

## Chapter 2

### 45+ POLISH WOMEN AT HOME AND IN THE LABOUR MARKETS

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#### ABSTRACT

*The chapter discusses the assumptions and main conclusions from the research conducted within the framework of the Polish part of the Time4Help project. The aim of the research was to evaluate the situation of mature Polish women in the context of challenges in the labour market. The main source of data for the analysis was the qualitative (semiotic) and quantitative research (CATI – computer assisted telephone interview). As part of the semiotic research, the authors analysed texts from broadly understood culture and mainly from 2016 to 2018. The CATI research was carried out in 2019 with the use of proprietary questionnaires on representative samples of women aged 45–65 and employers.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Polish part of the *Time4Help*<sup>1</sup> project was to develop, test and implement new solutions to support mature women. We have defined the target group of the project, that is, mature women, as women aged 45–65, regardless of their current professional activity. Determining the lower limit of the assumed age range was preceded by desk research, the aim of which was to fit into the characteristics (the most common in the literature on the subject) of middle-aged adults involved in taking care of dependent people (Evans

et al., 2016; Friedman, Sung, & Wiemers, 2017; Silverstein, Tur-Sinai, & Lewin-Epstein, 2020; Wiemers & Bianchi, 2015). The upper age limit – pre-retirement – was in a way imposed on us due to certain constraints of support from projects financed by the European Social Fund in Poland. According to the applicable law, in Poland 65 is the official retirement age, whereas women can retire at the age of 60.

As for limiting the target group only to women, while developing the concept of the project we thought that the group defined as mature women is the group particularly in need of effective support, and the need for this support will increase in the future. Mature women constitute the majority of the so-called sandwich generation, and they need support in every country. As for Europe, such a need is visible especially in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, where the notion of sandwich generation is still little known and rather not taken into account when developing systemic solutions. We assumed unequal treatment of women in the labour market as a key factor determining the situation of mature women. In all European countries, the employment rate for women is lower than that for men, while in countries such as Poland the difference amounts to over a dozen percentage points (Eurostat, 2020, 2021). Female employees earn less in general (statistically), and also less than men even if they have the same positions. It is due to the fact that they work much more often in the so-called helping professions that are usually lower paid. Women also less frequently take managerial positions. As potential employees, they are not that attractive because they are stereotypically perceived as less able to cope with modern technologies and less available due to the heavier burden of household duties. Finally, in many countries including Poland, women retire faster and, with statistically lower income and shorter professional activity, they are unable to earn a pension that will secure a decent life for them when they stop working. Higher average life expectancy, frequent lack of opportunities for self-development due to involvement in looking after dependent people and low income constitute a serious risk of poverty and loneliness in old age. Health problems resulting from, for example, long-term care for those who are dependent can be an additional problem.

In the project, we wanted to analyse the situation of Polish mature women and, using the results of the research, suggest solutions that may effectively increase the chances of improving their situation in the labour market. In order to bridge the gap in statistical data, at the stage of in-depth diagnosis of needs in the project, we planned primary research on representative samples dedicated to the broadly understood issues of mature women in Poland. From the point of view of the project's objectives, it was crucial to answer two research questions:

- (1) What is the perception of mature women in Polish society in the group of employers and the feelings of women aged 45–65 in this respect?
- (2) Are there any differences in the perception of the attractiveness of mature women as a group of potential employees according to employers and mature women themselves?

In this chapter, we will strive to answer these two research questions.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

The main source of data for the analysis was two types of research – qualitative (semiotic) and quantitative research (CATI – computer assisted telephone interview). The qualitative research was carried out with the use of semiotics and tools developed on its basis. It is worth emphasising that the semiotic research does not ask questions directly to respondents but covers existing texts from broadly understood culture. The semiotic research allowed us to identify the threads and themes of female maturity in popular culture, as well as the barriers present in this area in public discourse. The research on the so-called popular culture texts concerned the perception of mature femininity in general and in the context of work. Its aim was to understand the mechanisms, symbolism and codes of mature femininity present in popular culture and in public discourse. The survey was carried out in the first quarter of 2019 by a company specialising in this type of activity.<sup>2</sup> The texts used for the analysis came mainly from Poland from the years 2016 to 2018. Texts from other countries and materials from earlier periods were also taken into consideration. In total, over 500 press texts and about 1,000 videos, advertisements, book guides and Internet portals were analysed. The results of the semiotic research were to be used primarily to increase the effectiveness of communication with the distinguished target group.

