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## ENTREPRENEURSHIP OF SINGLE MOTHERS: SELECTED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

This article aims to present the entrepreneurship of single mothers, taking into account the multiple aspects of this phenomenon. The first part outlines selected definitions and classifications of entrepreneurship and characteristics of an entrepreneur. Then, an attempt is made to analyse the basic conditions for the development of entrepreneurship in the social group in question and examples of various forms of support in Poland are described.

This paper forms a conceptual overview contributing to the discussion about entrepreneurship in the changing social conditions connected with the new model of family functioning. The author is aware that a thorough analysis of this phenomenon requires detailed and in-depth analyses and research.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship of single mothers, entrepreneurial mindset determinants, entrepreneurship promotion

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is assigned many meanings. In economics, it is frequently seen as a major determinant of a country's socio-economic development. Social sciences, in turn, explain this notion by concentrating rather on defining a set of human characteristics driving entrepreneurial behaviour.

According to data from the National Population and Housing Censuses, the number of single-parent families and their share in the entire structure of households in Poland is growing. In 2011, more than every fourth family consisted of a single parent and his/her children. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of single parents increased by over 23%. About two out of three of these families live in

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a city. The proportion of single mothers in the structure of families in 2011 was almost 20%, and that of fathers – 3.0% [8, p. 44].

Single parenthood and upbringing by only one parent (mainly the mother) is an increasingly common experience of inhabitants of many, both poorly and highly developed, countries. In 2011, 15.5 million single-parent families lived with at least one child under 25 years of age in EU-28. They accounted for 11.0% of all families in EU-28. In many big EU cities, there was a relatively high proportion of single-parent families, and the lowest percentages were noted in rural and sparsely populated areas [5].

Women being heads of single-parent families face many difficulties in remaining in the labour market, since they are less available having to care for their children and to do a multitude of household chores. This social group, however, seems capable of being active and entrepreneurial despite existing constraints. For both economic and social reasons, the government should be concerned with developing entrepreneurial attitudes in that group of women and launching mechanisms for making use of such attitudes in practice.

## **2. THE ESSENCE OF AND SELECTED TYPES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

The variety of meanings results in entrepreneurship being a theoretical and practical research subject for representatives of many academic fields, primarily management, economics, sociology and psychology. The relevant literature also presents numerous multidisciplinary studies. There are, therefore, many simple and more complex definitions and classifications of entrepreneurship.

According to one of the simplest definitions, entrepreneurship is just the art of coping with various life situations. It can be learnt and trained [21]. Hence, this definition stresses the role of education in the development of entrepreneurship.

According to the classical depiction by P. Drucker, entrepreneurship should be understood as a specific approach to management involving the introduction of innovations that form the basis for a future business, with the best use of available resources [4]. There is, therefore, a strong correlation between innovation and entrepreneurship.

According to Timmons, entrepreneurship is a way of thinking, reasoning and acting that is opportunity obsessed and a pursuit of opportunity without regard for currently controlled resources [28, p.329]. This approach makes it clear that entrepreneurial action involves courage, determination, constant activity, ability to analyse phenomena and events occurring in the environment, and rapid and apt decision-making. It is also worth noting that entrepreneurship does not necessarily entail starting a business, yet in line with Gartner's classical understanding of the

organization and management theory, entrepreneurship is a role that individuals undertake to create organizations [7]. With such a definition of entrepreneurship, the focus should be on internal and external determinants of the decision to start a business. Moreover, as rightly pointed out by F. Bławat, typical acts of entrepreneurship include, for example, setting up a business and managing its development. Entrepreneurial behaviour, however, is a process rather than a single act [1].

One of the contemporary approaches is represented by the definition proposed by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor stating that entrepreneurship should be “any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business” [19]. GEM reports rely on calculations of various indicators that enable a quantitative and qualitative characterisation of entrepreneurship in individual countries and a determination of their ranking positions. Such indicators include: people attempting to start a business, start-up entrepreneurs, established entrepreneurs, subsistence entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship of companies. Those surveys concentrate mainly on the role of entrepreneurship in the economic development of each country.

Modern concepts of entrepreneurship focus primarily on multidisciplinary. It can be thus concluded that the example definitions of entrepreneurship quoted above complement each other.

Furthermore, the relevant literature presents numerous types of entrepreneurship. One of the classifications focuses on age, education, gender, health and family situation of the entrepreneur.

