children, which may lead to the perception that a woman, especially after maternity leave, is less effective at work (Pfeffer et al., 2016, pp. 652-672). Employers' concerns about reduced productivity due to caring responsibilities continue to be present in many industries and influence decisions about women's hiring, promotion and pay (Sng et al., 2024, pp. 477-507).

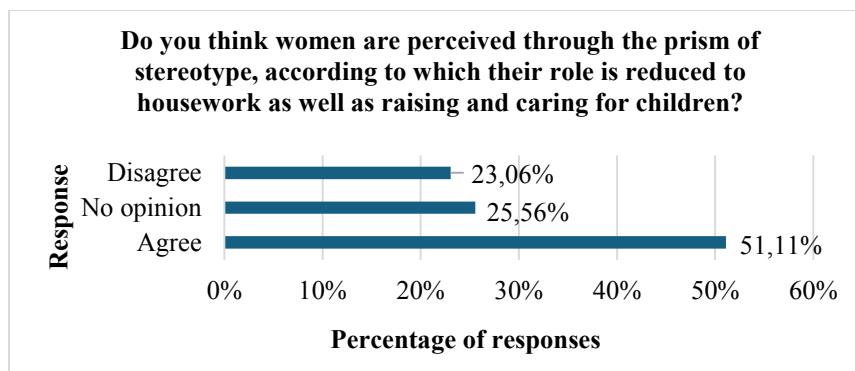


Figure 5. Perception of women through the prism of stereotype, according to which their role is reduced to housework as well as raising and caring for children.

Source: Own study.

The analysis of data regarding the perception of women through the prism of stereotypes related to housework and childcare indicates a significant impact of this phenomenon on the social perception of gender roles.

A total of 51.11% of the respondents (17.78% – “I strongly agree” and 33.33% – “I tend to agree”) think that women are perceived stereotypically, which suggests that the belief in traditional roles assigned to women still persists in Polish society. On the other hand, 23.06% of the respondents do not agree with this statement (20.28% – “I tend to disagree” and 2.78% – “I strongly disagree”). The percentage of people who have no opinion on the subject is also significant (25.56%). This may indicate a lack of a clear position in society or insufficient awareness of the problem. In some cases, this may result from a lack of direct experience with such stereotypes or from the belief that changes in society, particularly regarding gender roles, have already progressed sufficiently, making this issue less relevant. Additionally, some respondents may not notice this phenomenon in their daily lives or may feel that they do not have enough knowledge to express an opinion on the matter.

The results indicate that the stereotypical perception of women as being mainly responsible for housework and childcare is still prevalent, although there are groups which notice some changes in this regard.

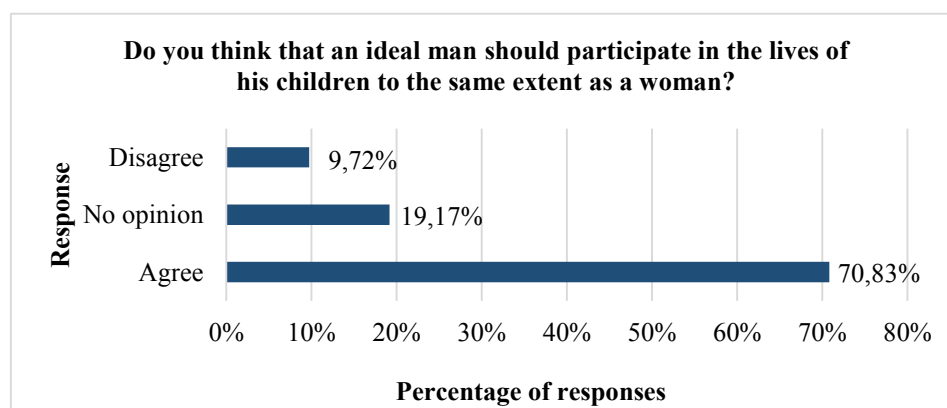


Figure 6. Perception of a man's participation in family life.

Source: Own study.

According to the survey results, 70.83% of the respondents believe that men should participate in the lives of their children to the same extent as women, both at the upbringing stage and in everyday duties related to paternity leave, parental leave and sick leave. The society is becoming more and more aware of the need for an equal division of responsibility between parents. Modern families are increasingly forced to share professional and family responsibilities, and therefore the expectations towards fathers are becoming more diverse and are extending to educational aspects.

However, the change in parental roles in the context of raising children does not only concern fathers' participation in everyday duties, but also a change in the perceived family model in a broader social context (Smirthwaite, 2009). In the traditional division of roles, the woman was responsible for taking care of the children, while the man focused mainly on providing the means to support the family. However, from a modern perspective, both parents are responsible for raising a child, which results not only from social needs, but also from economic realities in which both must participate on the labour market to ensure the financial stability of the family.

4. Summary

Summarising the study results, it can be noted that the society in Poland sees progress in the field of gender equality, but there are still serious barriers and stereotypes that affect women and men's access to equal professional, educational and labour market opportunities. On the one hand, the majority of respondents believe that women and men have equal opportunities to undertake studies in various fields, which suggests ongoing changes in the perception of equality in higher education. On the other hand, the findings indicate existing inequalities in access to work, differences in wages and persistent stereotypes related to gender role in the labour market. It was also noted that despite the wide acceptance of the idea of gender equality in education, there is still a belief that women have limited professional opportunities. The findings indicate the society's belief in pay inequality, where women, despite doing the same work, still earn less than men. These problems are often related to deeply rooted gender stereotypes and the so-called "glass ceiling" that hinders the advancement of women to top positions.

Despite these difficulties, the study results indicate a clear trend of changing social attitudes. Modern society is becoming more and more open to gender equality, both in the sphere of education and in the labour market. An important signal is also the acceptance of the idea of equal division of parental responsibilities, where men are increasingly perceived as active participants in their children's lives. These social changes have a huge impact on management in organisations, which are increasingly implementing diversity strategies and programmes

supporting gender equality. Although progress has been made in gender equality, there are still many barriers and inequalities which require further action by educational institutions, employers and society itself. Further education, changing stereotypical attitudes and introducing systemic solutions supporting equality in organisations will be crucial for the full implementation of gender equality in Poland.

The situation of women and men on the labour market, especially in the context of persistent gender stereotypes, should become the subject not only of scientific research, but also of considerations by employers and management organisations. It is an undeniable fact that the success of an organisation largely depends on the ability to use the potential of individuals with diverse intellectual, physical and mental characteristics, as well as a rich reservoir of knowledge and experience.

Employers who wish to support equality and build an inclusive work environment should take concrete actions. A key step is the implementation of transparent rules for remuneration and promotion, which help eliminate pay disparities and subjective evaluations. It is also recommended to organize training sessions on gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, particularly for managerial staff.

It is equally important to create parent-friendly workplace policies—such as flexible work arrangements, equal treatment of women returning from maternity leave, and the promotion of fathers' involvement in childcare. Employers should support women's professional development through mentoring programs and regularly analyze internal data for gender-based disparities. Equality should not only be a value but also an integral part of management strategy, shaping organizational culture, company reputation, and long-term effectiveness.

In subsequent stages, the research should be expanded to include a more nuanced analysis of demographic variables, particularly the age and cultural background of participants, which may significantly influence the perception and interpretation of gender stereotypes within the context of corporate environments. Incorporating these dimensions will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, taking into account its complex socio-cultural underpinnings. Furthermore, it is recommended that the perspective of individuals in managerial positions be included in future analyses. This will enable the identification of potential discrepancies in the perception of gender stereotypes between management and non-managerial staff, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of gender role dynamics within organizational structures.

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