The main objective of the CATI research was to assess the situation of mature women in Poland, their involvement in family and professional life, in activities related to improving their skills and competences, as well as to evaluate their state of being, economic situation and values important in life. The research was carried out in July 2019 with the use of proprietary questionnaires by a specialised company dealing with public opinion research.<sup>3</sup> Interviews lasted, on average, 20 minutes. The study was addressed to two groups – women aged 45–65 declaring their permanent place of residence in Poland and employers. Both groups included people and entities from all over the country. They were informed about its confidential nature and the

fact that its results will be presented only in the form of aggregate statistics. The size of the female sample included 1,010 people. It was representative in terms of the following characteristics: age groups, education level, the region of residence and size of the place of residence. The quotas for each category were proportional to the distribution of a given characteristic in the population. In the group of employers, 104 interviews were carried out. An employer was understood as an organisation employing (apart from the owner) at least four people, which was represented by a decision-maker in the field of hiring employees in a given organisation, for example, an owner, a managing director or the head of the HR department, who declared having at least 50% impact on decisions concerning employment. The sample was stratified due to the size of the organisation, the place where it had its office including the size of the town/city. The size of the strata was proportional to the distribution of characteristics in the population of companies. Additionally, the sample was controlled due to the fact of employing or not employing mature women – 50% for each category. In the case of meeting the quotas in a way slightly different from the assumptions, we applied post-stratification weighting. The characteristics of the research samples in terms of the indicated features are presented in [Table 1](#). As for the sample of female respondents, three age groups were distinguished: 45–55 years (women who have at least five years of work to go before reaching the full retirement age), 56–60 years (women who are at pre-retirement age and have related employee privileges) and 61–65 years (women at the retirement age). The level of education has been divided into three categories: primary or lower, secondary or post-secondary and tertiary or academic degree. The place of residence was considered at the NUTS 1 level, that is, macro-regions. In Poland, a division into seven macro-regions has been in force since 2018, whereas this year the Mazowieckie Voivodeship was separated as an individual macro-region. A similar solution was adopted in the second part of the study concerning employers. The size of the place of residence for both CATI research samples was determined on a seven-point scale – [Table 1](#) shows the results cumulated into four categories. In the case of the sample of employers, the size of the organisation was determined on a five-point scale. [Table 1](#) shows the division into three categories: micro-companies, small companies and medium and large companies.

In addition to the characteristics presented in [Table 1](#), it is worth paying attention to other respondents' features which did not concern the officially required quotas. About 45% of mature women evaluated their financial situation as average, which means that they can afford to satisfy their needs on a daily basis, but additional expenses might be a problem. A similar percentage of respondents can only afford to satisfy their basic needs or do not

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample of Mature Women and the Sample of Employers.**

Characteristic	Characteristic Categories/Percentage			
<i>Mature women</i>				
Age group	45–55 years old	56–60 years old	61–65 years old	
	47.0	27.5	25.5	
Education level	Primary or lower	Secondary, post-secondary	Tertiary, academic degree	
	49.0	44.4	6.6	
Region of residence	South	Northwest	Southwest	North
	17.9	17.2	12.1	14.3
	Central	Eastern	Masovian Voivodeship	
	10.7	13.8	14.0	
Place of residence	Village	City under 50 thous. residents	City under 200 thous. residents	City over 200 thous. residents
	35.6	26.7	19.3	19.4
<i>Employers</i>				
Firm size	5–9 employees	10–49 employees	50 employees and more	
	61.5	17.4	21.1	
Region of activity	South	Northwest	Southwest	North
	20.8	17.8	10.2	13.8
	Central	Eastern	Masovian Voivodeship	
	8.6	10.1	18.7	
Place of activity	Village	City under 50 thous. residents	City under 200 thous. residents	City over 200 thous. residents
	26.1	24.8	17.7	31.4

Source: Own elaboration.

