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Characteristics and Expectations of Low-Paid Workers in the Care Services Sector in Poland

Charakterystyka i oczekiwania pracy pracowników nisko wynagradzanych z sektora usług opiekuńczych w Polsce

Keywords:

low-paid worker, minimum
salary, care services sector,
elderly caregiver, expectations

Abstract: The article analyses the specific nature of work among elderly caregivers in Poland as a low-paid group and identifies these employees' expectations towards employers. In the context of an aging society, which increases the demand for caregiving services, the low level of compensation and social prestige associated with this profession poses a significant challenge that may negatively impact employees' engagement and job satisfaction. The study is based on literature review, a survey method directed at caregiving sector employees and statistical data analysis, which enabled a comprehensive identification of factors affecting their motivation and expectations. The results indicate the need to implement motivational strategies aimed at improving working conditions and enhancing job satisfaction among caregivers. Applying such solutions may contribute to increased productivity and reduced employee turnover in this professional group.

Słowa kluczowe:

pracownik nisko
wynagradzany, minimalne
wynagrodzenie, sektor usług
opiekuńczych, opiekun osób
starszych, oczekiwania

Streszczenie: W artykule dokonano analizy specyfiki pracy opiekunów osób starszych w Polsce jako grupy nisko wynagradzanej oraz zidentyfikowano oczekiwania tych pracowników wobec pracodawców. W kontekście starzejącego się społeczeństwa, które zwiększa zapotrzebowanie na usługi opiekuńcze, niski poziom wynagrodzenia i prestiżu społecznego tego zawodu stanowi istotne wyzwanie, mogące negatywnie wpływać na zaangażowanie i satysfakcję zawodową pracowników. Badanie oparto na przeglądzie literatury, metodzie ankietowej skierowanej do pracowników z sektora usług opiekuńczych oraz analizie danych statystycznych, co pozwoliło na wszechstronne zidentyfikowa-

JEL:
J31, J50, J53

nie czynników wpływających na ich motywację i oczekiwania. Wyniki badań wskazują na potrzebę wdrożenia strategii motywacyjnych, które byłyby ukierunkowane na poprawę warunków pracy i zwiększenie satysfakcji zawodowej opiekunów osób starszych. Zastosowanie takich rozwiązań może przyczynić się do zwiększenia produktywności oraz zmniejszenia rotacji pracowników w tej grupie zawodowej.

Introduction

The care services sector in Poland has become increasingly important in the context of an aging population, with demographic projections indicating that by 2050, people aged 65 and older will constitute over 30% of the population [GUS, 2023]. Caregivers play an essential role in supporting the elderly; however, their work remains undervalued socially and financially, as data show that over 70% of caregivers in Poland earn below the national average salary [MRPiPS, 2023]. Although data from MG Partner company indicate that it may be more than 70%. This role requires high competencies, physical endurance, and emotional resilience, with studies indicating that nearly 60% of caregivers experience significant emotional strain related to their responsibilities [Kowalski, 2021]. The complexity of the tasks they face daily makes this profession challenging, presenting numerous dilemmas and obstacles.

Furthermore, the demanding and complex tasks of daily caregiving contribute to a challenging professional environment, often leading to high turnover rates, estimated at over 25% annually in this sector [EC, 2022]. Given these difficulties, the expectations of care sector workers are rising, with demands for improved working conditions and salaries that reflect their responsibilities and efforts. According to the study in MG Partner company key expectations identified include fair remuneration, overtime pay, gender pay equity, and job stability. Additionally, professional development, career progression, and non-financial benefits, such as access to childcare and healthcare, are seen as essential for worker retention and satisfaction.

McKay and Fanning also highlight the impact of caregiving on mental health, noting that over 50% of workers report symptoms of burnout or depression [2000, p. 256], underscoring the need for employer-driven initiatives to address psychosocial stressors. In response, managers in the care sector face the critical challenge of adapting policies to meet these evidenced needs, balancing financial constraints with workforce stability and satisfaction.

This article examines the characteristics and scientifically-supported expectations of low-paid care sector workers in Poland, identifying potential strategies to enhance their professional conditions and quality of life.

Characteristics of Low-Paid Workers in the Care Services Sector

A low-paid worker is someone who receives the minimum salary for his employment (based on an employment contract), determined in the form of a rate or a minimum salary for work within the applicable time frame (usually on a monthly basis). This salary is set by the state and remains independent of the worker's level of competence, as well as other components of remuneration [Dz.U. 2016, poz. 1265].

