



ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FLEXIBLE FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE OPINION OF EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Flexibility of the labour market and employment in atypical forms has been indicated for years as a potential source of more effective competition. However, both types of flexibility constitute important changes for employees that cause concern in terms of employment security. In this context, the aim of the research was to determine opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of employment in atypical forms. The research was carried out in a chain of pharmacies and among paramedics, i.e. in entities where flexible employment constitutes the basic employment relationship. In the respondents' opinion, there are more disadvantages than advantages of employment in flexible forms, and the main disadvantage of atypical work is employment insecurity.

ZALETY I WADY PRACY W ELASTYCZNYCH FORMACH W OPINII PRACOWNIKÓW

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Słowa kluczowe: rynek pracy, elastyczne formy pracy, opinie pracowników.

Abstrakt

Elastyczność rynku pracy oraz zatrudnianie pracowników w atypowych formach od lat są wskazywane jako potencjalne źródła skuteczniejszego konkurowania. Obydwie formy elastyczności są dla pracowników istotnymi zmianami wywołującymi u nich niepokój o pewność zatrudnienia. W tym kontekście celem badań było poznanie opinii o korzyściach i wadach wykonywania pracy w atypowych formach. Badania przeprowadzono w sieci aptek oraz wśród ratowników medycznych, w podmiotach więc, w których elastyczne zatrudnienie jest podstawowym stosunkiem pracy. W opinii respondentów występuje więcej wad niż korzyści pracy w elastycznych formach, a główną niedogodnością atypowej pracy jest niepewność zatrudnienia.

Introduction

Globalization of the economy implies changes in economic structures in individual countries. The effects of increased freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and people are changes in generic, spatial, proprietary-corporate and institutional systems of national economies. As a result of these processes, the situation in the local, regional and national labour markets changes, as they become more international.

The changing numbers and structures of moving employees evoke the need for a quick response to the supply-demand relations of the workforce. From the supply perspective, the conditions under which employees want to commence work are important, as much as the principles of work organization according to which they want to perform work; while from the demand perspective it is about creating opportunities to increase the number of jobs. Both aspects of the labour market are important from a social and economic point of view, because the balance in the labour market improves the general quality of life of employees and affects the competitiveness and efficiency of management in a specific enterprise, region and country (Wysocka, 2016, p. 9).

The need for the rational management of labour resources (which in many European countries are insufficient), emerges from the outlined context of globalization of the economy and rapid technological progress. One of the ways to improve this state of affairs is to make the labour market more flexible and to employ and organize work in flexible forms. The requirement of having a rational management of manpower resources results from the fact that the two flexibilities described as beneficial, cause a decrease in the durability (certainty) of the employment relationship, in both temporary and part-time employment, a greater flexibility in beginning and ending work, as well as changes in the workplace (Puzio-Waławik, 2016, p. 107, 108).

The suggestion of increasing the flexibility of the labour market and the employment of employees in flexible forms results from a number of theoretical and empirical publications (among others, by Organiściak-Krzykowska, 2006; Riedmann *et al.*, 2006; Kalina-Prasznic, 2009; Kwiatkowski, 2011). The research

conducted by the authors cited above indicates the impact of such flexibilities on the earlier commencement and extension of professional activity, a reduction in the scope of professional exclusion, an increase in the chances of the “survival” of a company in times of strong economic crises and a better combination of work and personal life.

Flexibility of labour markets and forms of employment

The terms ‘flexibility of labour markets’ and ‘flexibility of forms of employment’ are not new terms, however they are not clearly defined in the literature on the subject. For instance, according to E. Kwiatkowski (2003, p. 19, 20) flexibility of the labour market is “the ability to quickly adapt to changes in market and technological conditions”, while R. Lewandowski, G. Koloch and A. Regulski (2008, p. 3) claim that the flexibility of the labour market is “the ability of the market to restore its former balance or achieve a new state of equilibrium as a result of external disorders.” However, L. Machol-Zajda and D. Głogosz (2010, p. 17) believe that the flexibility of the labour market is “the scope and speed of adaptation of the labour market to external shocks (e.g. oil, demand, supply, structural and technological revolutions) or market conditions.”

The issues of labour market flexibility have also been presented in a wider context, i.e. in macroeconomic and microeconomic terms. According to Z. Wiśniewski (1999, p. 41-44), in the macroeconomic approach, flexibility refers to the achievement of equilibrium in the labour market (the ability to adapt demand for labour, labour supply and wages), while in microeconomic terms it refers to the possibility of adapting an enterprise to satisfy the needs of working people or people actively seeking work.