possess sufficient financial resources to do this. Only 9% indicated that they can afford everything they need. The most frequently used source of information is television and the Internet, followed by friends, family and neighbours. Over 50% of the respondents take part in religious practices at least once a week. In the group of employers, 63% were women. Overall, 36% were the main decision-maker in terms of hiring employees, whereas the remaining 64% make decisions in this regard together with others. In terms of the position held, the respondents were mainly owners/co-owners (33%), people dealing with HR matters (31%), directors (16%) or senior managers (14%). According to the research assumptions, 50% of organisations were those employing mature women. Among them, the highest percentage was

constituted by companies/institutions in which the percentage of mature women in the staff was up to 25%, whereas the lowest – those where the percentage was more than 75%.

In order to analyse the data from the semiotic research, we relied on the semiotic square created by the Lithuanian semiotician, A. J. Greimas (1969). According to this model, meaning and value in a specific culture are generated by a place in the structure formed by binary oppositions (e.g. good–bad) and the relations of contradictions complementing them (e.g. not-bad–not-good).<sup>4</sup> As for data from the CATI research, we mainly analysed the number and frequency of selection of individual categories of answers in questions as well as descriptive statistics. Additionally, in order to assess the relationship between demographic and occupational characteristics and life situation, and values important in the life of mature women in Poland, a classification was performed using the two step cluster analysis method. This method allowed us to take into account both quantitative and qualitative variables in the research. Its selection was determined by the measurement of most of the characteristics included in the research questionnaire on a nominal or ordinal scale. The procedure applied within the software used (SPSS 26.0) made it possible to automatically select the optimal number of clusters by comparing the value of the model selection criterion for different grouping solutions. As a measure of distance, we adopted the likelihood ratio, whereas in the procedure of automatic determination of the number of clusters we used the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). One of the possible results of the classification was the formation of an output variable indicating that each participant belonged to a specific cluster (The SPSS, 2001). This made it possible to analyse the overrepresentation/underrepresentation of respondents with the selected categories of characteristics in individual clusters. Overrepresentation is understood as greater percentage share of representatives of a given subgroup in the cluster than the percentage share for the entire sample, whereas underrepresentation is the opposite situation, that is, a lower percentage share of representatives of a given subgroup in the cluster than the percentage share for the entire sample (basing on: Skiba et al., 2008).

### 3. PERCEPTION OF MATURE WOMEN ACCORDING TO SEMIOTIC RESEARCH

As part of the research of mature femininity, signs<sup>5</sup> available in texts from popular culture, advertising, press, television, films, literature and music were analysed. Thanks to this research, it was possible to identify the threads and

topics of mature women in popular culture. We particularly strove to identify barriers to this target group existing in public discourse because, as mentioned earlier, the main objective of the research was to increase the effectiveness of communication in the area of employing mature women. The main topic of the research was the professional activity of mature women and the so-called codes functioning in popular culture, that is, the methods of presenting mature femininity the most adequate for Polish society. According to cultural experts, codes are a form of a cultural shortcut and constitute typical visual, verbal, sound or mixed forms of discourse expression at a specific point in time (Alexander, 2000; Polak & Żurawicka-Koczan, 2011).

On the basis of the semiotic research, the main cultural barriers that hamper the employment of mature women have been identified in public discourse (Report on semiotic research carried out as part of the *Time4Help* project, 2019). From the perspective of women and employers themselves, they can be characterised as follows:

