

**Gender roles of Polish female emigrants and their
paths of self-realization in relation to work-life
balance policy**

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Political Preferences

2018, vol. 20: 59-82.

DOI: xxx

journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/PP

Submitted: 27/07/2018

Accepted: 03/09/2018



Abstract:

A numerous previous reports on Polish women's emigration provided information on their passive role in the decision making process concerning leaving Poland, obtaining employment predominantly in the sector of household services or their marriage-oriented strategy of survival in the foreign country. The current picture of women's roles in emigration has been changed. The purpose of the presented research was to explore the paths of self-realization of Polish female emigrants regarding the gender roles realised by them in the field of the work-life balance idea. The research was conducted in psycho-sociological approach.

There were 113 adult Polish female emigrants, who had spent a period of time exceeding one year on emigration in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia admitted to the research. This project was realised on the basis of quantitative data gathered throughout online survey and supplemented by qualitative data in the shape of 15 semi-structured interviews.

The obtained results showed that the examined Polish women declare to undertake gender roles compliant with the new cultural model, and to lesser extent compliant to the traditional one. They demonstrated proactiveness in the phase of decision-making about emigration and as they attempted to combine their family life with the professional sphere in the country they have arrived in what corresponds with the WLB idea promoted in developed countries.

Key words:

work-life balance, gender roles, self-realization, Polish women, emigrants

Introduction

The world of late modernity is characterised by “frontierlessness” (Lusińska-Grabowska 2012: 8), where an individual’s biography is less and less frequently attached to one geographic location, together with the increased mobility and opening of national frontiers migrations have become a common and, in a certain sense, a natural phenomenon. An ever growing number of individuals perceive the change of their place of residence as a chance to lead a better, more interesting or successful life.

Emigration is defined as migration of individuals outside the boundaries of a certain territory which is connected with the alteration of their permanent place of residence and temporary place of stay (Schmitz 2003). In terms of duration two types of migration are defined, namely the short-term (frequently seasonal) migration usually focused on improving the financial situation of individuals, relying in the change of the country of residence usually for the period between 3 and 12 months; and secondly, long-term migrations connected with the change of the country of residence for the period of over 12 months, frequently treated as permanent migration (*Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2017*). This dissertation is devoted to the second variant.

Women emigrating from Poland

Those specialising in research into migration agree on the fact that Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 significantly altered the dynamics and sources of emigration in this country (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2008: 1). In comparison to the pre-accession period the amount of individuals leaving Poland increased considerably, while the reasons behind mobility with the leading economic motivation have remained unchanged (Cekiera 2014: 143). Analogically, Polish entry to Schengen zone, which allowed Polish citizens to cross state borders freely, constituted a specific form of encouragement to search for employment and as a result also settle outside of their homeland. The emigration wave from Poland has reached its stable level and it has remained at the similar level since 2008, namely, between 2 210 and 2 130 individuals annually (Bielecka-Prus & Kruk 2014). The largest group among Polish emigrants is constituted by those of the so called “mobile age” that is individuals aged between 18 and 44, additionally women outnumber men in this sphere (*Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2017*).

The most important characteristics of the contemporary migration trends include feminisation apart from the migration globalisation, its acceleration, differentiation and increased level of political involvement (Castles & Miller 2003: 7-9). Whereas in the past men constituted the vast majority of economic emigrants, it was in the 1960s that females started to play an ever growing role in migrating abroad in search for employment – a fact, which led to present situation, when the number of emigrating women exceeds the number of men. These tendencies were confirmed both by international data (Castles & Miller 2003) and Polish statistics (*Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2017*).

Due to the limited presence of women among migrants, emigration of females until 1970s was treated as a natural consequence of male emigration, as women were supposed to be financially dependent on men (Kindler & Napierała 2010: 8). Female passivity in migration movements was assumed as well as their attachment to running the household and limiting themselves to taking care of family life, thus treating female emigrants, as if they were invisible (Boyd & Grieco 2003). The character of this approach reflects the image of main gender stereotypes at that period: femininity connected with passivity and commitment and masculinity related to agency and initiative (compare Wojciszke 2012: 125).

According to the research from the first decade of the 21st century financial migrations of Polish women were connected with performance of low prestige jobs, without opportunities for promotion, frequently in household service sector (as baby-sitters or carers of the elderly) (Kindler & Napierała 2010: 13). The character of employment niches entailed the depreciation of qualifications of female emigrants. It was also accompanied with an unequal division of household duties, which decreased women's possibilities of self-realisation by creating barriers in acculturation process due to the lack of time to build social networks in the receiving country (Kawczyńska-Butrym et al. 2016; Kindler & Napierała 2010)¹.

But if we consider the reports on the newest research into migration of Polish women conducted as recently as in the 2010s there are considerable changes reported that occurred in the scope of employment of Polish female emigrants. Multiple research focuses on the following destinations: Great Britain (e.g. Cekiera 2014; Eade 2007), Germany (Krasnodębska 2009;

¹ In articles devoted to Polish female emigrants the hypothesis that women are usually motivated to emigrate by family benefits and rarely by desire to obtain personal benefits prevails. These actions are frequently of „emergency” character in economic sense and they are always migration for somebody else. (after: Slany et al. 2014).