Often, these are individuals who cannot rely on other job opportunities, such as those lacking sufficient education or facing high unemployment in their region and a limited number of job offers, or due to life hardships, forcing them to take any available job. Additionally, this group frequently includes retirees and pensioners who treat work as a source of extra income. The social group from the care services sector – elderly caregivers – is relatively large and poorly compensated [GUS, 2023]. The author chose this group from the care services sector because it is essential to the health of the cared-for individuals, and this profession will become increasingly important due to the aging population.

According to T. Kamiński [2006], a caregiver for the elderly provides care and support services for seniors. Their duties include tasks aimed at helping clients maintain their health (e.g., taking medications), personal hygiene (washing and grooming), and, when necessary, assisting with basic activities such as eating and dressing. Alongside caregiving duties, an important group of tasks for caregivers involves supporting the elderly in the daily organization of life (e.g., planning expenses, doctor visits, shopping, and assistance with administrative matters).

Caregivers also engage in activating their clients, organizing leisure time (e.g., through conversations, games, and walks), supporting self-realization and development, and encouraging participation in family life (e.g., contact with family), social activities (e.g., interactions with the community of the care home), or cultural life [*Informacje o specyfice pracy opiekuna*, n.d.].

An elderly caregiver can work in a highly diverse environment, ranging from institutionalized and commercialized entities providing care services to private homes of individuals in need of support. Some tasks are performed indoors (e.g., in the rooms of those receiving care, dining areas, bathrooms, or common rooms) and are subject to the regulations, conditions, and limitations specific to the workplace. However, many tasks require going outside, for example, to run errands or for recreational activities. Since individuals needing support often require around-the-clock care, a caregiver's work may involve flexible and irregular hours, taking place both during the day and at night, as well as on weekends and holidays. The caregiver's availability is therefore crucial, and a lack of it may prevent them from taking on the job [PORP, 2016].

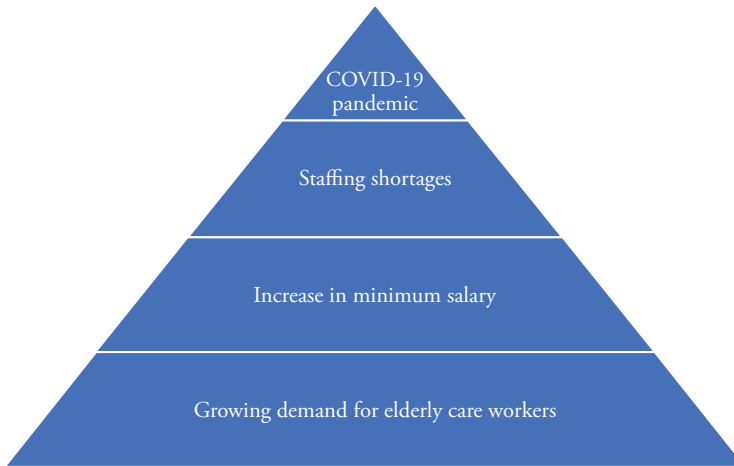
A caregiver's work involves constant interaction with the care recipient, which may be with a single person or involve caring for multiple individuals. This work can be individual (e.g., during personal care support) or group-based (e.g., during meals in a dining hall or activities in a common room). Caregivers emphasize the importance of maintaining an appropriate ratio of caregivers to care recipients to ensure proper care is provided [PORP, 2016].

The author of this paper agrees with A. Kotlarska-Michalska [2004], who believes that the ideal elderly caregiver should be "a cross between the all-knowing and the merciful". Therefore, in the author's view, caregiving for the elderly is a highly demanding profession, particularly from a psychological standpoint, as it involves frequent interactions with people. As a result, individuals working in this field should possess specific personality and psychological traits. These individuals should demonstrate emotional maturity, resilience in difficult situations and stress, the ability to overcome obstacles and limitations, strong interpersonal skills, kindness, sensitivity, empathy, tolerance, and respect for both their own dignity and that of others. They should also be responsible, disciplined, and systematic. Other essential qualities include patience, the ability to regulate emotions, adaptability to changing situations, divided attention, and concentration skills. An important aspect is the caregiver's attitude toward death and their ability to cope with the death of those they care for. In some situations, self-defence skills and courage may be necessary. Physical fitness is also crucial, especially considering the potential need to lift and carry patients. Medical conditions such as allergies, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal disorders (e.g., spinal curvature, varicose veins, flat feet), diabetes, epilepsy, and speech or hearing impairments can be contraindications for performing this work [*Informacja o specyficie pracy opiekuna*, n.d.].

