

# Women about flexible work arrangements- interpretation of results of empirical research<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The paper addresses an issue of differences between Polish and international results of the research on the perception of work flexibility among women. The causes of the identified problem have been found in both terminology inconsistencies as well as the specificity of the Polish labour market including the existing legal system. Drawing conclusions has been based on findings of the international and national research including the pilot research undertaken by the author with respect of the perception of non-standard employment arrangements among Polish students.

*Keywords: flexible work arrangements, non-standard employment arrangements, employment of women*

## **1. Introduction**

Flexible work arrangements constitute a subject of deliberations and scientific research and respective solutions applied have already established in the labour market. Thus doubts are raised whether it is justifiable to call them untypical or non-standard. In Poland flexible employment arrangements are applied by almost half of enterprises (Arendt et al., 2009: 137-147).

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been published in the Zeszyty Naukowe (scientific papers) of the Wrocław School of Banking No. 30/2012, pp. 9-20.

More and more often deliberations over non-standard work arrangements occur with reference to employment of women. Vocational activation of women, organization of work for mothers or gender discrimination constitute important issues from the social and economic point of view. It seems that a wider usage of flexible employment arrangements should favour the cooperation forms which meet expectations of the two parties of non-standard work relations and thus provide women with an opportunity for a more satisfying job.

The literature on the subject provides proof that women need flexibility of time and a place of work in a larger extent than men. The fact that in Poland opinions about non-standard employment arrangements are unfavourable may cause consternation. Some media reports and the colloquial language use the term “junk contracts” for defining non-standard employment arrangements. Women in Poland seem to favour traditional employment. In response, numerous projects promoting flexible work arrangements among women are set up.

The paper addresses an issue of differences occurring in findings of the empirical research on the perception of flexible work arrangements among women. The differences concern projects carried out in Poland and abroad. Potential causes were sought after in terminology inconsistencies and the specificity of the Polish legal system. It has been shown that it is important to differentiate between categories of untypical work organization forms, non-standard employment arrangements and flexible forms of organizing work time. The analysis of findings of the empirical research refers to international and national projects including the pilot research carried out by the author with respect of the perception of non-standard employment arrangements among Polish students.

## **2. The gender factor in the research on work flexibility**

Findings of the research on flexible work arrangements presented in the literature reveal differences in their assessment made by women and men. A satisfying review of the subject has been prepared by Greek scientists who subsequently made an attempt to verify a hypothesis about the influence of the gender factor on perception of flexible work arrangements among the Greeks (Giannikis and Miahail, 2011).

Scandura and Lankau (1997) have shown that women more than men value benefits of flexible work arrangements. Job satisfaction among women is better when the job provides them with a possibility of combining work and fulfilling work duties. Charron and Lowe (2005) have found that women emphasise benefits derived from flexible work arrangements whereas men mainly perceive costs related to alternative work forms. Similar conclusions were drawn by the research carried out by Albion (2004). According to them, men fear that when working flexible hours may be perceived as less involved in completion of tasks. Benefits derived from the possibility of better balance between personal and professional life is important only when non-standard work arrangements do not involve lower income.

Results of the research carried out in Greece confirmed the hypothesis. They indicate that women perceive more benefits from flexible work arrangements than men and in their opinion these arrangements affect areas like: work-life balance, possibilities of employment and keeping the job, productivity and the morale of employees. Whereas men see themselves as bread winners and take into consideration threats related to lower income, diminishing promotion opportunities or career development as well a limited possibilities of building interpersonal relations (Giannikis and Miahail, 2011).

The research carried out in Great Britain by Sullivan and Smithson (2007) focused on working from home and telework. Similarly it has indicated that perception of flexi time is diversified according to the gender criterion. It is related to roles traditionally played by women – the role of a mother and a housewife. Women working according to flexible arrangements use the time they managed to find for taking care of children and doing housework while men tend to focus on work duties even when they are at home.

Results of research carried out away from Poland clearly indicate that the gender criterion is of importance to perception of flexible work arrangements and that women see more opportunities and benefits of non-standard work arrangements.