Czubińska-Gańczak 2013), the USA (Slany & Małek 2005), Italy (Slany & Małek 2005; Kordasiewicz 2010), Spain (Redondo Toronjo 2010) and Scandinavia (Kawczyńska-Butrym et al. 2016; Napierała 2010). It has been shown that the employment of Polish female emigrants may also be associated with different sectors of economy compliant with their qualifications, providing them with opportunities to make use of their professional skills (Kawczyńska-Butrym et al. 2016). Although not only the occupational area seems to be the field for analysing the personal development among female emigrants. Nowadays, the identification of self, defined by social expectations towards feminine and masculine behaviours and roles, has become the axis of numerous research into migration tendencies (Boyd & Grieco 2003; Kindler & Napierała 2010). This implies considering the importance of gender in the motivation of female emigrants to change their country of residence and also in various spheres of life and adaptation to new social and economic conditions encountered in the receiving country (Boyd & Grieco 2003).

Gender roles and self-realisation in context of females emigration

It is likely that the above mentioned transformation of Polish feminine emigration occurs as a result of gradual liberalisation of the imprinted schemes concerning gender in western cultures, which has been observed for more than twenty years (Twenge 1997). Gender roles constitute an integral part of social roles system – these are social expectations concerning activity in interpersonal spheres: partnership, family and professional spheres created on the basis of perception of belonging to a given biological sex (Eagly 1997; Zosuls et al. 2011). The system of gender roles thus expresses the social and cultural differences between women and men, it penetrates the whole life of an individual and is connected with configuration of cultural patterns characteristic for a given society (Marecek et al. 2004). Sanctions used by agendas of socialisation contribute to the strengthening of appropriate attitudes and their purpose is to teach girls and boys to adjust to the descriptions of definite gender roles (Eagly 1997).

In the period between 2006 and 2010 the work-life balance programme was implemented in the EU (Commission of the European Communities 2006). The importance of the WLB programme for European social policy is demonstrated by the fact of priorities of the “European Pillar of Social Rights” – to modernise the existing legal framework, the European Commission has proposed a directive on work-life balance which will preserve existing rights and build on them with improved and new rights for both women and men (European Commission 2017a).

The Commission's project "seeks to promote a good balance between family and professional commitments and to provide more equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace and at home" (*Work-life balance for parents and carers*)². This supported reducing barriers in female participation in the labour market – for instance, through propagation of flexible forms of employment in connection with the transfer of taking care of a child onto both spouses (European Commission 2017b). The WLB is not only the European policy, but this idea is also implemented through various social and work programmes in Australia, USA and Canada (Work + Family Roundtable 2013; *Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures Act)* 2012; Bhushan 2012; Higgins et al. 2008).

The WLB strategies reflected the ever growing awareness of the patterns of realisation imposed on both men and women by culture and also of gradual disappearance of radical limits in typically masculine and feminine roles, while simultaneously promoting relations based on partnership and reduction of the existing harmful inequality of the sexes. These changes may be connected with the increasing independence and self-reliance of Polish women in the scope of decisions concerning their own emigration (it no longer needs to be emigration to join the bread-winning partner who migrates for economic reasons) and also with the selection of their path of personal development in the new state.

When analysing the situation of migrating females, here to Polish women, it seems to be vital to consider its dynamic conditions in the term of self-realization. Self-realization, according to Maslow (1974), signified pursuit of realisation (making real) one's own positive capabilities and it was considered the highest need in the hierarchy, maintaining human motivation for undertaking actions. The full expression of self-realization was conditioned by satisfying lower rank needs including the sense of security and belonging. Self-realization is closely connected with the concept of well-being and life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener 2008: 138). However, from the anthropological and philosophical point of view (Taylor 1999: 213) self-realization means life orientation focused on self, closely connected with the idea of freedom "where being free is a matter of what we can do, of what is open to us to do, whether or not we do anything to exercise these options". Undoubtedly, the gratification of needs for the sense of security and belonging as well as freedom of "what is allowed" tends to be particularly threatened among emigrants (see:

² The proposal for a new directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and careers repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU was submitted 26th of April 2017 (European Commission 2017b). In December 2017 the Council assessed progress on the equal treatment and work-life balance directive.

Maruoki et al. 2011). This dissertation assumes the self-realization of emigrants as their conscious choice of the most optimal way of development in both individual and interpersonal spheres in the culture of the receiving country, connected with the acceptance of gender roles in a professional and family life.

The presented study was to attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the gender roles undertaken by Polish women emigrating to other highly developed countries?
2. Do these gender roles of Polish female emigrants shape the paths of their self-realization that correspond with the work-life balance idea?

The exploration of paths of self-realisation of Polish female emigrants has been analysed through the following variables: motivation for migration, being in a relationship and type of the created relationship, manner of realisation of family life and roles within the family, commencing education in the receiving country, professional activity realised in the receiving country.

Subjects

The concept of sampling in the research assumed participation of adult Polish female citizens who made the decision to emigrate independently and reside permanently outside the territory of Poland in an economically developed country for the period not shorter than 1 year³. The total number of 113 women aged between 18 and 72 participated in the research (M=35.04; SD=7.32). Table 1. presents the sociodemographic description of this group.

The selection of women for the researched group was conducted through purposive (non-probabilistic) method with the use of the so called “snow ball” effect. Information on the research was sent to the target group via social networking sites and theme groups existing on such websites dedicated to Poles in emigration for instance *Polish woman in Europe*, through blogspots such as *Briskly-into-the-sky* and it was also propagated by private individuals.

³ Two women residing in medium developed countries according to the value of Human Development Index for 2015 have been included in the tested group, namely residents of Vietnam and the Republic of South Africa. Due to the fact that these were only two cases it has been decided to include questionnaire answers provided by them into the research material as these exceptions do not falsify the obtained results.

