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FEMINIZATION, BUT HOW?
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE POLISH PUBLIC RELATIONS
INDUSTRY BASED ON QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Abstract. The article, besides offering a literature search of the current situation of women in the labor market, covers research topics on gender structure in the public relations sector in Poland. It covers the demographic and employment data of 1,789 PR professionals, aggregated and statistically analyzed. The data come from several research projects conducted by the authors between 2017 and 2023. Women constituted nearly 2/3 of the respondents. The article proves that women are the dominant gender when it comes to employment in PR. As to the overall employment structure, the sector is subject to feminization. However, its high level is not reflected in the management structure, where women play a much lower role than men (22% vs. 33%). This, in turn, raises questions about the applicable principles of gender equality, diversity and inclusion, and contributes to an analysis of the level of experience of the PR professional community. The article develops a mediation model with which the authors try to clarify the relationship between position, work experience, and gender.

Keywords: feminization; gender; gender gap; glass ceiling; public relations industry; statistical analysis; mediational analysis; diversity management.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's increased activity in the labor market in Poland and in the world, is a fact. This has been caused by socio-cultural changes and economic conditions. Through their career, women satisfy not only their financial needs (their own and those of their loved ones), but also the needs placed at the very top of the hierarchy developed by Maslow – self-fulfillment. Women's professional activity entails transformations in the functioning of marriage and family, as well as transformations in the labor market. On the other hand, conditions of a socio-cultural, legal or economic nature determine the position of women in this market. When analyzing the aforementioned position, it is necessary to refer to a broader context that includes the availability of work, including particular professions, opportunities for promotion, remuneration or reconciliation of professional and family roles. It is important to pay attention to the phenomena of multidimensional feminization of the labor market, but at the same time we cannot ignore the barriers women face, i.e. the glass ceiling phenomenon.

WOMEN'S SITUATION IN THE LABOR MARKET AND THE GLASS CEILING

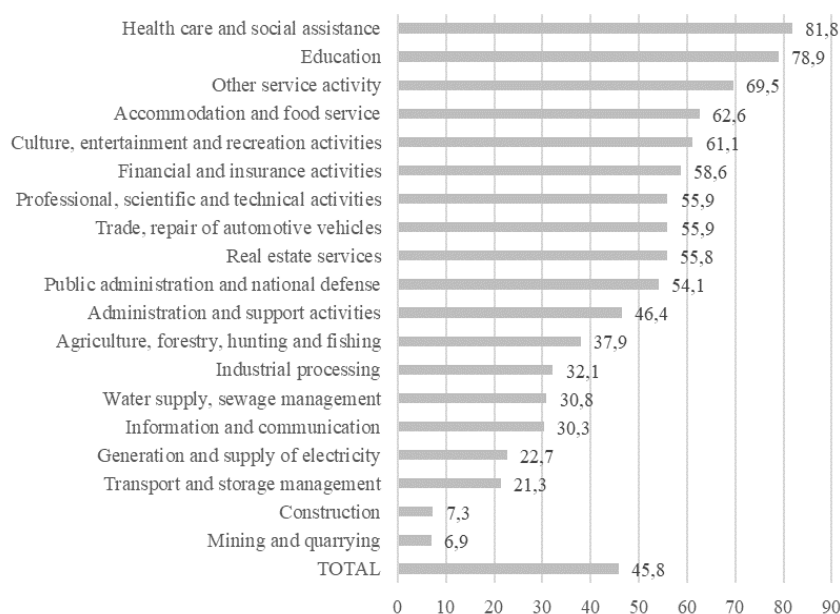
Data on labor force participation in Poland indicate that men are still more prominent in the labor market. Women's labor force participation, however, is steadily increasing (CSO, 2022). The labor force participation rate for women in 2003 was 48.0%, while in 2022 it was already 50.8%. The female employment rate also increased over this period, from 38.2% to 49.3% in 2022. In the total number of employed people in 2022, women accounted for about 45%. Despite the increase in indicators that illustrate the higher activity of women in the labor market, they are lower compared to men (CSO, Economic Activity of the Polish Population – Q4 2022). An important indicator showing the situation of women in the labor market is the percentage of economically inactive people. Women, in Q4 2022, accounted for 60.9% of the economically inactive. It should be noted that within the economically inactive population there are different groups. These are people who have not yet entered the labor market (education) and those who have already left the labor market (pensioners, retirees). A specific group are those who are temporarily excluded from working life. When considering the reasons for inactivity by gender, it is important to note the disproportion of inactivity due to family responsibilities. Women are more than ten times more likely (11.7%) to point to family responsibilities as a reason for inactivity than

men (1.5%). This indicates that it is still primarily women who bear the burden of providing care for family members (children) and loved ones (parents, spouse) (CSO, Economic Activity of the Polish Population – Q4 2022).

Such a situation is related, on the one hand, to socio-cultural factors (assigned roles or strategies for the functioning of households), on the other hand, to institutional factors (legal solutions that allow women to function in the labor market or the offer of institutions supporting the family). The feminization of women's inactivity – transforming into inactivity for reasons of fulfilling family obligations – is linked to the feminization of domestic work (Karwacki and Suwada, 2022).

Regardless of the feminization of labor inactivity, the feminization of the labor market is also apparent. It is mainly manifested in horizontal segregation. Considering the specific sectors of the labor market, the processes of feminization and masculinization are clearly visible. From the perspective of women, it is significant that they dominate in occupations stereotypically associated with women's roles, i.e. education and care. At the same time, it should be noted that these are lower-paid professions (Janiszewska, 2017; Kucharski and Kwiatkowski, 2020; Musiał-Karg, 2017). Such a situation of women in the labor market is also confirmed by CSO data (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of working women aged 18-89 by selected sections of the Polish Classification of Activities – PKD



Source: own study based on CSO data (2022).

In Poland, the overall share of women in the labor market amounts to 45.8%. Despite the relative overall balance, the horizontal segregation of the market is very apparent. By far the most feminized sector of the labor market is health care and social assistance (81.8% female participation) and education (78.9%). A significant preponderance of women (more than 60% of market share) can also be seen in the service activities sector (69.5%), accommodation and catering (62.6%), and activities related to culture, entertainment and recreation (61.1%). On the other hand, there are market sectors in which the share of women is negligible, i.e. mining and quarrying (6.9%) and construction (7.3%). A relative gender balance (women's share between 45% and 55%) can be seen in five labor market sectors, i.e. professional, scientific and technical activities (55.9%), trade, repair of automotive vehicles (55.9%), real estate services (55.8%), administration and national defense (54.1%), and administration and support activities (46.4%). The structure of the labor market in Poland, analyzed in terms of gender participation, reveals processes of feminization as well as masculinization of individual sectors. This process is related to the socio-cultural role models of men and women.

