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The Situation of Economic Activity of Female Rural Dwellers in the Research Perspective

Abstract: The study is devoted to sociological problems pertaining to the situation of women in the labour market. The problems were presented in the view of rural women themselves in relation to sociological literature and statistical data. The data which constitute the basis for the study are made up of 1600 questionnaires carried out on a nationwide sample of rural women as well as the reports from focus group interviews conducted with four groups of rural women.

The study on 'Rural women in the labour market. The diagnosis, conditions and prospects' was carried out in 2007–2008 as a part of SOP HRD 1.6 (b) project 'The diagnosis of the social and professional situation of rural women in Poland' funded by ESF and implemented by the Polish Social Policy Association in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The objective of the research was to carry out a diagnosis and to indicate the reasons and the determinants of rural women's activity and inactivity in the labour market. Researchers outlined independent variables regarded as potential indicators of economic activity, the sense of job security, inactivity and the plans concerning future employment. The indicators were grouped into seven sets: 1. variables related to the social standing of an individual 2. family situation 3. socialization patterns 4. socio-political activity 5. environment-related factors 6. educational activity 7. a subjective assessment of the local labour market. The paper focuses on a number of socio-demographic correlates that affect rural women's labour market situation and merely outlines the presence of other variables that might be important from the point of view of professional activity of this group of women.

Keywords: professional activation and inactivation; rural women; rural areas; job security; plans concerning future employment.

Introduction

Rural women's professional activity is a rarely diagnosed yet important phenomenon for the Polish and rural labour market as well as the beneficiaries and their families.

The term 'rural woman' is often associated with 'a female farmer', a woman who lives on the farm and who is attached to this farm not only pursuant to a deed of ownership or marriage or family ties but due to devoting a considerable proportion of her time to farming duties in the house and in the homestead. On the whole, 'rural women' often don't perceive it as professional activity yet as a broader range of duties related to a household. It is noteworthy that, working on a farm, they actually represent a socio-professional group within a category of rural women. This category is socially and professionally diverse, as a result of changes promoted by long-term modernisation process as well as political-and-economic transformation in the Polish countryside.

The diversification of rural areas¹ on the national level results from settlement characteristics, the degree of urbanization, infrastructural and institutional background. Particular areas differ in terms of the level of economic development, prevalent lifestyle, the degree of activity undertaken by its residents as well as the effectiveness of strategic management on the part of local or regional authorities. The localization of rural areas in relation to urban areas and main transport networks plays an important role as far as the current condition of the local economy and the development of this economy are concerned. The rural areas which are located within the scope of influence exerted by urban agglomerations (and routes of transport) are characterised by a higher degree of development in comparison to the areas which remain on the periphery of the cities. In such rural areas the role of agriculture decreases (especially as regards traditional farming), being superseded by non-agricultural functions such as services and trade. The landscape and architecture of such areas also changes as they increasingly imitate the urban model. The process of suburbanization leads to increasing significance of the residential function of rural areas. The housing estates which are established there are inhabited by incomers from metropolitan areas. These incomers are usually well-educated, affluent and entrepreneurial.

This multifaceted diversity of rural areas is reflected in the diversification of socio-demographic and professional structures in these areas (Frenkel 2006), a category of rural women inclusive. Rural areas are inhabited by women who represent different categories and social environments, who differ in terms of their acquired and practised professions, the level of education, lifestyle, their attitude towards work which is manifested in their declarations concerning work situation, in defining their expectations, chances and preferences connected with the labour market.

The determinants of activity in the labour market are placed on both the supply side (qualities, capabilities and professional qualifications as well as willingness on the part of women to take up work and their acceptance of the terms stipulated in job offers) as well as on the demand side for the work performed by women on the part of potential employers (expectations as to the qualifications possessed by women). The labour market in the case of rural women has prevalently a local dimension. The scope of rural women's labour market covers the area of the commune in which women live.

The following factors define employment chances of women in the local labour market: place of residence, economic characteristics of this place, institutional background, transport system, technological infrastructure, social infrastructure, location of the place within the commune and other features pertaining to the environment women live in. The location of the commune within the region, economic and spatial development of the region, proximity of women's place of residence to urbanized areas may play an important role in terms of extending the labour market for the rural women with particular socio-demographic and personality characteristics.

¹ Within the framework of Rural Areas Development Scheme for the years 2007–2013 (hereinafter referred to as PROW) rural areas have been defined as places located within the administrative boundaries of rural communes (gminas) and urban-rural communes to the exclusion of towns with over 20 thousand inhabitants, urban communes with the exclusion of localities inhabited by over 5 thousand inhabitants, p. 8.

Employment and labour market activity of women is favourable for the country's economy. Professional activity and activation of women in the countryside is an important factor in multifaceted diversity of rural areas (Kłodziński 1997; Paszkowski 2001) where women conduct professional, organisational and social activity in different areas of economic and socio-cultural life. Some of them have deliberately given up professional activity for various reasons, while others would like to take up a job under favourable circumstances. The diagnosis of rural women's professional activity and eagerness to work is necessary for social policy planning in rural areas—communes (gminas), counties (poviats) and regions (voivodships). It is also important within the context of considering an equal status of men and women in terms of their access to primary social goods, including employment. These are the arguments in favour of the diagnostic analysis of rural women's labour position.