The requirements and qualifications for the profession of an elderly caregiver vary depending on the employer. In public care centres, having a secondary education is a prerequisite for employment. Completing specialized training as an elderly caregiver is also beneficial. Often, employers seek caregivers with nursing or general medical education, as these qualifications are particularly valuable in providing comprehensive care.

It is also worth noting the situation regarding the salary of elderly caregivers, which changed in 2023 compared to previous years. In the care services sector, salaries increased, similar to other sectors of the economy, although regional and institutional differences were significant. The rise in salaries in this sector was driven by several key factors, including the growing demand for care workers, the aging population, and regulatory measures such as raising the minimum salary. Picture 1 presents the factors influencing the change in salaries.

Picture 1. Factors influencing changes in salaries



Source: own study based on information from MG Partner¹.

As shown in Picture 1, the first factor influencing the change in salaries for elderly caregivers was the growing demand for such workers. With the aging population, the demand for elderly care workers has significantly increased. Another factor that contributed to this change was the increase in the minimum salary, which directly impacted the rise in salaries in an industry that often employs low-paid workers. Staffing shortages were another factor affecting salary changes. Due to a lack of workers, especially in elderly care, employers were forced to offer higher salaries to attract employees. The final key factor was the COVID-19 pandemic. It introduced additional burdens in the care services sector but also raised public awareness about the role and importance of care workers, leading to improved working conditions, including salaries.

Table 1 presents the estimated salaries of low-paid workers in the care services sector in Poland over the past five years.

As shown in the data presented in Table 1, from 2019 to 2023, there was a steady increase in both the average monthly gross salaries and the gross minimum salary in Poland. In 2019, the average gross salary ranged from 2,500 to 2,800 PLN, and the minimum salary was set at 2,250 PLN. The year-over-year increase in the minimum salary compared to the previous year was 7.1%. In 2020, the average salary increased to a range of 2,700 to 3,000 PLN, and the minimum salary rose to 2,600 PLN, marking a significant jump of 15.6% year over year. The following year, the average salary ranged from 2,900 to 3,200 PLN, and the minimum salary was 2,800 PLN, which represented

¹ MG Partner – a company providing care services in Poland for over 10 years.

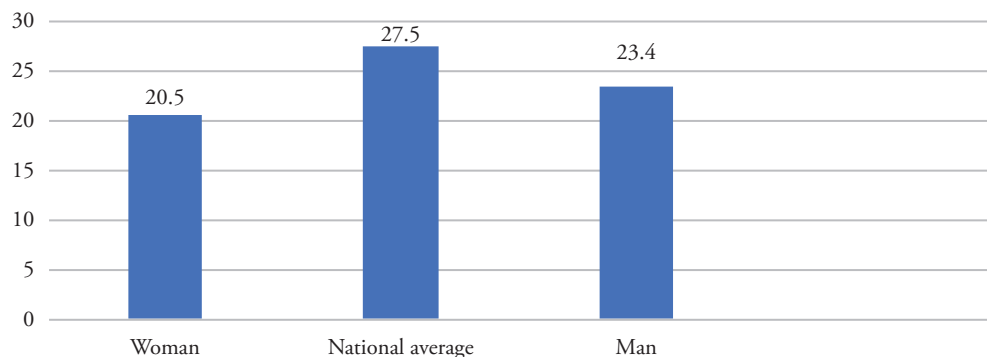
a 7.7% increase compared to 2020. In 2022, the average gross salary ranged from 3,100 to 3,500 PLN, while the minimum salary reached 3,010 PLN, growing by 7.5% year over year. By 2023, the average salary reached between 3,300 and 3,700 PLN, and the minimum salary increased to 3,600 PLN, a substantial increase of 19.6% compared to the previous year [GUS, 2023; MRPiPS, 2023]. This analysis reveals that both average salaries and the minimum salary rose consistently, with the most noticeable increase in the minimum salary occurring in 2023. Salaries in the care services sector grew by approximately 30% over the past five years, mainly driven by increases in the minimum salary. Differences in salaries may be attributed to location (cities vs. rural areas) and the type of employer (private institutions vs. public institutions). The increase in salaries was also strongly correlated with the rise in the minimum salary, as many workers in the care services sector were paid at or near the minimum salary level.