The distribution of women and men in various sectors of the labor market (including the PR industry in question) has a significant impact on the formation of basic labor market indicators. These indicators demonstrate the position of men and women in the labor market. An analysis of a number of factors shows the weaker position of women in this context (Kucharski and Rutkowska, 2021). In addition, data from the CeSAR Central Analytical and Reporting System show that the share of women among registered unemployed seeking employment in the profession of PR, advertising, marketing and sales specialist was as high as 67% in 2022.¹

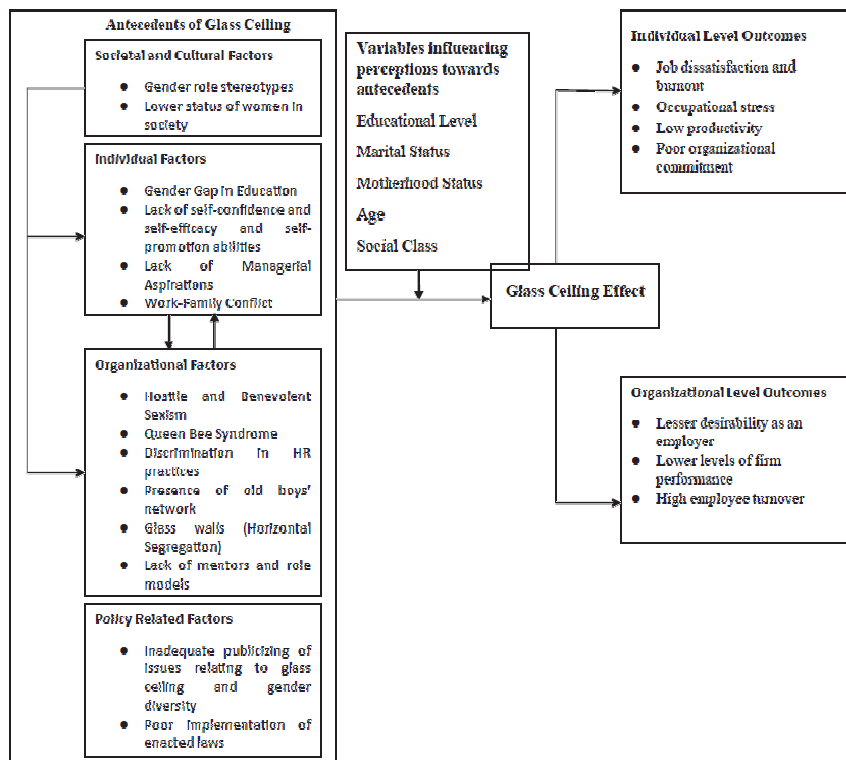
An important element in the analysis of the situation of women in the labor market is vertical segregation, which refers to limited chances of promotion and holding managerial and decision-making positions (Janiszewska, 2017). A concept that defines the barriers that a woman faces on the path of career advancement is the so-called glass ceiling. It symbolizes the visibility of promotion while at the same time it is not attainable (Budrowska, Duch and Titkow, 2003). In the literature, there is a significant gender disparity in leadership positions in favor of men. Researchers have introduced further "glass" metaphors. It is interesting to note that even in female-dominated professions, it is easier for men to reach high positions. This process is referred to as the "glass elevator," which

¹ On this see specialist services, such as the browser available at <https://barometrzwodow.pl>, or visit the portal <https://www.cesar-africa.com/publications>.

allows men to get to leadership positions effortlessly and without obstacles. In a situation where women manage to break through the glass ceiling and get promoted, they may run into a “glass wall,” which is a lack of full acceptance from co-workers. A final metaphor to describe the situation of a woman who already holds a managerial position is the “glass cliff.” Women in high-level positions are at high risk and a greater likelihood of failure (crashing into a glass cliff) (Góral, 2021). Awareness of the existence of such limitations can cause women themselves to be reluctant to take on professional challenges.

The phenomenon of the glass ceiling is multidimensional and dependent on many factors. It entails various individual and institutional consequences. It is possible to distinguish elements of an overall process that makes it difficult for women to climb the career ladder (Bertrand, 2018; Mansi and Usha, 2022; Musiał-Karg, 2017).

Figure 2. Glass ceiling effect model by Mansi and Usha



Source: Mansi Taparia and Usha Lenka (2022). An integrated conceptual framework of the glass ceiling effect.

Based on a literature review, Mansi and Usha (2022) created a comprehensive model that takes into account the causes and effects of the glass ceiling. They indicate that the following factors contribute to its formation: socio-cultural factors, individual factors, organizational factors and factors related to the political and economic situation. Interactions between these factors can lead to adverse consequences for both female employees and employers. The element that models a woman's situation in the labor market – and thus either nullifies or reinforces the glass ceiling effect – are individual factors that influence the perception of barriers, i.e. education, age, marital status, having children as well as social class (2022).

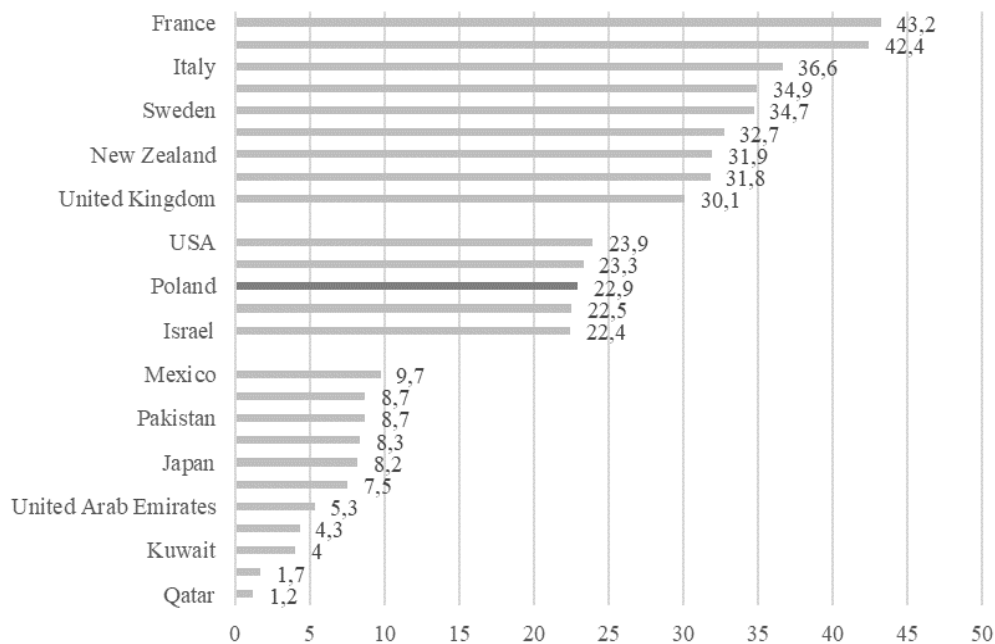
The consequences of the glass ceiling can occur at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, the glass ceiling effect can be seen in lower job satisfaction and commitment among women. At the same time, the awareness of the existence of barriers to promotion can cause burn-out among female employees and also their high turnover. The negative psychological effects of the glass ceiling reduce the performance of female employees, and consequently the performance of the entire team decreases, which is an effect on a broader level – the organizational level. The functioning of the glass ceiling reduces the attractiveness of the employer. This, in turn, can cause an outflow of the most talented and productive female employees, as well as an inability to attract new ones. It should be noted that the functioning of the glass ceiling can demotivate not only women but can evoke a sense of social injustice in men as well (Mansi and Usha, 2022).

