

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVATION
OF THE UNEMPLOYED OVER 45 YEARS OLD**

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Key words: unemployment, professional activity, elderly people.

A b s t r a c t

In the article the results of survey carried among 75 people unemployed over 45 years old were presented. The survey shows that these people tend to have rather low qualifications but are trying to increase their competences and to find a proper job. They are also aware of their advantages like: dutifulness, responsibility, experience and life stabilization. But, on the contrary, when we analyze the employers' attitude towards these group of people, it occurs to be full of stereotypes basing on a belief that elderly workers are simply worse than the younger ones.

AKTYWIZACJA ZAWODOWA OSÓB BEZROBOTNYCH POWYŻEJ 45 ROKU ŻYCIA

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A b s t r a k t

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki sondażu diagnostycznego przeprowadzonego wśród 75 osób bezrobotnych powyżej 45 roku życia. Wyniki analizy wskazują, że osoby te z reguły mają niskie kwalifikacje, jednak są aktywne w podnoszeniu kompetencji i poszukiwaniu zatrudnienia. Są także świadome swych atutów: obowiązkowości, odpowiedzialności, doświadczenia i stabilizacji życiowej. W postawach pracodawców przeważają natomiast stereotypy oparte na założeniu, że starsi pracownicy są gorszy od młodszych.

Introduction

The contemporary stage of civilization development is sometimes described as post-modernism with particular characteristics such as common variability, liquidity and lack of permanence (BAUMANN 2007). This results from accelerated outdating of products, states, needs and technologies becoming. Nothing is permanent; what is new will soon be old and everything that is good will soon be replaced by the better. And the word “soon” reflects the nature of the rate of those changes. Everything changes and changes at the same time. Consumerism that is the core of the post-modernism means depreciation of products as of the moment of floating them to the market and satisfying the needs/whims in a way that they should create new needs/whims (BAUMANN 2006). Change, as the sign of the times applies even to the climate, although it is the unintended consequence of human activities that forces adjustment (coping with) inconsistent weather conditions. That accelerated obsolescence of material, behavioral, organizational, institutional and technological conditions of life and work also cause accelerated obsolescence of employee qualifications and usefulness. This results in the need for continual updating of the professional knowledge and skills as well as obtaining the abilities of acting under the conditions of change. This involves not only the skills in adapting the change but the creativity, the ability to generate change. However, as life shows, human ability to accept changes decreases with the age, and creativity decreases even further. As a consequence, the problem of employment and professional use of the “older” people is becoming increasingly important in the developed countries. In this context the term “older” until recently applying to the people aged fifty plus (50+ programs) currently applies to the people over 45 years of age and it can be expected that the limit of being “older” would soon move to encompass even younger people. At the same time the average life expectancy increases. Longer vocational activity is also expected (proposal of higher retirement age). As a consequence, reconciliation of the accelerated obsolescence of the employee with longer active vocational life is becoming an important issue (KOŁODZIEJCZYK-OLCZAK 2005).

The vocational activity index for people over 45 years is much lower than in case of the younger age groups. Their share in the structure of the unemployed is also higher. The common stereotypes concerning the elder workers that discourage employers from employing people over 45 years of age are among the factors causing those phenomena. Those stereotypes assume that elder people are less flexible, present more claims, get sick more frequently, do not want to get trained, learn foreign languages or get to know new technologies. The concerns among employers are also caused by the legal commitments making it impossible to make an employee in the protected age redundant

(*Rynek...* 2007). The low level of vocation activity among the elder people has many negative consequences for those people as well as consequences for the general public and the economy (Enterprise Europa Network). As a consequence, in all the European Union countries, including Poland programs are initiated and activities are undertaken to retain or restore the abilities of vocational functioning in the market of people over 45 years of age. This is also one of the specific goals of the Human Capital 2007–2013 Operational Program.

This paper contains the results of questionnaire-based survey conducted on the group of 75 persons (including 44 women) aged over 45 years registered as unemployed with the County Labor Office in Ostrołęka. The study aimed at identification of barriers hindering finding employment by those people and identification of their competences, attitudes and expectations related to employment.

Results of studies

Demographic changes in the majority of the European countries including Poland cause that the share of the elder people in the population structure increases while that of the younger people decreases. The forecasts by demographers indicate that by 2020 the number of the people aged 50–64 years will increase by 26% while the number those aged 20–29 years will decrease by 20%. This means that for natural reasons the interest in employing the elder people and problems involved will be increasing. Among the unemployed registered at the County Labor Office in Ostrołęka in 2009 the share of the people aged over 45 years increased from 16,9% in January to 20% in December. Long-term unemployed represented a significant part of that group, which confirms the thesis that with age it is increasingly hard to find a job and falling out of the labor market frequently means staying outside it for a long time. Unemployed aged over 45 years generally possess low level of education, which is confirmed by evaluation of qualifications of the people covered by the survey as 33% of the respondents possessed basic vocational education and 5% elementary education. The respondents represented various vocations; the majority of them (15 persons) before becoming unemployed used to work as sales assistants or office workers (14 persons). The majority of the respondents had the history of employment exceeding 20 years (55%). The group covered was diversified as concerns the duration of unemployment. The largest group (39%) was unemployed for less than 6 months while as many as 35% were unemployed for longer than 24 months and 11% were unemployed from one to two years. The causes of loss of employment by the covered group

could be divided into two groups – objective and subjective factors. The first group includes the factors independent of the employee such as liquidation of the employer, restructuring, liquidation of workstation. The respondents also indicated factors such as dishonesty of the employer, without however indicating the type of it. The subjective factors were dependent on the employee and included loss of the license to work at a given position (e.g. loss of the driving license), violation of employee duties or resignation from work. The women pointed at unequal treatment comparing with the men, which was expressed by, among others, making the woman redundant immediately on return from the child care leave.