Rural Women in the Polish Labour Market—Research and Statistical Data

Currently, the labour market analysis reveals a general picture of employment, unemployment, in terms of age, sex, education, territorial division (voivodships, poviats and gminas) as well as labour market in urban and rural areas. However, there is no specifically outlined information on professional activity of rural women.

Social Diagnosis 2007 (Czapiński, Panek 2007) provides data that indicate improvement of the labour market situation in Poland. In 2007 the unemployment rate in Poland dropped to 10.7% while the employment indicator increased reaching 50.3%. The professional activity coefficient decreased by 0.5% (from 56.8 to 56.3%) during this period. In rural areas, following the decrease of the unemployment rate from 13.9 in 2005 to 11.0 in 2007, the employment indicator dropped in comparison to 2005 and amounted to 49.8% in 2007 (Czapiński, Panek 2007: 116).²

It is outlined that the employment rate among women residing in the countryside is relatively low. Perhaps the drop in the unemployment rate may be resulting from the withdrawal from the labour market into economic inactivity, finding a job abroad or undertaking studies. The flow between the statuses of the Polish labour market, that is the group of employees, the unemployed and economically inactive, indicates that 39% of those who have withdrawn from the labour market (from employment or unemployment to economic inactivity) covers individuals aged 45–59, women constituting 23.2% of the proportion. In addition, 13% of women aged 25–34 have turned to an economically passive state. Overall statistics point to an improvement in the situation in the Polish labour market.

In the process of systemic and economic transformation women have been predominant among the population of the unemployed. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office, the unemployment rate among women exceeds that among men. For example, in the fourth quarter of 2005 the unemployment rate among

² *Social Diagnosis 2007*, p. 117. The information concerning the labour market presented in this document does not contain the data pertaining to rural areas split to show proportions in terms of gender or age.

women amounted to 18.3% and 15.4% among men. Women aged 25–34 and 45–59 represent the groups most at risk of economic inactivity. The risk of inactivity and leaving unemployment is related to women's education. Women with low level of education, vocational at most, leave the labour market.

Among the self-employed 47% were individual farmers, 34% of non-agricultural self-employed were women. Among the residents over 25 who improved their professional qualifications between 2005 and 2007, women constituted 57%. The higher the level of education, the more efforts are devoted to improve professional qualifications and other skills. About 30% of the employed—53% of them being women, and 40% of the total proportion being residents of the countryside—have declared that their current employment does not allow to practice their qualifications. Among the unemployed due to the lack of required qualifications in 2005–2007, the majority had basic vocational training and were residing in the countryside or small and medium-sized towns. Women constituted 57.4% of all the unemployed due to the lack of required qualifications. The above data confirming higher level of education among women rather than men and their more active participation in professional qualification advancement may indicate that the growing occupational potential of women is not taken full advantage of in the labour market.

There is no data on the situation of rural women in the labour market, taking into account the above data and statistical distribution.

As it was pointed out in *Social Diagnosis 2007*, the ranking of reasons for remaining in the category of unemployed is different for women and men. Approximately 96% of women mentioned housekeeping and looking after children as the main reason, the second most important reason was age (67%) and the third—lack of motivation to work (63%). 57–58% of Polish women pointed to poor health, receiving welfare benefits and difficulties with finding a job as the main reason for remaining unemployed. Approximately 53% of women mentioned the fact they are still learning as one of the reasons and 38%—the fact that they retired. Women more often than men pointed to the difficulties with finding a job and emphasised the significance of improving one's professional skills as regards their status on the labour market. The data presented above concern the whole population of Poles (including women), however they do not give an exhaustive picture of the place rural women occupy in the labour market.

The issue of rural women's employment status is not distinguished in the statistics and the sociological literature hardly touches upon it and, if it does, there are only marginal references made to it in the context of broader research problems such as the activity and inactivity of Polish women (Gawrońska-Nowak; Jura; Zarzycka 2003; Gutkowska 2004), unemployment among these women, poverty that they are stricken by (Tarkowska 2000; Golimowska 1996). It is also present in the research on overall economic activity of women, which is carried out in Poland and other member states of the European Union (Kurzydłowski 2001; Duch-Krzysztożek, Titkow 2006), or in a gender perspective pertaining to: gender equality, prevention of discrimination in the labour market, allotment of responsibilities in the context of authority in the family (Brodzińska 2004; Lisowska 1998; Strykowska 1999). It is also worth pointing out that researchers are interested in the issue of entrepreneurship displayed by rural women

(Szymańska 2004; Bylicki, Szafranek 1996). As research indicates, in spite of being burdened with family responsibilities rural women are very committed to setting up in business (Bylicki, Szafranek 1996). The industriousness and reliability they display is usually confined to their commitment to work for the benefit of an individual farm (Tryfan 1995). On the other hand, many responsibilities a rural woman must fulfil, particularly those connected with the farm, limit the amount of free time and determine the process of rural women's professional activation (Knapik 2005). Rural women are equipped with the potential which makes them competitive in the labour market in relation to men. According to research, women are better-educated than men and they are more entrepreneurial.