Academic entrepreneurship, understood broadly as the integration of science and economy, may evolve into various forms, chiefly as education cooperation, business counselling, organization of joint research programmes and creation of enterprises by researchers and, above all, by university students and graduates. Academic entrepreneurship concentrates on creative attitudes among academic communities and using the effects of such attitudes in business practice. Efficient cooperation between the academic and economic sectors should be a key element of national economic policy [22]. Therefore, researchers try to define entrepreneurial attitudes of young people, for example students, who are yet to decide about their future career. Universities are now becoming important as regards encouraging their students and staff to adopt open attitudes towards entrepreneurship, self-employment, expansion of knowledge matching the needs of the market and small and medium-sized enterprises, and initiating partnerships and network relationships with regional companies [16].

The so-called mature entrepreneurship is another form. The literature often refers to entrepreneurs aged over 55 as grey entrepreneurs or senior businessmen, third-age entrepreneurs or second-career entrepreneurs. Mature entrepreneurship is relatively new in the Polish literature, and so are many other issues of older age. Nonetheless, statistical data and empirical studies show that mature entrepreneurship is an undeniable fact in today’s world [30]. This is due, above all, to more and

more intensive demographic ageing of societies caused by longer human life and low birth rates. In the context of business activity, it is a fact that people over fifty display the following characteristics: lower propensity to take risks, smaller creativity and openness to change and lower self-confidence manifesting itself in limited self-presentation skills, as compared to younger persons. These features may actually inhibit entrepreneurial behaviours. Nonetheless, it should be noted that mature people are generally perceived as more reliable and trustworthy, which fosters lasting business contacts [24].

Another type of entrepreneurship addressed in the literature is family entrepreneurship. It plays a meaningful role in the economic development of a country, since values cherished by generations of family businesses lead to young people adopting positive entrepreneurial attitudes [31]. As demonstrated by empirical research by K. Wach, experiences of family entrepreneurship foster greater initiative in undertaking entrepreneurial activities among students. Thus, the experience of family entrepreneurship makes the young generation adhere to the entrepreneurial ethos, through appreciating the prominent role played by entrepreneurs in the society, and show greater propensity to take entrepreneurial risks [29]. Hence, a link exists between family and academic entrepreneurship.

Another factor determining entrepreneurial attitudes is gender, which, according to F. Bławat, is a determinant of company survival [2]. In today's society, female entrepreneurship is becoming more and more important. It is significant that socio-cultural impact, as manifested by the degree of approval for women running their own businesses, is particularly meaningful for female entrepreneurship. In addition, many studies indicate numerous constraints on female entrepreneurship. An analysis of the usefulness of various forms of business support for women running for office and starting their businesses is thus becoming a major issue [26].

It is worth noting that social entrepreneurship is now undoubtedly an intensively evolving field of economic practice and academic discussion. Its primary goal is to offer innovative solutions to help strengthen social integration, with a simultaneous positive impact on a country's socio-economic development. Social entrepreneurs, by definition, try to identify the exclusion of certain groups of people from economic activity, for example those without sufficient financial resources or educational achievements to find a job and achieve a decent standard of living. Social activists also strive to create solutions that release the potential of excluded social groups [17, p. 33].

Social entrepreneurship development may, therefore, be vital for single mothers who often find themselves in a difficult financial situation and who lack the educational achievements matching current needs of the labour market or support from their families and social environment. According to H. Fisher, it is women who have the biggest opportunities in the social economy sector and, as US studies reveal, it is there that they exert the greatest influence [6].

The above discussion suggests that entrepreneurship is a complex process, with a large variety of underlying factors. The next section attempts to identify those factors in the case of entrepreneurship of single mothers.

### 3. MAJOR DETERMINANTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SINGLE MOTHERS' ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Founding a company, achieving a strong competitive position or just survival in the market depends both on personal predispositions of individuals setting up ventures and on external conditions in which an entrepreneur operates. Figure 1 presents factors affecting entrepreneurial attitudes of single mothers. Those factors can both stimulate and limit entrepreneurial development. Moreover, they overlap and are strongly interrelated.