The Glass ceiling is a phenomenon that includes many factors that have different shades determined by individual reasons, but also much broader ones such as state policy or culture. Important are measures taken at state and international levels (EU directives) promoting equal opportunities for men and women in the labor market. Removing the “ceiling” brings the benefits of allowing employees to realize their potential. It also increases productivity and innovation. The absence of a glass ceiling helps women realize their potential for the good and success of the organization. It also provides a sense of opportunity for self-realization in all dimensions (Kour and Chib, 2023).

In addition to the theoretical analysis of the glass ceiling phenomenon, its causes and effects, it is necessary to pay attention to the state context and international regulations that determine the way each country operates. Barriers to women's advancement are more pronounced in developing and underdeveloped countries (Mansi and Usha, 2022).

An indicator of the existence of barriers to women's professional development is the representation of women in leadership positions, on boards of directors, supervisory boards. Global data on this subject is provided by the report of the consulting firm Deloitte "Women in the boardroom: A global perspective" (7th ed.). The report presents information from 72 countries from around the world. It covers the representation of women on boards of directors and supervisory boards. Analyses at the global, regional and country levels are based on data from 10,493 companies in 51 countries, covering Asia-Pacific, North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The main title of the report, "Progress at a snail's pace," indicates that changes in the structure are not happening rapidly, but very slowly. With regard to global indicators, the very different situation in many countries must be taken into account.

Figure 3. Percentage rate of women occupying leadership positions (supervisory boards/boards of directors) in selected countries²



Source: own study based on Deloitte's "Women in the boardroom: A global perspective" (7th ed.).

² The chart does not include all countries participating in the analysis. Presented are the countries with the highest percentage (above 30%), the lowest (below 10%), and Poland with two countries with a higher score and two with a lower score.

The global percentage of women on supervisory boards and management boards relating to the 51 countries surveyed is 19.7%. In Europe, it is 38%, while in Poland it is 22.9%. Compared to the previous survey (2018 edition), this indicator in Poland increased by 1.8% percentage points. Comparing the Polish indicator to the global one, it seems that Poland is doing well in terms of equality policies with regard to the gender balance in management positions. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the global index also takes into account countries with a very low proportion of women on supervisory and management boards. In the course of the analysis, we observe 11 countries where the rate in question did not exceed 10%. The lowest rate was recorded in Saudi Arabia (1.7%) and Qatar (1.2%). The leaders of the ranking are European countries. In two countries, the rate exceeded 40%: France (43.2%) and Norway (42.4%).

In relation to most European countries, and thus to the European index, Poland ranks below average. Nevertheless, it is one of the few countries in the world where there has been an increase in the representation of women on supervisory boards. There are also noticeable changes in the highest positions – that is, among CEOs and managing directors. As the Deloitte survey indicates, only 11.6% of women head supervisory boards and 5.1% hold the position of CEO among companies listed on the WSE. Four years earlier, the figures were 8.7% and 6% of women, respectively. Increasingly, women are being appointed as CFOs – now 13.3%, but in 2018 it was only 7.1%. Nonetheless, top positions are still held by men, with only 5.1% being female CEOs (“Women in the boardroom: A global perspective” (7th ed.).³

Eurostat statistics are an equally valuable source of data relating to European countries. An interesting indicator of women’s participation in the upper levels of public life is the number of seats held in parliaments. The European indicator in 2022 was 32.5%. No European country has a preponderance of women in parliament. Indicators in this regard vary strongly from country to country. Sweden has the highest rate (46.4%), while Hungary has the lowest (13.1%). In Poland, the rate was 27.5%. Similar figures in the Deloitte report are revealed in an analysis of senior management positions held by women. The European rate is 32.2%, while the Polish rate is 24.2% (Sustainable development in the European Union Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2023 edition).

Analysis of the data shows that globally, in Europe and locally (Poland), there is still a dominance of men in management, leadership or political positions.

³ Note that those charts refer to the representation of women in top positions at companies listed on the WSE.

Of course, men's advantage over women varies greatly, but the opposite situation (women's advantage over men) has not yet been recorded for any country. As noted earlier, the particular situation is that there are market sectors that are definitely feminized and yet there is a male preponderance in managerial positions.

SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

An industry that is strongly feminized globally is public relations (PR) in the broadest sense. As indicated in the report *Global Women in PR: Annual Index 2022*, despite the fact that the two-thirds of the global PR workforce is women, management boards are still dominated by men. Similar correlations show up in studies of the PR industry in different countries. Regardless of their location, women make up the majority of PR employees. In Finland, 89% of PR/Comms employees are women, while in the UK the figure is just over 60% (Adi and Ayme-Yahil, 2020). Ongoing research confirms that despite the feminization of the industry, managerial positions are mostly held by men (Adi and Ayme-Yahil, 2020; Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Tench and Topić, 2017; Davis Backett, 2020). This state of affairs is also confirmed by our own research (described in detail in the methodological part of the paper).

The authors' own research showed a stronger correlation between the hierarchical position held and years of work in PR among women. Nevertheless, the research shows that women's careers in PR differ from those of men. It is sufficient to say that a statistical man works longer in the PR industry than a woman. The statistical woman has to work longer to reach certain career levels. The shorter tenure of women may be related to the determinants of women's work. The career path of women is in many cases non-linear. This is related to the difficulty of maintaining job continuity, which is traditionally a prerequisite for professional success. Many women, at least temporarily, remain economically inactive, especially for reasons of a family nature. This fact makes it difficult for them to reach higher positions and changes the course of their careers (Davis Backett, 2020).

