

FACTORS AFFECTING JOB SATISFACTION AMONG YOUNG POLES

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Purpose: Observation and analysis of the behavior of young people in the modern labor market reveals that their expectations may differ from the expectations of previous generations. The aim of this article is to identify the factors influencing job satisfaction among young Poles in the context of employment. The article refers to current problems on the labor market related to the issue of matching the expectations of potential employees to the employment conditions offered by employers.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted using the CAVI survey method on a representative sample of 1067 Polish men and women in the fourth quarter of 2024. Two age groups were distinguished: individuals aged 18-24 and 25-39. The study employed random, proportional sampling, and only employed individuals were surveyed. The analysis was deepened by calculating the Cramer's V correlation coefficient between declared expectations and membership in a specific age group.

Findings: The results show no significant differences in employment expectations between Generation Y and Z and older generations. Across all age groups, key factors valued in employment include job stability, a low-stress working environment, and adequate compensation.

Research limitations/implications: Conducting in-depth individual and group interviews with members of Generations Y and Z could provide more detailed insights into their work-related motivations and attitudes in the workplace.

Practical implications: The findings can support organizations in developing effective recruitment strategies targeting young people.

Originality/value: This article explores the employment-related expectations of Poles across different age groups, with a particular focus on Generations Y and Z. The study's findings may serve as a valuable resource for organizations looking to tailor their recruitment processes and workplace structures to better align with the evolving career aspirations of younger employees.

Keywords: labor market, Generation Y, Generation Z, work-life balance, career expectations.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Currently, young people belonging to the so-called Generation Z are entering the labor market. Their expectations regarding employment differ significantly from those expressed by previous generations (Muster, 2020). Another important aspect of this issue is the growing influence that these young individuals are likely to exert on the functioning of organizations. This is largely due to a declining fear of unemployment and an increasing tendency to seek employment that aligns with one's own expectations and values. Moreover, young people are more willing to change jobs if their current position does not meet their satisfaction.

Based on a review of the existing literature, several factors influencing job satisfaction among young Poles have been identified. The pursuit of a balance between professional and private life - commonly referred to as work-life balance - no longer appears unusual. In today's fast-paced world, more and more individuals seek joy and rest beyond their professional roles. Successive generations are increasingly aware of the negative consequences of excessive dedication to work at the expense of personal well-being.

It would be inaccurate to claim that young people lack professional aspirations. On the contrary, in many respects they approach employment with a heightened sense of awareness. However, the rise in the number of fixed-term or civil law contracts suggests that many employees, especially younger ones, lack employment security. As a result, precarious employment is becoming more widespread, leading to a sense of uncertainty and instability in the labor market. This, in turn, affects young people's ability to achieve independence or make long-term life decisions, such as starting a family. granted, the birth rate is declined each year, which - alongside increasing life expectancy - contributes to a range of demographic, social, and economic challenges.

The aim of this article is to identify the factors that influence job satisfaction among young people in Poland. The study was conducted using the CAVI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method on a representative sample of 1067 employed Polish men and women during the fourth quarter of 2024. Two age groups were analyzed: individuals aged 18-24 and those aged 25-39. A random, proportional sampling method was used. The study focused exclusively on employed individuals, and the analysis examined correlations between reported employment expectations and the respondents' age group.

2. Young people on the job market

When defining who young people are, it is essential to first consider the concept of "generation," which is understood in various ways in the literature. Significant differences arise from the characteristics that most strongly shape each generation's identity. These definitions can be categorized into three main groups. The first is demographic, where age is the defining feature. The second is demographic-historical, which, in addition to age, emphasizes a specific period - shared life experiences that shape individuals during a given time frame. The third group consists of historical-psychological definitions, which disregard age and focus on the events that shape a generation's worldview and influence its attitudes (Miroslaw, 2014). The idea of generations was explored by Mannheim (Mannheim, 1992), who defined a generation as a group of individuals whose common life experiences have a profound and lasting impact on their lives. It is evident that each generation perceives issues such as values, family, education, work, and responses to change differently. These differences stem from evolving political, economic, and social contexts, as well as unique personal experiences (Aronowska, 2014).