The definitions selectively referred to show that flexibility of the labour market is, above all, keeping up with changes in the environment. External expressions of this flexibility are various forms of employment, working time and remuneration of employees as well as the variability of labour supply (Kwiatkowski & Tokarski, 2004, p. 274). The first three of these forms are referred to as flexible forms of employment, as well as flexible forms of work, atypical forms of employment and alternative forms of employment, working time and organization of work¹.

To summarize the flexibility of the labour market, it should be added that this flexibility should be analysed in three dimensions, i.e. employees, employers and the state. In the modern labour market, employees must be willing to improve their skills and change their profession and place of employment. An employers’ flexibility should be expressed in the dynamic adaptation to a constantly changing environment, capturing market opportunities and an integrated vision of the relationship between the state of the labour market, the general strategy

¹ In literature on the subject and in this article, these terms are used interchangeably.

and the personnel strategy implemented in a given organization. On the other hand, the state's flexibility should be demonstrated by the rapid development and adoption of appropriate legal regulations favouring all stakeholders in the labour market (Wysocka, 2016, p. 78).

The issues raised have been very significant for years in Poland (and in other European countries) because of an unfavourable effect arising from the political changes initiated in 1989, which resulted in problems with double-digit unemployment, among other issues. This problem was due to the advantage of the demand side over the supply side in the labour market, which meant that in terms of establishing employment relationships, potential employees had to accept the employers' terms concerning forms of work and the amount of remuneration. Legal regulations in the field of employment relations introduced since the beginning of the political transformation facilitated the employment of employees on the basis of fixed-term employment contracts, on the one hand, while on the other hand, they weakened the protection against dismissal of employees with permanent employment contracts (*Employment protection...*, 2017, p. 12). The situation raised is worrying, especially in Poland, because for years the highest fixed-term employment rate has been recorded among EU countries. For example, in 2015, the highest percentage of temporary employees in the EU was recorded among the total number of employees in the 20-64 age group (22%, with the EU-28 average = 11%). The transition rate from a fixed-term employment contract to an indefinite one was similar, as a result of which Poland was classified sixth last among all EU Member States (*Employment protection...*, 2017, p. 4).

Definitional ambiguity also occurs in relation to flexible forms of employment. According to L. Florek (2003, p. 94), atypical employment is "non-employee employment under a contract other than an employment contract." A similar definition is presented by E. Kwiatkowski (2003, p. 13), according to whom non-standard employment is "employment in a different than traditional form, i.e. for an indefinite period, an eight-hour working day, permanent working hours." In turn, J. Wratny (2003, p. 116) defines flexible forms of employment as "a variety of ways to perform work according to principles that deviate from a model that can be considered traditional performance of work as part of an employment relationship between an employee and an employer employing him/her (contract work, subordinate, dependent), established on the basis of an indefinite employment contract, full-time, fixed hours and a specific place usually at the employer's office." However, Ł. Piotrowski (2015, p. 48, 49) emphasizes that flexible forms of employment constitute "a manner of using human activity in the work process, creating an opportunity for both sides (employer and employee) to regulate the form of the employment relationship separately from the generally applicable one, in a way that facilitates reconciliation of duties related to employment and legitimate interests of individual persons performing work". Based on the definitions given above, it can be concluded that atypical employment

is the establishment of an employment relationship in a form different from full-time employment and for an indefinite period.

Legal regulations in terms of the flexibility of the labour market in particular EU Member States mainly concerns three aspects of employment protection, i.e. protection of employees in the case of individual dismissals; requirements in terms of group dismissals and temporary forms of employment (*Employment protection...*, 2017, p. 15). All aspects of the regulations introduced are related to the provisions contained in the EU documents. For example, in *White Paper (Growth, Competitiveness, Employment...*, online) the increase in flexibility of employment was considered to be one of the most important priorities in labour markets within EU Member States. The issues concerning the promotion of atypical forms of employment were also discussed in the *European Employment Strategy (EU horizontal policies...*, 2006). Suggestions contained in the above-listed document are reflected, among others, in the *National Employment Strategy* in Priority 3, in which the improvement of the adaptability of employees and enterprises and the flexibility of the labour market is going to be achieved by promoting atypical forms of employment (*National Employment Strategy...*, 2005). In the summary of the analysed issue, it should be added that flexibility of employment is not only the establishment of an employment relationship, but also the termination of the employment relationship, however, provisions of, among others, the MOP Convention (*Convention on part-time work...*, online). European Social Charter (*European Social Charter...*, 1996) and Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (*The Charter of Fundamental...*, 2000) protect employees from being dismissed by employers (Wysocka, 2016, p. 84).

