

# Barriers to Professional Activity in the Opinion of the Disabled and Employers from Lubelskie Voivodship

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## Abstract

*The purpose of the research was to identify the barriers to professional activity among disabled persons in the opinion of the disabled living in rural areas and in the opinion of their employers. We have examined 800 disabled respondents and 100 employers both from Lubelskie Voivodship. People with disabilities indicated the following reasons for inactivity: lack of jobs suitable for people with different levels and types of disability, the importance of place of residence and in this connection difficulties in getting to work; limitations resulting from the disability, inadequate education, and negative attitudes of employers towards persons with disabilities. Important was the fact that the surveyed employers also considered these factors the most crucial causes of the failure to undertake professional activity among the disabled.*

**Keywords:** barriers to professional activity, disabled person, employer

## Introduction

Despite the still improving state of health among Europeans, which was observed at the beginning of the 21st c. in countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary (Zatoński 2011), the issue of disability, mainly among the elderly, is still topical. One may encounter the opinion that the ageing of society, as people live longer, results in an increase in the number of disabled people. The elderly are often perceived unfavorably in their social environment and they are often found less useful (Smith 1987; Solignac 2004). An important question is the diversification of these people's difficulties depending on the sort of disability (Bergier B., Bergier J., and Kubińska 2010; Putnam et al. 2003).

Despite the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004, a considerable disproportion remains in particular regions of the country, to the disadvantage of the people living in rural areas, which is typical of Lubelskie Voivodship. The research into the health problems of the residents of Lubelskie Voivodship, conducted during the years 2006–2008 on a population of 4000 people, have shown the percentage of people biologically disabled, with the disability certified by a competent authority, was much higher among older age groups. The elderly find their state of health worse than younger people (Panasiuk 2011). It should be noted that among the elderly disabled people, men dominate and people in rural areas (Elwan 1999; Grundy and Glaser 2000; Hardy et al. 2008).

In recent years, due to numerous social campaigns propagating the idea of normalizing the life of the disabled, we have observed significant changes in the way they are perceived as a social

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group. “Disability is no longer perceived as a result of body damage or illness, but rather as a result of social, economic and physical barriers” (Czech 2009, 319).

Despite a wide range of possibilities offered by Polish legislation regarding the employment of disabled people, an enormous number remain outside the labour market. Among 3 million 387 thousand disabled people which took part in the economic activity survey in 2010–2012, 2,830 million are people professionally inactive, and 1 681 thousand consider the illness or disability as the cause of the status quo (*Kwartalna informacja...* 2010).<sup>1</sup> Many of those people would take up work, if there were real opportunities to do it. However their effectiveness is assessed ambiguously. That visible percentage of people professionally inactive in the population at an economically productive age has made and makes the authorities take legal actions aimed at their professional activation. From an analysis of the statistical data it ensues that during recent years in the employment structure of the disabled there has been an increase in the number of wage workers and a decrease in the number of self-employed people and employers. In 2009 employers filed 23 thousand job offers at labour offices for the disabled. Among those offers 25% (5 801) were subsidized job offers. However, it must be noted that when compared to 2008 the number of job offers for the disabled decreased by 12,4% (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2014).

Barriers to the employment of the disabled may have their sources in external factors and/or ensue from the individual features of the disabled people. Among the individual features of the disabled that hinder employment the most significant are: low or insufficient professional qualifications, low level of education, bad state of health, fear of losing the pension, a passive attitude towards the work or professional activity, lack of support from the family, low social competence, lack of knowledge of the possibilities of employment (Żuraw 2006, 131).

The barriers highlighted in the literature which hinder the functioning of the disabled were considered when planning the research on these people and their employers from Lubelskie Voivodship. Work is very important for those whom fate was unfavourable towards and who due to their disability and illness, must put forth a great deal of effort in order to become a full member of society (Wieczorek 2012, 122–134). Despite numerous analyses the question of their relatively low professional activity is still topical. The collating of current opinion of the disabled from the rural areas of Lubelskie Voivodship with the opinions of the employers from the region create the opportunity to create more effective projects on professional activation of the disabled.

## 1 Methodology of the research

The aim of the research was to identify the barriers to professional activity among the disabled in the opinions of the disabled people living in the rural areas of Lubelskie Voivodship and in the opinions of the employers. They were asked two principal research questions:

- What are the barriers that lower the professional activity of the disabled in their opinion?
- What are, according to the employers, the barriers that hinder the employment of the disabled people?