The 2022 *Global Women in PR* report attempts to show the position of women in the PR industry around the world. GWPR brings together women in senior positions related to the PR and communications industry. It is an organization with offices in Europe, Russia, India, Africa, the Middle East, Central America and the Asia-Pacific region. In Poland, the survey "Women in PR"

was conducted by the Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association (ZFPR) in cooperation with OpinionWay Polska. The research conducted in 2021 was based on the GWPR questionnaire. It is worth noting the barriers to promotion that women working in the PR industry indicate in relation to both international and Polish surveys.

In both research projects described above, the fact that women mostly take over the care of children or other family members was considered the most important barrier to women's advancement to higher positions (GWPR – 89%; Poland – 82%). In international surveys, the second most frequently cited barrier is the lack of flexible working hours and family-friendly work policies (GWPR – 75%, Poland – 59%). Another barrier is that women are less active when it comes to asking for promotions (GWPR – 71%, Poland – 57%). Also identified as a barrier to promotion were a lack of transparency in recruitment and promotions (GWPR – 70%, Poland – 62%) and lack of work-life balance in senior positions (GWPR – 66%, Poland – 73%) (“Global Woman in PR 2022”, “Women in PR” 2021).

According to the GWPR report, more than half (53%) of women in PR worldwide have experienced some kind of discrimination in the workplace. The most common reason for discrimination is gender (27%). Women also point out that they experience discrimination due to pregnancy (13%) and when returning from leave related to having children (13%).

The non-linear nature of women's careers, the burden of motherhood and domestic responsibilities, and the lack of multidimensional support results in a continuing underrepresentation of women in senior positions, even in feminized industries such as public relations.

In favor of increasing the proportion of women at management levels is not only the rationale behind the increasing participation of women in the labor market, including in the PR industry, but also management theories. One of these theories is diversity management. The concept of diversity management appeared and developed in the US in the second half of the 20th century. It was intended to bring about the integration of diverse groups on the labor market. Although by design it may seem to go against discrimination, its effect is broader, discernible mainly at the organizational level. The diversity management theory is not about equalizing opportunities for individual group members (e.g., women), but about recognizing that diversity benefits the entire organization. This thinking is rests on the assumption that diversity is a value in itself, as it allows all employees to reach their full potential (Durska, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Our own research was conducted among PR professionals using quantitative research methodology (Babbie, 2004). The first stage of the research consisted of preparing the unit of analysis, which involved collecting data from 1,789 respondents in various independent research projects on the broadly defined PR sector in Poland.⁴ In each of these surveys, among other things, we collected information on the profile of respondents, which provided a starting point for further analysis. The combination of information from eight research projects, conducted between 2017 and 2023, is in line with the theory of methodological triangulation, where researchers use different approaches in the way they collect data to reach the widest possible range of respondents who meet key recruitment criteria (Jack and Raturi, 2006). In each study, the sampling was purposive (Apanowicz, 2002) and allowed us to obtain information from both practitioners and researchers in the field of PR in Poland. It should be emphasized that there is no official sampling frame with contact information for all public relations professionals in Poland. Thus, it is necessary to rely on purposive selection and samples of usually 100-200 respondents. According to estimates in 2022 (Szuba, 2022), the PR market in Poland is made up of at least 48,000 professionals from various professional backgrounds (including mainly specialists from private companies, public institutions and PR agencies, who account for almost 82% of the total). Given these results, the survey sample of nearly 1,800 people appears to be a good quality basis for conclusions about industry trends across the country (maximum error less than 3%).

The next step was an analysis to check the logical consistency of the data and reject duplicates, so that the target database contains only unique records. Next, the characteristics of the research sample were prepared (Table 1). It is a cross-section through 5 demographic and occupational variables (key from our perspective).

⁴ The compilation of data included the following research projects carried out by the authors of the article: 1) New information technologies in PR (audience survey; implemented in 2016); 2) Analysis of the condition of the PR industry, 1st round (auditorium survey; implemented in 2017); 3) Analysis of the condition of the PR industry, 2nd round (auditorium survey and CATI; implemented in 2019); 4) PR industry in the era of coronavirus (CAWI; implemented in 2020); 5) Psychology of crisis in the context of crisis management (CATI, CAWI, PAPI; implemented in 2020-2021); 6) Analysis of the condition of the PR industry, 3rd round (audience survey and CAWI; implemented in 2021); 7) Perception of cybersecurity by PR professionals (CAWI; implemented in 2022); 8) Market trends and changes in the PR industry (auditorium survey and CAWI; implemented in 2022–2023). The thematic and situational context these surveys provides an opportunity to conduct a collective analysis, which is supported by the methodology and the structure of the research tools used and the same target group of respondents.

It is worth mentioning that gender, place of work, position and seniority in PR refer to questions asked directly in the survey. On the other hand, the variable defining the type of respondent was created for the purpose of this article based on the authors' experience. The dataset was prepared, among other things, to verify the hypothesis that there are significant differences between men and women in terms of the functions they hold and the professional experience they have gained in the public relations industry. The authors assumed that the feminization of the Polish PR industry is at the operational level, while management positions are dominated by men.

Table 1. Characteristics of the research sample ($n = 1789$)⁵

| Profile of respondents | | <i>n</i> | % |
|--|--|----------|------|
| Gender | Female | 1159 | 64.8 |
| | Male | 630 | 35.2 |
| Workplace | Private company (not a PR agency) | 550 | 31.8 |
| | PR agency | 503 | 29.1 |
| | Authority, institution, public sector | 402 | 23.3 |
| | Freelancer, own business | 105 | 6.1 |
| | University, research center | 97 | 5.6 |
| | Non-governmental organization | 70 | 4.1 |
| Position | Executive | 490 | 32.3 |
| | Executive-managing | 640 | 42.2 |
| | Managing | 387 | 25.5 |
| Seniority in the PR industry | Up to 3 years | 338 | 20.3 |
| | 4–10 years | 620 | 37.2 |
| | Over 10 years | 709 | 42.5 |
| Respondent's type of work⁶ | Internal PR officer (represents own PR services) | 1022 | 62.7 |
| | External PR professional (represents PR service providers) | 608 | 37.3 |

Source: own study.

Women make up nearly 2/3 of the respondents – they dominate employment in PR (in terms of the overall employment structure). It is interesting to note

⁵ Possible missing data, so numbers may not add up to 1,789.