In this analysis, two age groups were distinguished: individuals aged 18-24 and those aged 25-39. Within these groups, we identify Generation Y and Generation Z. Generation Y, also known as Millennials, consists of people born between 1980 and 1995 (Bencsik et al., 2016). Members of this generation are often characterized by contrasting traits. They seek autonomy but also have a strong need for belonging. While group affiliation is important, they challenge many established norms. Generation Y has significantly influenced the labor market, particularly in terms of organizational culture, values, and management practices (Baran, Kłos, 2014). Millennials are adept at adapting to change, which has become a constant element in modern life. While unpredictability and uncertainty create challenges for many, Generation Y adapts better than previous generations, who prioritized stability (Myers, Sadaghiani, 2010). Generation Y employees often value a positive work atmosphere, which fosters strong relationships among colleagues and motivates them to perform well, not to disappoint their peers. They are also more aware of ethical and unethical corporate practices and are typically reluctant to work for companies with poor reputations (Piątek, Kobylińska, 2018). The use of new technologies is not a major challenge for them, as they are the first generation to show signs of digital addiction, often spending excessive time on mobile devices and social media. This constant connectivity shapes their behavior. Generation Z, those born after 1996, who are now entering the labor market, share similar traits. They also seamlessly navigate digital environments and, in terms of employment, value independence, variety, and the ability to creatively complete tasks. Remote work and flexible hours are also crucial to them (Czyczerska et al., 2020). Given the growing awareness of burnout, Generation Z is particularly mindful of the risks associated with the persistent lack of work-life balance.

(Konkel, 2023). Young people entering the labor market today are more likely to change employers and explore various positions, which has led to shorter contracts and frequent job changes (Świerkosz-Hołyś, 2016). Many start their academic careers believing that a higher education will give them a competitive edge in the job market. While a university degree does not always guarantee success, it remains a valuable asset in a potential employee's CV (Sobotka, 2023). Moreover, an increasing number of young people who continue their education also seek employment. Gaining work experience as early as possible is essential for them, as it enhances their competitiveness in the labor market. The trend of students working while studying affects various aspects of their lives. Remote work and flexible hours allow students to work even while pursuing a full-time education. However, this raises concerns about the impact on the quality of education, as lack of concentration or absence from classes can hinder learning. Furthermore, this lifestyle may contribute to burnout, a growing issue for many individuals today. Nonetheless, one positive aspect of this trend is that it enables young people to quickly determine whether their chosen career path aligns with their expectations. Research shows that students who work while studying tend to have more realistic expectations of the labor market (Wronowska, 2015). While a university diploma is no longer a guarantee of employment, individuals with higher education tend to fare better in the labor market. Currently, people with higher education in Poland constitute the largest part of the professionally active population (Figure 1).

