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# Academic teacher's work in the face of contemporary challenges — interdisciplinary considerations\*

## Praca nauczyciela akademickiego wobec wyzwań współczesności — rozważania w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym

### **Abstract**

The way of performing work by an academic teacher due to the COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot, and in the future these changes (especially in the field of didactics) may already be permanently inscribed in its standards. The need to perform work (teaching, research and organization) remotely, often in a home environment, has highlighted a number of problems. Undoubtedly, it was (and still remains) a challenge for an academic teacher to find their way in the realities of remote working. For the academic teacher who is a parent (caregiver), it remains a challenge to find the right rhythm between the professional and private spheres. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed not only long-standing problems related to the phenomenon of invisible (unpaid) work, or gender inequality in employment, but has also created completely new ones related to the expectations of constant readiness and availability of the employee to work or the imposition of additional obligations, which the employer has burdened teaching staff in particular. The existing doubts related to the evaluation of scientific work have also gained in

### **Streszczenie**

Sposób wykonywania pracy przez nauczyciela akademickiego ze względu na pandemię COVID-19 bardzo się zmienił, a w przyszłości zmiany te (szczególnie w zakresie dydaktyki) mogą już na trwałe wpisać się w jej standardy. Konieczność wykonywania pracy (dydaktycznej, badawczej i organizacyjnej) w formie zdalnej, często w warunkach domowych, uwypukliła szereg problemów. Niewątpliwie wyzwaniem dla nauczyciela akademickiego było (i wciąż pozostaje) odnalezienie się w realiach pracy zdalnej. Dla nauczyciela akademickiego będącego rodzicem (opiekunem) wyzwaniem pozostaje odnalezienie właściwego rytmu między sferą zawodową a prywatną. Pandemia COVID-19 wyeksponowała nie tylko problemy istniejące od dawna, a związane ze zjawiskiem pracy niewidzialnej (nieodpłatnej) czy nierównością płci w zatrudnieniu, ale stworzyła zupełnie nowe, związane z oczekiwaniami ciągłej gotowości i dyspozycji pracownika do pracy czy nałożeniem dodatkowych obowiązków, którymi pracodawca obciążył szczególnie pracowników dydaktycznych. Również istniejące wątpliwości dotyczące ewaluacji pracy naukowej zyskały znacząco na sile.

strength. The lack of legal solutions regulating the issue of the impact of an employee's excused absence from work due to parental leave (and in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, absence due to the need to provide care) on the evaluation of the quality of scientific activity is a significant burden for university employees. The sociological research cited in the article reveals that the burden of caregiving and performing additional duties rested primarily on the shoulders of women. In many cases, this has translated directly into the number of articles written, research conducted, or grant proposals submitted. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only forced some changes in the current organization of the professional work of academic teachers, but above all has revealed problems whose scope is no longer only individual, but primarily social. The aim of the article is to trace selected challenges faced today by women and men employed in higher education and to analyze the legal solutions in force as well as to identify gaps in the law that make it difficult to mitigate them. An interdisciplinary examination of the presented issues will enable us to search for legal and non-legal solutions, which will contribute to the removal of barriers in the academic work environment, in which many stereotypes still prevail.

#### Keywords

higher education, academic teacher, invisible work, remote work, COVID-19, work-life balance, right to be *offline*, academic performance evaluation

JEL: K31

## Introduction

The status of academic teachers is regulated by the provisions of the Law on Higher Education and Science,<sup>1</sup> which in general terms have the characteristics of professional pragmatics, although they do not have the attribute of comprehensiveness (Baran, 2020). The regulations of this Act are of a special nature in relation to the Labour Code, although sometimes, due to the specificity of the work of academic staff, they are further modified. This specificity of working in higher education, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been put to a kind of test. The way a university employee performs their job has changed a lot, and in the future, these changes (especially in the area of teaching) may already become a permanent part of the standards of a university teacher's work. The need to carry out work (research, didactic and organisation) remotely, often from home, has highlighted a number of problems. Undoubtedly, it was (and still is) a challenge for an academic to find their way in the reality of remote working. On the other hand, for the academic teacher who is a parent (carer), the challenge is not only the