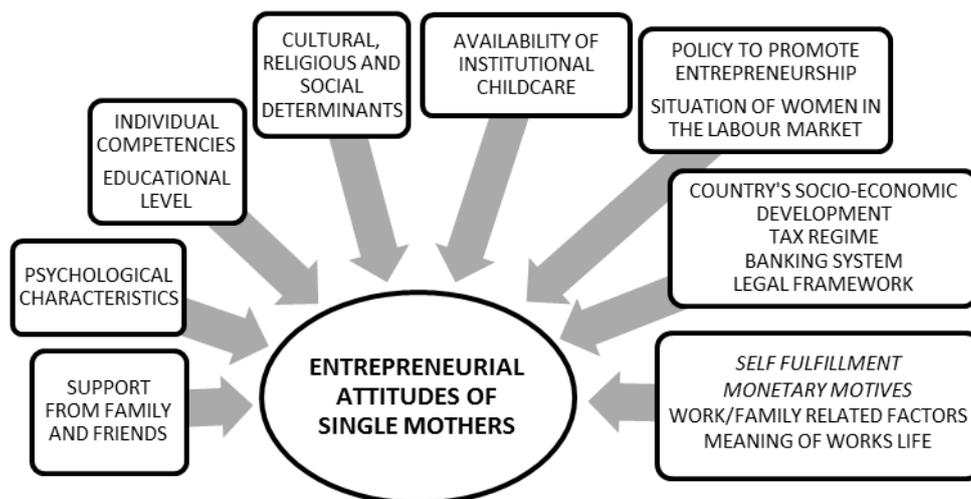


Fig. 1. Major determinants of entrepreneurial attitudes of single mothers (own elaboration)

Many of these factors concern all entrepreneurs, both men and women, especially those who have children. However, according to research the motivation to start a business is different for women and men. Money is an important factor reported by all perspective entrepreneurs, but for women more important than money are non-monetary components of entrepreneurship (e.g. time flexibility). Moreover, mothers more often than other groups of entrepreneurs think about the best match between work and family [15].

According to the research by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development [20, p. 6], both Polish women and men most often faced the following barriers to business development: too high non-wage labour costs, problems with attracting new customers, complex financial formalities, too complicated procedures, time-consuming formalities for, among others, issuing permits or licences, and changing labour law. A significant difference in barriers to doing business between men and women lies in conditions of family life and caretaking responsibilities for young children. Women more often than men point to limited access to institutional care of children.

According to EUROSTAT data contained in the report on female entrepreneurship in the Baltic States, up to 8% of the working age female population runs their own businesses. Finland follows, with the rate of 6% [3, p. 18]. Female entrepreneurship in Poland is expanding vastly, which does not mean that this trend, positive for the Polish economy, should not be reinforced.

A 2011 survey conducted by MultiBank suggests that every third company using its services is run by a woman. However, only one third of them was run by a mother, and women under 34 represented the lowest percentage. These data reveal how difficult it is for young mothers to reconcile work with raising children [32].

In addition to real financial and emotional problems, an overload with job responsibilities and household chores, this group of women must also fight against harmful stereotypes and prejudices. Unfortunately, the opinion that a two-parent family is a social norm is still dominant in Poland. As indicated above, the lifestyle of a single-parent family is led by nearly every fourth family in Poland. Despite this, it is still not considered to be alternative to and of the same value as a two-parent family. The lingering stereotype of a single mother as a loser, inept person leading a so-called "disorderly personal life," translates into false assessments of how that group of women functions in the labour market and runs their businesses.

In an extremely conservative, fortunately less and less common, understanding of a family, an absent father actually impairs family functioning and single-parent families are, by default, regarded as having smaller possibilities of fulfilling their socialising and educational functions. Research into the functioning of single-parent families, covering a broad spectrum of issues and taking into account both psychological and socio-economic factors, essentially undermines the existing stereotype. Its results prove that in many cases it is single motherhood that sometimes gives a woman a strong impetus towards economic independence. Coping with single parent-

hood further boosted personal development of the women surveyed [18].

Running a business involves great responsibility and the need for skilful self-organization. Single mothers have simply no other option than to improve their self-organization and, in general, are faced with a much bigger responsibility for their lives and happy childhood of their children than other mothers. Furthermore, the relevant literature distinguishes the following characteristics of an enterprising person: activity, willingness to take risks, ability to adapt to changing conditions,

ability to spot and seize market opportunities, creativity, and sense of duty and resilience to failure. Single mothers' life situation undoubtedly forces them to develop these qualities.

Another stereotype involves the belief common in certain circles that using non-family childcare services, such as day nurseries and sometimes even kindergartens, is a necessary evil, even though many studies confirm that children develop faster and better if they socialise early. Supporters of the so-called traditional model of the family claim that the most important and perhaps the only sensible life role for a woman is that of a mother. Sending a child to a day nursery must prove a lack of love and regrettable preference for career over the child's welfare.