Other findings indicate that in comparison to women who dwell in urban areas rural women find it much harder to cope with a new situation connected with losing a job and finding a new one (Lisowska 1998; Gawrońska-Nowak, Jura, Zarzycka 2003; Gutkowska 2004). However, it should be pointed out that in comparison to male rural dwellers women are more active in case of 'crisis situations' and they are more resourceful in obtaining the means to live on. Sociological research carried out in the environments stricken by the collapse of State-owned Agricultural Enterprises (PGRs) points to numerous cases where the families of former employees of these closed down state-owned farms were able to survive only thanks to the determination displayed by women (Psyk Piotrowska 2004).

An inadequate scope of studies of professional activity among rural women is to a certain extent compensated by nationwide research carried out in 2007–2008 as a part of the SOP HRD 1.6 (b) project 'The diagnosis of the social and professional situation of rural women in Poland' funded by ESF and implemented by the Polish Social Policy Association in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The project covered four modules.³ These sociological studies on the subject of 'Rural women in the labour market. The diagnosis, conditions and prospects' (module 3) explored the characteristics of the situation of women residing in the countryside, provided the outline of key factors that determine their professional activity and inactivity, including unemployment.

Professional Activity of Rural Women in the Light of Nationwide Sociological Research. Methodological basis for the research

The population under study comprises women residing in rural areas. Economically active rural women are legally employed by public or private institutions, by firms

³ The project 'The diagnosis of the social and professional situation of rural women in Poland' covered four modules: 1. Local authorities (poviats and gminas) and their social policy targeting rural women—supervised by the project coordinator Jerzy Krzyszkowski; 2. The activities of social services (social welfare and labour administration) targeting rural women's professional activation—supervised by the project coordinator K. Pięcek; 3. Rural women in the labour market. Diagnosis, conditions, prospects—supervised by the project coordinator Elżbieta Psyk-Piotrowska; 4. Determinants of socio-political activity of rural women—supervised by the project coordinator Danuta Walczak-Duraj.

operating in various branches and pursuant to various forms of ownership, by individuals on the basis of a formal contract (of any type) or by individuals carrying out business activity (including business activity conducted on the farm) on their own or as co-owners.

Women who are currently not employed, but declare that they are ready to take up legal, permanent work and who are actively looking for a job belong to the group of the unemployed. A proportion of them are registered and some are entitled to the unemployment benefit. This category comprises the women who once worked, who are currently not employed, but are ready to take up work. There are also women who so far have not worked, but as a result of a change in their life situation they want to join the labour market and take up work. Some women who live on the farm are also interested in taking up a job outside agriculture. The category of the economically inactive is made up of women who do not have a job and are not interested in taking up professional work. Most of them have never worked. There may also be women who once worked but who are currently not interested in performing any work.⁴ There is a special category of rural women which is made up of women who reside in farm houses and who perform work related to the functioning of the farm as owners, co-owners or family members. They are referred to as “women farmers” who do not identify themselves with the “economically active” women as they do not treat their work performed on a family-owned farm as professional work. The population is also divided into working women (currently employed) and non-working women (not employed, including the unemployed) to illustrate i.e. the conditions for the situation out of work.

To diagnose the situation of rural women in the labour market, both qualitative and quantitative sociological research methods were applied. Quantitative research was carried out on a representative nationwide sample of 1600 rural women selected according to 4 criteria: voivodship, age, education, economic activity—lack of economic activity. The distribution of these characteristic features reflects their structure nationwide. The proportion of respondents in voivodships represents the ratio of rural women compared to urban female residents in the respective voivodships while their age structure—the nationwide age structure of professionally active rural women.⁵

Focus group interviews constituted a supplementary method—in two of them unemployed women were interviewed and in two of them working women were surveyed. Thanks to them it was possible to deepen and supplement some information obtained in the quantitative material. On aggregate 43 women took part in focus group

⁴ The following terms were adopted in this article: Economically active women: employed and unemployed (potentially economically active), inactive. The employment rate shows the number of the employed, while the unemployment rate shows the number of people who do not have a job, but who are willing to take up work in relation to the number of those who are economically active. The economic activity rate indicates the number of the employed and the unemployed in relation to those who are potentially economically active.

⁵ Subsequently to a pilot study, the research was carried out by a Research Unit of the Polish Sociological Association on the basis of a questionnaire drawn up by the research team. The data obtained thanks to the research, which were saved in the form of the Statistical Package for the Social Science for Windows, were transferred to the team which processed them statistically and included in a report.

interviews who came from two communes (Jedwabno situated in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship and Andrespol from the Łódź Voivodship) which differ in terms of space, economic performance, demographic and social aspects.