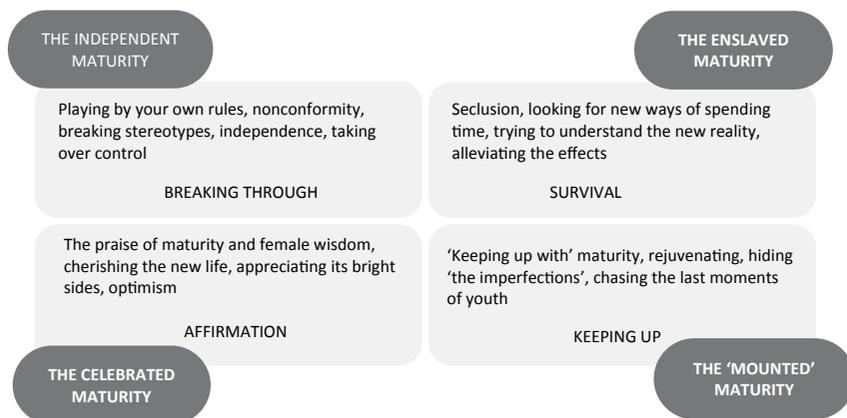
- *Family limitations* – in public discourse in Poland mature women are often depicted as people involved in numerous household and family duties, which undoubtedly discourages them from fighting for their own rights in the labour market. As confirmed by the CATI research, family responsibilities and duties are crucial for mature women, whereas issues connected with professional life become of secondary importance. On the other hand, the employers are not interested in employing a mature woman because they fear that she might abandon her job for the sake of family or roles she has to fulfil, for example, a grandmother or carer. It seems that this barrier, along with the perceived image of a mature woman as the guardian of hearth and home, is the main reason for not taking up any professional activity or taking it up in a very limited scope.
- *The cult of youth and change* – this type of discourse deprives mature women of their professional strengths and depreciates their skills as well as abilities. Stereotypically, a mature woman is perceived as a person reluctant to change and an employee who finds it difficult to keep up with modern technologies and adapt to them. The employer prefers someone younger who can keep up with the times and who will be open to changes and novelties. Loyalty and experience, which are attributes of mature women, are perceived rather pejoratively as a sign of stability or even stagnation.
- *Fear, shame and humiliation* – it is believed that mature women tend to stick to the same workplace for several years, without the possibility or willingness to change or take on new challenges. Such an attitude also

discourages them from, for example, setting up their own business. As a result, employers gain advantage over female employees, as in the case of employees with disabilities. They may also exploit them and see no need to invest in their development.

- *Stagnation in a full-time job* – there is a conviction among mature women that working full-time is ‘safe’ for them. The moment of losing one’s full-time job evokes great fear that makes it impossible for the person to look for something new or adapt to the current requirements of the labour market. From the employer’s point of view, mature women are a burden for the company, especially that there are less costly and more flexible forms of employment that employers can use.
- *Looking forward to retirement* – another conviction says that mature women are less valuable for a company than their younger colleagues. According to employers, mature employees (regardless of gender) constitute a burden and a limitation for the company, especially in the context of adapting to changing market conditions.
- *Unwanted potential* – demographic changes and the ageing of Polish society create an opportunity for mature women to enter the labour market. However, employers should send a clear message saying that this group is a source of potentially good employees with high potential. It should be noted that employers are still not prepared to consciously employ mature women. They treat them as a ‘demographic compulsion’ and are not convinced of the importance of features such as experience or loyalty.

The analysis of the texts of culture collected during the semiotic research made it possible to distinguish four main ways of perceiving mature femininity, schematically presented in the form of a semiotic square in Fig. 1. Their characteristics are as follows:

- *Independent maturity* – depicting the mature woman as a strong individual, not succumbing to peer pressure or stereotypes. She establishes conditions on her own, going beyond applicable schemes and models. The mature woman does not undergo any dictates of ‘young and beautiful’ but stays independent.
- *Enslaved maturity* – lack of willingness to experience anything new. The mature woman keeps thinking about the past and just tries to survive. She holds on to the role assigned to her – the role of a caretaker,



Source: Report on semiotic research carried out as part of the *Time4Help* project (2019).

**Fig. 1. Semiotic Square of Perception of Mature Women in Popular Culture.**

a grandmother and the guardian of hearth and home. She endures comments and stereotypical opinions about her. When at work, she looks forward to her retirement.

- *Celebrated maturity* – radiating joy. The mature woman treats her maturity as the beginning of something new, time for herself she can spend however she wants. She follows her passions which were often put off for years, accepts herself as she is, and enjoys the life. She is convinced that she can achieve a lot more professionally, financially and emotionally.
- *'Mounted' maturity* – desire to keep up with changes. The mature woman tries to meet expectations, she is active and looks for practical tips. She is convinced that one cannot succumb to old age and has to fight for themselves. She can take care of herself and work on her physical and mental condition. According to this idea, mature femininity requires effort – therefore she constantly looks for practical hints.