Brak rozwiązań prawnych regulujących kwestie wpływu usprawiedliwionej nieobecności pracownika w świadczeniu pracy wywołanej urloпами rodzicielskimi (a w dobie pandemii COVID-19 nieobecności wywołanej koniecznością zapewnienia opieki) na ocenę jakości działalności naukowej stanowi znaczne obciążenie dla pracowników uczelni wyższych. Przywołane w artykule badania socjologiczne ukazują, iż ciężar opieki oraz wykonywania dodatkowych obowiązków spoczął przede wszystkim na barkach kobiet. W wielu przypadkach przełożyło się to bezpośrednio na liczbę napisanych artykułów, przeprowadzonych badań czy złożonych wniosków grantowych. Pandemia COVID-19 wymusiła nie tylko pewne zmiany w dotychczasowej organizacji pracy zawodowej nauczyciela akademickiego, ale ujawniła problemy, których zakres jawi się już nie tylko jednostkowo (indywidualne), lecz przede wszystkim społecznie. Celem artykułu jest prześledzenie wybranych wyzwań stojących współcześnie przed osobami zatrudnionymi w szkolnictwie wyższym i analiza odnoszących się do nich, obowiązujących rozwiązań prawnych oraz identyfikacja luk w prawie utrudniających ich łagodzenie. Interdyscyplinarne zbadanie przedstawionych zagadnień umożliwi poszukanie rozwiązań prawnych, jak i pozaprawnych, które przyczynią się do zniesienia barier w akademickim środowisku pracy, w którym wciąż panuje wiele stereotypów.

#### Słowa kluczowe

szkolnictwo wyższe, nauczyciel akademicki, praca niewidzialna, praca zdalna, COVID-19, work-life balance, prawo do bycia *offline*, ewaluacja działalności naukowej

remote work itself, but also finding the right balance between professional (remote) and private life, or rather finding the right rhythm between the professional and private sphere. The need to carry out professional duties remotely while at the same time providing care (for a child, elderly or dependent person) has undoubtedly shaken the concept of work-life balance. At the same time, it exposed long existing problems related to the phenomenon of invisible (unpaid) work or gender inequality in employment and created completely new problems related to the expectations of continuous readiness and availability of an employee to work or imposing additional obligations on employers, especially on teaching staff (preparation of teaching materials in electronic form, online training (courses) in the field of introducing new teaching methods, remote examinations). Also, existing doubts related to the evaluation of scientific work have gained considerable strength. The lack of legal solutions regulating the impact of an employee's excused absence from work due to parental leave (and, in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, absence due to the need to provide care) on the assessment of the quality of scientific activity places a significant burden on university staff.

In the period of the pandemic, when libraries, archives, and laboratories where research was conducted were closed in Poland, travel was restricted, both research and teaching work became much more difficult. Sociological studies cited in the article show that the burden of care and performing additional duties rests primarily on the shoulders of women. In many cases, this has translated directly into the number of articles written, research conducted or grant applications submitted. The COVID-19 pandemic not only forced some changes in the existing organization of the professional work of an academic teacher, but most importantly revealed problems whose scope is no longer only individual, but primarily social. One such problem undoubtedly remains the phenomenon of invisible work, which sociologists have long studied, pointing to the gender contract of gender and rarely embedding this concept in legal categories related to professional activity. Invisible work, i.e. unpaid work — mainly in the domestic space — concerns mainly women and is treated as a natural attribute of their social role. However, with cultural and generational changes, invisible work, especially childcare, increasingly concerns men as well.

The aim of the article is to trace selected challenges currently faced by men and women employed in higher education and to analyse the existing legal solutions, as well as to identify gaps in the law which make it difficult to mitigate them. The analysis will address the following challenges: violation of the work-life balance, the requirement for continuous professional availability and the burden of invisible professional responsibilities, especially of a non-research nature. The identified problems have long remained present in the academic space (see Zaworska-Nikoniuk, 2019, pp. 85–105), however, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown has greatly exacerbated their impact. An interdisciplinary examination of the issues presented will enable us to look for legal and non-legal solutions that will contribute to the elimination of barriers in the academic work environment, where stereotypes still prevail.