It is known that children of single mothers enjoy priority in admission to day nurseries and kindergartens. Nonetheless, in many discussions, demands are put forward that they should be deprived of this privilege, since it makes it difficult to admit children from "normal families". Moreover, those who hold such a view argue that most of those mothers only pretend to be single, actually living in informal relationships. Implementation of such plans would undoubtedly impede the real lives of many working women. Fortunately, it seems to be unrealistic at the moment.

The possibility of using institutional childcare services is essential for enterprising women. Nonetheless, help from close family and friends is necessary in many cases (child's illness, business trips). Such childcare support makes it much easier to run a business efficiently and effectively.

Motherhood is a vital experience in a woman's life. The role of mother is widely recognized as one of the most important in her life. It can and should also be

a source of strength and contribute to building self-esteem. This will not, however, happen if it fully dominates all other female roles and largely or completely deprives women of career ambitions.

Obviously, all mothers of young children who undertake professional activity – too early, according to some – have to fight against stereotypes, also those mothers who do not raise their children alone. It is widely known, though, that each year without professional activity reduces women's chances in the labour market and affects the amount of future pension. As a result of rapid changes in working methods and technology, prior professional experience loses its value. In addition, employers may fear that work discipline declines during a long period of exclusion from working life.

On the other hand, it should be mentioned that young mothers who are ready to work are reluctantly employed for fear that they will frequently take sick leaves to look after their ill children and will not be fully available to work overtime. It may thus be concluded that mothers of young children can find self-employment an alternative to contractual employment, spotting the advantages of being able to work flexi-time and combine the roles of a mother and a working person.

It should also be borne in mind that setting up a business involves risks, whereas contractual employment guarantees a certain degree of security (even if sometimes it is only apparent). That is why, this aspect may inhibit entrepreneurship of single mothers, because they must provide for their children as sole breadwinners.

In accordance with the studies mentioned before, the limited possibilities of single parents may generate high levels of economic stress. Although high economic status and higher education do not completely eliminate the stress levels of a single parent, they may contribute to maintaining a sense of security [18]. Therefore, education focused on the promotion of entrepreneurial attitudes among young women and various initiatives to support entrepreneurship play such a crucial role in socio-economic development.

#### **4. INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS**

The types of entrepreneurship outlined in the first part of this study lead to the conclusion that entrepreneurial attitudes are diverse. From the point of view of the policy to promote entrepreneurship, it seems appropriate to make an analogy to the concept of diversity management that is used by companies and is becoming an increasingly important approach to human resources management. It might, therefore, be claimed that the employer should, at the microeconomic level, create and maintain a work environment that is most friendly and tailored to employees' individual needs arising mainly from their demographic and social characteristics in order to make the most of their potential. On the other hand, at the macroeconomic level, the government should employ adequately adapted instruments for different groups of entrepreneurs when implementing the policy to promote entrepreneurship.

For example, mature entrepreneurs do not need funds for company development that they do not plan whatsoever. They would find training in communication based on modern technologies more useful [30]. In turn, young enterprising women who have or plan to have children benefit most from support such as guaranteed admission of their children to a day nursery or kindergarten.

Surveys under the @lterEgo project proved that the Polish society showed a relatively low awareness of the real needs of single mothers wishing to develop entrepreneurial attitudes. Most respondents thought that single parents should be entitled to receive support chiefly in the form of financial allowances. Further forms of support included: vocational training courses and legal advice, and finally transport of children to school, educational assistance for children and additional medical services [27]. Such responses might have resulted from the low appreciation of entrepreneurial attitudes of single mothers and a deeply rooted stereotype of

a single mother as a poorly educated, unemployed person who receives various social benefits for most of her life. The fact is that the surveys were conducted a few years ago, but public awareness of this issue has probably not changed much.

The PARP report referred to above, implies that the fundamental problem lies in the reconciliation of business activity and motherhood. It should be emphasised that it is all the more important in the case of single mothers. That barrier must be reduced through appropriate solutions supporting caretaking functions of the family.

There are a number of institutions in Poland to promote female entrepreneurship, both among mothers of young children and older women. These include, for example, the Centre for the Advancement of Women Foundation existing since 1991 with a primary goal of motivating women to consciously, fully and professionally participate in working, social and political life. The Foundation offers a variety of training and consulting, and is also a partner in projects that support women as regards to gender equality in socio-economic life [14].