Table 1. Sociodemographics of the researched group

Sample characteristics	N	%	M (SD)
Age			
in general			35.04 (7.32)
18-25	6	5.3	
26-35	56	49.6	
36-45	46	40.7	
46-55	3	2.7	
56 or more	2	1.8	
Education			
vocational	1	0.9	
secondary	27	23.9	
higher	85	75.2	
The length of the period of living abroad (in years)			
less than 1	4	3.5	
1 - 5	35	31	
over 5 -10	21	18.6	
over 10 - 15	39	34.5	
over 15 - 20	8	7.1	
over 20	6	5.3	
Country of respondents' current living – high and very high developed countries			
United Kingdom	41	36.3	
Germany	12	10.6	
Belgium	8	7.1	
France	6	5.3	
Canada	5	4.4	
USA	4	3.5	
Spain	4	3.5	
Norway	4	3.5	
Ireland	3	2.7	
Italy	3	2.7	
Netherlands	3	2.7	
Portugal	2	1.8	
Australia	2	1.8	
Austria	2	1.8	
Sweden	2	1.8	
Czech Republic	1	0.9	
Cyprus	1	0.9	
Denmark	1	0.9	
Switzerland	1	0.9	
Finland	1	0.9	
Turkey	1	0.9	
Kuwait	1	0.9	
Mexico	1	0.9	
China	1	0.9	
Country of respondents' current living – medium developed countries			
Vietnam	2	1.8	
South Africa	1	0.9	

Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

Methods

The research was conducted with the use of CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) technique, it was conducted online in the form of own survey questionnaire published in the portal *ebadania.pl*. Thanks to the implementation of this research technique it was possible to gather answers from respondents living in various countries of the globe in a relatively short time. All respondents expressed their consent to participate in the research, the procedure was approved by the University Committee for Research Ethics. Qualitative collection of data was conducted simultaneously through semi-structured interviews via Skype (N=15) in order to obtain a wider image and examples illustrating the data from the questionnaire. Randomly selected women were interviewed among the group of the survey respondents who volunteered for Skype meeting. In total 47 women expressed their readiness to participate in the interview and 15 out of them were randomly selected. The interviews were recorded in audio format with respect for confidentiality and subsequently transcribed and analysed with the use of software for qualitative data analysis Nvivo10 (QSR International, Burlington, MA) and theme analysis method (Thomas & Harden 2008). The research lasted from March to July 2017.

Results

As presented in Table 2 **the main reasons (motives) underlying migration of Polish women** include above all “willingness to break free from their life as it has been so far” (28.3%) and “desire to provide themselves and their families with better living conditions” (25.7%). A considerable percentage of the studied females hinted the motivation connected with a perspective of a better paid job with opportunities for personal development (in total 45.2%). A smaller percentage of respondents mentioned marriage or joining their partners who had emigrated earlier due to their contract of employment as their motives for emigrating.

The analysis of the answers “Other reason” enabled to differentiate subsequent categories of repetitive migration motives listed by the respondents, which include the following: joining their partners (4.4%) or emigration conditioned by their husbands’ contracts of employment (3.6%). Less popular reasons for female emigration included emigration connected with the plan to continue their education abroad (2%) or seasonal employment which subsequently transformed into permanent emigration (2.7%).

Table 2. Main motives of emigration of Polish women

Category of motives of emigration*	N	%
The need to "transcend" the current life conditions	32	28.3
The perspective for better quality of life for her and her family, then she or they had in Poland	29	25.7
The perspective for the job, that would bring better possibilities to develop career	28	24.8
The perspective for better-paid job	23	20.4
The need to cut off the previous life experiences	19	16.8
Hardships with finding any employment in Poland	13	11.5
Missing the family which was abroad (husband, children)	12	10.6
The perspective of marriage	12	10.6
The need to overcome serious financial problems (her or her family's)	9	8
The hardships connected to self-reliant home keeping and upbringing of children	1	0.9
Other reason	20	17.7

*Multiple choice was possible

Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

To obtain the picture of the gender roles as indicators of self-realization the **remaining in a relationship and type of the created relationship** within the examined group of Polish female emigrants were analysed. Table 3 indicates that a significant majority of respondents that is 87.6% remained in partnerships, while other respondents were single. Married women were the largest group among those in relationships (55.8%), the majority of respondents created relationships with male citizens of the state they emigrated to (41.6%) and the current relationship for majority of respondents began in emigration.