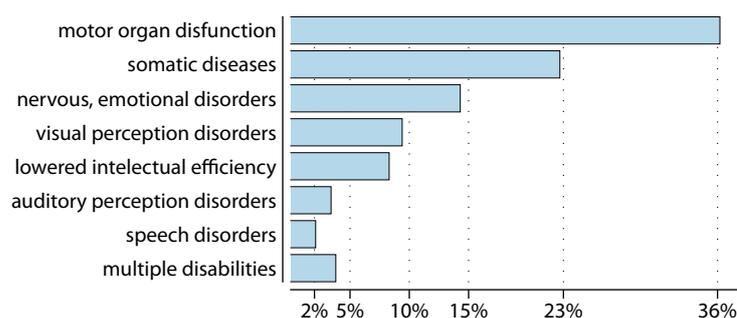
The basic method of gathering the research material was a diagnostic survey, within the framework of which a special questionnaire was applied. The study was conducted in 2010. The presented material refers to the studied group of 800 persons who are disabled and live in the rural areas of Lubelskie Voivodship as well as 100 employers from the voivodship. 800 disabled persons, living in the rural areas of Lubelskie Voivodship, aged 16–54, were surveyed. The study was pursued on an address sample, obtained from the communal welfare centres. Quota sampling of the studied group was made. It was assumed that the persons should represent communes from different parts of the voivodship, both males and females, of different ages, and of different levels of disability. 100 employers living in the voivodship were also surveyed.

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1. [In the journal (in both Polish and English texts) European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style). Furthermore in the International System of Units (SI units), fixed spaces rather than commas are used to mark off groups of three digits, both to the left and to the right of the decimal point.—Ed.]

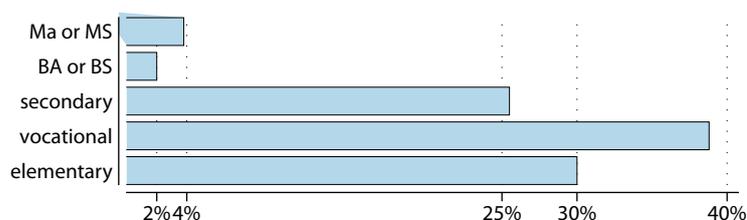
In the group of the disabled 45% (363) were women, and 55% (437) were men. The largest group of the respondents was in the age group of 46–55—29,3%, and 26–35—23,8%. Whereas, the least representative were the margin age groups (i.e., people aged 16–25 (15,6%) and people older than 55 (12,3%)). Participants included those certified with a moderate level of disability (53,3%), with a mild level of disability (27,7%), and those with a considerable level of disability (19%).

The largest group were people with kinetic system disability and various somatic diseases. Over a half of the sample have this kind of disability. In addition the respondents declared they had nervous and emotional balance disorders as well as vision organ disorders. A light level of disability was declared by 8,3% of the sample. A slight percentage of the studied group were people with auditory perception disorders, speech disorders and multiple disabilities (fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Types of the disability among the research sample

The situation representing the structure of education is not a state that could be assessed as positive, if we consider the fact that 68,8% have at most vocational education, and only one fourth has secondary education. When analyzing in detail the structure of education we observe the situation in which only 3,8% of the disabled have a master's degree and 2% of the respondents are qualified at the level of a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, the dominant group are people with vocational education – 38,8%, and elementary education – 30%. People with secondary education constitute 25,5% of the respondents (fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Education of the survey sample

During the study 18,39% of the disabled people living in the rural areas of Lubelskie Voivodship were professionally active. 81,61% of the studied group were professionally inactive. The study of employers was conducted on a group of 100 persons from Lubelskie Voivodship, who were mainly men (66%). The largest group of the employers taking part in this survey are people aged 46–55 (46%). Another 28% are people aged 36–45. Only 2 studied employers were in the age group 18–25. The studied group of employers is diversified in terms of the level and type of education. 43% are people with university education and one third has secondary education. Vocational education is declared by 15 employers and 12 of them have completed higher vocational studies.

An important variable in terms of the employment of the disabled was the size of the enterprise. As the findings show all the establishments can be qualified as small and mid-sized enterprises. Almost 47% of the entities are micro-enterprises employing fewer than 10 workers. The employment of 10–30 workers is declared by 32% of the employers and 14% of the employers manage a staff of 31–50 workers. Only 7% of the establishments are mid-sized enterprises with up to 80 employees.

Professional experience is another factor characterizing the studied group of employers. In order to describe the variable, the on-the-job work experience was distributed into the following time

brackets: 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, and over 16 years. The respondents declare the most numerous was the 6–10 years bracket (34%). 16-year work experience was declared by 24%, and 21% of the studied had either 1–5 or 11–15 years of experience.