The main opposition is 'independent maturity', that is, the strong and independent woman versus 'enslaved maturity' presenting the woman who succumbs to the current stereotypes. The contradiction of the former is 'mounted maturity' indicating the need to keep up with the upcoming changes, whereas the contradiction of the latter is 'celebrated maturity', which treats this stage of life as a time to pursue one's own passions and interests. 'Mounted maturity' and 'celebrated maturity' create the second semantic system based on opposition.

#### 4. SITUATION OF MATURE WOMEN IN POLAND ACCORDING TO CATI RESEARCH

The CATI research on the representative sample of women aged 45–65 concerned mainly the following aspects: assessment of their life situation including the context of their own development, assessment of the professional situation and their values. Due to the fact that in the questionnaire used in the research conducted among employers at the same time we also asked about the assessment of the professional situation of mature women, it was possible to confront the opinions of both groups.

##### 4.1. Life Situation and Taking Care of Personal Development

According to the results of the CATI research, the majority of women (70%) aged 45–65 living in Poland are in stable relationships. In the household where they live, there are on average three people, but most often two (37% of the respondents' answers). Mature women very often take care of different people (49% of the respondents). In most cases, they look after children or parents (35% of answers for each option), grandchildren (29% of answers), but less often partners/husbands (19%) or other people (e.g. relatives, siblings, grandparents, unrelated persons – less than 5% of the answers for each option). It is worth emphasising that this care is very intense – an average amount of time devoted to this activity is 35 hours a week (in the group of women who provide this care), which is equivalent to working full-time. Importantly, more than one-third of mature women (38%) look after people with disabilities who belong to one of the above-mentioned groups of dependent people. About 18.6% of the respondents belong to the sandwich generation (i.e. they take care of the older and younger generation at the same time), whereas 8.6% to the group of working sandwich generation.

The first group of questions concerned the self-assessment of independence, primarily in the use of broadly understood modern technologies and mobility. Mature women, especially those from the younger group (45–55 years old), feel very comfortable with what the online world offers, especially when it comes to basic functions and activities. They can use the Internet, smartphones and computers, as well as social media and instant messaging – 49% of the respondents stated they are fully independent in this regard. Online banking, shopping or reservations are not a problem for 37% of the respondents. However, the situation looks different when it comes to driving a car – only 35% of the respondents indicated full independence in this

respect, and another 6% indicated little need for help. The assessment of one's health appeared to be positive. Mature women assess their mood and general sensation on a daily basis as good (77% of all respondents), whereas 83% of the respondents who are professionally active – as good or very good. As for physical fitness and current state of health, 69% of all respondents perceive it as good or very good. As before, a higher percentage was observed in the group of working women – 77% for physical fitness and 78% for the current state of health, respectively. Better assessments of all aspects of health in the case of professionally active women are probably due to the fact that women who feel better work much more often, although it is possible that better mood and general sensation may be the result of professional activity. Another interesting finding concerned low activity of mature women in their free time. Only about 12% of the respondents stated that they belong to associations, foundations or housing communities, 8% indicated they are active on blogs or Facebook and another 8% stated they were involved in sports and tourism. About 7% of the respondents claimed they belong to religious organisations or movements. As many as 67% indicated lack of any activity in an organised form in their free time.