Due to the subject of research on ‘the situation of rural women in the labour market’, two possible variants were distinguished: the situation of economic activity—the employed and the unemployed (49% of the surveyed) and the lack of such activity (51%)—inactivity resulting from the lack of interest in work, the lack of job opportunities or the lack of willingness to be employed. This category also encompasses the women who are still learning 11%, the women who receive a pension or an old-age pension—17%. The category of economically active women comprises: women working on family-owned farms (39.5%), outside the farm (52.3%) and those who combine the work on the farm with a job outside the farm (8.2%).

Table 1
Currently Working and Non-working Respondents

Response categories	Number	Percentage
Working on a farm owned by a respondent, husband or parents	310	19.4
Working on a farm and outside agriculture	64	4.0
Occupation outside agriculture	410	25.6
The total number of responses	784	49.0
Non-working women	816	51.0
Total	1600	100.0

Source: own research.

The situation of women on the labour market was diagnosed by means of isolated and described determinants and by means of the indicators of economic activity. Independent variables regarded as potential indicators were grouped into seven sets:

1. variables related to the social standing of an individual (age, level of education, level of affluence, professional status, a subjective assessment of the degree to which the material needs of an individual’s family are satisfied, being a beneficiary of the social welfare, social benefits);
2. family situation (state of the family—the number of children including the number of children under three years, economic activity of the husband/partner, the family members who immigrated within the framework of labour immigration, distribution of power within the family);
3. socialization patterns (work within the framework of the system of values the surveyed women adhere to, patterns of the work performed by women in the family, in the immediate environment, economic activity of the mother, mother’s level of education, mother’s membership in an organization, the idea of the role of a woman in the family, opinion on the need for women of having a job);
4. socio-political activity (membership of social and political organizations), execution of the right to vote in elections, social activity (participation in the actions undertaken for the benefit of the community);

5. environment-related factors (type of a village a given woman resides in, the background of the village in terms of the institutional infrastructure, presence of the employers who play an important role in the labour market, proximity of an urban agglomeration);
6. educational activity (participation in trainings and courses—in the past and currently, qualifications confirmed by a certificate, self-assessment of the qualifications possessed);
7. a subjective assessment of the local labour market (an assessment of the labour market in the immediate vicinity, job opportunities of women as compared to those of men).

The present paper focuses primarily on certain socio-demographic correlates that have an impact on the situation of rural women in the labour market, and only mentions other variables that might be significant from the point of view of professional activity of this group of women. For further details, please refer to a more comprehensive report on research findings drawn by the team under module 3.

Selected Determinants of Professional Activity or Inactivity of Rural Women

1. Characteristics of a Social Position (age, education, occupational status) as the Correlates Locating Rural Women in the Labour Market

It is worth noting that young women (aged 18–30) who enter the labour market (34%) and women aged 31–49 who are at the stage of the most intense economic activity (44%) are present in the structure. The surveyed women aged over 56 account for approximately 10% of the surveyed population being the target of research. As indicated by the findings of research (which will be analysed hereinafter), this category is oriented towards withdrawing from the labour market. The percentage of working women is the lowest in this group.

A relatively low percentage of economically active women was noted in the age group under 25 years. More than 72% of rural women within this age group are not working. This is related to their higher educational activity and higher requirements posed by employers as well as searching for a job that meets their qualifications and professional skills. Among the youngest working women (under 25), $\frac{3}{4}$ work outside agriculture and 90% of non-working women of this age plan to take up a job outside agriculture. This indicates a tendency for young women to leave work in agriculture and seek employment in other sectors. When planning a professional career, formal schooling as well as professional qualifications play an important role. This information shall be of interest to stakeholders in voivodships where rural women represent a considerable proportion of the female population. Within the age category of women between 26 and 55 the majority is currently working. Nearly 30% of working rural women work on a farm. About 41% of female farmers are over 46, whereas 23.2% of women employed outside agriculture are above 46 and 76.8% is under 45. Among working women who are older than 56, female

Table 2

Working and non-working rural women according to the age category

Age category		Current occupational status		Total number
		Working	Non-working	
18–25	Number of respondents	99	261	360
	Percentage of respondents	27.5%	72.5%	100.0%
26–35	Number of respondents	220	171	391
	Percentage	56.3%	43.7%	100.0%
36–45	Number of respondents	226	109	335
	Percentage	67.5%	32.5%	100.0%
46–55	Number of respondents	199	156	355
	Percentage	56.1%	43.9%	100.0%
56–60	Number of respondents	40	119	159
	Percentage	25.2%	74.8%	100.0%
Total	Number of respondents	784	816	1600
	Percentage	49.0%	51.0%	100.0%

Source: quantitative data based on own research.

farmers represent 67.5%. Nearly 30% of women of this age work outside agriculture.