The flexibility of employment is related to the flexibility of working time that enables, on the one hand, meeting the needs of work organization according to the employer's plans, and on the other hand, the needs and abilities of the employee. Of course, the most advantageous solution would be a situation in which none of the parties to the contract has a privileged position and enforces a second solution that favours only one party.

Another determinant of employment flexibility is the flexibility of employees' remuneration that allows optimization of labour costs, especially in periods of economic crises resulting in a lower demand for specific goods or services, and thus a lower demand for labour. In such situations, the amount of wages should respond adequately to changes in factors determining it, such as "the situation on the labour market, the profitability of the enterprise or labour productivity" (Kalinowska, 2007, p. 194). The fourth dimension of employment flexibility is the flexibility of labour supply, which E. Kryńska (2000, p. 9-14) defines as the "adaptability of the workforce to the requirements of labour demand in such cross-sections as occupations, qualifications, education or space".

Signalled forms of employment flexibility are supplemented by the concept of flexicurity, according to which employment flexibility should occur inseparably with the social security of employees and persons temporarily remaining

outside the employment relationship. In the summary of the theoretical outline of the research subject, it should be added that the analysed forms of employment flexibility are not new issues. These issues were already mentioned in 1993 in the White Paper and in 1997 in the Green Paper of the European Union. In the first of the above-mentioned documents, it was emphasized that the reason for the low efficiency of labour markets is a lack of flexibility, especially in dimensions such as working time, remuneration and the mobility of employees. On the other hand, the second document pointed to the need to undertake activities that enable achieving a balance between seemingly contradictory states of the labour market, i.e. flexibility of employment and the social security of employees (Wysocka, 2016, p. 105).

In recent years, regulations in Poland have been aimed at eliminating employment based on so-called *junk* contracts. In 2016, restrictions were placed on the number of successive fixed-term employment contracts, and the notice period for fixed-term employment contracts was equated with the period of notice for an indefinite employment relationship (*Employment protection...*, 2017, p. 14). In turn, since April 1, 2019, a new act on emergency medical services (Consolidated text of the Act on State Emergency Medical Services of April 25, 2019) came into force, according to which the emergency medical system in Poland will be nationalized, and such services can only be provided by independent public healthcare institutions or public companies with a minimum of 5% public capital shares.

Research assumptions

The objective of the research was to identify opinions about advantages and disadvantages of employment in atypical forms of work. The research was carried out in a chain of pharmacies and in the emergency medical unit operating in the province of Warmia and Mazury. The selection of diagnosed institutions was a deliberate procedure. These entities were chosen because the employees employed in them work mainly in atypical forms. It was assumed that their opinions on the research subject would be highly credible because they result from experience, and not just general knowledge about employment flexibility. The analyses were based on secondary data from 2016, which was compared with the results obtained by other researchers between 2003 and 2016; and the results obtained from this particular research.

The research procedure sought answers to the following questions:

- what is the knowledge of employees about atypical forms of work?
- what flexible forms of work are used in the surveyed entities?
- what are employees' opinions about the advantages of working in flexible forms?
- what are the employees' concerns about employment in flexible forms?

Based on the objective of the research and detailed questions, the following hypothesis was formulated: the majority of employees employed in the surveyed entities see more disadvantages than advantages in employment in atypical forms, which results from the combination of flexible employment mainly with less certainty about the duration of the employment relationship.

The diagnostic survey method was used in the research. Questionnaire surveys constituted the research technique and the tool was a survey questionnaire completed by sixty employees employed in pharmacies and thirty paramedics. The entities where the respondents work were located in the province of Warmia and Mazury.

Results

A total of 90 people participated in the research. The respondents from the chain of pharmacies were mostly women (70%) and the paramedics were mostly men (60%). The structure of respondents employed in individual atypical forms of employment is presented in Table 1.

The figures in the table show the main forms of atypical employment in the surveyed entities in 2016. Most of the employees in the chain of pharmacies had fixed-term contracts, and every third employee worked part-time. On the other hand, among the paramedics, self-employment and weekend employment dominated. Similar results, also obtained in 2016, were presented by M. Mazurkiewicz (2016, p. 41). In that study, part-time employment was declared by 70% of the respondents, 51.0% were employed based on contracts of mandates and 23.0% on contracts for a specific task. The same percentage of employees performed work based on self-employment.