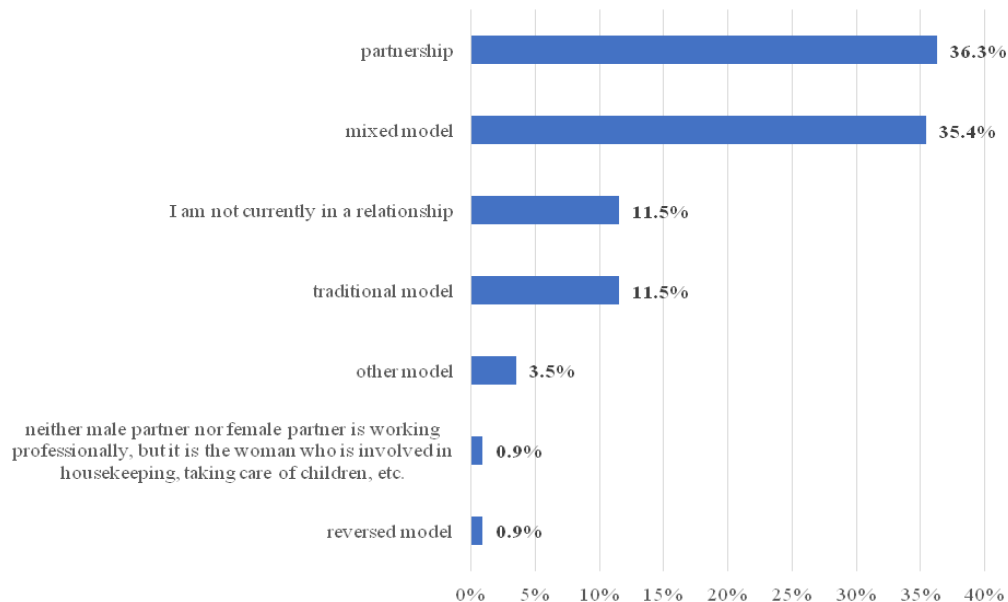
Table 3. Marital status of respondents

Sample characteristics	N	%
Type of relation		
marriage	63	55.8
cohabitation	34	30.1
concubinage	2	1.8
single	14	12.4
Period in the life in which the woman entered the present relationship		
before emigration	47	41.6
in emigration	52	46
Nationality of the current woman's partner		
a Pole who emigrated from the country about the same time as me	43	38.1
a Pole who grew up in the country in which I am currently living	2	1.8
a citizen of the country in which I am currently living (the nationality of the country in which I am currently staying)	47	41.6
an emigrant from other country	7	6.2

Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

The female emigrants were also requested to define **the model of their current relationship**. The results (see Figure 1) showed that women declaring that they remain in partnership or a mixed relationship⁴ dominated among the respondents – approximately every third respondent listed either of these models. The traditional model was declared much less frequently. Several females defined their relationship in a different way. Two of them admitted that their husbands are more involved in their carers and household chores are relatively evenly shared by both partners.

Figure 1. Models of the respondents' current close relationships



Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

Also during the interviews the respondents most frequently declared partnership in their relationships, yet some of them emphasised that the current role model required negotiations with their partners.

(...) I could see that my husband was really trying to push me back into the kitchen, stereotypically. Of course we had fights here, so I said: "if you are hungry, food is to be found in the fridge, you can prepare it yourself, so yes, in the beginning we didn't have arguments about it exactly, it was more like defining our place and what we wanted to do in the house and I think we've made it. We managed to reach a compromise." [92/ES]⁵

⁴ Partnership has been defined as such relationship in which husband (partner) and wife (partner) devote approximately the same amount of time to work, both of them contribute equally to housekeeping and taking care of children. A mixed model assumes that both husband (partner) and wife (female partner) work but the husband (partner) devotes more time to his career, while the wife (female partner) apart from her career takes care of the house, children etc.

⁵ Symbols placed after the quoted fragments: research participant's number assigned to maintain her anonymity / abbreviation of the country of her current residence.

Another fact worth emphasising is that some women defined the model of their current relationship as partnership but they admitted that the man acted as the head of the family – they tend to leave the final decisive power to him, when making important decisions and they are prepared to accept such decisions. The respondents believed that this model is appropriate and beneficial for all family members.

I would respond by saying that my relationship is actually a partnership, still I don't have any doubt that my husband is the head of the family in the sense that he earns more, much more than me. He makes decisions, because I, I simply don't like making decisions. [101/ES]

Subsequently data connected to the **manner of realisation of family life and roles performed within this sphere** were analysed. Table no 4 presents the respondents' replies to the question concerning who most frequently performs various household chores in their families.

Table 4. People responsible for particular housekeeping duties

Type of duty	Respondent	Husband (partner)	Child (children)	Other person
Preparing meals	N	82	37	2
	%	73.2	33.0	1.8
Daily cleaning	N	87	29	7
	%	77.7	25.9	6.3
Solid housekeeping	N	83	38	7
	%	74.1	33.9	6.3
Washing	N	86	22	1
	%	76.8	19.6	0.9
Ironing	N	65	27	2
	%	58.0	24.1	1.8
Ordering jobs from third parties	N	38	80	0
	%	33.9	71.4	0.0
Dealing with administrative matters	N	63	63	2
	%	56.3	56.3	1.8
Paying main bills	N	51	74	1
	%	45.5	66.1	0.9
Providing minor repairs	N	23	86	0
	%	20.5	76.8	0.0

* Multiple choice was possible.

Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

The results suggest that women were those who more often prepare meals, take care of daily cleaning, as well as cleaning and washing than their partners – the percentage of females declaring the performance of the above mentioned chores exceeded 70.0% for each of these activities. Similarly, ironing was one of those duties which was mostly performed by the respondents (58.0%).

Dealing with administrative matters was the domain of women and their partners in equal proportion (56.3% replies each). Male activity was larger in realisation of tasks connected with performance of minor repairs (76.8%), ordering jobs from third parties (71.4%) and paying bills (66.1%). It is worth mentioning that some respondents used the support of third parties, especially in the scope of cleaning.

The presented results indicate a greater burden of household chores resting on female shoulders, especially those chores which are stereotypically considered typically feminine. However, a certain percentage of the respondents' partners were involved in these duties. This was suggested by the replies of those females who declared that both they and their men are those family members who take responsibility for the performance of certain tasks. Approximately every third interviewed female remained in a relationship where household duties are divided between the woman and the man.

These data were confirmed by the opinions of the interviewed women – nearly all respondents declared participation of their partners in activities conducted within the household.

I don't like cleaning so he does it. I can cook better so I do the cooking and set the washing machine because I prefer to segregate my clothes in a proper way. But when it comes to other activities like ironing and others – we simply share the duties. (...) It's not because we have agreed to have it that way or prepared some kind of schedule defining who does what, it just happened naturally. [94/GB]

Female emigrants who were not employed or were less involved in their work admitted that they performed the majority of household chores. What is more, they put emphasis on the fact that they were satisfied with this situation.