⁶ The analysis does not take into account universities and research centers, as they can perform important functions in both distinguished types (no definitive categorization possible).

that an even greater disparity in attendance – that is, a more intense feminization – depicting gender distribution in PR can be encountered when using the search engine for professionals via LinkedIn (in the campaign the percentage of active accounts of women in Poland that declare professional ties with PR and whose skills and interests fit into the field of public relations is as high as 81%. Only one in five accounts meeting the above criteria belongs to a man.

The data in Table 1 show that, on average, two out of three PR professionals in Poland work in the private sector, with a dominant and almost even distribution between PR agencies (commercial companies) and non-agency companies. This category (private sector) also includes sole proprietors and freelancers (6%). On the other hand, 23% of respondents professionally engaged in PR work in the public sector. The remaining workplaces are relatively less frequent and are formed by those working in PR academically or for the non-governmental sector (less than 10% in total).

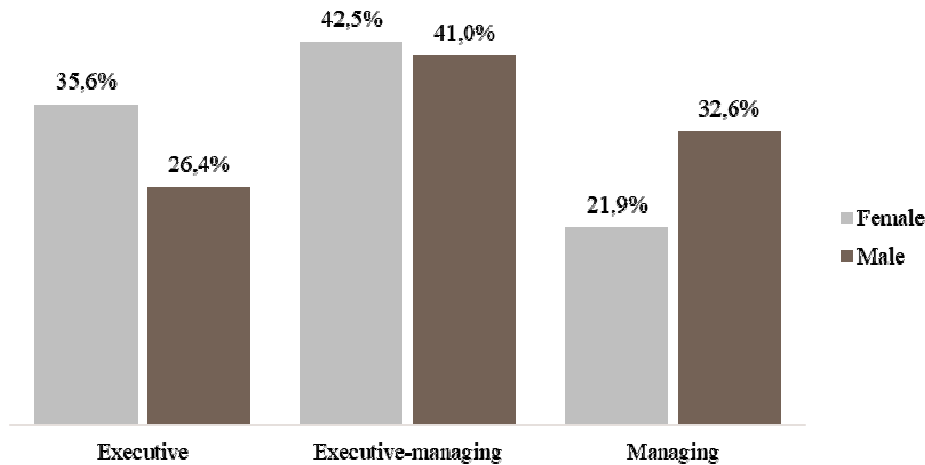
In the course of data analysis, the results were tested for statistical significance. According to the literature guidelines, statistically significant differences between groups (e.g., women vs. men) were assumed to occur when the test statistic p value was less than 0.05. Depending on the level of measurement of the variables (gender, place of work and type of respondent – nominal level, position and seniority in the PR industry – ordinal level, years of work in PR – quantitative scale), adequate statistical procedures were used for description and interpretation. The authors used measures of central tendency and dispersion, cross-tabulations (including chi-square and Kramer's V or Φ test), a procedure for comparing averages along with the use of the Mann–Whitney U or Kruskal–Wallis H test, and Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (Blalock, 1975; Szwed, 2009). A mediation hypothesis testing model was also used, which tests whether a relationship between two variables exists through some third variable, called a mediator (Baron and Kenny, 1986). All analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (v. 28).⁷

⁷ The choice of non-parametric tests (i.e., with fewer formal requirements) was determined by the obtained distributions of all analyzed variables, which deviated significantly from the normal distribution ($p < 0.001$). Based on the v -Wilk probability distribution normality test (see Shapiro, Wilk, Chen, 1968), the following results were obtained for the variables: gender ($W = 0.600$, $p < 0.001$), workplace ($W = 0.809$, $p < 0.001$), position ($W = 0.807$, $p < 0.001$), seniority in PR ($W = 0.792$, $p < 0.001$), type of respondent ($W = 0.611$, $p < 0.001$).

GENDER STRUCTURE
IN THE POLISH PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

When we analyze the hierarchy of positions in relation to gender, we notice clear differences within the management structure.⁸ On average, one in three male respondents holds only management positions. For women, the ratio was almost 11 percentage points lower, showing disparities within the tenure of key PR positions. Women are more likely to hold executive positions – dedicated to operational activities, and thus less well paid (36% vs. 26% among men).

Figure 4. PR positions in relation to gender, $n = 1505$

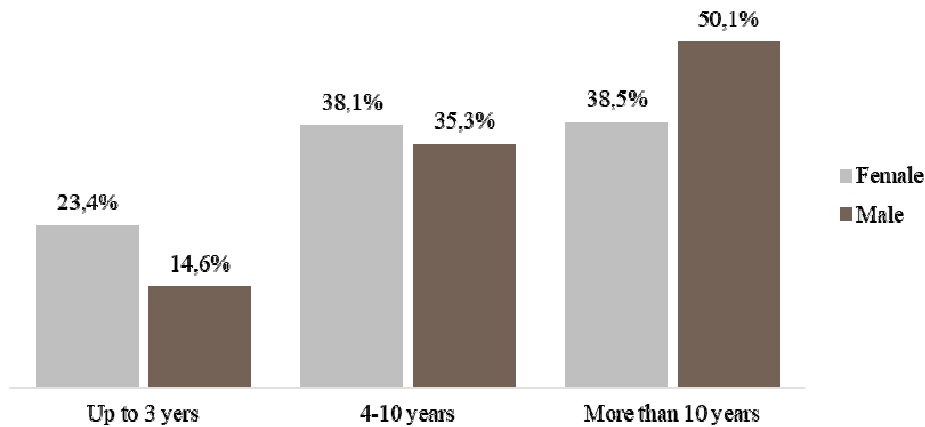


Source: own study.

And one of the reasons for this can be found in the level of professional experience of the respondents. As many as half of the men surveyed have worked in the PR industry for more than 10 years. In contrast, among the women's group, the aforementioned rate ranged below 39%. While the percentage of responses in the middle range (4–10 years) is comparable for both genders, there is a significant preponderance of women among those least experienced in the PR industry (23% vs. 15%).⁹

⁸ Chi-square = 24.106; $p < 0.001$; Kramer's V = 0.127.

⁹ Chi-square = 27.449; $p < 0.001$; Kramer's V = 0.129.

Figure 5. Seniority in the PR industry in relation to gender, $n = 1658$ 

Source: own study.

A statistical female PR specialist works in the industry for an average of two and a half years less compared to a specialist,¹⁰ despite the fact that it was among women that a stronger correlation was diagnosed between the hierarchical position held and years of work in the PR industry ($\rho = 0.390$). Therefore, in the group of women, the correlation is more apparent, according to which the longer we work in a particular industry, the higher positions we occupy. This may also mean that women have to be more active and determined during their active working time in order to achieve this professional success.

¹⁰ Females: $n = 1014$; median = 8; dominant = 10; standard deviation = 6.495; variance = 42.180; minimum = 0; maximum = 30; spread = 30; skewness = 0.560; kurtosis = (-0.525); coefficient of variation $V = 71\%$.