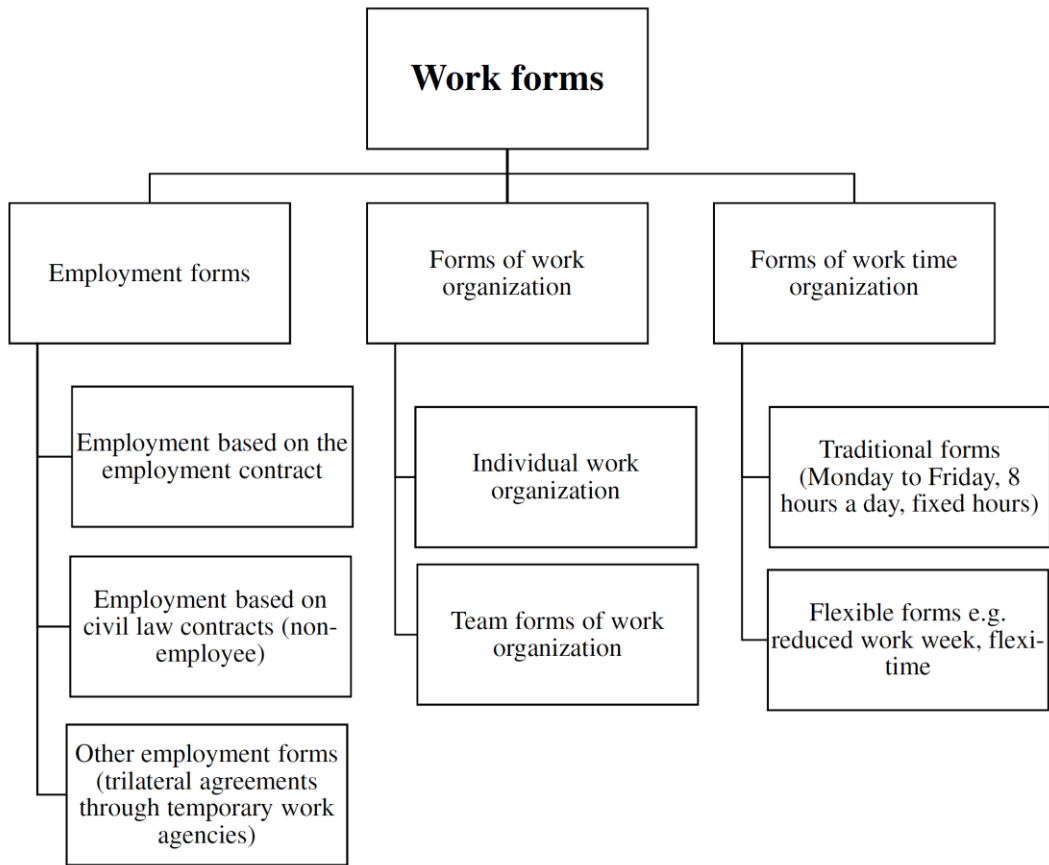
### **3. Flexible work arrangements and non-standard employment arrangement- the specificity of the Polish labour market**

The term “flexible work arrangements” is a broad category comprising: employment forms, forms of work and time organization (see Figure 1 1). The English literature most often uses this term whereas ‘*forms of flexible labour/work*’ is less often used. The terms are identified with legal solutions practically implemented which formally or informally enable people to choose a place and time of doing a job (Maxwell et al., 2009). Three basic categories are recognised within flexible work arrangements (*Flexible Work Arrangements...*):

- Flexibility of work time organization e.g. in a reduced working week,
- Flexibility of work time e.g. part-time,
- Flexibility of workplace e.g. working from home.

The problem arises when we compare solutions and results of research presented in the English literature with the situation in the Polish labour market. This happens when flexible work arrangements are identified with non-standard employment arrangements in Poland. In the Polish legal system – according to the case law of the Highest Court- employment does not have to be employee-related and may result from civil law contracts (I PKN 432/99, 2001). It is accompanied by a basic division of employment arrangements into employee and non-employee related. Non-employee related employment involves working on the basis of one of contracts of the civil law (Pisarczyk, 2003: 9). This leads to a specific work relationship which positions the contractors outside the binding labour law system and in particular cases outside the system of obligatory social security.

The Polish specificity distinguishes clearly with employment arrangements introducing the term non-employee related employment complicating the usage of the “employee” term. There is no an equivalent term in the British system.