Table 1. Estimated salaries of low-paid workers in the care services sector in Poland (2019–2023)

Year	Average Monthly Gross Salary (PLN)	Gross Minimum Salary (PLN)	Year-over-year increase in minimum salary (%)
2019	2500–2800	2250	7.1
2020	2700–3000	2600	15.6
2021	2900–3200	2800	7.7
2022	3100–3500	3010	7.5
2023	3300–3700	3600	19.6

Source: based on GUS [2019; 2023].

Figure 1. Average hourly salary of caregivers in 2023, by gender (net, in PLN)



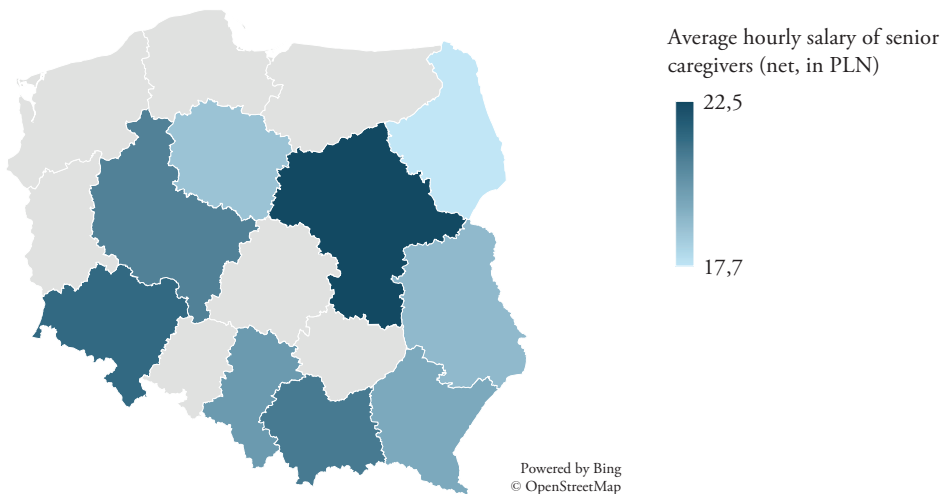
Source: own study based on Sedlak&Sedlak [2024].

An interesting study on caregiver salaries was conducted by the company Sedlak & Sedlak [2024], and the results from this research regarding the average hourly salary of caregivers, broken down by gender in 2023, are shown in Figure 1.

The data in Figure 1 show that men earned an average of 23.40 PLN net per hour, which was about 86.7% of the national average salary, while women earned 20.50 PLN net per hour, which amounted to about 75.9% of the national average salary. In 2023, full-time elderly caregivers in Poland earned an average monthly gross salary of approximately 4,310 PLN, which corresponded to around 3,268 PLN net [Sedlak & Sedlak, 2024]. From this analysis, it can be concluded that women earned on average 12.4% less than men, and their earnings were 24.1% below the national average. Men also earned less than the national average, but the gap was only 13.3%. The national average salary is higher because it includes high-paying sectors, such as information technology (IT) and telecommunications, finance and banking, healthcare (especially for doctors and specialists), law, energy and petrochemical industries, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, and aerospace. These sectors offer significantly higher salary, which distorts the image of how much majority of employees earn [Sedlak & Sedlak, 2024]. Additionally, the structure of the labour market and gender pay differences contribute to lower average salaries calculated separately for women and men.

Figure 2 presents the average hourly salary of senior caregivers in selected provinces in 2023.

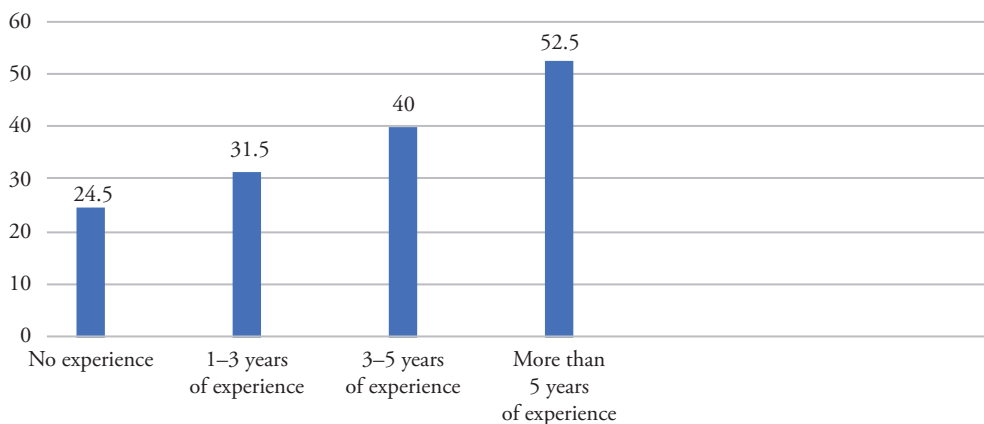
Figure 2. Average hourly salary of senior caregivers in 2023 in selected provinces (net, in PLN)



Source: own study based on research from Sedlak&Sedlak [2024].