Males: $n = 555$; median = 10; dominant = 10; standard deviation = 7.571; variance = 57.320; minimum = 0; maximum = 41; spread = 41; skewness = 0.496; kurtosis = (-0.287), coefficient of variation $V = 65\%$.

Table 2. Hierarchy of positions and seniority in relation to gender of PR professionals in Poland

| Variables | All | Female | Male | Test of difference between genders |
|---|-------|--------|-------|------------------------------------|
| A. Hierarchy of positions ¹¹ (average) | 1.93 | 1.86 | 2.06 | U = 219134,5 ($p = 0.000$) |
| B. Seniority in the PR industry ¹² (average) | 10.06 | 9.17 | 11.69 | U = 228698,5 ($p = 0.000$) |
| C. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient AxB | 0.394 | 0.433 | 0.307 | $p < 0.001$ |

Source: own study.

It should also be emphasized that men work longer in the public relations industry, which is confirmed by the data collected for each of the analyzed positions in the organization.¹³ Interestingly, the relatively largest difference in experience is in the executive positions held, where the rate in the group of men is more than 2 years higher than the result of women.

Table 3. Seniority in the PR industry in relation to position held and gender

| Hierarchy of positions | | Average | <i>n</i> |
|------------------------|--------|---------|----------|
| Executive | Female | 5.43 | 301 |
| | Male | 7.76 | 121 |
| | Total | 6.09 | 422 |
| Executive-managing | Female | 10.20 | 363 |
| | Male | 11.97 | 184 |
| | Total | 10.80 | 547 |
| Managing | Female | 11.95 | 194 |
| | Male | 13.73 | 142 |
| | Total | 12.70 | 336 |

Source: own study.

¹¹ The higher the average, the higher the position (coding 1 = executive position, 2 = executive-management position, 3 = management position).

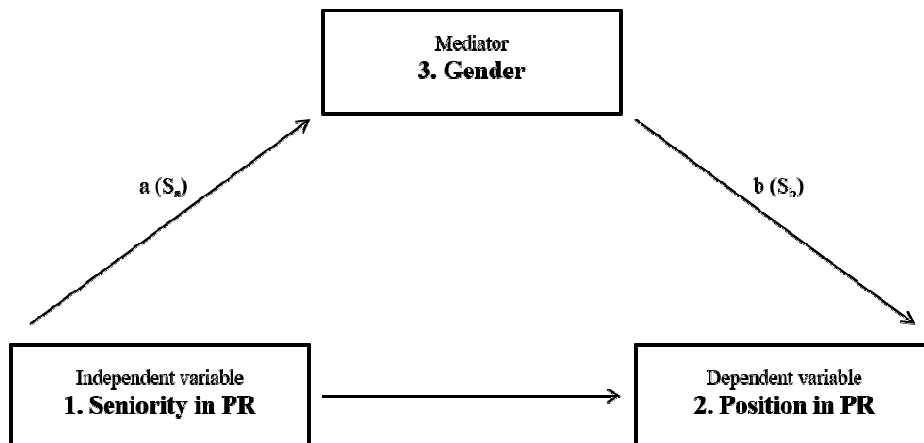
¹² The higher the average, the more experience in PR (quantitative variable, minimum = 0, maximum = 41).

¹³ $F = 116,840$; $p = 0.000$.

The results obtained fit strongly into the interpretative framework of other projects devoted to the issue of gender structure in Polish PR. For example, one study (Tworzydło, Szuba and Życzyński, 2021) showed that 22.4% of women working in Polish PR agencies occupy management positions. Meanwhile, in UK agencies (the country leading the European PR services market) there is a level of gender balance in key management positions, where female participation is at 49.8% (PRWeek, 2020).

Based on the three variables analyzed so far (gender, position, and seniority in PR), an attempt was made to see if gender is a mediator of the relationship occurring between seniority in PR and the position held in the PR organization.¹⁴ In doing so, the authors looked for an answer to the question: Do women have a harder time taking on managerial positions in the organization despite their extensive work experience in the industry? For this purpose, a mediation analysis was used, where in the first step the researcher's task is to determine whether there is a relationship between the independent and dependent variable and the dependent variable and the mediator (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Mediation model for PR industry with gender variable as mediator



Source: own study.

The effect of mediation is usually tested by regression analysis, and interpretation is made in the form of path inference, where:

¹⁴ The basis for the initial adoption of the relationship, which is shown in Figure 6, was the significant pairwise correlation coefficients ($p < 0.001$) between the variables, that is, Spearman's rho: seniority x position = 0.394; seniority x gender = 0.155; position x gender = 0.123.

• Step 1: Variable 1 allows you to significantly predict the occurrence of variable 2. Therefore, it is likely that the length of seniority in PR is the cause of the position held in the PR organization, that is, you can continue to build a mediation model and proceed to the next steps.¹⁵

• Step 2: Variable 1 allows significant prediction of the occurrence of variable 3, since the average length of service among women is significantly lower than among men. Therefore, the gender variable can be part of a path running from variable 1 to variable 2.¹⁶

• Step 3: Variable 3 allows significant prediction of the occurrence of variable 2 using multiple regression analysis, where variable 1 is also included as a predictor. An important observation is that:

- gender has an impact on a position in the PR industry, otherwise the gender variable could not be part of a path from 1 to 2;
- the inclusion of variable 1 as a predictor confirmed that the observed relationship between gender and position is not that both variables are the cause of variable 1 (rather than that only one is the cause of the other).¹⁷

• Step 4: Using the Sobel test, the significance of mediation (whether there is mediation of the variable gender) was checked. The results of the test are presented in Table 4.¹⁸

Table 4. Sobel test results

| Coefficient | | Test statistic |
|----------------|-------|--|
| a | 0.012 | Sobel test = 1.606 Standard error = 0.0005 $p = 0.108$ |
| b | 0.070 | |
| S _a | 0.002 | |
| S _b | 0.042 | |

Source: own study.

¹⁵ The coefficients for the linear regression with the dependent variable position in PR are $R^2 = 0.142$; $\beta = 0.377$; $t = 14.721$; $p < 0.001$.

¹⁶ The coefficients for the linear regression with the dependent variable gender are $R^2 = 0.030$; $\beta = 0.172$; $t = 6.913$; $p < 0.001$.

¹⁷ The results confirmed step 3, as with the help of information on the gender of the PR professional, it is possible to predict the type of position he or she holds ($\beta = 0.044$; $t = 1.678$; $p = 0.094$) while taking into account the years worked in the PR industry ($\beta = 0.369$; $t = 14.177$; $p = 0.001$). R^2 for the multiple regression model = 0.144.