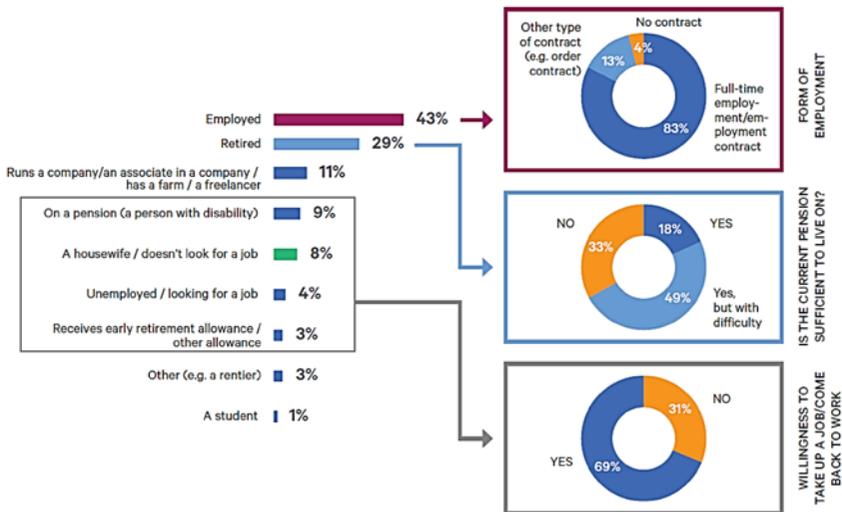
Among the women who are not currently retired, the declared awareness of the amount of their future retirement pension is not high – only 52% of the respondents stated they knew it. The vast majority of respondents have great concerns about whether the amount of the future retirement pension will allow them to live a decent life – 63% of the respondents indicated that they are afraid that their pension will not be enough for them to live on, whereas another 30% claimed that it will be enough, but with difficulty. Only 7% of the respondents indicated that the future retirement pension will fully satisfy their needs. It is worth emphasising that the younger the respondents were, the more negative opinions about the future retirement pension they expressed.

We obtained a worrying, yet interesting distribution of answers to the questions about the possibility of self-development. The need for professional development and ambitions related to a professional career are not the most important in the hierarchy of mature women's needs, because the first place is taken by the family and responsibilities related to the household. As many as 73% of the respondents indicated that their family/home responsibilities are more important than a professional career. In turn, 57% of the respondents stated that they learn new things when it is necessary for their work, and 48% because they want to develop professionally. Only slightly more than one-third of the respondents (36%) stated that their family and friends support them in their professional development and career, and 32%

considered professional development and career as a way to achieve their personal dreams and goals. The vast majority of mature women do not plan any changes related to their professional activity in the near future – only 22% plan to change or find a job that suits them better, whereas 5% plan to start their own business. It is worth noting that in the opinion of mature women, this group needs support in the area of employment and education – on average 73% of the respondents said ‘yes’, and in the group of those who take care of others the percentage of affirmative answers was as high as 79%.

#### 4.2. Current Professional Situation

According to CATI research results, it can be concluded that the professional situation of mature women in Poland is diversified (see Fig. 2). More than half of the respondents are professionally active (54%). About 43% of the respondents stated they are employed, and 11% indicated running their own business or pursuing a freelance profession. Among the employed, 83% indicated a full-time employment contract, 13% indicated a different type of contract (part-time employment contract, a civil law contract) and 4% of the respondents described their professional activity as work without any contract (i.e. in the so-called grey area). The respondents who said they were retired (29%) were asked to assess whether the amount of pension was



Source: Own elaboration based on CATI research results.

Fig. 2. The Professional Situation of Mature Women in Poland.

sufficient to satisfy their daily needs. The responses were not optimistic. Only 18% of this group indicated that the retirement pension was enough for them to live on, another 49% indicated that it was enough but with difficulties, and as many as 33% gave negative answers. Another group of respondents (24%), including those on disability pension (9%), not working and taking care of their household (8%), unemployed (4%) or on a bridging allowance (3%), were asked about their willingness to take up employment or return to work. In this group, 69% of the respondents expressed their willingness to undertake professional activity. The remaining 31% of the respondents who did not want to enter the labour market were asked about potential arguments that could convince them to take up employment. The most common answer was a difficult financial situation (31%) and better state of health (15%). It is worth adding that 26% of the respondents from this group indicated the lack of any argument that would convince them to undertake professional activity.

In the group of mature women and in the group of employers, we asked a question about the opinions concerning the employment of mature women, and presented the answers obtained from both groups in Fig. 3. The analysis of the distribution of answers shows that the issue of employing mature women is perceived differently by employers and by mature women themselves. The latter believe that employing mature women makes it possible to



Source: Own elaboration based on CATI research results.

**Fig. 3. Opinions on the Impact of Employing Mature Women on the Functioning and Evaluation of the Organisation According to CATI Research Carried Out Among Mature Women and Employers.**

diversify experiences among employees and improve the company's image. Even greater differences in the assessment performed by both groups were observed in the case of arguments convincing employers to employ mature women. While both groups agreed that the key arguments included professional experience and qualifications (40% in the group of mature women and 50% in the group of employers), there was a significant difference in the evaluation of the importance of life experience – this argument was indicated by 30% of mature women and only 9% of employers.