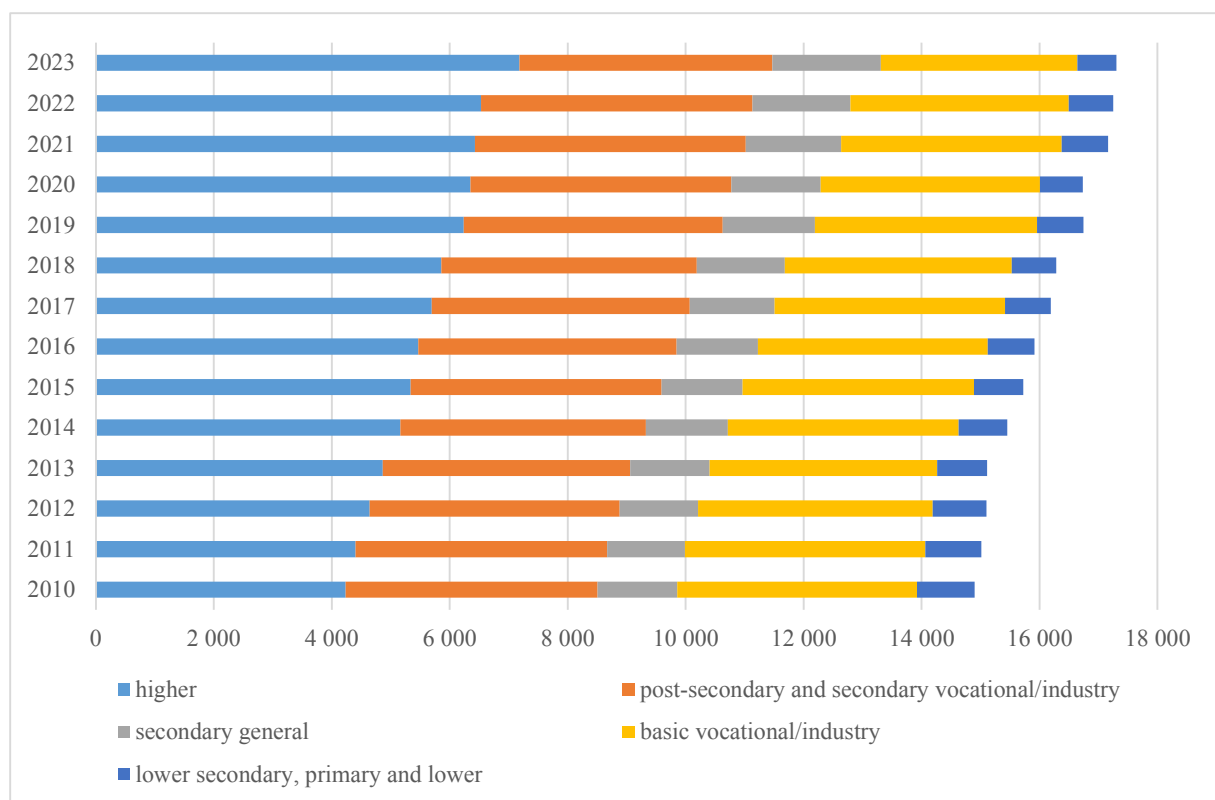


Figure 1. Professionally active persons by education level in 2010-2023 in Poland [in thousands].

Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office data.

Currently, a decline in the total number of unemployed individuals within the labor market in Poland is observed (Figure 2). Analyzing the structure of the unemployed by education level, it is evident that, both in 2010 and 2023, the largest proportion was represented by individuals with basic vocational or industrial education (33% in 2010 and 29% in 2023). The share of individuals with higher education among the unemployed increased from 13% in 2010 to 19% in 2023. Meanwhile, individuals with post-secondary and secondary vocational or industrial education accounted for 26% of the professionally active unemployed in both years under analysis.

