



ORIGINAL PAPER

Risks and Consequences of Women's Unemployment in Rural Communities from Romania. Results of an Empirical Study in Dolj County*

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Abstract: This article presents, in a sociological approach, the analysis of the issue of women's unemployment, a topic that plays an important part both on the European public policies' agenda, as well as in the current sociological research and studies, which aim at increasing the rate of employment for the vulnerable categories of population. The importance of this topic derives from the fact that female persons in the rural areas are considered to be a vulnerable social category, usually confronted with several obstacles regarding employment, lacking the same access as those in the urban areas to financial, educational and training resources that would allow them to improve the quality of life or to evolve in a profession. The article also presents the results of a quantitative research carried out in three rural communities in Dolj county (the South-West Oltenia Region) which are facing high or severe risk of marginalization, and in which one of the issues that require attention is women's unemployment, especially long-term unemployment.

Keywords: *rural marginalized areas, long-term unemployment, women, social exclusion.*

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1. Theoretical framework: EU regulations on women employment

Same as in other South-Eastern European societies, women in Romania have been, are, and will continue to be more exposed to the risk of becoming unemployed. Thus, being regarded as a vulnerable category of population, especially in times of economic recession, along with the elders, young people and immigrants, women represent a priority in the design of European policies aiming to increase employment. Women represent a vulnerable social category in the Romanian labour market, and the women in the rural areas are twice as much exposed to the risk of facing long time unemployment as the women living in urban areas. Furthermore, the argument that led our research is that the lack of a job for more than twelve months affects both the subjects (having an impact on their physical and psychological health, their relations with the members of their families, friends and other relatives), as well as the families they are part of (impacting on the level of income, the quality of life, the relations among the family members etc.). Women from rural areas, especially those from marginalized communities don't have access, in the same extent, with those from urban areas to specific tools through which they can benefit from professional development. Also, there are differences in terms of financial and time resources, which makes this topic important from a sociological point of view (Niță and Pârvu, 2020; Motoi and Popescu, 2017: 112).

Why a research on women? Because beyond the realities of the changes that have taken place in the Romanian labour market, women are perceived as a socially disadvantaged category in relation to others, and they have been and, therefore, are still seen as social actors on the labour market with a higher risk potential than men. Also, As regards to gender inequality in the field of participation in vocational training, it can be explained by the fact that women have a more important family role (Crocquey, 1995: 61-63) and a rate of work different from that of men, most of the time working in areas where training is less developed.

The topic of our research is focusing on unemployed women, because also in many other scientific papers we can find the idea that certain categories of people are severely under-represented in vocational training for the unemployed: women, the low-skilled, the very long-term unemployed, the unemployed certain specific groups such as persons with disabilities. Also, women from rural areas are more exposed to unemployment because rural environment is often characterized by “a preponderance of employment in agriculture which offers a minimum subsistence conditions for the inhabitants”. (Pricină, 2018: 34)

Over time, European strategies and policies have had as their fundamental aim the increase of the employment rate at the level of the member states, so in 1997 the Luxembourg Summit takes place as a result of the increase in the unemployment rate at the European level, having four main objectives: increase the rate of employment, supporting entrepreneurship, equal opportunities between women and men and adaptability. In March 2000, the Lisbon Summit discussed the need for full employment, which in 2010 had to reach the threshold of 70% for men and 60% for women. The Lisbon Strategy through the Program established for the years 2001-2004 pursued the following objectives: equal opportunities for women and men; the need for better social inclusion; using time in a more useful way; employment growth. In fact, social inclusion is subject to many EU reports, studies and policy papers, being one of the “6 prevailing items of EU social action” (Olimid and Georgescu, 2016: 43).

Risks and Consequences of Women's Unemployment in Rural Communities from Romania. Results of an Empirical Study in Dolj County

This strategy proposes active measures that start from the premise of the interdependence between economic policy, social policy and labour policy. The reduction of the unemployment rate among young people and the elderly, the need to develop entrepreneurship and the elimination of gender discrimination are supported.

Following the revision of the Lisbon Strategy in 2002 and its launch in 2005, the next program (2005-2008) of the European Union was based on the progress recorded in the period 2001-2004, in this sense the need for solid social policies capable of making facing the challenges that have arisen.

In 2008, the European Council established the Program for the years 2008-2010, which contained a total of 23 guidelines, eight of which were dedicated to employment.