The family do not wander around hungry, there is dinner every day. When he [husband] gets back home from work there is always dinner waiting for him. My child is also always fed. I don't work, so I need to get busy with something. So I cook, bake, experiment, have fun, the division of duties in our family is really cool because.... Well, I don't really know if there is any division because at the weekend he will also cook something. [51/B]

Table 5. People most often engaged in various activities related to childcare in the respondents' households

Type of activity		Respondent	Husband (partner)	Other person
Activities connected with children hygiene	N	62	37	1
	%	98.4	58.7	0.9
Feeding/serving meals	N	60	35	1
	%	95.2	55.6	1.6
Taking children to a doctor	N	61	26	0
	%	96.8	41.3	0.0
Putting children to bed	N	60	35	0
	%	95.2	55.6	0.0
Teaching children discipline	N	58	50	0
	%	92.1	79.4	0.0
Spending free time with children	N	61	44	5
	%	96.8	69.8	7.9
Walking or driving children to the kindergarten or school	N	49	37	8
	%	77.8	58.7	12.7
Helping children with the homework	N	39	19	3
	%	61.9	30.2	4.8
Attending parents-teacher meetings	N	47	27	2
	%	74.6	42.9	3.2
Participating in the shows and parties in the kindergarten or school	N	50	36	3
	%	79.4	57.1	4.8

* *Multiple choice was possible.*

Source: Own study and assessment (N=63).

Women having a child or children slightly outnumbered those without any offspring – such declarations were provided by 55.8% of respondents. They were questioned on who performs or performed various activities connected with childcare most frequently in their relationships. The summary of replies presented in Table 5 shows that mothers were usually more strongly involved in taking care of the children – nearly all of the questioned women admitted that they either used to or still perform activities connected with children's hygiene, feeding, taking them to the doctor, putting them to sleep, teaching them discipline and finally spend free time with the children. Slightly smaller proportion of respondents admitted that it is their duty to walk or drive children to the kindergarten or school, help them with the homework,

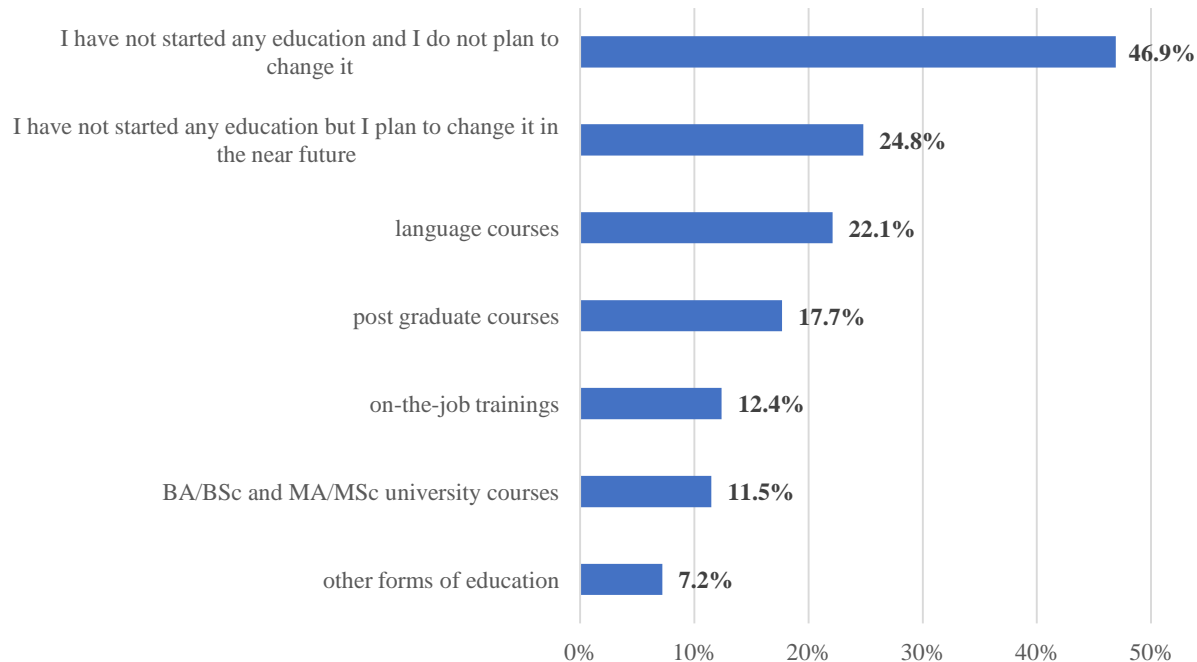
attend parents-teacher meetings and participate in the shows and parties prepared by and for children. The gathered data also indicated that a large group of male partners became involved in childcare. Their participation in raising of sons and daughters was the greatest, when the need to discipline a child arose, if the child was naughty; additionally, men spent free time with the children relatively frequently. The activities performed by fathers least frequently included: helping children with the housework, taking children to see the doctor, and attending parents-teacher meetings.

The quantitative data were confirmed in the interviews. Respondents usually admitted that they were responsible for the majority of duties connected with childcare, however, they seemed to believe that it is natural and they simultaneously appreciate the time their partners spend with the children.