¹⁸ The Sobel test examines whether the reduction in the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (after accounting for the mediating role) is a significant reduction (that is, whether the mediating effect is statistically significant).

For the entered values of the *B* coefficients and their standard errors (obtained in steps 2 and 3), the calculated Sobel test showed that gender is not a mediator of the relationship between seniority in the PR industry and position held ($p > 0.05$). In other words, the mediator does not “capture” even part of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable – that is, gender does not mediate the relationship between seniority and PR position. Therefore, the authors turned to a more in-depth analysis of the PR workplace.

PR WORKPLACE VS. GENDER

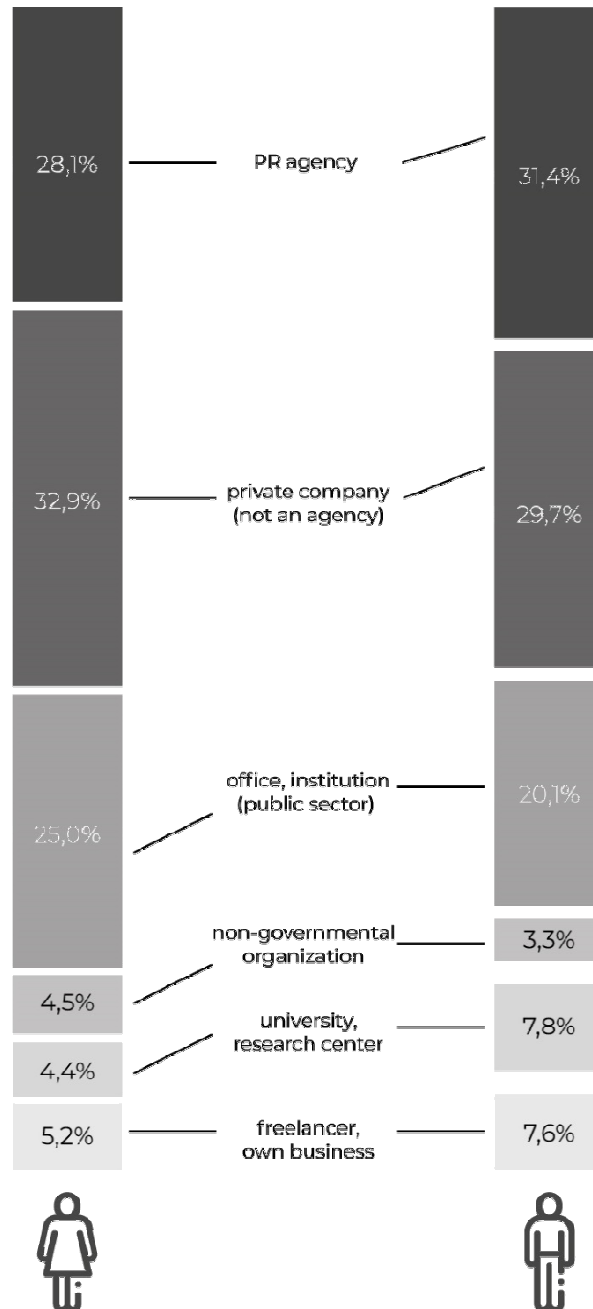
Another analysis showed that women are more likely to be involved in public relations activities in the public sector, such as working in institutions or offices (the largest deviation of up to 5 percentage points). There is also a slightly higher percentage of women in private companies that are not PR agencies (+3 percentage points). Using NGOs as an example, there is a balance in employment. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be found in the group of PR scientists and agency consultants (+3 percentage points). The observed differences are clear enough to accept the hypothesis that gender determines where PR specialists are employed.¹⁹

In addition, the division of respondents into “in-house PR professionals” (specialists representing their own PR services in various organizations that are not PR agencies) and “outsourced PR professionals” (PR service providers, i.e., companies and experts serving clients on an outsourced basis for PR activities)²⁰ also showed significant gender differences (Table 5). In general, men are more likely to participate in the outsourcing of PR services.²¹

¹⁹ Chi-square = 19.856; $p < 0.001$; Kramer's V = 0.108.

²⁰ This type of division is the unit of analysis of other studies conducted in Poland as well (Wojcik, 2005; Tworzydło, Szuba and Życzyński, 2019).

²¹ Chi-square = 8.781; $p = 0.003$; phi = 0.074.

Figure 7. PR workplace in relation to gender, $n = 1716$ 

Source: own study.

Table 5. Respondent's work type in public relations in relation to gender, $n = 1620$

| Variables | Females | Males |
|----------------------------------|---------|-------|
| In-house PR professionals | 65.2% | 57.7% |
| External PR professionals | 34.8% | 42.3% |

Source: own study.

The relatively largest difference in work experience between the two genders is in universities and research centers. This is where male PR professionals have more than 8 years of work experience compared to women. It is also worth noting the agency and NGO sectors (where the difference reaches about 4 years in favor of men).

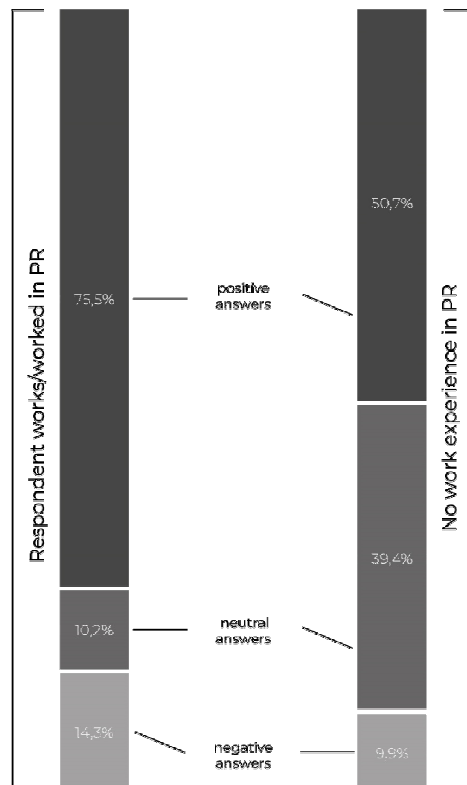
Table 6. Seniority in the PR industry workplace and gender

| Workplace in PR | | Average | <i>n</i> |
|---|--------|---------|----------|
| PR agency | Female | 8.27 | 271 |
| | Male | 12.52 | 163 |
| | Total | 9.86 | 434 |
| Private company | Female | 9.27 | 316 |
| | Male | 9.67 | 154 |
| | Total | 9.40 | 470 |
| Office, institution, public sector | Female | 9.76 | 249 |
| | Male | 10.93 | 112 |
| | Total | 10.12 | 361 |
| Non-governmental organization | Female | 9.23 | 44 |
| | Male | 12.89 | 19 |
| | Total | 10.33 | 63 |
| University, research center | Female | 9.07 | 44 |
| | Male | 17.64 | 42 |
| | Total | 13.26 | 86 |
| Freelancer, own business | Female | 10.62 | 53 |
| | Male | 10.48 | 44 |
| | Total | 10.56 | 97 |

Source: own study.