The analyses presented in this paper are based on data from the quantitative research Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring (GEAM) conducted within the *Communities of PrACTice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe* (ACT) project.<sup>2</sup> The online survey was conducted between June 15 and July 10, 2020 among employees of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and was designed to monitor the state of gender equality in terms of working conditions, organizational culture and work environment, interpersonal behaviours and relationships, beliefs, attitudes, and biases. To capture the changes occurring in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey instrument was expanded to include questions about its impact on working conditions in four dimensions: academic, psychological, support and work-family balance. The questionnaire used allowed us to capture the perspective

of male and female employees working in research, teaching, administrative and technical positions, however, for the purposes of this article, only the analysis of the situation of research and teaching staff will be presented.<sup>3</sup>

## Work-life balance disorder in the work of university teachers

The need to work remotely<sup>4</sup> (Mitrus, 2020a) has already become part of pandemic life and has directly affected the work-life balance (difficult to achieve even in the period before the pandemic), creating the need to find the right rhythm between this "new" work and private life (work-life rhythm). At the same time, balance does not necessarily mean being equally involved in family and professional life. The amount of time devoted to professional and private activities remains variable and depends on age, gender, education, timing of career or family situation. There is no universal model of balance, and matching demands with work and family often means reducing mismatches (Siemieniak & Rembiasz, 2018). On the other hand, life is the time free from work, belonging to the private sphere of a human being, so it covers personal life of an individual, social contacts, but also family life in the framework of which a human being also performs work of an unpaid (invisible) character, connected with running the house, caring or simply resting. The concept of work-life balance is based on a choice made by the employee himself/herself in order to reconcile his/her professional and private roles.

However, in the light of sociological research conducted at the Jagiellonian University, it should be stressed that this choice remains strongly determined by the workload of male and female employees<sup>5</sup> of scientific-research institutions. It is the demands of their work that adversely affect family life, while the burdens in their personal and family lives are much less likely to impede functioning at work. While the conflict of work and family/private life is experienced in a similar way by women and men, the factor that differentiates it to a much greater extent is taking up care. Male and female workers who care for children under 18 or another adult were more likely to report difficulties in functioning at work due to both fatigue resulting from the burden of household responsibilities (8% several times a week and 21% several times a month compared to 2% and 7% respectively) and personal commitments (3% several times a week and 10% several times a month compared to 1% and 4% respectively).

When remote work is accepted at home (Mitrus, 2020b, p. 6 and next), it is difficult to use terms of either a work-life conflict or a conflict of goals. The missing boundary between the private and the professional can only be expressed by the concept of integration (integration of goals), thus, work-life integration (Godlewska-Bujak, 2020, p. 5 and next). Although more and more often it is proposed to combine these two spheres, reconcile them or even mix them, depending on

the needs, pointing to the interpenetration of private and professional life (see Tomaszewska & Pawlicka, 2019, pp. 42–51). The pandemic period brought about a shift in priorities creating real risks associated with loss of employment, which in turn pushed the protection of family life into the background. We can agree with the thesis that the concept of work-life balance has been reduced in the period of the pandemic to the state of integration of professional and family life, but on condition that we treat this state only as transitory, due to the numerous threats it poses.

Currently, European Union member states, including Poland, have time (until 02.08.2022) to adapt their national legislation to the new legal instrument of the European Union, which is the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) 2019/1158 of 20.06.2019 (which came into force on 01/08/2019) on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.<sup>6</sup> The new Directive 2019/1158 builds on and complements the principles established in Directive 2010/18/EU by strengthening the existing arrangements and introducing new rights, while addressing gender equality in employment much more broadly (see Ludera-Ruszel, 2020, pp. 10–18). The main aim of EU regulation is to achieve equality between women and men in terms of labour market opportunities and to make it easier for working parents and carers to reconcile work and family life. EU law does not interfere with the organisation or functioning of the family and does not divide responsibilities between spouses, but aims at facilitating the reconciliation of family and professional life for workers, taking into account the different structures within the family and the principle of non-discrimination based on sex (see Szczerba-Zawada, 2011, pp. 230–252; 2014, pp. 25–32).