Thus, among working women residing in the countryside, women of elderly age groups work on a farm in terms of employment and they usually do not plan to change jobs. Women employed outside agriculture work in services (41%), public administration (25%) and industry (21%). Non-working women who want to take up a job in the future aspire to employment in trade and services as well as institutions of public administration. Some women, based in farming, are considering employment in contemporary agriculture or agritourism (11.5% out of 663 of the non-working respondents). If there was a choice, women would prefer working full-time (48.6%) yet 34.2% would rather run their own business. At the same time the proportion of women under study who own a company constitutes 3.3%. Women declared that they would like to run their business in traditional services, especially trade or groceries. Rural women are not interested in flexible working hours. Limited working hours or less typical forms of employment are not considered by wives and mothers. They either take up a full-time job or give up work altogether.

Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of women within the group of those over 56 consider themselves non-working. Out of 816 currently non-working women 602, that is 73.6%, used to work, these are women of various ages who have withdrawn from the labour market into inactivity for various reasons: their workplace has been closed down as a result of restructuring, their employment contract has ended—about 33%, their own or relative's illness—about 13%, giving up a job because of low wages or inconvenient working hours—3.5%, following the childbirth—30%. Currently only 7.2% of the respondents have responded that they don't work because they don't want to, 34.5% don't work because they look after children, home or people in need of care, nearly

16% cannot find a job meeting their qualifications or believe they don't have required qualifications for a job, 11% study, the same proportion are on a disability pension or are of ill health, and 6.6% are pensioners. The distribution of characteristics indicates that the primary cause for giving up a job is the role of a housewife (looking after family and children) traditionally ascribed to women. These are mostly women over 26. Further reasons why rural women stay jobless include employers' decisions and employment policy. This is especially true in the case of women over 45. Younger women under 25 focus primarily on investment into their professional career by way of education.

On the whole, 43.2% of non-working rural women don't plan taking on a job for the above reasons (such as the necessity of fulfilling parenting duties at home, qualifications that don't meet labour market expectations). Among non-working women and women working on a farm, as many as 94.3% of the respondents don't consider employment (40% among women aged 36–45 and 69.5% among women aged 46–55).

Professional activity of women is highly related to their level of education. Among well-educated women the employed constitute the majority of the proportion, and non-working women constitute the majority within the group of women with primary education. Nearly 70% of the respondents with university degrees are employed, the same goes for over 50% of women with secondary education and less than 50% of women with vocational training. The respondents with primary education are the least professionally active, more than 64% of them currently don't work.

Table 3

Current Professional Activity and Education of the Respondents

Education		Current occupational status		Total
		Working	Non-working	
Primary	Number of women	152	275	427
	Percentage of women	35.6%	64.4%	100.0%
Vocational training	Number of women	235	251	486
	Percentage of women	48.4%	51.6%	100.0%
Secondary	Number of women	319	256	575
	Percentage of women	55.5%	44.5%	100.0%
Higher	Number of women	78	34	112
	Percentage of women	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%
Total	Number of women	784	816	1600
	Percentage of women	49.0%	51.0%	100.0%

Source: quantitative data based on own research.

According to *Social Diagnosis 2007* and the literature on the subject, rural women on average have a higher level of education in comparison to men (except for women residing on a farm), but at the same time their level of education is lower as compared with female city dwellers (Lisowska 1998; Gutkowska 2004; Gawrońska-Nowak,

Zarzycka 2003). These discrepancies first and foremost result from more limited opportunities in terms of education in the rural environment. Women are aware of the fact that inadequate education constitutes an important barrier to finding a job. Additionally, the belief women adhere to that, when competing with men, their access to most jobs emerging in the labour market is limited makes them less confident of succeeding in finding a job. This constitutes the basis for formulating conclusions (present in the sociological literature) that a relatively low level of rural women's education as well as lack of self-confidence constitute a barrier to their economic activity. However, the data recorded in the statistics and in the studies point to the growing level of education of rural women. As Gawrońska-Nowak, Jura and Zarzycka (2003) outline in the quoted paper, in recent years the number of highly educated working women doubled (from 10.8% to 20.1% in 1992–2002). The analyses covered by 'Social Diagnosis 2007' indicate that rural women are getting better and better educated. The advancement of education is accompanied by the growing number of professionally active women, which outlines the importance of this factor for professional activation. The research carried out by our team proved that rural women are better educated than their husbands. The proportion of husbands who completed only basic vocational education (56%) is higher than that of women who have such a level of education (26.6%), whereas the number of women who completed lower-level secondary education is larger than that of men with the same level of education, respectively 27% and 16%. 22% of husbands completed secondary education and 36% of women, whereas as regards higher education, the percentage of husbands amounts to 6% and the percentage of women amounts to 7%. Respondents are better educated than their mothers. The data clearly point to a positive selection for professional work (outside the farm) of rural women with higher qualifications. The women who work solely on their farms are characterised by a lower level of education. In this context, it comes as no surprise that women farmers do not have plans related to taking up a job outside farming. The Report on the state of the countryside (*The Polish Countryside 2006*) states that people working in individual farming display a lower level of education as compared to rural dwellers who have a job outside agriculture. This also concerns women from family farms. Moreover, a lower level of education is attributed to such women than to men farmers. Work on small farms, which are predominantly unprofitable and low-income, limits the possibilities of acquiring education, especially on the higher level. A low level of education results in a low level of competitiveness of farmers including women in the labour market. Education correlates with a professional status of a working female. Among women of a higher and medium professional status the decisive majority (75.6%) are employed. Among women of a lower status a little over 51% of the respondents are employed.