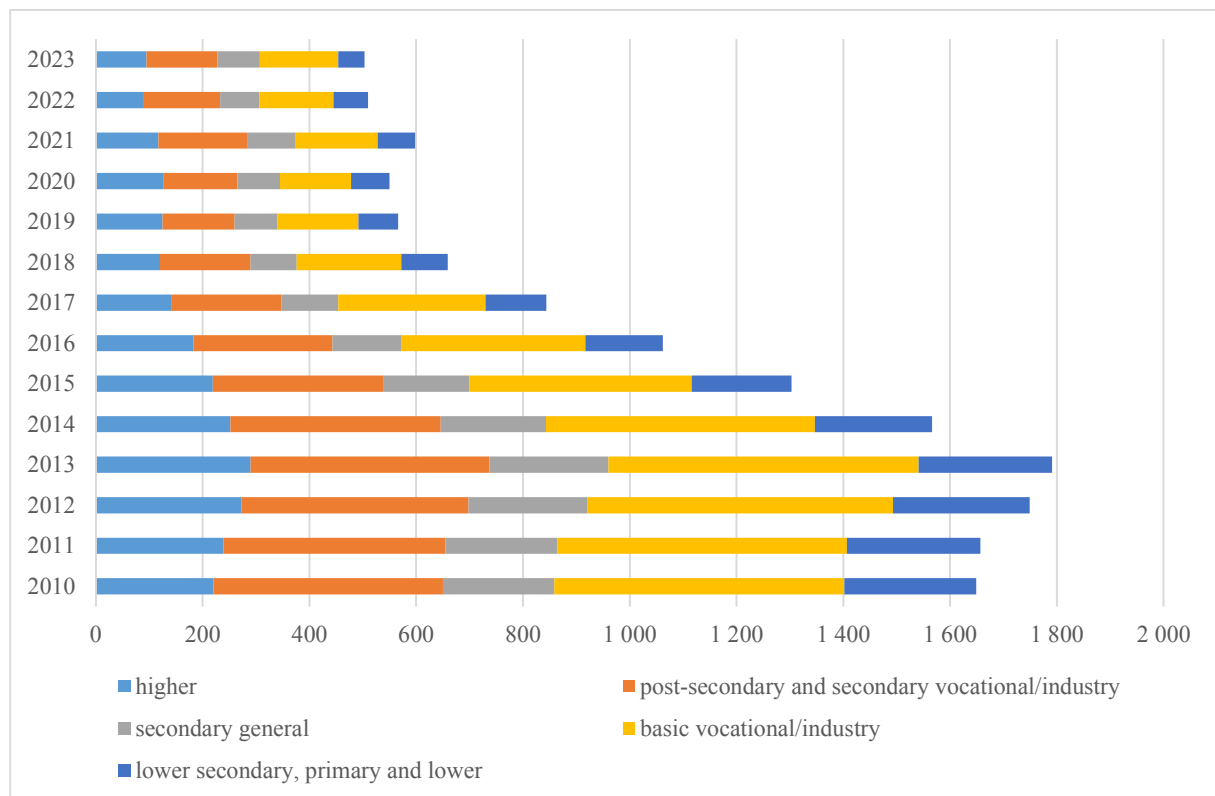


Figure 2. Economically active unemployed by education level in 2010-2023 in Poland [in thousands].

Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office data.

The research suggests that dividing society into specific generations in relation to the labor market is unjustified, given the minimal differences in the characteristics and employment expectations across generations. Furthermore, actions taken by some organizations to adapt to the expectations of younger generations may prove ineffective (Costanza et al., 2012). In contrast to the concept of distinguishing specific generations and their influence on the labor market, Hackman and Oldham's model (Hackman, Oldham, 1975) identifies five characteristics of work that contribute to employee satisfaction, regardless of their age. Work will meet employees' expectations if it requires the use of a variety of skills. The opportunity to utilize individual talents enhances the sense of meaning in carrying out professional tasks. Another characteristic is task identity, which occurs when an individual is responsible for a task from start to finish, allowing them to identify with it and observe the results. If the work is perceived

as important to the organization or the external environment, this becomes another factor that increases job satisfaction. Autonomy, defined as the ability to independently plan and execute assigned tasks, is another crucial characteristic. Finally, feedback allows employees to assess their effectiveness in relation to the effort invested. This model emphasizes that the source of job satisfaction should be sought in the nature of the work itself rather than in generational specifics. However, given the dynamic changes in the workplace, work itself is evolving, directly influencing employee expectations and requirements. The rise of remote work, the growing emphasis on work-life balance, and the increasing prevalence of digitization and artificial intelligence are transforming the labor market in significant ways.

3. Expectations of young people regarding employment in the context of the current situation on the labor market

When analyzing the current situation on the labor market, it is essential to consider the concept of VUCA. This acronym encapsulates four characteristics that define the contemporary socio-economic environment:

- Volatility, which refers to rapid and unpredictable changes in various spheres, such as the economy, politics, and the environment. These fluctuations make it increasingly difficult to forecast future developments. Volatility creates instability, thereby increasing uncertainty, which may discourage individuals from planning their future career trajectories.
- Uncertainty, which directly influences the ability to predict the outcomes of the actions taken by both individuals and organizations.
- Complexity, a condition where multiple, often overlapping factors influence different aspects of human life, making it challenging to isolate specific causes or effects.
- Ambiguity, characterized by situations in which connections between particular events or phenomena remain unclear or uncertain. Misinterpretations arising from ambiguity may lead to suboptimal decision-making (Jeruszka, 2023).

Despite the volatile nature of the current environment, economists argue that it is still possible to identify and anticipate shifts in the labor market, particularly regarding the evolving demands for specific competencies and professions. A key area that warrants attention is the need to align the education system more closely with the needs of the labor market, which would help mitigate the issue of youth unemployment among individuals with specific educational backgrounds, as well as address employers' difficulties in finding appropriately skilled candidates. This alignment will be achievable if the interrelationship between the labor market and the education system takes into account broader economic shifts (Kwiatkowski, 2001). By responding proactively to these economic changes, it will be possible to more

effectively match the skills, knowledge, and competencies of young individuals with the demands of the labor market upon their completion of formal education.