The need for such solutions is also clear in relation to higher education employees among whom, similar to society as a whole, there are significant gender differences in the distribution of domestic responsibilities. Both in Poland (Siemieńska, 2001, p.17; Knapieńska & Szyszko 2018, pp. 89–114; Wagner, Finkielstein & Czarnacka, 2017, pp. 2–3.) and in other countries (Schiebinger & Gilmartin, 2010) women spend more time than men on housework and caring for dependents, including children, which poses a challenge in a research environment that is at the same time highly competitive and lacks job stability (OECD, 2018; 2021). This is also shown by the research conducted among female and male employees of the Jagiellonian University.<sup>7</sup> The actual burden of care work, as well as social perceptions about the lesser availability of women who perform these functions, cause women to miss out on some opportunities for professional development, for example they have been shown to be less scientifically mobile and to participate less than men in international cooperation (Zippel, 2017).

The discussed disproportions have intensified with the closure of care and educational institutions and the introduction of remote education as well as difficulties in

institutional medical care, it is mainly women who have taken over the responsibility for caring for children and sick family members (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey & Tertilt, 2020; Blaskó, Papadimitriou & Manca, 2020; Viglione, 2020, p. 365 and next), which makes it difficult for them to perform their professional duties (de Dios Ruiz & Pajares Sánchez, 2020; Deryugina, Shurchkov & Stearns, 2021; Watchorn, Deirdre, Heckendorf & Smith, 2020; Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh, 2020; Vincent-Lamarre, Sugimoto & Lariviere, 2020) The negative impact of the pandemic on the work of people in higher education is also confirmed by the results of the GEAM survey, showing that COVID-19 affects academics more strongly than technical and administrative staff.<sup>8</sup> It is worth adding that both women and men felt burdened with care, which may result from the build-up of caring roles in the pandemic (including educational roles) and be an indicator of the transformation of parental roles, where men's involvement in care work becomes a value for them and an area of growing activity (Slany & Ratecka, 2018).

The need to adapt Polish legislation to the assumptions of Directive 2019/1158 may be an excellent opportunity to change institutions that have raised interpretation doubts for years. This is not necessarily by increasing the already considerable rights of employees — parents (guardians) and burdening only the employer with them, but precisely by refreshing institutions that have been rooted in the Labour Code for years (child care leave), reorganizing the model of functioning of new institutions (parental leave) and transferring the obligation to finance them to the state and not only to the employer. Changes should also take place in insurance regulations. Since the attention of the EU legislator is focused on increasing flexibility in the employment of employees of parents (guardians), this cannot take place without ensuring them adequate social security. These changes, as shown by the results of sociological research presented above, should also take into account the specificity of academic teachers' work, who already before the COVID-19 pandemic were overburdened with work, which generated conflicts between family and professional life.

## **Endless work, that is the right to be *offline***

Another of the risks and undesirable phenomena resulting from the ubiquitous remote working and contributing to the difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance is the blurring of the boundary between work and leisure. The pressures of being online limit an employee's ability to switch off during their free time and stay *offline*. Although this problem had been identified before (Eurofound, 2017), it took on new significance during the pandemic. As the research (Dolot, 2020) shows, some of the negative consequences of working remotely during a pandemic are the constant feeling of being at work and giving up breaks while working. This is a problem that

affects the majority of employees working remotely, which is why the European Union has taken action to introduce appropriate regulations in all Member States which resulted in the adoption by the European Parliament on 21 January 2021 of a resolution containing recommendations to the Commission on the right to be *offline* (2019/2181, INL). Work on the text of the directive is still in progress, but it is nevertheless important to consider whether, in the light of existing national labour law provisions, it is really necessary to introduce further solutions (legal and organisational) which would allow for the separation of professional and private life in this way? Will these regulations translate directly into the work of an academic teacher?