It is noteworthy that nearly 60% of all respondents represent lower professional status holding positions of non-skilled and manual workers. Women who are better educated than men predominantly exercise tasks involving manual work. This is indicated by the research findings on 'The willingness to take up

Table 4

A Professional Status of the Respondents and Professional Activity

The category of a professional status		Current occupational status		Total
		Working	Non-working (used to work)	
Higher (managerial staff, self-employed, expert positions)	Number of women	118	38	156
	Percentage of women	75.6%	24.4%	100.0%
Medium (public officials, law enforcement officers, white-collar workers)	Number of women	154	103	257
	Percentage of women	59.9%	40.1%	100.0%
Lower (skilled workers and non-qualified workers, farmers)	Number of women	307	293	600
	Percentage of women	51.2%	48.8%	100.0%
Total	Number of women	579	434	1013
	Percentage of women	57.2%	42.8%	100.0%

Source: quantitative data based on own research.

economic activity among women from areas of low urbanisation' that focus on lower qualified services carried out by underqualified rural women.⁶ Slightly more than 15% of the respondents performed managerial tasks. It can be concluded that the educational potential of this social category is not fully taken advantage of.

2. Qualifications and Positions of Women in the Local Labour Market According to Respondents' Views

What qualifications do respondents have apart from formal education? Among 1600 of the surveyed women 41% claim that they have a driving licence, 23.5% claim that they have a good command of one language (and 4.6% of more than one language), 43% are computer literate (Word, Excel), 31% declare that they are able to use office equipment (fax, photocopying machine), 38% declare that they are able to use the Internet and e-mail and 7% point to other qualifications. Almost one third of women think that they do not possess any of the qualifications mentioned above. Definitely more economically active women (especially those who work outside the farm) than other respondents declare that they possess the qualities mentioned above. It is hard to unambiguously state that the qualifications declared by rural women reflect the qualifications of an average Polish woman. Women are not committed to improving their qualifications and skills. In the period when the research was carried out nearly 7% of people attended courses devoted to the following subjects: raising funds from the European Union (7 respondents), acquiring new qualifications necessary to work in another profession (19),

⁶ The topic examined in 2006–2007 as a part of PTPS and MPiPS project, financed via ESF 'Multifaceted diagnosis of women's labour situation' (*Wieloaspektowa diagnoza sytuacji kobiet na rynku pracy*).

re-skilling (10), improving computer skills (17), foreign language learning (18), driving a car (29 women). 39 women reported their participation in other trainings. During focus group interviews the unemployed women under study emphasised how unattractive various courses aimed at improving qualifications are. They evaluate the courses as too theoretical and thus unhelpful in the labour market. Rural women are not interested in long-term courses which require changing the place of residence and finding somebody who could look after their children for a long period of time.

When asked to assess their own professional background and qualifications respondents predominantly (56.7% of them) stated that they are average. 20.5% of the surveyed evaluated their qualifications as low. Slightly more respondents (27.8%) stated that their qualifications are high. Opinions of respondents differ depending on the type of their economic activity. As for women farmers, 14.2% assess their qualifications as high, 21.3% as low, whereas in the case of women who have a job outside the farm, 38.4% regard their qualifications as high and 7.6% as low. The opinions women expressed about the situation in the local labour market also differ depending on whether a woman works on the farm or has a job outside the farm. The proportion of women farmers who evaluate this situation as good is slightly lower than in the case of other women (10.4% as compared to 14.6% of women working in other professions), whereas the proportion of women farmers who evaluate this situation as bad is slightly higher than in the case of other women (57.7% and 46.5% respectively). Generally, the women who evaluate the situation in their local market as bad point to a shortage of vacancies and claim that, as regards the limited number of vacant jobs, they are reserved only for selected job categories. 12.5% of respondents stated that the situation in the labour market is good—there are many vacancies and if you search effectively it is possible to find something suitable. The participants of focus group interviews residing in both communes evaluated the local labour market in negative terms. Economically active women pointed to low salaries, the necessity to work overtime, breaching the rights of employees. Unemployed women criticised the lack of vacancies which they would be interested in. There are some branches where there are vacancies, such as tailoring and work in supermarkets (trade) however, in their opinion, low salaries and hard working conditions make work in these branches unprofitable. According to three fourths of respondents, the discrimination of women in the local labour market aggravates their professional situation. In their opinion, men are more likely to find a job in the vicinity than women. The husbands of most respondents (70% of them) have a job. According to nearly half of respondents, the salaries of their husbands constitute the basic source of income for the family. Approximately 3% of women reported that their husbands went abroad to find a job there. Economic activity of husbands may be the main reason for women's taking over household chores [Duch-Krzyszczek 2007]. 22% of women reported that their close relative currently works or studies abroad. Approximately 18% of respondents consider going abroad and staying there for some time as they expect to find a job there, especially a better-paid job. For 8% of women, learning a foreign language could motivate them to go abroad.