According to the respondents, there are many reasons that caused them remaining unemployed. They drew attention, among others, at their shortcomings concerning qualifications and general education, including lack of command of a foreign language limiting the possibilities of working abroad, not satisfying the expectations of the employer, lack of experience in the vocation learned, difficult travel to the place of work, poor ability of moving on the labor market.

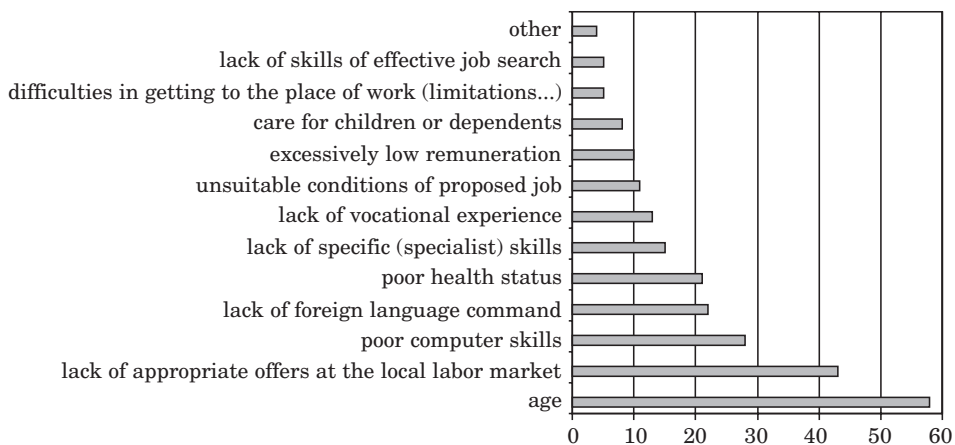


Fig. 1. Factors hindering getting a job according to the respondents

The vast majority of the respondents (58 persons) indicated age as the major factor hindering finding a job (Fig. 1). This is not just a subjective feeling of those people as it is confirmed in the reasons given by employers for refusal of employing those people (Fig. 2).

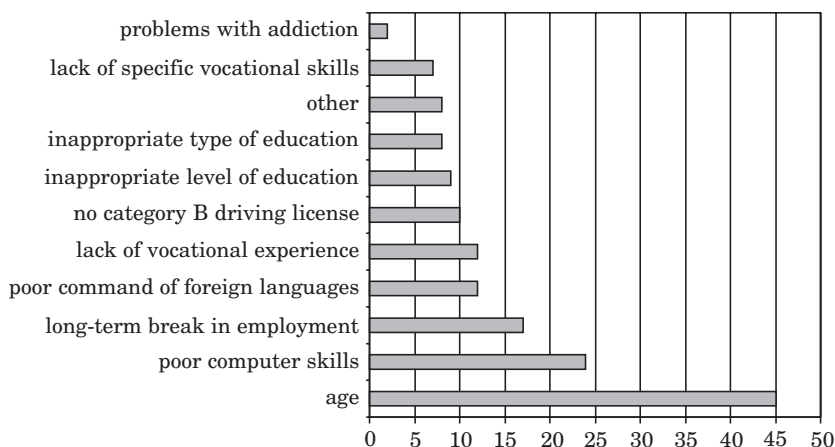


Fig. 2. Arguments for refusal of employment given by the employers

Employers are unwilling to employ long-term unemployed, which confirms the general regularity that the longer you are unemployed the more difficult it is to return to work. Probably for that reason some of the respondents resigned consciously from searching for a job losing the faith in success of such efforts and expecting generation of income from accidental, unofficial work or various forms of the state aid.

It is characteristic that among the factors hindering finding a job the respondents indicated first the external factors that were independent off them (age, situation in the labor market) and only farther they indicated the factors that they had influence on (qualifications, skills). Some of the factors are of relative nature resulting from the excessive expectations of the employer or the candidate for work, which leads to resignation from the employment offer. That involved offering unfavorable work conditions, excessively low remuneration, requirement of the extended workday as well as on Saturdays and Sundays or poor reputation of the employer.

Lack of the possibility of employing 37% of the respondents at positions using IT equipment is a confirmation of the general opinion, upheld also by the respondents and partly the employers indicating that lack of preparation for use of the IT represents an important obstacle to employment of the people aged over 45 years. At the same time 69% of the respondents expressed the readiness for reskilling or/and acquiring new qualifications listing most frequently operation of computers and fiscal registers.