Another area covered by the CATI research was the participation of mature women in educational activities. Only 30% of the respondents admitted that in the last five years they had taken part in some form of education. It is worth noting that the majority were improving their professional qualifications (62%) or digital skills (22%). Even fewer – only 24% – declared their willingness to continue education in the future. On the other hand, in the group of employers, as many as 64% of answers to the question about the need for further education of mature women were affirmative (mainly in the field of digital skills and professional qualifications – approximately 80% of the respondents declared the need for further education).

#### 4.3. Values Important in the Life of Mature Women in Poland – Differentiation Due to the Characteristics Taken into Account in CATI Research

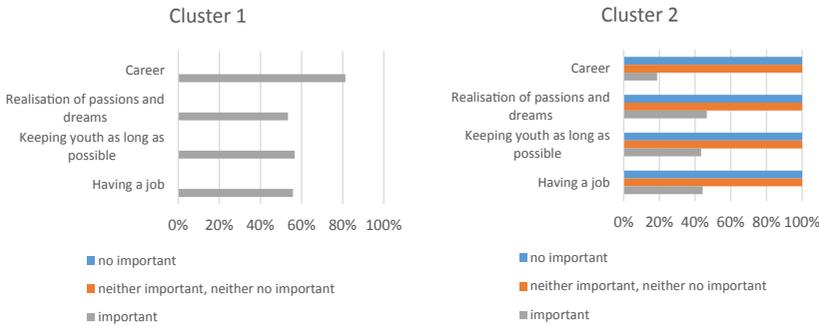
Another area covered by the CATI research was values important in the life of mature women. The hierarchy of values influences the activity of mature women in the labour market, and is believed to be important when making decisions and choices. It is also connected with self-esteem, including the evaluation of professional attractiveness. The research covered the following values:

- (1) family/helping children/parents, etc.,
- (2) professional career,
- (3) active life,
- (4) obtaining a retirement pension that makes it possible to live a decent life,
- (5) developing passions and pursuing dreams,
- (6) staying in good health as long as possible,

- (7) staying young as long as possible,
- (8) having a job and
- (9) being independent from others.

The values were assessed using a five-point scale: completely unimportant, rather unimportant, neither important nor unimportant, rather important and very important. The opinions expressed by women allowed us to divide them into groups. Due to the fact that the basis for the classification should be variables with sufficient differentiating properties, these properties were assessed in the first step. The differentiation of the opinions concerning the importance of specific values was checked with the use of the coefficient of variation calculated by comparing the standard deviation of a given variable with its mean value. The obtained values of the coefficients of variation ranged from 10% when assessing the importance of maintaining good health as long as possible to 34% for the professional career. In the further analysis, only those variables (values) were taken into account that were characterised by sufficient differentiation, that is, the value of the coefficient of variation at the minimum level of 20%. The adopted threshold value resulted from the literature review in this field (Everitt, 2002; Reed, Lynn, & Meade, 2002). Ultimately, the variables that were qualified for the further part of the analysis included (2) professional career, (5) developing passions and pursuing dreams, (7) staying young as long as possible and (8) having a job. For the purposes of the classification, the values of variables were taken into account after aggregation into three states: important (initially: very important and rather important), neither important nor unimportant and unimportant (initially: completely unimportant and rather unimportant). As a result of classification, we obtained two clusters, which appeared to be the best solution characterised by the best values of measures of model quality assessment. The Silhouette measure of the coherence and distinctiveness of individual clusters was 0.6, which proves high quality grouping (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 2005). The characteristics of both clusters are shown in Fig. 4.

The first cluster included only those people who evaluated all four values in classification as important, that is, the respondents who value their professional career, the fact of having a job, the opportunity to develop their own passions and fulfil their dreams, for whom it is also important to stay young as long as possible. The second cluster included the remaining people – those who considered at least one of these characteristics to be unimportant or neither important nor unimportant. The number of people in both clusters was similar and amounted to 470 and 540 people, respectively, which gives the percentage of 46.5% and 53.5%. The characteristic that differentiated the



Source: Own elaboration.