3. Family Situation and Professional Activity of Rural Women

As statistical sources and the evidence gathered during the research indicate (inter alia included in the cited study “Readiness to undertake economic activity among women residing in the areas characterised by a low degree of urbanization”), the number of children rural families have decreases. In the case of almost three fourths of the families who have children, the family model they pursue is that of a small family (having one or two children). 9% of women have large families (having a least four children). Around 19% of women have children under three and twenty something of them have two children under three. Women with two, three, four and more children have comprised an absolute majority of the occupationally active. Among women with three children the highest proportion (63.4%) of the employed was noted. On the contrary, professionally inactive women were found among the female respondents with a single child.

Table 5

The Correlation Between the Number of Children and Professional Activity

Number of children		Current occupational status		Total
		Working	Non-working	
1	Number of respondents	170	188	358
	Percentage of respondents	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%
2	Number of respondents	227	164	391
	Percentage of respondents	58.1%	41.9%	100.0%
3	Number of respondents	118	68	186
	Percentage of respondents	63.4%	36.6%	100.0%
4 and more	Number of respondents	51	41	92
	Percentage of respondents	55.4%	44.6%	100.0%
Total	Number of respondents	566	461	1027
	Percentage of respondents	55.1%	44.9%	100.0%

Source: quantitative data based on own research.

The family situation of women is also dependent on whether both spouses (partners) engage in the matters which are vital as regards the life of household members and on the extent to which they engage in such matters. Women are predominantly or solely responsible for household chores in more than half of the surveyed families. In 43.5% of families household chores are divided between both partners. The families of economically active woman are more often based on equal partnership. In two thirds of families a husband and wife jointly make decisions concerning expenses in their family. In every fifth family primarily a woman decides about family spending. Men generally avoid making decisions concerning family expenses on their own, although their contribution to the family budget is usually larger. No matter who is the main breadwinner, most of the surveyed women are convinced that a man should perform this role (54.6%), whereas 45% of them think that both a man and a woman

can be gainfully employed to support their family. Transformation of the variables presented above made it possible to arrive at a synthetic variable, thanks to which the distribution of power within the families of respondents could be depicted. The presented data show that an egalitarian system of relations is predominant in the families of respondents (approximately 45%). In the case of every third household, the patriarchal model of the distribution of power is predominant. Distribution of power based on the patriarchal model was more often found on farms than in other rural households.

The data indicate that the model of the rural family is undergoing changes, which probably results from the heterogeneous character of the socio-demographic structure and occupational structure of rural areas. Young women (including women from a peasant background) want to participate in the social and professional life to a greater extent than their mothers did and to build a family model based on partnership. These changes can be attributed to the fact that in the countryside there live some women who come from families which were not attached to farms. These women have been exposed to the role models of women (both in their families and in their neighbourhood) who have a job and who jointly with their husbands make decisions regarding family matters. In the case of more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents, their job is important not only for them but for their families as well. It is not only an instrumental value, which brings income, but also enables women contacts with other people, improves their position in the family, makes other people respect the active person. Such opinions expressed by women suggest that rural women are perhaps starting to overcome the lack of self-confidence, fear of the unknown, fear of the public opinion attributed to them. Easier access to diverse media and different content conveyed by the media as well as different patterns of behaviour rural dwellers enjoy is of significance.

Summary

The research data analysis offers the conclusion that 'professionally active' women constitute the category of 'most preferential occupational activity' age, better educated, with higher professional status, higher than average material status, rarely enjoying social assistance.

In the case of economically active women, their self-assessment of their professional skills is more favourable. The educational activity variable, which does not contribute to diversification, is worth highlighting. A small proportion of women attends courses and trainings and the qualifications respondents possess (a driving licence, computer skills, command of a foreign language) cannot be treated as qualification attributes pertaining particularly to economically active women. The collected data also indicate that a proportion of women who are currently out of work, but who had a job in the past possess qualifications which they could use in their professional work. Family situation only to some extent affects the decision concerning taking up a job by women. Unemployed women mention their family situation as a vital argu-

ment. Whereas rural women who want to take up a job do not take into consideration the number of children they have and even the necessity of taking care of an infant aged up to 3 (as well as the fact that their husband has a job). This is evidenced by a higher percentage of women who have children among the working women than among those who are out of work. The most significant factor pertaining to family situation which determines whether a woman can or cannot work is the system of power distribution in the family i.e. whether the family is based on a partnership of equals and whether a man participates in vital family matters. When considering the influence exerted by socialisation patterns on rural women's economic activity it can be stated that a rural woman, especially with a peasant background, undergoes a different socialisation process, which primarily grooms her for performing the functions connected with farming duties and for performing the function consisting in taking care of and bringing up children as well housekeeping (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2002). These women's attitude towards professional work was supposed to have been conditioned by the lack of adequate models of women's economic activity, especially in the immediate neighbourhood and in the home where they were raised (Gutkowska 2004). Our research indicates that such models occur in rural women's families. There is a belief, which is very common among rural women, that work plays a vital role in our life and that it constitutes an important value. Work in this context encompasses both the duties performed on the farm as well as professional work done in different jobs. This belief is additionally reinforced by the fact that other women who are familiar to rural women have a job and do not confine themselves to taking care of children and housekeeping. According to respondents, women who have children can also take up a job; however it is only possible within certain limits. Employers should be aware of these limits. As regards environmental factors, proximity of an urban agglomeration and of large-size business entities, where a woman expects to find more vacancies, plays the most important role: favourable local communication, both in terms of accessible means of transport and frequency of commuting services, quality of local roads. There are deficiencies in social infrastructure: nurseries, kindergartens, welfare centres or private welfare services that could enable joint occupational and childcare functions for rural women.