**Figure 1.** Work forms and their elements

Source: author’s own elaboration.

In Great Britain there are *employees, the self-employed, outsources workers and agency workers*. They may do the job for a particular enterprise and are called *workers*. The first group comprises *employees*; the second one comprises *non employees* under non-standard arrangements (Leighton, 2007: 14-15).

The terminology related to the indicated problem involves making empirical research more difficult. One has to pay attention to the fact that non employees are associated in the Polish market with poorer care of contractors (see more: Bąk-Grabowska, 2011a). As mentioned in the introduction, media reports use the term of “junk contracts”. If we are to compare results of research carried out in different systems, one has to consider the actual subject of the research- flexibility of time and a place of work or non-standard employment arrangement.

In the Polish literature there are far-fetched inconsistencies and no consistency in using the terminology related to flexible work arrangements. Arendt and Kulak-Dolata (2010: 61-81) make use of the notion “flexible work arrangements” meaning flexible employment and flexible work time organization. The authors think that the differentiation between flexible employment and flexible work time organization is not explicit and separable and specialists dealing with this issue do not agree how to classify arrangements like job sharing or part-time jobs.

Figure 1 presents a visualisation of parts of work arrangements proposed by the author in connection to the insufficient clarity of the terminology. Employment arrangements have been defined as those resulting mainly from the legal basis- relationships of employees and contractors and enterprises they do the job for. Work organization arrangements comprise individual and collective solutions. Within the two categories work can be done in a company or at home on the basis of telework or a virtual team. There is a category of work time organization including traditional and flexible arrangements of work time organization such time, interrupted working time, flexible time, changeable hours of beginning and ending work, individual working time, shortened working week or weekends (Kryńska, 2003; Sajkiewicz, 2003; Sadowska-Snarska, 2006: 23-32).

#### **4. Evaluation of flexible employment arrangements among women in Poland**

Within the project completed in 2011 a survey was carried out among students of Economic Sciences Faculty at Wrocław University of Economics studying at the Management Programme. 120 people were surveyed, 91 were students under 26 years old. Women constituted 53% of the surveyed sample. A research questionnaire was elaborated and used asking about facts and opinions. The questions were about the employment arrangement respondents had. Then there was a request to define attractiveness of particular arrangements on the six-grade scale and to express an opinion about twenty statements about non-standard employment arrangements. Respondents has a possibility of choosing one of the four options – definitely yes, rather yes, rather no or definitely no. We can recognise it as a four-grade Likert’s scale (Dyduch, 2011).

The statements the respondents expressed their opinions about were formulated with different meaning- nine of them were positive, nine negative and two neutral. It was assumed that the way the questionnaire was drawn up as well as its comprehension required verification and that is why the research is of pilot nature and its result presented. Below there is an evaluation of the four statements which most explicitly refer to the relationship of non-standard employment arrangements and work time organization in the short and long-term.

One of the basic benefits indicated in the literature on the subject with regard to non-standard employment arrangements is constituted by keeping work-life balance. However the presented research results have shown that more than a half of men than women definitely agreed with that statement. Women chose the option rather agree. At the same time one quarter of the women said that non-standard employment arrangements do not bring benefits when it comes to work-life balance. In view of the quoted results of foreign research the above responses must be considered surprising.

Women (similarly to men) said that in case of non-standard employment arrangements it is more favourable to have a permanent contract with a possibility of having flexible work time. Only 8% of students chose the option that it is rather not like this, none of them contradicted. The women absolutely agreed with the statement that flexible work arrangements cease to be attractive when health problems arise or when a woman gets pregnant. Men's responses were similar. That is why in respondents' view, flexible work arrangements are unfavourable in situations where the importance of job protection and social security e.g. inability to work in pregnancy is emphasised.

Almost all female students (only 4% of rather no responses) were in favour of the statement that after starting a family it is better to work permanent. There were doubts among men. According to conversations with respondents and research results, men more often than women think about starting their own business and treat self-employment as a non-standard arrangement. The results also show that even if at present non-standard work arrangements is accepted by students due to the necessity of combining work and study and smaller remuneration then as graduates they will prefer permanent employment.