Figure 2 presents the average hourly net salaries of senior caregivers in selected provinces of Poland in 2023. Salaries vary depending on the region, influenced by local economic conditions, demand for care services, and the cost of living in each province. Caregivers in the Mazowieckie province, which includes Warsaw, earned the highest net hourly salary at 22.50 PLN. Higher salaries in this region are driven by the high cost of living and strong demand for care workers. In the Małopolskie province, the average rate was 21.00 PLN net per hour, with Cracow, the region's main city, playing a significant role in shaping salaries. In the region including Wrocław, salaries were 21.50 PLN net per hour, influenced by rising living costs in the area. Senior caregivers in Wielkopolska earned an average of 20.80 PLN net per hour, slightly below central Poland but still relatively high on a national scale. In the Śląskie region, salaries were around 20.00 PLN per hour. Although Silesia has a high demand for care workers, salaries were lower than in central Poland. Other provinces, such as Podkarpackie (19.50 PLN) and Lubelskie (19.00 PLN), offered lower salaries due to the lower cost of living and less demand for care services compared to larger cities. In the Kujawsko-Pomorskie province, caregivers earned 18.70 PLN net per hour, placing it in the lower range of salaries. The lowest average salary for senior caregivers was in the Podlaskie province, where the average net hourly salary in 2023 was around 17.70 PLN, close to the national average for workers in similar positions. Salaries in this sector can vary depending on experience, education, and location, with higher rates typically found in larger cities and more developed regions. The data indicates that higher salaries are concentrated in more developed regions and major cities, such as Warsaw, Cracow, and Wrocław, where living costs are higher and demand for care services is growing.

Figure 3. Average hourly salary of caregivers with varying professional experience in 2023 (net, in PLN)



Source: own study based on research from Sedlak&Sedlak [2024].

The distribution of average hourly salaries for senior caregivers with varying levels of professional experience is illustrated in Figure 3. The data in Figure 3 shows that work experience has a significant impact on the hourly rate.

Expectations of low-paid workers in the care services sector

In Poland, the profession of elderly caregiver is not only low-paid but also classified as a demanding job. Despite its low social prestige, the role requires workers to possess high competencies. As a result, there are certain expectations from employees toward employers, calling for measures to enhance the social status of this profession. These demands are also articulated by A. Urbanek [2010, p. 19]. One of the primary expectations is the right to fair compensation for work, as outlined in the 1996 Labor Code [Dz.U. 1996, No. 24, item 110]. The European Social Charter (ESC) of 1961, revised in 1996, states that all workers have the right to fair remuneration for their labour, which should ensure an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families [ESC, 1996, point 4, part I]. This primarily includes the right to increased pay for overtime work and the right to equal pay for men and women performing the same job. Workers expect their employers to honour the right to a “reasonable” notice period in the event of employment termination. Another crucial aspect is the right to protect salaries from various deductions [Urbanek, 2010, p. 19].

Bieńko also highlights similar challenges, mainly stemming from external sources, focusing on economic difficulties like low salaries, and organizational challenges such as excessive formalization and poor organization of work [Bieńko, 2012, p. 114]. According to A. Kanios, employees often complain about the burden of filling out unnecessary paperwork and face constraints due to time limitations, insufficient financial resources, and rigid regulations. This negatively impacts their work efficiency [Kanios, 2014, p. 41].

Therefore, job satisfaction, based on fair and dignified salaries, is a crucial element. In many cases, the financial situation of low-paid workers is only marginally better than that of their care recipients, making salary expectations a significant concern. Bieńko also notes that employees expect improvements in career advancement opportunities. The barriers in this area discourage effective work [Bieńko, 2012, p. 114].

Solutions to the aforementioned challenges, as noted by T. Zbyrad [2007], are expected to come in part through legislative changes. These changes should primarily focus on the tasks imposed on employees in the course of performing social work. There are high expectations for employers to provide appropriate working conditions and salaries, ensuring that taking on this work is not simply a necessity due to a lack of other job offers in the labour market.

Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, and Dziegielewska [2006, p. 52] highlighted that social workers expect their managers to possess competent knowledge in social gerontology, which is essential for working effectively with the elderly. Consequently, as the expectations of these workers evolve, the demand for educated staff and the necessity to offer new services is increasing. In this context, there are expectations from employees to expand the range of community-based services. These services would provide support to families caring for elderly individuals, particularly in the form of counseling [Szatur-Jaworska et al., 2006, pp. 153–155].

According to Gaszyńska et al. [2009, p. 67], an elderly caregiver requires and expects, based on the demands of their work, knowledge from various fields of science. These include psychology, sociology, social policy, as well as knowledge about age-related diseases, elderly care, caregiving methods, and health promotion and prevention, supported by practical training.

Petelczyc [2011, pp. 20–33] believes that, according to caregivers, knowledge in these areas is a necessary condition for achieving the appropriate competencies needed to provide effective care. In Petelczyc's opinion, acquiring such knowledge meets the worker's expectations regarding their qualifications and offers hope for better and more dignified salaries. A caregiver specialized in this field will be more adept at fulfilling their duties and making responsible decisions. The resulting confidence of the caregiver directly translates to a sense of security and calm for the care recipient.

As Cieślak and Łuszczynska-Cieślak [2001] add, work is also a source of stress and burdens. Elderly caregivers are particularly concerned about the stressful situations related to their workplace, which they cite as one of the main factors detrimental to their health. Ogińska-Bulik [2006, p. 81] writes that in a changing society, various types of risks are continually increasing, disproportionate to the salaries offered. These risks are particularly related to the negative impacts of psychosocial factors, such as excessive workload, time pressure, interpersonal conflicts, organizational uncertainty, and lack of control.

As a result, there are expectations from employees to address and eliminate these risks. Dąbrowski [1985, p. 59] believes that employees have significant expectations for employers to ensure dignified working conditions, primarily due to concerns about mental health. A good mental state is crucial for effectively performing duties and managing emotions in challenging situations. Poor mental health lowers the quality of life, which directly affects the effectiveness of work-related tasks. It is also a cause of frequent absenteeism and, consequently, one of the main reasons for resigning from the job.

According to Rosalska [2008, pp. 239–248], working with the elderly is undoubtedly more prone to stress compared to other professions. This justifies the concerns of caregivers stemming from the tension and burdens associated with caregiving tasks. These concerns relate to the negative consequences in various areas of the caregiver's functioning, primarily involving professional failures and burnout, which can hin-

der full engagement in working with elderly individuals. These issues are particularly noticeable in cases of non-professional care for the elderly within domestic or family settings, which becomes not only an individual but also a societal problem. Bauman [2006] asserts that caregivers are indirectly responsible for the quality of the aging process of their care recipients.

Recently, the issue of ensuring broadly understood workplace safety has become increasingly important. People want to work in peace and security, in conditions with minimal risk, from which they are effectively protected. Workplace safety should involve not only adherence to existing legal agreements concerning occupational health and safety (OHS), but also, for example, mitigating the negative consequences of employment flexibility. Here, it is worth mentioning Standing [2014], who states that job insecurity, temporary contracts, and minimal labour protection essentially mean a lack of opportunity for development and do not provide a sense of professional identity. This flexibility and uncertainty cause fear and frustration among employees, leading to existential uncertainty and living in the present without an identity that provides a sense of security [Bodak, Gableta, 2016].

Szweda-Lewandowska [2017, p. 150], based on conducted research, highlights the problems and expectations for changes in certain areas of work for elderly caregivers. Caregivers often find it difficult to balance caregiving with various aspects of their personal lives. This includes a lack of personal time, the burden of commuting, and the challenge of providing care for an elderly person while managing professional responsibilities, particularly when the caregiver is also employed. Added to this is the exhaustion caused by such demanding work. Another significant issue is the lack of medical support, leaving the caregiver to face the often difficult situations of elderly individuals alone.

Additionally, the challenge of balancing work and caregiving at home worsens family relationships. In the study conducted by Szweda-Lewandowska [2017, p. 150], caregivers also pointed to difficulties in coordinating care provided by two working caregivers for the same elderly person. A key problem is the low salary, which, according to caregivers, is unfair given the demanding and responsible nature of the job.