The objective according to which in 2010 the employment rate of women had to reach 60% was reached in certain states in 2009, instead in Romania the employment rate of women was 52% (Frunzaru, 2012: 85).

The Europe 2020 strategy represented the desire of the European Union to lay the foundations for a sustainable, intelligent and favourable growth for social and economic inclusion (Ilie Goga, 2014: 201-202).

So the main three priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy refer to: intelligent growth, through the development of an economy based on knowledge and innovation; sustainable growth, by promoting a more efficient, ecological and competitive economy; growth favourable to inclusion by promoting an economy with a high degree of employment that ensures social and territorial cohesion (European Commission, 2010).

In the National Strategy for Employment, 2014-2020 of Romania, the main objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy regarding the labour market are presented: employment rate for people aged 20-64 over 75%; both public and private investments to support research and development of 3% of the European Union's GDP; reducing school dropout to a maximum level of 10% and increasing the graduation rate of a tertiary education level of people aged between 30-34 (minimum 40%); the decrease by 20 million of the number of European citizens threatened by poverty and social exclusion.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research objectives

Our research started from the following two research objectives:

O.1. Knowing the main challenges faced by rural women in finding a job and identifying the job expectations.

O.2. Knowing the degree of involvement in finding a job and the interest in participating in professional training courses.

2.2. Research hypotheses

H.1: The lower a person's level of education, the more difficult access to the labour market is;

H.2. The older a person is, the more difficult access to the labour market is;

H.3. The younger a person is, the greater the availability for continuous professional training.

2.3. Methods

The research that we have conducted in 4 rural marginalized communities from Dolj County is a quantitative one (opinion survey method), using as research tool the questionnaire. We have used a questionnaire with 28 questions: Close-ended questions, Open-ended questions, Multiple choice questions, Rating scale questions.

2.4. Sample

The sample was represented by 457 women living in 4 rural communities from Dolj County, with different employment statuses, from all age categories and with different levels of education. The distribution of the sample, on employment status, education level and age categories are presented in the two tables bellow:

Table 1: Distribution of the sample, by the current employment status (N=457)

Short-term unemployed women	46,6%
Households' women	40,8%
Long-term unemployed women	12,6%
Total	100,0

Table 2: Distribution of the exploratory lot, by age group and level of education

By age group		By level of education	
18-25 years	15,8%	High school (Secondary school)	33,1%
26-35 years	42,4%	Lower-Secondary school	28,6%
36-45 years	32,4%	Vocational school	14,5%
46-55 years	9,4%	Post-secondary school	18,4%
		Higher education	5,4%
Total	100,0%		100,0%

3. Results

Related to the personal perception on labour market, our research revealed that the majority of respondents, respectively 77%, believe that the labour market does not provide sufficient employment opportunities.

Table 3: Do you consider that there are enough jobs in your county? (N=457)

No	77,0%
Yes	21,5%
Don't know/ N.A.	1,5%
Total	100,0

A pessimistic orientation, correlated with a perception about the deterioration of the quality of life, of a discouragement regarding the search for a job and the perception of difficulties (lived or that may occur) in the process of looking for a job. Also, we have observed that there is a strong correlation with the desire to accept any job (even if it does not correspond to the qualification held) The first question addressed to the

Risks and Consequences of Women’s Unemployment in Rural Communities from Romania. Results of an Empirical Study in Dolj County

participants in this study confirms the negative effects of unemployment (45,0% stated that their life is worse, when comparing it with the previous year-2021)

**Table 4: Quality of life perception (2022, compared to 2021)
– bivariate analysis, by level of education (N=457)**

Level of education	Quality of life perception (2022, compared to 2021)					
	Don t know/ NA	Much Better	Better	The same	Worse	Much worse
Lower secondary school	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	53.3%	26.7%
High School	1.2%	0.9%	7.5%	29.0%	43.3%	18.1%
Vocational school	0.6%	1.9%	7.5%	17.6%	48.4%	23.9%
Post-secondary school	1.3%	0.0%	3.8%	34.6%	42.3%	17.9%
Tertiary/University	0.8%	2.0%	4.7%	33.2%	47.0%	12.3%

From the bivariate analysis presented in the table above we may observe that those who are affected the most from unemployment are graduates with a low level of education (which confirms the H1 of our research). Thus, 80.0% of the lower secondary school graduates experienced a worsening of the standard of living, followed by 72.3% of the vocational school graduates. At the opposite pole are high school graduates totalling 61.4%, post-secondary school graduates - 60.2% persons who accuse the decrease of the standard of living due to unemployment and the graduates of higher studies with 59.3%.