The recruitment process, designed to hire the most suitable candidates, is often resource-intensive, time-consuming, and costly for both employers and prospective employees who seek jobs that align with their professional aspirations (Włodarczyk, Sikorska, 2017). This is attributable, among other factors, to the inherent imperfections of the labor market, particularly its lack of transparency. The absence of sufficient information and transparency leads to less effective and often costly recruitment practices (Ostoj, 2015). In this context, the concept of social capital, including organizational capital, provides a useful framework for reducing recruitment costs, as well as time and effort spent in the search for optimal candidates. Social capital is rooted in trust, wherein employers leverage the knowledge and networks of existing employees to identify and recruit new talent (Stiglitz, 2000). The pursuit of a work-life balance is integral to achieving high levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being. The challenge of maintaining such a balance often results in conflicts across various dimensions of life. An excessive workload, in particular, can undermine personal relationships and lead to difficulties with focus and productivity in the workplace.

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature and empirical research conducted to date, several key factors influencing job satisfaction among young Poles with regard to employment can be identified (Zwardoń-Kuchciak, 2021; Świerkosz-Hołyś, 2016). These factors include:

- competitive salary,
- job security and stability,
- clear, well-defined expectations and responsibilities,
- the ability to maintain a work-life balance,
- a positive workplace atmosphere,
- opportunities for career advancement,
- the chance to develop professional skills and competencies,
- flexible working hours,
- autonomy in task execution,
- additional employee benefits.

The survey, conducted with a representative sample of 1,067 respondents, included participants from various age groups: 18-24 years - 61 people, 25-34 years - 232 people, 35-44 years - 312 people, 45-54 years - 276 people, and over 54 years - 186 people. The results of the survey, specifically the responses to the question ‘What do you consider most important in professional work?’ are presented in figure (Figure 3) in percentage terms.