It's mostly me who takes care of the child. This is simply the natural course of events, that at that time I didn't have a permanent job (...) when it comes to duties, so if my husband is at home, you see he works most of the time, so if he is home, he helps me, changes diapers, plays with him. For instance, I told him that I needed to do something here, for instance, to learn and my husband is sitting with the baby now. He used to wake up to check on the baby at night, but I have to say honestly that I was doing more things anyway. [70/ES]

The women also provided answers to the questions diagnosing **the forms of education undertaken after emigration**. Nearly half of them did not start any education. However, one quarter of the respondents declared a plan to change it in their near future. The every fourth of the surveyed women made an attempt to improve their qualifications or competences following their arrival into the target country. The summary of replies presented in Figure 2 proves that the most frequently selected form of education were language courses. The second position in terms of frequency of selection of this answer was occupied by post-graduate courses, while further positions were occupied by on-the-job trainings and courses as well as BA/BSc and MA/MSc university courses. Several respondents mentioned in their answers forms of educating themselves other than listed, such as courses focused of self-development, those developing interest and hobbies or apprenticeships. It is worth emphasising that the individuals who commenced some form of education after emigration usually selected several various forms of education in different areas.

Figure 2. Forms of education undertaken by respondents in emigration



Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

This fact was confirmed by the respondents' answers. The majority of female emigrants enumerated several courses and trainings.

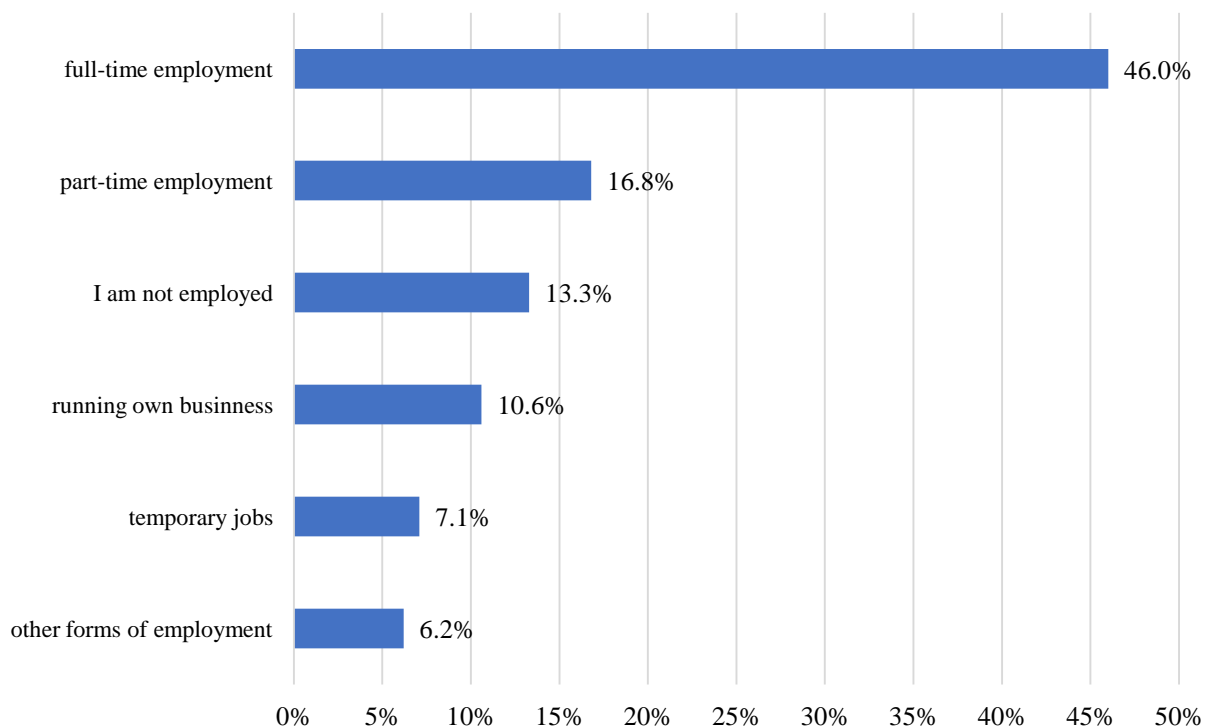
I learnt French in Switzerland. After my arrival in the States I did two online courses, one concerning purchase, to consolidate the vocabulary, also this section of vocabulary related to purchases and to learn a bit of American English and American purchase terminology. Within the frames of my personal education and development I have also completed a course called "Study of Happiness" held at University of Berkeley. [72/USA]

Several of the interviewed women emphasised the fact the decision on further education was in their case dictated by the necessity to obtain employment at a position different than their qualifications. This was the consequence of the fact that upon arrival abroad the diplomas obtained in Poland were not sufficient to find an interesting job.

At the very beginning, right after I was left alone, I tried to organise some courses to obtain some certificates here. I qualified as an agricultural engineer, but here no one was interested in the fact that I graduated from a university, a kind of equivalent of their Bachelor, nobody paid attention to this. I also have some experience from Poland in the area of preparation of applications for the EU financing, but it also didn't matter here. [94/GB]

The indicator **professional activity realised in the receiving country** was analysed through several questions in the survey. The data collected in this manner (Figure 3) hint that women working full-time constituted the largest group (almost 50.0%) among the surveyed females. Approximately, every sixth respondent worked part-time while every tenth ran her own business. Several of them performed temporary jobs and the total amount of 7 women mentioned other forms of employment which included: keeping a blog, voluntary work and working as a freelancer. As many as 13.3% of respondents declared they were not employed in any form. The most frequently provided reasons underlying lack of employment included the break in employment connected with raising a child and also difficulties in obtaining employment relevant to the respondent's qualifications (5 replies for each of these options). The following reasons were listed by two respondents each: poor health, difficulties in finding any employment, studying at university and good material situation of the family allowing women to resign from professional career.