Table 1

Employment structure in atypical forms of employment

Form of employment	Entity type	% Respondents
Fixed-term contract	P	67.0
	EM	17.0
Part-time	P	33.0
	EM	17.0
Civil law agreements	P	20.0
	EM	25.0
Weekend employment	P	13.0
	EM	32.0
Self-employment	P	0.0
	EM	41.0

P – pharmacies, EM – emergency medical services.

Source: own elaboration based on *Elastyczne formy...* (2016, p. 38-45), Świerszcz (2016, p. 46-65).

It should be mentioned that results similar to those presented above have been received in Poland for many years. For example, the research conducted by E. Kryńska published sixteen years ago (2003, p. 240, 241) showed that the most frequently used forms of atypical work in Polish enterprises were fixed-term contracts (78.4%), civil law contracts (68.6%), part-time employment contracts (66.3%) and self-employment (23.5%). The structure of the applied forms of employment has not changed much in the subsequent years. According to the results presented by B. Puzio-Waławik (2009, p. 189), fixed-term contracts (69.5%), civil law contracts (66.0%) and self-employment (22.4%) continued to dominate. The dominance of these forms of atypical employment also occurred in 2012 (among others, by Arendt, 2012, p. 22; Wysocka, 2013, p. 213).

In order to learn the advantages and disadvantages of employment in flexible forms, the respondents were first asked about the level of their knowledge about atypical employment. It was assumed that increased knowledge about the discussed forms of work would be related to an increased awareness of their pros and cons. A three-level scale was adopted: Knowledge, partial knowledge and no knowledge. The results obtained are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

The level of knowledge of flexible forms of employment

Employment form	Entity type	Assessment (% responses)		
		knowledge	partial knowledge	no knowledge
Fixed-term contract	P	100.0	0.0	0.0
	EM	100.0	0.0	0.0
Part-time employment	P	46.7	53.3	0.0
	EM	88.9	11.1	0.0
Civil law contracts	P	66.7	33.3	0.0
	EM	92.5	5.3	2.2
Weekend employment	P	20.0	80.0	0.0
	EM	64.0	32.0	4.0
Self-employment	P	33.3	67.7	0.0
	EM	100.0	0.0	0.0
Division of labour	P	13.3	67.7	20.0
	EM	8.9	59.0	32.1
Substitute employment	P	100.0	0.0	0.0
	EM	100.0	0.0	0.0
Telecommuting	P	40.0	60.0	0.0
	EM	32.0	65.0	3.0
On-call employment	P	23.3	76.7	0.0
	EM	100.0	0.0	0.0
Temporary employment	P	20.0	80.0	0.0
	EM	12.5	73.5	14.0

P – pharmacies, EM – emergency medical services.

Source: own elaboration based on *Elastyczne formy...* (2016, p. 38-45), Świerszcz (2016, p. 46-65).

Based on the data in the table, it can be concluded that the most well-known forms of employment in the surveyed entities are those in which employees are most often employed, i.e. in the chain of pharmacies – fixed-term employment, substitute employment and employment based on civil law contracts. In turn, paramedics declare the most knowledge in the field of fixed-term employment, civil law contracts, self-employment, substitute employment and on-call employment.

In the other forms listed in the table, similar results were recorded among employees of both entities. The discussed results should be supplemented with a lack of knowledge of employment in the form of division of labour (every fifth respondent from the chain of pharmacies and almost every third paramedic had no knowledge of it). In addition, respondents from both subgroups stated that they do not have knowledge of the forms of atypical employment, such as task-oriented work time, equivalent work time, shortened work week, flexible working time or individual work time schedule. These forms of work were also listed in the questionnaire.

Other researchers obtained similar results to the results presented above. For example, from the nationwide research into the knowledge of flexible forms of employment conducted among 4,610 employees published ten years ago by A. Mazur (2008, p. 132), it can be concluded that forms such as the following contracts were best known: fixed-term contracts – 97%, contracts of mandate – 96 %, contracts for a trial period – 91%, contracts for a specific task – 90% and substitute employment contracts – 58%. In turn, in the research carried out in the Lower Silesian Province (sample of 1,000 employees), 57% of all respondents declared a relatively high knowledge of flexible forms of employment (Sochańska-Kawiecka *et al.*, 2013, p. 44, 45).