Considering the expectations of low-paid workers, it is worth examining the research conducted in 2015 by Haya and Thinks [2015, pp. 1–5]. The study reveals that the main expectations of low-paid workers regarding their jobs are support for childcare and insurance. Most respondents evaluated their jobs as either good or bad based on how well they fit into their lives and other responsibilities. Workers' suggestions for improving their professional lives also focused on improving internal communication, increasing decision-making opportunities, and enhancing collaboration with managers [Ahlstrom, 2010].

Caregivers in the elderly care sector have several core expectations related to their challenging work conditions, fair compensation, and support for their emotional and

physical well-being. According to N. Ogińska-Bulik [2006], caregivers expect adequate salaries that reflect their responsibilities and the demanding nature of their work. Fair pay is often a primary source of satisfaction and helps reduce frustration associated with undervaluation. Stability of employment is also a key expectation, as secure job conditions provide peace of mind and reduce anxiety over job uncertainty. Additionally, caregivers look for emotional and psychological support, particularly due to frequent exposure to suffering and end-of-life situations, which can lead to emotional exhaustion. Access to counselling or support programmes is valued as it helps mitigate the risk of burnout. Furthermore, caregivers are eager for opportunities for professional development and training. These opportunities not only enhance their skills in elderly care but also contribute to their sense of competence and job satisfaction.

In reference to studies conducted by the author of the paper, low-paid workers, such as elderly caregivers, primarily expect the introduction of new services in the fields of social, care, and nursing assistance. Given the growing demand for such services, caregivers also expect their competencies to be enhanced to improve the quality of the services they provide. This job requires not only appropriate substantive preparation and its continual improvement, but also various forms of support from state institutions and family members.

Table 2. Expectations of low-paid workers toward employers

Expectations of low-paid workers toward employers
Respect for the right to fair remuneration
Respect for the right to overtime pay
Respect for the right to equal treatment of men and women regarding pay for the same work
Respect for the right to a "reasonable" notice period in case of termination of employment
Respect for the right to protection of salaries from unjust deductions
Expectations for adequate and dignified remuneration
Expectations for career advancement opportunities
Expectations for expanding the range of community services
Employee expectations regarding their qualifications
Expectations for eliminating risks related to the negative impact of psychosocial factors
Expectations for childcare support and insurance

Source: own study based on interviews carried out in MG Partner company².

² The studies were conducted at MG Partner, a company providing caregiving services across Poland. The research involved 180 elderly caregivers.

From the above analysis and Table 2, it is evident that the expectations of low-paid workers are significant. Employees prioritize good working conditions, job security, workplace safety, and a healthy work-life balance. They also expect the elimination of risks associated with the negative impact of psychosocial factors, as well as an expansion of childcare support and insurance coverage. In response to the growing demand for care services, caregivers also anticipate opportunities to enhance their competencies through internal training, which would improve the quality of services they provide.

Conclusion

Based on the research conducted at MG Partner, several key findings can be drawn that align directly with the expectations and challenges faced by low-paid workers in the caregiving sector. The multidimensional nature of tasks, the application of methods, principles, and awareness of the complexity of social issues described above regarding low-paid workers, makes performing this profession challenging and brings many dilemmas. The requirements placed on individuals in this profession are equally complex. Despite being a social group that is crucial for the well-being of those in their care, and whose role will become even more important in the future due to an aging population, the remuneration for this position is decidedly too low. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that social workers in Poland are not well compensated relative to the responsibilities and demands of their job. Undoubtedly, working as a caregiver for the elderly is a vocation.

The author's research reveals that the expectations of low-paid workers in the care services sector are high. Several key conclusions can be drawn from the expectations expressed by these workers. Employees in the care services sector clearly expect employers to respect their rights, especially regarding fair remuneration, overtime pay, and protection from unjust deductions. There is also a strong emphasis on the need for equal treatment, particularly in terms of gender pay equity for the same work. Workers seek assurance of "reasonable" notice periods and general job stability. Career advancement opportunities and professional development are increasingly important, signalling a desire for long-term growth within the workplace. Childcare, insurance, and other non-financial benefits are becoming critical aspects of job attractiveness for this group of employees. Workers are also increasingly aware of how working conditions affect their mental health, leading to expectations for improvements in this area.

Taking into account the literature review, several key expectations and challenges faced by caregivers have been identified. A primary concern among caregivers is fair and dignified remuneration. Despite the demanding and complex nature of their work, caregivers often receive low pay, which they view as unjust given the responsibilities

they shoulder. Literature sources, such as Urbanek [2010] emphasize caregivers' expectation of fair pay, overtime pay, and equal pay for equal work between genders, as well as protection against unfair salary deductions.