The respondents did not limit themselves to just following the job offers available at the labor office in their search for employment. All the respondents confirmed that they undertook also other efforts to find a job (Fig. 3).

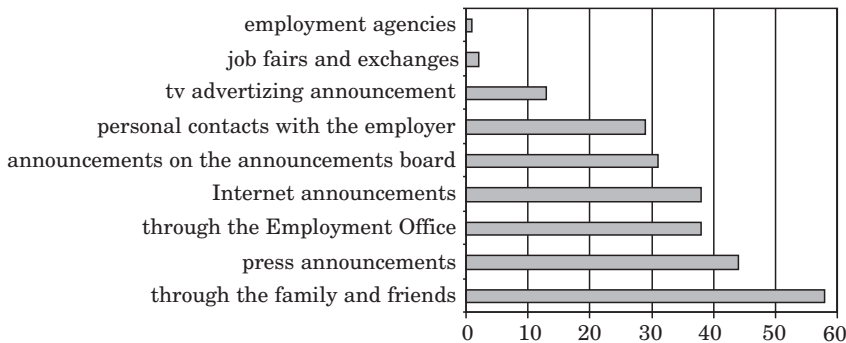


Fig. 3. Methods of searching for a job used by the respondents

The majority of the respondents realized their strengths as compared to the young people and they knew how to use them in their contacts with the potential employers. They classified, among others, long years of vocational experience, responsibility, life stabilization, additional qualifications possessed and flexibility in adjustment to the employment conditions as their strengths. The majority of the respondents (ca. 67%) stated, that they were able to define their vocational goals, move in the labor market as well as write a CV or the motivation letter and prepare for the qualification interview. On the other hand, the remaining persons agreed that they were not prepared appropriately for searching for a job and had problems with, e.g. preparation of application documentation. This could result from the fact that the majority of them used to work for years for the same employer and did not have to deal with the problems involved in changing the place of employment.

In addition to the eventual consent for reskilling the respondents did not project making any major changes in their lives just to get employment. This concerns the decision on change of the place of residence (55% exclude such a possibility), going abroad (38% of negative responses) or taking employment in a location away from the place of residence (34% of negative responses). Lower mobility of the elder persons than the younger person is a natural characteristic and results from social and economic “establishment” increasing with the age. A large proportion of the people, however, does not categorically reject the above possibilities and would make choices in specific situations only. This also applies to setting up own business activity where the same proportion, 30%, of the participants accept and reject that possibility. The determination to find employment is diversified among the participants in the study and dependent on numerous factors, including the family situation. Some of the people, particularly those aged over 55 years, would like to get a calm, light and well-paid job in good atmosphere, near to the place of residence to live

“decently” till retirement while some participants would take any job just fast and without any initial conditions, even seasonal work, even “black” work, just to obtain the possibility of earning any money. Some of the participants, however, resigned even the hope of finding a job.

In the open questionnaire question concerning the strengths of candidates for employment aged over 45 years the respondents most frequently indicated rich vocational and life experience, availability, responsibility, dependability and conscientiousness, skills of logical thinking, hard working, honesty, reasonability, stability and discipline. In their opinions using the above characteristics they can compete with the young employees and employers could use their potential for development of their businesses. Opinions of the respondents concerning that issue are expressed, among others, by the following statements: “... the employee aged over 45 years is active and can work not worse than a younger employee. He/she also possesses work experience and can be active and faithful and honest in performance of the tasks”, “... is more reliable, persistent, accurate and he cherishes the job more”.

Conclusions

The problem of employment and vocational activity of people aged over 45 years will increase as a consequence of demographic changes and growing population of the elder people as well as the need to employ the potential that those people represent. Currently, on the other hand the increased intensity of eliminating the mature people from the labor market is observed. The negative consequences of that phenomenon are to be prevented by various programs of support for people aged 45+ and popularization of knowledge on the need and for and benefits of employing such people among the employers. The employers should realize that the share of the elder employees, as a result of demographic trends and processes, would increase systematically. The retirement age can be increased by 5 years and as a consequence somebody who currently is 45 years old will become equivalent to the present day 40 years old in the labor market. The results of the study indicate that:

1. The unemployed aged over 45 years are people with rather low qualifications although possessing vast vocational and life experience. Those people, although in their majority active in the labor market, encounter numerous barriers to employment of which the age is the major one. The vast majority of those people express readiness for reskilling or acquiring new knowledge to return to or gain on attractiveness as employee at the market. The mobility of those people, however, is lower.

2. People aged over 45 years that are unemployed express high readiness to improve their qualifications in the areas in highest demand among the

employers such as knowledge of information technologies and computer skills or command of foreign languages. At the same time they are aware of their strengths resulting from experience, responsibility and reliability as well as life stabilization and others. They are also able to move actively in the labor market.

3. The attitudes of the employers frequently reflect functioning of stereotypes resulting from the assumption that the elder of the candidates for work is worse; as a consequence it is necessary to promote and encourage employers to use objective, non-discriminatory evaluation criteria to candidates for employment. It is also necessary to popularize the knowledge on employees' age structure management.

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