From the point of view of the person looking for a job it essential for them to know the profile of the establishment in which they apply for a job. Each sector of the national economy has its specifics and special working conditions. In this study this variable was also taken into consideration. The studied employers decisively (91%) represent the service sector. 6% of them run an industrial company and only 3% are farmers (fig. 3).

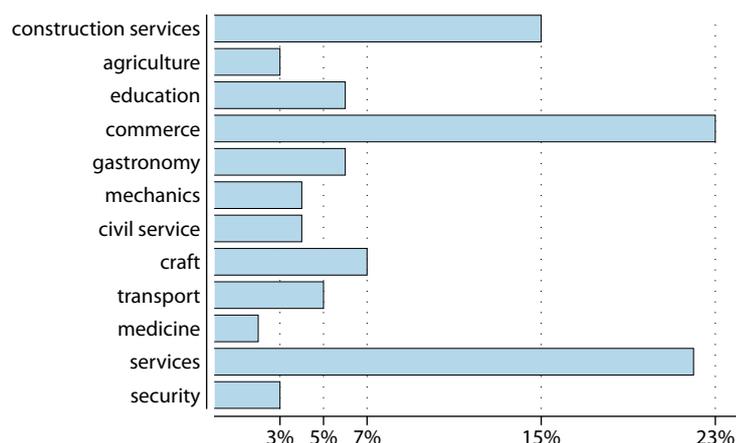


Fig. 3. Structure of enterprises managed by the surveyed employers by sectors of economy

## 2 Results

The disabled people have pointed out the most important parameters hindering their professional activity. The lack of job offers is the most important barrier in the professional activation of the disabled. This factor has been pointed out by 95% of those surveyed. Only 55 of the disabled have not recognized the importance of this factor. Difficulties resulting from commuting, according to 81%, are the main barrier hindering professional work. This factor did not have such a negative effect in the opinion of 19% of the respondents (16% said it was of little importance and 3,6% — it was of no importance). Obviously, like anybody, a disabled person also considers pay as the equivalent of the effort made. Therefore 75% of those surveyed have stated that inadequate pay may be a barrier in taking up work, whereas for 20% it had minor importance. Pay was not important for 5% of the respondents. Residency in rural areas is a factor of great importance for 72% of those studied. For 23% this factor was not important.

Disability and the limitations resulting from it, in the opinion of 72,3% of the respondents, constituted a vital obstacle when looking for a job. For 22% this factor was of little importance, and for 5% — of no importance. The lack of proper education constituted a vital obstacle in the professional activation of the disabled living in rural areas. Such an opinion was formulated by 70% of the respondents, while every fourth person attached little importance to this factor. Over half of the studied group (55%) claimed that the factor hindering their employment is the lack of faith in their abilities. That factor was not important for 10% of the studied and 36% said this factor was of little importance.

Negative professional experience constituted a serious barrier in taking-up professional activity, according to 49% of the respondents. Such negative experience was of little importance for 36%. In the opinion of 15% of the respondents this factor did not affect their professional activity. The uncertainty over whether one will meet the expectations of the employer was a serious barrier when looking for a job for over half of the disabled. Every fifth person thought that the anxiety over employers' expectations was not important in the process of professional activation. For 31,65% of the respondents the factor was of little importance.

Negative attitude of the employers towards the disabled, in the opinion of 66% of the respondents, constituted a vital obstacle when looking for a job. The factor was of little importance in taking up work in the declarations of 28% of the disabled. 6% of those studied did not pay attention to the negative attitude of employers.

Anxiety over co-workers was of little importance as a barrier for 40% of the group. This factor was important in the opinion of 39% of the respondents. 21% of those studied did not pay attention to this factor. Legal determinants may be an activating factor but also a barrier when looking for a job. The legal provisions were of no importance for 20% of the respondents, and of little importance for 34%. The remainder declared that legal determinants were important on the labour market. (tab. 1)

The authors of the paper searched for relations between gender, education, professional activity, level of disability, and factors hindering the professional activation of the disabled. Person's