Figure 3. Current employment of respondents



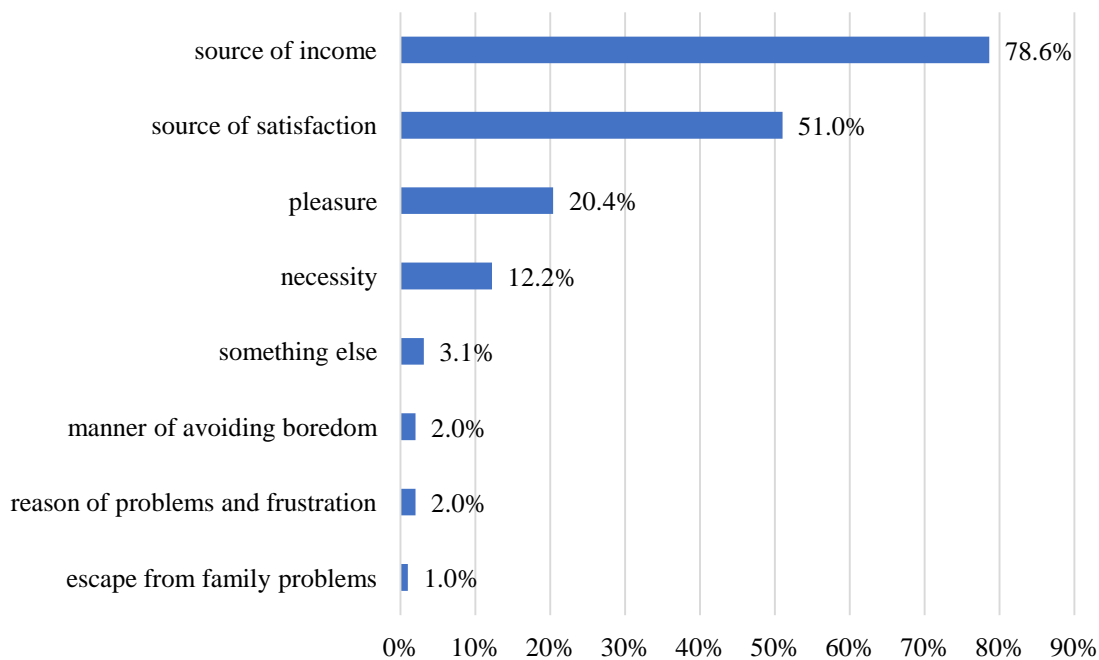
Source: Own study and assessment (N=113).

The results of the survey were reflected in the interviews – the respondents usually worked full-time, however several of them mentioned other forms of employment. One of them was a freelancer – she accepted various tasks upon request or order. She declared being satisfied with her work but she felt the need for stabilisation, which – in her opinion – would be provided by a standard contract of employment.

(...) I am not connected with any company and I work as a freelancer. It's fine with me because I decide on my working hours and now I do some work on Saturday mornings (...). I am satisfied, but I miss working in a standard way, you know, full time, I miss the stabilisation, paid holidays etc. [4/D]

Women, who were currently employed, were asked what their job means for them. As shown in Figure 4 their jobs constitute above all the source of income for a definite majority of respondents. Approximately half of the employed female emigrants declared that their jobs constitute a source of satisfaction. Every fifth respondent admitted that her job gives her pleasure. Slightly smaller number of respondents expressed the opinion that their job simply constitutes a necessity. Answers indicating that professional career is a manner of avoiding boredom, the reason of problems and frustration and finally an escape from family problems appeared sporadically.

Figure 4. The meaning of work for respondents



* Multiple choice was possible.

Source: Own study and assessment (N=63).

Analogically, opinions that their job is mainly their source of income were also mentioned most frequently in course of interviews with the female emigrants. However, several of them also emphasised that their job is their passion, it constitutes an activity which makes them feel satisfied.

(...) I devote a lot of time to my work because yes, of course it is the source of money, but it is also my great passion (...). You could say that I am simply so engrossed in my work, I mean the official working hours have no significance for me (..) Most often I tend to spend long hours in the evening in front of the computer working, it often happens at the weekends so it is a big challenge, but is also a very big pleasure and passion. [91/B]

In case of majority of employed respondents (60.2%) their current job is compatible with their competences. Approximately every third respondent (37.8%) admits that her current position is below her level of qualifications.

Those women who perform work compliant with their competences were the biggest group among the interviewed respondents. Nevertheless, the remaining respondents mentioned the necessity to accept jobs below their competence level. This was frequently connected with insufficient knowledge of the language:

(...) I feel as if all my competences have been taken away from me, well maybe nearly all of them. (...) I feel like a student who is starting from scratch, but I also have the reflexion that one day, maybe, my language competence will catch up. [4/D]

Discussion and conclusions

The results of the study showed that already in the sphere of motives for emigration the surveyed Polish women proved to be seeking change, they initiated activities aimed at improvement of both their material and psychological welfare. This result opposes the previous reports on marital motives, which were supposed to prevail among females who chose to emigrate (Boyd & Grieco 2003). Moreover, this result breaks the stereotypical image of feminine roles emerging from the previous research on female emigrants. It is possible that the cultural changes concerning feminine roles supported by political and social movements such as the WLB, have opened a less traditional path of development for Polish female emigrants. However, the analysis of motives underlying the decision to emigrate remains partially compliant with the findings that the economic aspect is the leading reason for emigration of Polish females (Cekiera 2014). Undoubtedly, the fact that the largest percentage of the respondents' replies mentioned

their need “to break free from their lives so far” deserves attention. This category seems to have strong connotations with the idea of pursuit of self-realization and psychological wellbeing (Pavot & Diener 2008; Taylor 1999), as it expresses the desire for freedom and to initiate action aimed at the realisation of freedom. This freedom provides chances to make choices and control an individual’s own life, which constitutes an orientation of self-agency, stereotypically perceived as a masculine trait (Wojciszke 2012). As has been confirmed by the research (Miquelon & Vallerand 2006) those individuals who pursue to realise a self-appointed goal resulting from personal choice and strong interest, possess higher sense of happiness and self-realization.