Job security and stability are also essential expectations, including reasonable notice periods in the event of employment termination. This stability provides caregivers with a sense of security in a sector often characterized by uncertainty and high demands. Additionally, caregivers face organizational challenges, such as excessive paperwork, time constraints, and rigid regulations, which impact their efficiency. A. Kanios [2014] and M. Bieńko [2012] discuss these bureaucratic burdens, which caregivers expect to be reduced to allow for more efficient and fulfilling work.

Professional development and career advancement are critical expectations. Caregivers seek opportunities to enhance their skills and advance within the profession, expecting employers to offer pathways for growth, training, and educational support to improve their competencies, as noted by Gaszyńska et al. [2009] and Petelczyc [2011]. These opportunities align with caregivers' desire for better pay and recognition through improved qualifications. Mental health support and the reduction of psychosocial risks are equally important. Caregiving is highly stressful, with frequent exposure to emotionally challenging situations. Studies by Cieślak, Łuszczynska-Cieślak [2001] and Ogińska-Bulik [2006] highlight the need for employers to address high workloads, time pressure, and organizational uncertainty, which often lead to burnout.

Work-life balance is another pressing concern. Caregivers often struggle to manage work demands alongside personal life, affecting family relationships and overall well-being. Szweda-Lewandowska [2017] notes caregivers' difficulties in balancing multiple caregiving roles, which often result in physical and emotional exhaustion. This expectation emphasizes the need for improved scheduling, reduced commuting burdens, and support for those with dual caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, caregivers expect an expansion of community services to support families with elderly care needs, such as counselling. This reflects a broader societal role for caregivers and a desire to integrate their work with comprehensive community support, as discussed by Szatur-Jaworska, Błądowski, and Dziegielewska [2006].

A supportive work environment is also critical. Studies by Hay and Thinks [2015] indicate that low-paid workers value improved internal communication, collaborative decision-making, and positive relationships with management, which enhance job satisfaction and foster a positive workplace culture essential for retention in caregiving roles.

In conclusion, caregivers in Poland expect fair pay, job security, reduced bureaucratic burdens, opportunities for professional development, mental health support, work-life balance, expanded community services, and a supportive work environment. Addressing these needs is essential for improving job satisfaction, reducing burnout, and ensuring high-quality care for the elderly.

Managers face a significant challenge in meeting their employees' expectations, and to do so effectively, they must understand their workforce and apply the right motivational tools.

Based on the above considerations, several motivational strategies could be implemented to address the needs and improve the satisfaction of caregivers. Firstly, fair compensation and financial benefits are critical; offering competitive salaries that reflect the responsibility and demands of caregiving is essential. This includes not only fair base pay but also additional compensation for overtime and equal pay for equal work across genders. Introducing performance-based bonuses or extra allowances for work in challenging conditions could also increase caregivers' sense of being valued. Job security and stability are also important, and providing permanent contracts or long-term employment agreements can reduce job insecurity and build loyalty. Clear and reasonable notice periods in the case of termination contribute to a sense of stability and respect for caregivers' well-being.

Additionally, caregivers require psychological support and mental health care. Creating programs for psychological support, such as access to counselling or therapy sessions, can help caregivers manage emotional stress, while regular stress management training can further enhance resilience, enabling caregivers to handle the emotional demands of their role. Professional development and career growth opportunities are also essential. Providing training courses or professional certifications can enhance caregivers' sense of competence and job satisfaction, and clear career advancement paths motivate caregivers to stay within the organization and invest in their personal and professional growth.

Support for work-life balance is another key factor. Flexible scheduling options allow caregivers to balance their personal and professional responsibilities more effectively, and support for childcare or partnerships with local childcare providers can ease the burden for caregivers managing family responsibilities alongside work. Improvement of working conditions is also crucial; ensuring ergonomically designed workplaces reduces physical strain and enhances comfort. Streamlining work processes and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy improves efficiency and lowers stress levels, allowing caregivers to focus more on their core responsibilities.

Finally, social support and recognition from management are essential for creating a supportive work environment. Regular recognition of caregivers' contributions, even though small acknowledgments, can significantly boost morale. Fostering open communication and positive relationships with supervisors helps create a supportive work culture, encouraging caregivers to feel valued and understood. Implementing these strategies can improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance caregivers' engagement and the quality of care they provide. Managers and policymakers need to consider these motivational strategies to create a supportive, rewarding, and sustainable environment for caregivers.

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