**Fig. 4. Characteristics of the Clusters Obtained in the Classification of Mature Women.**

two clusters the most was professional career, for which we noted the highest share in the first group of women who considered it to be important in life (81.3%) and the lowest share in the second group.

On the basis of the obtained classification results, the overrepresentation and underrepresentation of the respondents in specific clusters were calculated due to the metric characteristics and answers to other selected questions included in the research questionnaire. The analysis of the results made it possible to evaluate the diversity of values important in the life of mature women characterised by different categories of features, different situations or attitudes. In the research we took into consideration, among others, demographic characteristics, family situation, financial situation, educational activity and issues related to taking care of other people. In the first cluster which included respondents open to development possibilities and placing great importance on work and career there was overrepresentation of women from the central region and cities with more than 500,000 residents. The share of women who assessed their financial situation as very good, who planned further educational activities (e.g. training courses) and who evaluated the amount of future retirement pension as not sufficient to live a decent life was also higher than the percentage share for the entire sample. On the other hand, the underrepresentation in the first cluster occurred mainly for women living in medium-sized towns with a population of 100–199,000 people in the Mazowieckie region, evaluating their current financial situation as very bad and their future retirement pension as fully sufficient to live on. Women who do not regularly take care of other people, including people with disabilities, had a lower share in the cluster than the percentage share for the entire sample. However, the differences in relation to the mean in this case were slight – less than 3%.

The characteristics that did not have any differentiating significance were mainly the age group and the fact of having a stable relationship.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Referring directly to the research questions posed in the introduction to the chapter, it should be stated that the analyses carried out indicate that the perception of mature women in Polish society does not favour undertaking or maintaining professional activity by them. In Poland, a mature woman is perceived stereotypically as a guardian of hearth and home rather than someone pursuing a professional career. For mature women, career does not take a high place in the hierarchy of values. The most crucial for them is family and the state of health. Especially, the latter might be a serious obstacle in entering or re-entering the labour market, but it can also favour the decision about leaving a job when the family expects that, even at the cost of living on a very low retirement pension. Nevertheless, the most serious barriers to professional activity of mature women are their unwillingness and lack of need.

While carrying out CATI research on representative groups of mature women and employers, we found differences in the perception of mature women as potential employees. While the undisputed key arguments used by both groups are work experience and qualifications, it seems that women overestimate the significance of their life experience. The results of the research show that this is not a convincing argument for employers and not a reason for hiring someone. What employers value in mature female employees is their flexibility and availability, as well as possible financial incentives from the state. Further differences are visible in the approach to training and improving one's qualifications. Employers see the need for special training courses for this group much more than mature women themselves. Such courses should concern mainly digital skills because employers tend to think that these are the competences which female candidates usually lack. For employers, a positive social perception of employing representatives of this group is of little importance – any decisions about hiring them result from a natural need rather than a willingness to improve the company's image. According to the research results, overestimating one's own IT skills or not seeing any gaps in this area, as well as overestimating life experience in the workplace, are the main reasons for possible recruitment failures in the group of mature women. Proper preparation of this group for entering the labour market is undoubtedly a task for supporting institutions and training companies. It is also worth considering sending the right message to employers, communicating the strengths of mature women as potential employees.

## NOTES

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2. Semiotic Solutions sp.j. is one of the few companies in Poland that professionally deal with semiotic research. It has been operating on the Polish market since 2005 under the license of the British company Semiotic Solutions UK. The company uses a methodology that is unique in the world, based on semiotics and cultural anthropology. For more information visit [www.semiotyka.com](http://www.semiotyka.com).
3. IQS Sp. z o.o. is a Polish research and analytical company operating in the market for over 25 years. For more information visit <https://grupaiqs.pl/pl>.
4. Binary oppositions are important for understanding the basic semantic mechanism, but they do not make it possible to describe the deeper structure of the analysed phenomenon. The use of the semiotic square increases and improves the recognition of the analytical classes by increasing their number from two (good/bad) to four (good/bad, not-good and not-bad).
5. According to [de Saussure \(1995\)](#), a sign is a combination of two elements: the signifier (e.g. a word or a picture) and the signified (e.g. meaning of the word or the picture).

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