In turn, the Polish Embassy for Women Entrepreneurship is a foundation whose goal is to raise the number of women running their own stable businesses and creating new jobs. The Embassy devises partnership programmes and develops cooperation networks of various business circles. Such networks allow female business owners to establish new contacts and good business relationships by applying high ethical and quality standards and following the principle of equal opportunities in order to build and develop a modern civil society. In 2015, the Embassy for Women Entrepreneurship Foundation was once again an official partner of the Fifth European SME Congress in Katowice [9].

In Poznań, the Women Entrepreneur Club was organized as a forum to promote various initiatives of business women. One of its main objectives is to build a platform for business relations in Wielkopolskie Province. On the initiative of the Club and its partners, the “School of Business” project and the “CSR and flexicurity – the basis of business of Wielkopolskie Province companies” conference was organized, to name a few. The Club members are now attending regular meetings known as Business Lunch for Women Entrepreneurs, where they establish new contacts that can potentially evolve into lasting business relationships [11].

It should be highlighted that recent years have seen a number of new initiatives to promote entrepreneurship among women with different levels of educational attainment and social status.

Single mothers who are in difficult situations and receive support from Municipal Family Assistance Centres may attend therapeutic and psycho-educational activities. These aim at improving the standard of living by reinforcing self-esteem and self-confidence and stimulating single mothers to participate in the labour market and social life. They are addressed primarily to single mothers of children of preschool and school ages [25].

Another example is provided by the successful “Spółdzielnia MaM” (MaM Co-operative) project initiated by the MaMa Foundation, which helped 15 young, single and unemployed mothers to return to social and working life. The project com-

prised training in artisanal techniques and Polish folklore and a module covering practical establishment and management of cooperatives. The Cooperative was designed to become autonomous and those young mothers were to gain financial independence [10]. Currently, the Cooperative's membership includes 12 mothers who rent out premises consisting of office and production space. Some women work almost exclusively at home, while others work solely on the premises. The Cooperative manufactures short series of high-quality products inspired by folklore. Its broad offer is addressed to both individual and business customers who can order the production of company gadgets. In addition, the Cooperative also organizes handicraft workshops for children and adults [12].

Interesting local initiatives also include a project called "Mother Tech Lab. Design your balanced career path" planned by the Warsaw-based G10 Foundation with the support of SAP Poland. It will take the form of workshops aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among mothers of children under 3 years of age and outlining opportunities to use modern technologies in running their own business [13].

It is significant to note that the creation of initiatives promoting female entrepreneurship and addressed largely to single mothers indicates that such women are in demand. This may but does not have to prove their effectiveness. In order to solve this interesting and meaningful research problem, it is necessary to conduct more detailed, in-depth and long-term analyses.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It is noteworthy that many of the problems described may concern women who are raising children alone in formally "normal families" when the father does not actually participate in family life. However, there are some fundamental differences between them and single mothers. The first is the higher average family income, and the second is the lack of the negative attitude of the social environment especially in small towns and villages.

Due to the very low rate of maintenance obligation enforcement in Poland, single mothers are sole breadwinners. This should not imply that various kinds of allowances and social welfare benefits should be the main source of their income. Such a situation results in passivity and a failure to exploit the potential of single mothers and creates negative models for their children. As already mentioned, there is a strong correlation between entrepreneurship of parents and entrepreneurial attitudes of the young generation. It should be noted that the availability and amount of various social benefits depends on the public finance situation of a country. For both families of single mothers and the entire economy, it is far more beneficial to set up legal and institutional frameworks to support the conduct of own businesses.

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#### **PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ MATEK SAMODZIELNIE WYCHOWUJĄCYCH DZIECI – WYBRANE ASPEKTY EKONOMICZNE I SPOŁECZNE**

##### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wieloaspektowe przedstawienie zjawiska przedsiębiorczości kobiet samotnie wychowujących dzieci. W części pierwszej charakteryzowano wybrane definicje i klasyfikacje przedsiębiorczości oraz cechy przedsiębiorcy. Następnie podjęto próbę analizy podstawowych uwarunkowań rozwoju przedsiębiorczości opisywanej grupy społecznej oraz przedstawiono przykłady różnych form wsparcia w Polsce.

Publikacja ma charakter przeglądowo-koncepcyjny i stanowi przyczynek do dyskusji nad zjawiskiem przedsiębiorczości w zmieniających się warunkach o charakterze społecznym, związanych z nowym modelem funkcjonowania rodziny. Autorka ma świadomość, że dokładna analiza tego zjawiska wymaga szczegółowych i pogłębionych analiz i badań.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przedsiębiorczość kobiet samotnie wychowujących dzieci,  
determinanty postaw przedsiębiorczych, wspieranie  
przedsiębiorczości