Employees participating in the research see a number of advantages to working in flexible forms. In their opinion, these forms of employment also have disadvantages. The main advantages and disadvantages of practicing flexible forms of employment are summarized in Table 3.

Respondents from both professional groups indicated more disadvantages than advantages resulting from employment in atypical forms. For the employees of pharmacies and paramedics, the greatest benefit they have from flexible employment is more time for the family. In other words – they have greater opportunities to combine work and family life. Among the advantages, the respondents also indicated the possibility of obtaining additional employment because they can undertake other work. However, flexibility of their employment may also result in lower remuneration in situations when, “for some reason” they are not able to fulfil the previously agreed time proportion of work.

The main disadvantage of employment in flexible forms, according to the majority of respondents, is the uncertainty of employment and a short notice period, which results from the limited legal protection of atypical employment. For every fifth employee of a pharmacy and every fourth paramedic, employment in flexible forms prevents them from participation in training at the company’s

Table 3

Advantages and disadvantages of employment in flexible forms of work

Specification	% Responses	
	P	EM
Advantages		
More free time	33.3	14.1
Additional source of income	33.3	27.0
Gaining new professional experience	23.3	0.0
Better chances of finding the right job	27.0	0.0
More time for the family	37.9	48.0
Increased opportunities to pursue one's interests	0.0	18.0
Disadvantages		
Insecurity of employment	53.0	62.0
Short notice period	40.0	73.0
Lower earnings	26.7	48.0
Ineffective/non-motivating form of remuneration	0.0	16.0
Limited legal protection	26.7	82.0
Lack of creditworthiness	18.0	0.0
No access to training in the company	20.0	25.0
Irregularity of income	68.2	12.0
Fewer opportunities for promotion	40.9	0.0

P – pharmacies, EM – emergency medical services.

Source: own elaboration based on *Elastyczne formy...* (2016, p. 38-45), Świerszcz (2016, p. 46-65).

expense. It is puzzling to find that nearly 70% of pharmacy employees indicated the irregularity of income. Such situations may affect employees employed on the basis of civil law contracts or result from the fact that some of the respondents work in franchise entities, which may generate disruptions in the flow of receivables between the franchisor and individual franchisees. However, these issues were not identified in the discussed research.

Opinions of respondents concerning the advantages and disadvantages of atypical employment correspond to the results obtained in studies conducted by M. Kolwitz *et al.* (2017, p. 68-72) between 2014-2015 among nurses and paramedics from the West Pomeranian Province. The cited authors stated that the majority of employees surveyed prefer employment in the form of a permanent employment contract. The indicated preference results from associating this form of employment with greater “employment protection” and greater “social protection”. Some respondents declared preferences for performing work in the form of self-employment, which resulted from the possibility of obtaining higher income by performing work for an increased number of hours.

The above-mentioned financial aspect of the possibility of performing work in the form of self-employment does not correspond to the postulate of paramedics and nurses of the emergency medical service system seeking employment only on the basis of a permanent employment contract (Kurowska, 2016). If such a regulation enters into force without increasing the remuneration of this group of employees at the same time, then those who chose self-employment for financial reasons would lose such opportunities because the employment contract must comply with the number of working hours specified in the Labour Code.

The advantages and disadvantages of employment in flexible forms summarized in Table 3 can be considered as relatively typical and changing insignificantly in the opinion of Polish employees. This statement is justified because similar results were obtained in research published eleven years ago (among others, by Dziubiński & Kowalewski, 2008, p. 109-126), seven years ago (among others, by Wysocka, 2016, p. 188 – research completed in 2012) and three years ago (among others, by Mazurkiewicz, 2016, p. 44).

Conclusion

The empirical material collected in the research confirmed the hypothesis. It was determined that the employees taking part in the research reported more disadvantages than advantages resulting from employment in atypical forms of work. The self-assessment of knowledge regarding flexible forms of employment can be considered satisfactory, which probably results from the fact that in the surveyed entities flexible forms of employment constitute the basic form of employment and most respondents work in these forms.

The employees of both professional groups associate flexible employment mainly with fears of an easier and faster loss of employment because, in their opinion, these forms of employment are less protected by law. Perhaps their articulation of these fears results from the practices they experience in the entities they work for. It seems that these issues may be an interesting subject of detailed research and analyses regarding pathologies occurring in the labour environment, including those resulting from the employment of employees in atypical forms of employment.

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