The right to be *offline* also called the right to disconnect, it is understood as not to engage in work-related tasks outside working time and not to participate in communication through digital tools, directly or indirectly. It is intended to give the employee the opportunity to put aside the tools used to do the job and not to respond to orders from the employer outside of working time with the guarantee that there will be no negative consequences for doing so. In practice, this will refer in particular to not answering work phone calls and emails or not attending online meetings after working hours. The right to be *offline* is intended to apply to all employees (including those under civil law contracts) regardless of the industry or sector (public or private) in which they are employed, and therefore also to university teachers. The increasing use of digital technology has created a culture of the 'always-on', 'always-present', 'always-ready and available' worker, and the timing of the ongoing pandemic only reinforces this. The phenomenon of digital nomadism is taking place, as a result of which workers are becoming unable to disconnect from work, which over time leads to physical and mental health problems (stress, anxiety, depression and burnout), has a negative impact on occupational health and the work-life balance of workers, and deprives workers of their fundamental right to rest (Piwowarska, 2021). This is confirmed by the results of a survey carried out at the Jagiellonian University, according to which the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to remote working caused difficulties in concentration for 38% of academics and a deterioration in mental well-being for 47% of respondents.

It seems that under the current Labour Code regulations, employees already have adequate legal instruments guaranteeing them the right to rest (daily, weekly) or the right to annual leave, and therefore the right to exclude, although named differently, remains regulated. At the same time, such an employee's right to be *offline* could not deprive the employer of the possibility of issuing an order to perform overtime work, and there are appropriate legal tools in this regard as well. It seems therefore that it is not the lack of regulation of the right to be excluded that is the challenge. It undoubtedly remains a change in social attitudes towards this newly developed work culture. The

problem, of course, also boils down to incompetent organization of the process of remote work, inadequate communication of the parties to the employment relationship in this sphere, mutual disrespect for the hours of remote work. At the same time, legal regulation of the possibility of remote working would make it possible to rework the balance between remote work and non-work life, which particularly affects employees-parents (carers) and women who are still heavily burdened by conflicting social roles. It is also a challenge for employers who still consider instruments facilitating reconciliation of work and non-work life in the context of costs, organisational mess, relaxation of work discipline or even conflicts among the staff (Smóder, 2011, p. 192). The question is whether such a legal regulation would have any impact on the performance of work (especially scientific work) by academic teachers, which as a rule remains unregulated, where overtime is an indicator of dedication to work and a sense of academic mission, where overwork is a complete norm.<sup>9</sup>

The overwork of research teaching staff exemplify the long-standing problem of accounting for the working time of academic staff. Teaching is only one part of their duties, which can be put into a specific time frame due to the fixed salary. However, in the case of other professional duties (related to the preparation of teaching materials, the introduction of new teaching methods, participation in trainings, conferences, checking students' work, performing organizational or research work), the legislature did not set any limits on the number of hours academic teachers should devote to this work. Only in general can reference be made to the applicable working time standards of the Code. However, academic teachers are subject to a task-based working time system, which in practice makes it difficult to prove the specific number of hours allocated to particular duties. The judicature has referred to the participation of academic staff in organisational work quite broadly, holding that such obligatory participation in the organisational work of a higher education institution is not limited only to the work directly related to the organisation of research, teaching and teaching work. In the opinion of the Supreme Court<sup>10</sup> (see Grzebyk, 2015) the performance of organisational duties by academic staff resulting from participation in a statutory body of the university, such as a tender committee, falls within the scope of their duties without the right to additional remuneration on this account. A claim for additional pay could only be based on exceeding the applicable working time standards. Although the cited decision was made with reference to the provisions of the repealed Act, it illustrates the vagueness of this notion, which is still reproduced by the legislator in the provisions of the new Act.