The need to have job security among women is comparatively high. According to results of the research on task structures carried out by Lichtarski (2011: 154-157), there is more

uncertainty in untypical systems among elderly people (over 46 years old) holding executive positions and women.

In a broader view the issue of poor acceptance of non-standard employment arrangements among women has been revealed in the research results carried out within the project undertaken by the Human Resources Centre. The results show that out of the most important solutions facilitating the combination of household chores and work women indicate flexible working hours of care institutions and adjusting them to working hours of parents. Non-standard employment arrangements are not favoured by them. According to the research, starting a family by women is strictly connected to the need of permanent employment. Women are convinced that flexible employment arrangements are tied up with the lack of stability and security. The biggest disadvantages of these arrangements include no possibility of taking sick leaves and maternity leaves as well as instability of employment. There is a conviction that a worker hired on flexible basis is first to go. Moreover, the knowledge about non-standard work arrangements is so poor that it generates stress in difficult work situations. Some women identify it with more duties at lower pay and also consider it a job with no perspectives of promotion or a pay raise (*Flexible Employment Arrangements...*).

Diagnosed women's doubts can be connected to a broader problem of not respecting interests of temp workers. In the literature there is a hypothesis about dichotomy in the human resources management where permanent employees are taken care of, namely the core and to a lesser extent the stable zone whereas flexible arrangements receive limited attention for workers' expectations (Bał-Grabowska, 2011b).

Sometimes the application of non-standard employment arrangements does not help to combine work and life but also worsens it. According to research results flexible work arrangements are tied up with completing tasks on days or hours when other family members are off work and then it has a negative influence on respondents who consider it as disorganization of their personal lives and contacts with their family (Mazur, 2008).

The above research results indicate that women while assessing flexibility of work attach great attention to features of employment arrangements namely to the legal basis and related determinants. Job security and protection of social security in Polish circumstances are of key importance. It seems that benefits from flexibility of work and work place, though desirable, do not compensate insufficiencies related to flexible work arrangements and the like. These



statements have been formed on the basis of pilot research. Their verification should be a subject of further research.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of terms used in the English literature has led to the conclusion that the research results concern flexibility of time and work place which may but does not have to be related to untypical employment arrangements. Women can make a better use of flexible work and time arrangements by joining vocational and house duties. The job that enables them to do it satisfies them. In view of that the results are quite explicit. These propositions have been proved both based on the quantitative and qualitative research.

It is a mistake however to transfer the above findings to the ground of deliberations about non-standard employment arrangements applied in Poland. The basic features of such solutions like work based on civil law contracts mean instability of work and limited employee's rights. Employers mainly use them to reduce employment costs and do not have to take into account expectations of women with regard to time and work place.

According to assumptions of the *flexicurity concept*, flexible work arrangements should be introduced considering expectations of both parties of the relationship. On the basis of the analysis of empirical research results we can say that women prefer flexible solutions to work and work time organization provided they are implemented with consideration of their needs and feeling of security. Fears about the lack of employment stability and social benefits generate stress in women.

With their strong position in the Polish labour market, employers introduce non-standard employment arrangements taking into account only their own needs of flexibility in terms of numbers, time and functionality. Employers' unwillingness to offer employment contracts for unspecified time enabling workers to participate in forming work time and place is affected by factors of economic, organizational, legal and cultural nature. The potential of building more partner-like relations and enabling workers to take satisfaction in work is not used. In case of women this satisfaction is particularly connected to the possibility of combining a career and personal life.

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***Kobiety o elastycznych formach pracy - interpretacja wyników badań empirycznych***

***Streszczenie:***

W opracowaniu podjęto kwestię występowania różnic pomiędzy polskimi i zagranicznymi wynikami badań nad percepcją elastyczności pracy wśród kobiet. Przyczyn zidentyfikowanego problemu dopatrzone się zarówno na gruncie nieścisłości terminologicznych, jak i specyfiki polskiego rynku pracy, w tym w ramach obowiązującego systemu prawnego. Wnioskowanie oparto na analizie wyników badań zagranicznych i krajowych, w tym w ramach realizowanego przez autorkę pilotażowego badania percepcji niestandardowych form zatrudnienia wśród polskich studentów.

***Słowa kluczowe:*** elastyczne formy pracy, niestandardowe formy zatrudnienia, zatrudnienie kobiet