Despite the age of information society, rural women in general do not consider occupations from home exercised by means of internet connection and other flexible means of employment. Their most preferred form of occupation is public sector employment, full-time employment, preferably less than 40 hours a week, without required continuous learning.

Family situation may pose a threat to women of losing a job in particular circumstances, which encompass the fact of having children who are not self-reliant and therefore require special care. The level of education, completed courses and age are not statistically significant characteristics which determine the sense of job security of rural women in the labour market. The characteristics which can be taken into consideration encompass: professional status, a subjective assessment of the level of qualifications possessed by women as well as an assessment of the local labour market. The higher the professional status of women and the greater their awareness

of possessing relatively higher qualifications, the more secure women feel as regards keeping their current job.

Their sense of job security is reinforced by their positive opinion of the local labour market.

Women do not perceive their opportunities on the labour market solely from the angle of their family situation. The unemployed did not mention continuous education, seniority and professional experience as the characteristics which could improve their job opportunities.

Apart from age, appearance and connections, the important factors which adversely affect the chances of finding a job encompass the factors which are related to the quality of the environment where women reside and of the neighbourhood such as: shortage of jobs in the place of residence, the distance from big cities, poor local transport system both in terms of availability of means of transport and frequency of rides, the quality of local roads, lack of social infrastructure—nurseries, kindergartens, care homes or private social services. The aforesaid elements of social infrastructure would make it easier for rural women to reconcile the responsibilities pertaining to prospective professional work with the functions consisting in taking care of and bringing up children they perform at home.⁷

The findings of quantitative research on a representative sample as well as qualitative research (focus group interviews) validated the existing barriers, pointed out in sociological literature, which limit the possibilities for rural women's activity in the labour market. These barriers encompass: social standing variables (rural women's scores as regards the index of social standing are lower than those of urban women), lower level of affluence, poor institutional infrastructure of rural areas, limited access to social services and psychological barriers, low level of self-confidence.

On the basis of the data collected in the research it would be hard to make forecasts as to the future situation of Polish rural women in the local labour market let alone the supra-local one. It is necessary to introduce changes especially as regards the material, social and institutional infrastructure of the rural environments. These changes have already been initiated but a lot still remains to be done. One of the necessary changes consists in creating a system of rural schooling, which would offer better opportunities for the young people, including women, securing them an equal starting position in their life and which would adjust the structure of the post lower secondary school education to the needs of the regional labour market and to the vacancies it offers. First and foremost, the awareness and mentality of rural women must keep on changing in terms of mutual relations between the roles in the family but also rights and obligations of a perspective employee at work and at home. There emerge new trends of changes which regionally differentiate rural areas from the rest of the country (Adamowicz 2004; Wilkin 2002). They are *inter alia* connected with a population drift to rural areas, implementing European Union programmes aimed

⁷ These barriers are also pointed out by Gutkowska, Tryfan in the cited literature and in the study "Readiness to undertake economic activity among women residing in the areas characterised by a low degree of urbanization" carried out as a part of the project entitled "Multifaceted diagnosis of the situation of women in the labour market."

at socio-economic activation of the local structures, exchange of experience occurring between the units of local authorities in the European framework (Kłodziński 1997). These changes along with their consequences will determine the situation of rural women in the labour market as well as their participation in the social life. It must be taken into consideration that the category of rural women will remain more or less diverse and vast. The population of rural women in the areas where farming is the most prevalent activity may be dominated by women who work on the farm. The challenges ensuing from changing work situation in this sector of economy may be of significance for them. Among professionally diverse indigenous rural dwellers in the rural areas situated in the vicinity of agglomerations or in more urbanised localities there will still occur the women who belong to the category of rural women due to the fact that they dwell in the countryside, but whose socio-demographic and professional characteristics and their life style will be closer to urban women's characteristics. Their aspirations and life strategies, including the strategies concerning their choice of the form of gainful economic activity, will be radically different. The countryside will undergo further diversification and its image will change. It is not certain in what time perspective these changes will take place. The possibilities for economic, social, political or comprehensive civil activity will be determined by the speed and quality of changes which will take place on the scale of individual regions. This regional scale is the level on which it is possible to diagnose, improve and predict rural women's social and economic activity on the basis of specific determinants of material, socio-cultural and structural nature.

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