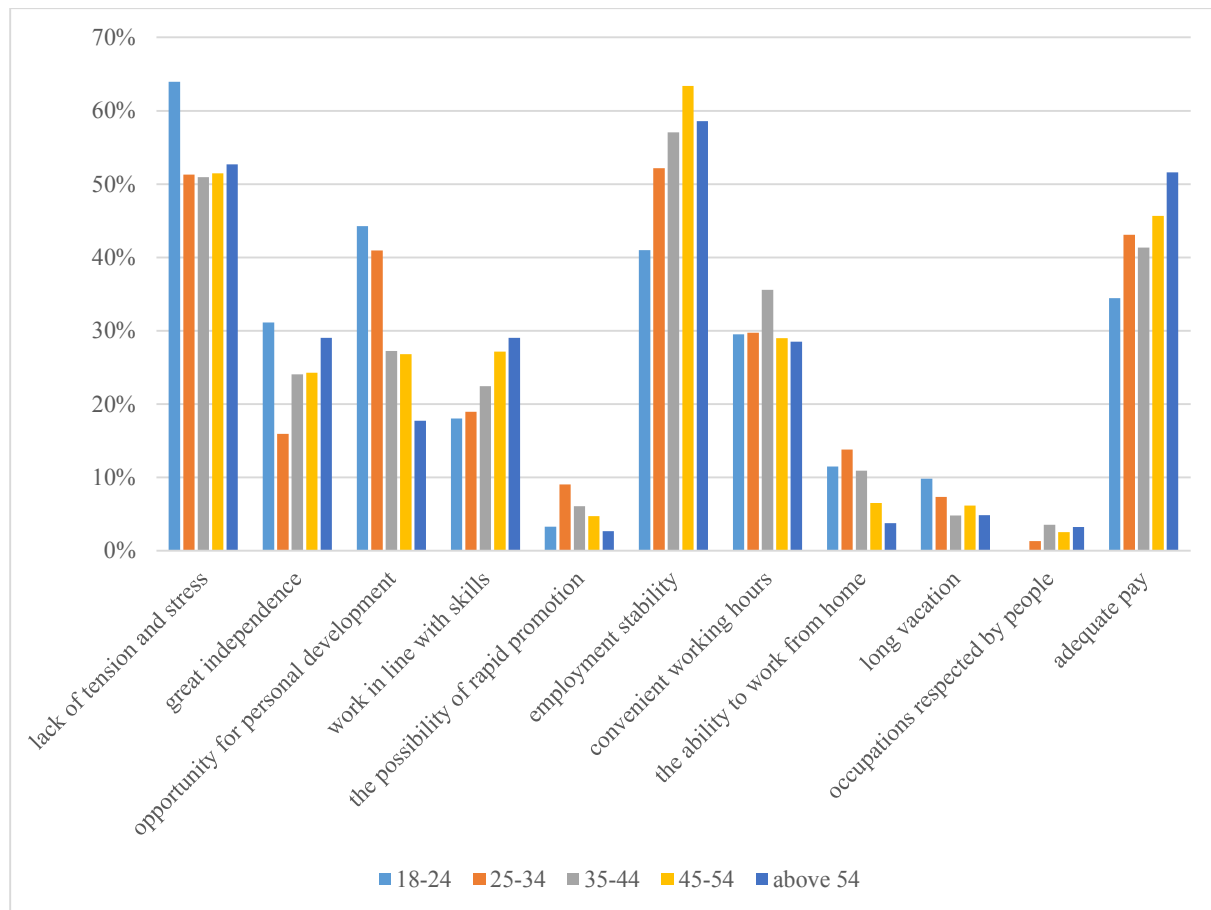


Figure 3. Expectations of Poles regarding employment based on the answers provided in the survey [in percent].

Source: own study based on the conducted survey.

Analyzing the responses provided by the participants in the survey, three factors emerge as having the greatest impact on job satisfaction among Poles: the absence of tension and stress, employment stability, and appropriate compensation. Work that does not cause excessive stress was considered important by respondents of all age groups, with the youngest group (18-24 years old) identifying this factor most frequently. Employment stability, on the other hand, was more highly valued by older respondents, particularly those in the 45-54 age group. For younger participants in the labor market, the opportunity for personal development and a high degree of independence were significant, while the prestige of the job appeared to be less important. Notably, none of the respondents aged 18-24 considered the prestige of their job to be a key factor. In addition to these primary concerns, respondents also highlighted other factors such as "convenient location", "proximity", "working with colleagues in the office", and "separation of work from private life." A potential area for further research could involve exploring the issue of compensation in greater detail, specifically identifying what level of remuneration would be deemed satisfactory for different age groups.

Table 1.

Summary of the number of respondents' answers to the question "What do you think is most important in professional work?" depending on age group

	lack of tension and stress	great independence	opportunity for personal development	work in line with skills	the possibility of rapid promotion	employment stability	convenient working hours	the ability to work from home	long vacation	occupations respected by people	adequate pay
18-24	39	19	27	11	2	25	18	7	6	0	21
25-34	119	37	95	44	21	121	69	32	17	3	100
35-44	159	75	85	70	19	178	111	34	15	11	129
45-54	142	67	74	75	13	175	80	18	17	7	126
above 54	98	54	33	54	5	109	53	7	9	6	96

Source: own study based on the conducted survey.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the Cramer's V correlation coefficient was calculated at 0.08497, which indicates a very small correlation between the number of indications of specific important issues in the area of employment and a specific age group.

4. Conclusions

The existence of differences in how subsequent generations approach the issue of employment is inevitable. When analyzing the expectations of specific generations, it is important to consider the numerous changes in various aspects of life, which undoubtedly shape a person's worldview and their way of functioning. Regardless of age, Poles place particular importance on job stability, the absence of tension and stress in the workplace, and adequate compensation. Conducting in-depth individual and group interviews with representatives of Generations Y and Z could provide valuable insights into what motivates them in the context of employment and the attitudes they adopt in the workplace. While the expectations of young Poles may overlap with those of older generations, their approach to work and their perceptions of it are distinct. More detailed interviews with both young people and employers could yield a deeper understanding of the expectations of Generations Y and Z regarding employment.

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