**Tab. 1.** Factors hindering the professional activity of the disabled in the opinion of disabled

Factors hindering employment	To a large extent		To a small extent		Not significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Lack of job offers	730	94,6	32	4,2	10	1,3
Hindered commuting	621	80,7	121	15,7	28	3,6
Inadequate pay	524	75,0	141	20,2	34	4,9
Place of residence	558	72,5	179	23,3	33	4,3
Limitations resulting from disability	556	72,3	172	22,3	42	5,4
Insufficient education	535	69,5	192	24,9	43	5,6
Negative attitude of employers towards the disabled	511	66,3	212	27,5	48	6,2
Anxiety over whether one will meet the employer's expectations	434	56,3	244	31,7	93	12,1
Lack of faith in one's abilities	422	54,9	273	35,5	74	9,6
Negative professional experience	373	48,8	277	36,3	114	14,9
Legal determinants	357	46,4	258	33,6	154	20,0
Anxiety over co-workers	300	38,9	313	40,6	158	20,5

Note: Studied sample  $N = 800$  persons

**Tab. 2.** *P*-values of the Pearson's chi-square test

Factors hindering taking up work	Level of disability	Professional activity	Education	Gender
Lack of job offers	0,0224	0,3215	0,1470	0,6191
Place of residence	0,9905	0,0005	0,0686	0,7458
Insufficient education	0,3202	0,0001	0,0016	0,1464
Negative professional experience	0,0497	0,4333	0,6659	0,6119
Hindered commuting	0,2770	0,1403	0,1000	0,2023
Lack of faith in one's abilities	0,2352	0,4491	0,5396	0,3393
Anxiety over whether one will meet the employer's expectations	0,2500	0,0966	0,3341	0,7518
Limitations resulting from disability	0,0744	0,0026	0,0243	0,0316
Negative attitude of employers towards the disabled	0,3851	0,0366	0,2084	0,2055
Anxiety over co-workers	0,9417	0,00027	0,1044	0,0730
Legal determinants	0,6891	0,0015	0,2220	0,5650
Inadequate pay	0,9385	0,0059	0,1539	0,3503

Note: Level of disability takes three values: mild, moderate, considerable; professional activity takes two values: active, non-active; education takes four values: elementary vocational, secondary, higher; gender takes two values: male, female.

chi-square test was used. Professional activity is significantly dependent on seven factors: place of residence, insufficient education, limitations resulting from disability, negative attitude of employers towards the disabled, anxiety over co-workers, legal determinants and inadequate pay. Lack of job offers is significantly dependent on level of disability.

The employers from Lubelskie Voivodship were asked about their opinion on barriers to professional activity of the disabled. The employers have underscored four basic barriers to professional activity of the disabled. They claimed (91%) that it is the place of residence and difficulties in commuting (89%) that constitute deciding factors that hinder employment. In this group 90% of the respondents pointed at the fact that success on the labour market is difficult for the disabled due to a number of limitations such as lack of or insufficient number of job offers. An additional difficulty, according to 86% of the employers from Lublin Province, are limitations resulting from the physical disability itself.

In the opinion of 70% the fear over whether they will meet the employer's expectations may to a large extent determine their potential for employment. Slightly fewer employers have shown low self-esteem and lack of belief in one's own abilities (59%) to contribute. The social behaviour resulting from the anxiety over negative attitude of the employers and co-workers towards the disabled is pointed out by 59 and 48% of the employers respectively. More seldom the employers pointed out the negative meaning of such factors as a low level of education (62%), financial and legal aspects (48% of the employers from Lubelskie Voivodship). In this group no statistically relevant dependences were found (i.e., the dependences associated with the employers' opinions and their characteristics regarding the gender, education, or work experience of the survey sample) (tab. 3).

**Tab. 3.** Factors hindering taking on a job in the opinion of the employers

Factors hindering taking up work	To large extent	To little extent	Not significant	I don't know
Lack of job offers	90	7	1	2
Place of residence	91	8	1	0
Insufficient education	62	28	7	3
Negative work experience	51	33	5	10
Hindered commuting	89	10	1	0
Lack of faith in one's abilities	59	19	7	15
Anxiety over whether one will meet the employer's expectations	70	22	4	4
Limitations resulting from disability	86	5	6	3
Negative attitude of employers towards the disabled	59	29	7	5
Anxiety over co-workers	48	34	11	7
Legal determinants	48	29	11	12
Inadequate pay	48	37	8	7

Note: Studied sample  $N = 100$  persons

A vital part of the research process was compiling the opinions of the disabled and the employers living in Lubelskie Voivodship. It may be concluded that in both studied groups the greatest importance was attached to similar factors. Lack of job offers was signaled by over 90% of the respondents coming from both groups. Both the disabled and the employers more often underscored the negative meaning of the place of residence, hindered commuting, and the limitations resulting from the disability. The disabled more often pointed at the barriers to the professional activation related to lack of job offers, negative attitude of the employers towards the disabled, inadequate pay and insufficient education. In the category of "inadequate pay" one could notice the biggest differences between the opinions of the disabled and the employers, yet the factor was underscored mostly by the disabled. Nevertheless, the employers from Lubelskie Voivodship pointed at the importance of other factors. Among the employers more often was noticed the adverse effect of the