Referring to the PR workplace from a gender perspective, the authors also decided to conduct a nationwide survey of full-grown women.²² Among other things, the goal was to determine the scale of ad vocem employment in the PR industry. The results showed that 4.4 percent of Polish women in 2023 claimed to have professional experience in the public relations industry. Professional presence in the PR industry also determines how the term “public relations” itself is perceived. Women who have worked in the industry before have a more positive association (average 5.37 versus 4.70).²³

Figure 8. Associations with the term “public relations” among women working and not working in PR, $n = 1108$



Source: own study.

²² CAWI technique ($n = 1108$); surveys representative according to gender, province, age, and place of residence.

²³ $F = 12,494$; $p = 0.000$.

Average calculated for a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = extremely negative associations, 4 = neutral associations, 7 = extremely positive associations.

CONCLUSIONS

One dimension of diversity is gender, which determines socio-cultural roles. In Poland, society is relatively homogeneous in terms of culture, race and religion. Therefore, gender is a fundamental element of diversity policy, although of course it has its broader dimensions (race, ethnic group, nationality, religion, age, membership in a sexual minority or disability). Many organizations still fail to recognize the potential of gender diversity (Dźwigoł-Barosz and Leoński, 2019). In light of diversity management theory, it is pointed out that women bring different skills and experiences to the job, especially at the management level. This increases productivity at the organizational level. Additionally, it promotes the creation of a positive corporate image (Wodzyńska, 2016).

An analysis of our own research, as well as of available reports and literature, indicates that there is an ongoing male advantage at the management level. It can be seen despite the fact that women are mostly the strength of the public relations industry (feminization at 65%). In light of the survey results, it can be concluded that women working in the public relations industry value employment stability and safe working conditions more. Confirmation of these words can be found in an analysis of the employment structure. Well, the relatively highest prevalence of women is in companies operating in the public sector (+5 percentage points compared to men).

Diversity management theory is one possible way to counteract the barriers women face in their careers. The PR industry is a fast-growing market sector seeking diverse potential. Therefore, it is extremely important for employers to put diversity management theory into practice. Actions taken at the individual, organizational and socio-cultural levels should aim to diversify potential at all levels. According to "Global Woman in PR," despite the still relatively low level of women on boards, the benefits of gender diversity are being recognized. The majority of respondents believe that the presence of women in management structures enhances a company's creativity (79%) and removes barriers to promotion for other women (73%). Nearly nine out of ten women (89%) believe that more should be done to ensure that women in the PR industry are placed in leadership positions. Through such efforts, it is possible to diversify and see the benefits of tapping into the potential of all its employees, including women.

The feminization of the public relations industry is a fact but there are areas in which men are perceived to perform far better. One of these is crisis management, an area that requires a range of qualities and skills, including mental toughness and resilience to stress. Crisis management not only forces immediate responses, but also triggers the imperative to act under permanent stress. Thus, it may

be a determinant that men are the ones who mainly engage in responding to problematic situations, and they are also the ones who largely lead public relations firms – in Poland, only 22% of women are on boards of directors (Szuba, 2022), while, for example, in British PR agencies, the figure of women occupying only management positions is more than twice as high as in Poland.

The feminization of the public relations industry may also be due to the specificity of activities undertaken within the PR task spheres by agencies, companies and organizations. Events, social media, media relations of all types, and communication campaigns are certainly not as much of a burden as crisis management, investor relations or public affairs, so the prevalence of the aforementioned “non-burden” areas may have an impact on attracting women to the profession and their ease of adjustment to what they do in PR. The feminization of the PR industry is also influenced by the connection to traditional roles of women with a prominent presence in the PR industry. Building relationships, engaging communications or organizing events are examples of areas attracting women to public relations. It is worth noting at this point, however, that Polish research on women’s life preferences indicates that it is men who have relatively more employment opportunities, more opportunities to start and run their own businesses, and more advantages when it comes to gainful employment.²⁴

Looking from the perspective of the research presented in this article, it should also be noted that the observed division is more likely to be permanent. Division of competencies, or factors that influence the perpetuation of differences between men and women who work in public relations, requires further scientific and research deepening. One of the analytical perspectives is to conduct a similar research in industries competing with public relations (marketing, advertising), whose common denominator is the provision of communication services to the market environment. In this way, among other things, a comparative analysis would be possible.

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FEMINIZACJA, ALE JAKA? ROLA KOBIET W BRANŻY PUBLIC RELATIONS W POLSCE NA PODSTAWIE BADAŃ ILOŚCIOWYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł – oprócz kwerendy literatury w kontekście aktualnej sytuacji kobiet na rynku pracy ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem branży PR – obejmuje zagadnienia badawcze dotyczące struktury płci w branży *public relations* w Polsce wraz z analizą czynników warunkujących sytuację wyjściową. Jednostką analizy są dane demograficzno-zawodowe 1789 specjalistów ds. PR, które zostały zagregowane i poddane analizie statystycznej. Dane pochodzą z kilku projektów badawczych realizowanych przez autorów w latach 2017-2023. Kobiety stanowią w nich blisko 2/3 badanych, czyli jest to dominująca płeć, jeśli chodzi o zatrudnienie w branży PR. Dlatego w ujęciu ogólnej struktury zatrudnienia mamy do czynienia ze zjawiskiem feminizacji branżowej. Jednakże wysoki poziom sfeminizowania nie przekłada się na strukturę zarządczą. W tym wymiarze kobiety odgrywają już znacznie mniejszą rolę niż mężczyźni (22% względem 33%). To z kolei rodzi pytania o obowiązujące zasady równości płci, różnorodności i integracji, a także jest przyczynkiem do analizy poziomu doświadczenia środowiska zawodowego PR. W artykule opracowany został model mediacyjny, za pomocą którego autorzy starali się wyjaśnić zależności pomiędzy zajmowanym stanowiskiem, doświadczeniem zawodowym i płcią.

Słowa kluczowe: feminizacja; płeć; gender gap; szklany sufit; branża public relations; analiza statystyczna; zarządzanie różnorodnością.