Another of analysed spheres of self-realization of Polish females in emigration was **maintaining a relationship**. A definite majority of respondents have created partnerships (with domination of married women). For nearly half of the surveyed women their current relationships began in emigration. Similar number of respondents were in a relationship with a Pole as with a citizen of the receiving country. This fact could lead to the conclusion that Polish female emigrants are motivated by marriage perspectives, yet when we compare it with the motives underlying emigration declared by the respondents it changes its form – their migration motives are not compatible with their current status in the relationship. Thus the partnerships and marriages of emigrating Polish women created with the citizens of the receiving countries constituted rather as a natural consequence of living in the given territory at the time.

The **manners of realisation of family life and functions performed within the family** tend to vary within the examined group. Approximately every third respondent declared being in a partnership, simultaneously the amount of females describing the model of their relationships as mixed was nearly the same. An in-depth analysis of the data on the division of the respondents’ household duties revealed that women were more heavily burdened with household chores as well as activities connected with childcare. This suggests that contrary to the female emigrants’ declarations the dominating model of relationships among the surveyed women is the mixed model of relationship, that is such a model in which apart from being professionally active women tend to perform the majority of household chores. Hence the reasons underlying the fact that females described their relationship model as partnership seem worth considering. Perhaps the reason is that they appreciated the mere fact of men becoming involved in the performance of household chores and this provided them with sufficient justification to classify their

relationships as partnerships. It is probable that most of the women acknowledged the difference between the division of roles realised by men and women in their current relationship in relation to that of their parents, which, was mainly based on double burden resting on female shoulders (Firlit-Fesnak 2007: 193)⁶.

The majority of respondents did not begin **education in the receiving country**, but every fourth of them plans to do so in the future. The result is consistent with the motives of emigration indicated by researched women – education was one of the rarest reasons for them. The surveyed females mostly participated in language courses, which seems to be a natural behaviour of every immigrant wishing to obtain employment or at least be able to communicate with the surroundings. Post graduate courses and on-the-job trainings were popular among the surveyed females too. It is worth emphasising that there was a group of women among the emigrants who had completed several various courses or trainings. These females were clearly characterised by large motivation to self-development, as they were aware of the fact that their professional development requires continuous improvement of their qualifications. These women seem to be open to new experiences and to develop themselves, which are crucial aspects of self-realization. A considerably numerous group of the surveyed females declared that courses free of any fees are particularly desirable due to the fact that for some emigrants education abroad is too costly, which may constitute an important barrier for self-realization of an individual who has just arrived into a new country.

The overwhelming majority of surveyed females was constituted by **professionally active individuals** employed either full or part time. The female emigrants did not decide to run their own business abroad too frequently. Realisation of professional roles seems to be important for female emigrants, yet when they were questioned about the meaning of work their most frequently selected responses focused on work as the source of income. Work was not always perceived as source of self-realization, although it was usually compliant with the possessed qualifications. It is possible that a better, more interesting work would reward them with greater satisfaction and the sense of fulfilment. However, the fact that females are deeply involved in family life cannot rule out the possibility that they purposefully do not seek more absorbing jobs,

⁶ The family model with double burdening of women: both parents work, thus obtaining financial resources for the family but the working mother bears the main responsibility for childcare and running the house. The results of Research into Economic Activity of Society for 2001 showed that 57% of Polish females and males maintained this model of relationship (Firlit-Fesnak 2007: 193).

which could interfere with the household roles realised by women (it is worth mentioning at this point that young women with young children demanding a lot of attention and care constituted the majority of the surveyed respondents).

To sum up, the study allowed to answer the research questions. The surveyed Polish female emigrants realised their goals – in fact emigration was for them the equivalent of the self-realisation concept. The participants manifested their entrepreneurship, many of them succeeded in obtaining employment compliant with their qualifications,. Polish women on emigration attempted to combine their careers with their family life, yet the roles performed by these females in their families are usually characteristic for the mixed family model, in which the overwhelming majority of both household and childcare duties relies on women in spite of the fact that both partners are employed. This pattern was observed both in relationships of the respondents with Polish men and with the citizens of the countries these women have emigrated to. What is important, Polish women appreciated the involvement of their partners in family roles and subjectively they treat their relationships as partnerships. Hence one may conclude that the surveyed females undertook gender roles compliant with the newer cultural model supported by the WLB strategies – in case of majority of them it was this very combination of professional activity with successful family life which constitutes the source of satisfaction and self-realization on emigration.

The authoresses are aware that the size of the researched sample constitutes the limitation of this study as well as of the fact that it may not meet the representativeness criterion. It is highly probable that digitally excluded female emigrants failed to participate in the survey. Another factor reducing the extrapolation of results is the lack of representation of females belonging to the oldest age group (50+). Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress that in this generation migrations resulting from free choices did not occur too often ([Castles & Miller 2003](#)). An unquestionable advantage of the research relies in obtaining respondents from the countries of residence that coincide with the most frequently registered destinations of Polish female emigrants ([Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2017](#)). Moreover, the research model based on the triangulation of methods supported the statistical image of gender roles and self-realisation of Polish women on emigration with a subjective, phenomenological accent originating from direct quotes of the emigrants' opinions. Thus the showed exploratory outcome may be useful for designing further programmes of the migration policy regarding more

affordable education for women on emigration, and focusing on the WLB strategies in their way of self-realization.

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