**Tab. 4.** Barriers to professional activity of the disabled in the opinion of the disabled and employers

Factors hindering taking up work	To a large extent				Not significant			
	Opinions of the disabled		Opinions of the employers		Opinions of the disabled		Opinions of the employers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Lack of job offers	730	94,6	90	90	10	1,3	1	1
Place of residence	558	72,5	91	91	33	4,3	1	1
Insufficient education	535	69,5	62	62	43	5,6	7	7
Negative work experience	373	48,8	51	51	114	14,9	5	5
Hindered commuting	621	80,7	89	89	28	3,6	1	1
Lack of faith in one's abilities	422	54,9	59	59	74	9,6	7	7
Anxiety over whether one will meet the employer's expectations	434	56,3	70	70	93	12,1	4	4
Limitations resulting from disability	558	72,3	86	86	42	5,4	6	6
Negative attitude of employers towards the disabled	511	66,3	59	59	48	6,2	7	7
Anxiety over co-workers	300	38,9	48	48	158	20,5	11	11
Legal determinants	357	46,4	48	48	154	20,0	11	11
Inadequate pay	524	75,0	48	48	34	4,9	8	8

place of residence, limitations resulting from the disability, anxiety over meeting the employer's expectations, and anxiety over the relations with co-workers. In this group the biggest differences occurred in the assessment of the "place of residence" factor, yet this factor was chosen more often by the employers (tab. 4).

No statistically relevant differences between the opinions of the employers and the disabled were found in the majority of barriers. The chi-square test has shown statistically relevant differences between the answers of the disabled and the employers in the following categories: negative work experience ( $p = 0,01$ ), anxiety over whether one will meet the employer's expectations ( $p = 0,007$ ), anxiety over co-workers ( $p = 0,01$ ), and inadequate pay ( $p = 0,02$ ).

### 3 Discussion

Constructive assistance to the disabled means noticing both the needs of the disabled and their own models of the world's perception of disability, a world which may be understood differently by themselves. This knowledge may be useful in better understanding and acceptance by the able-bodied. Disability should be perceived as something that exists objectively, and as something one should live with and be open to any problems related to it (Kirenko and Sarzyńska-Mazurek 2012, 52–70). The opinions of the disabled serve cognitive purposes.

The current socio-economic situation of our country makes work very important in people's lives. To the disabled it is of great importance. Social-professional activation is supposed to restore people's faith in the sense of life and ensure the satisfaction of psychosocial needs, which are vital for the process of the integration of the individual within the local community. To a disabled person work is has an additional dimension—it accelerates the return to better dexterity, and compensates the limitations that occur. Thanks to work, full personal development is possible, as well as self-fulfilment and boosting the person's self-esteem. The able-bodied, through contact with the disabled in various situations, can understand the needs of the latter and find out the potential, which is necessary to debunk the myths and stereotypes about the full dependence of the disabled on assistance from other people (de Barbaro, Ostoja-Zawadzka, and Cechnicki 2005, 67–85).

The awareness of these values must translate into constructive decisions and actions. The findings show that among the factors that prompt the person to take up work the most important are: adequate pay which makes the person independent financially, stability of employment, convenient

commuting, lack of stress resulting from doing work or interpersonal relations. These are key factors for those who are interested in real intervention in the professional situation of the disabled. Those surveyed also had different opinions on the barriers, in other words the factors hindering the process of their own professional activation. The disabled attached more importance to inadequate pay, whereas the employers from Lublin Province more often emphasized the importance of the place of residence as a major barrier to professional activity of people with disability.

## Conclusions

An analysis of the opinions of the surveyed people with disabilities, points out the occurrence of the following factors of the professional inactivity of the disabled:

- lack of job offers suitable for people with different levels and kinds of disability
- place of residence, and hindrances to commuting
- limitations resulting from the disability
- insufficient education
- negative attitude of the employers towards the disabled

Opinions of the disabled on factors hindering taking on a job depend on the level of disability, professional activity, education, and gender. What is very important is the fact that the employers from Lubelskie Voivodship, taking part in the study, have found the above-mentioned factors to be the root cause of unemployment among the disabled. Those surveyed also had different opinions on the issue of barriers, i.e. factors hindering the process of their own professional activation. The disabled attached more importance to inadequate pay, while the employers more often underscored the place of residence as the main barrier to the employment of the disabled.

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