Table 5: To what extent, the fact that you currently do not have a job, has affected your family stability? (N=457)

To a very small extent	27,8%
Not at all	24,6%
To a large extent	19%
To a small extent	15,9%
To a very large extent	9,5%
Don't know/NA	3,2%
Total	100,0%

A percentage of 25,4% of women have stated a deterioration of the family relations, which reveals the seriousness of the phenomenon from the social point of view and not necessarily from the economic one by correlating with the age of the respondents, those who reported this consequence are between 50 and 54 years (35.9%).

Table 6: What are the main problems/challenges you faced when looking for a job? (N=457)

Lack of professional experience	25.9%
Age	17.5%
Small salary	7.0%
Working conditions	1.5%
Lack of studies	3,1%
Extra hours / extended program	1.5%
Lack of qualification trainings	1.3%
Lack of job offers	14,5%

Big competition on vacancies	1.2%
Other	2,6%
Can not appreciate	13.9%
Total	100.0%

The structure of these answers reveals the main problems faced by those seeking job search: too young or too old, no professional experience, low wages, working conditions and extended working hours etc. These are perceived as problems depending on the profile of the respondents, personal expectations, and professional goals. Difficulties due to lack of experience can be a cause for which they accept jobs for which they are not qualified. This category of women is predominantly found among those with a working experience between 1-3 years. The same attitude is also found in the opinions of women who have a significant seniority in work, such as those with 10 years or more. Most of those who would work in any field are married (in the case of people aged 35-55), and unmarried in the case of youth (up to 35 years).

Table 7: When you are concerned about finding a job, where do you get the information? (N=457)

From online platforms with vacancies	66,7%
From friends	16,7%
Directly from the companies	4,6%
From newspapers	4,0%
From the National Agency of Employment	4,0%
From relatives	2,4%
Total	100.0%

Form the figure above we may observe that the presence in the first place in the preferences of the Internet for the search for a new job is an important element, in relation to the search methods. To explain this percentage, we correlated this research method with the main characteristics of the respondents. Most of those who are looking for a job using this method are youth. Thus, 62.5% of respondents under the age of 20 use the Internet to acquire a job, followed by those between the ages of 20-24 years (43,7%) and those aged 25-29 with 38,3%. After 29 years, the job search on the Internet decreases in the options of the respondents, the other methods of job search being preferred.

Table 8: Would you accept a job which is not according to your qualification? (N=457)

No. I prefer to have a job according to my qualification	27,5%
Yes	52%
Don't know	30,5%
Total	100.0%

Difficulties due to lack of experience can be a cause for which they accept jobs for which they are not qualified. This category of women is predominantly found among those with an working experience between 1-3 years. The same attitude is also found in the opinions of women who have a significant seniority in work, such as those with 10

Risks and Consequences of Women's Unemployment in Rural Communities from Romania. Results of an Empirical Study in Dolj County

years or more. Most of those who would work in any field are married (in the case of people aged 35-55), and unmarried in the case of youth (up to 35 years).

Conclusions

Unemployment meant for almost half of them (45%) a lower standard of living, and for 3.5% the standard of living experienced significant decreases. Taking into consideration the age criteria, there is a greater dissatisfaction in the case of persons over 25 years and a maintenance of the state of satisfaction of persons up to 24 years. The explanation of these answers may also be due to the salaries obtained by each professional category and to the responsibilities associated with each age. Apart from the standard of living, unemployment also influences family relationships. 21.0% of the respondents stated that unemployment influenced the relationships between family members (to a large extent). Less than half of unemployed women have been participated to a job interview during the last year (2021). The percentages obtained from the responses indicate low efforts for job search, who can have multiple causes, starting from the lack of effective job search strategies, the lack of opportunities in the labour market in Dolj county (especially for persons living in rural areas), the lack of informations on the dynamics of the labour market, the demand of employers for new employees etc.. Regardless of the reasons for not being actively involved in the process of searching for a job and maintaining the status of inactive or unemployed, these situation leads to social marginalization and long-term exposure to the process of social exclusion. The problems encountered in the labour market were revealed, in small percentage, by the respondents to this survey. For most of them, the case of young people, lack of experience and professional experience represents an obstacle to employment.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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