## The phenomenon of invisible work in higher education

As outlined above there are clear gender disparities in the distribution of domestic responsibilities among those

employed in science. Anyway the functioning of the entire world economy is to a large extent based on unpaid work performed by women, i.e. domestic work, care, upbringing and education (Oxfam, 2020). Such work does not generate income for the household, is not counted in the GDP and thus is not appreciated either materially or socially. It is seen as entirely voluntary work, as invisible work, and therefore as work that falls outside any legal structure. Invisibility remains here only a symbolic notion, as it defines work that is strongly related to the individual life situation, the effects of which remain visible although often unconscious and unappreciated. However, unpaid (invisible) work should not be confined to domestic and caring structures alone, for it also includes activities that occur in the context of paid employment, which workers perform in response to (implicit or explicit) employer demands, which are essential to income generation, obtaining or retaining a job, and career advancement, but which are often overlooked, ignored and/or devalued by employers, consumers, workers and ultimately by the legal system itself (Poster, Crain & Cherry, 2016).

In the context of science and higher education, invisible work encompasses a whole range of work that, while absorbing, receives little recognition or consideration in promotion procedures (Wang, 2019). This work includes, but is not limited to, teaching and mentoring students, participating in university committee meetings, or other service work to the university community. These responsibilities are sometimes referred to as *academic housekeeping* (Kaplan, 2017; Kalm, 2019, p. 5 and next). Women have, on average, more teaching responsibilities than men (Misra, Lundquist, Holmes & Agiomavritis, 2011, pp. 22–26; Viglione, 2020) and research — conducted mainly in the United States and Canada — also shows that women (and people from ethnic and other minority groups) are burdened with service responsibilities to a greater extent than men or, more broadly, people with majority status (Babcock, Recalde, Vesterlund & Weingart, 2017; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, Agiomavritis, 2011; Guarino, Borden & Victor, 2016; Wang, 2019; Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017, pp. 54–75). Universities, like many other organizations, are gendered institutions (Acker, 1992, pp. 565–569), which among other things means that they have reward structures that are gendered. Teaching and mentoring associated with caring are seen as more feminine activities, whereas research and administrative functions are more masculine as they require innovation and leadership skills. The reward structure at the university gives more weight to these "male" activities (Social Sciences, 2017). The gender nature of the division of academic responsibilities is also indicated by the results of a study carried out at the Jagiellonian University. The female respondents declared that they are more often assigned to non-scientific duties which (although necessary for the efficient functioning of the institution or scientific teams) are clearly less valued and less important in promotion procedures. An additional

conclusion regarding the nature of invisible work emerges from this study, namely, that invisibility can also manifest itself in failing to recognise or appreciate a person's competence or the work they have done.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting here that the lower visibility of women's substantive contributions may influence their lower chances to take on important tasks or professional roles. This is evidenced by the results of this study — 57% of respondents (including 72% of women and 35% of men) indicated that senior positions are more often assigned to men, and 41% (including 55% of women and 35% of men) declared that men are more often assigned attractive or desirable tasks or roles.

Gender inequalities in the academic invisible workload were exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a study conducted among those employed in science in various countries around the world found that in the first year of the pandemic, 62% of female academics—compared to 40% of male academics—spent additional time supervising students and managing staff online (Watchorn, Heckendorf & Smith, 2020). Due to the increased burden of teaching responsibilities, the need to adapt course curricula and methods to the requirements of remote learning may also place a greater burden on women (Viglione, 2020).

Among the proposals to include invisible work in the professional activity of people employed in science and higher education is the need, firstly, to acknowledge that this work is done (to see it), secondly, to measure and monitor it, and thirdly, to include this activity in the guidelines for promotion rules (Wang, 2019) and thus include it in the criteria for scientific excellence. You can read more about it in the next section. One can also learn how to *navigate invisible work*, e.g. learn time management strategies, when to say no. Methods used in some US universities and research institutes include deliberate and even allocation of responsibilities, inclusion of service to the academic community, including, for example, mentoring of students, in internal promotion policies, and allowing employees to determine how much (a percentage of their academic work) they want to devote to these activities (Wang, 2019).

## **Periodic evaluation of academic staff and evaluation of the quality of scientific activity**

Academic staff subject to periodic appraisal shall remain academic staff who may be employed in teaching, research and research and teaching staff groups. The assessment refers in particular to the fulfilment of basic obligations, which have been specified in a collective and synthetic manner (Jędrzejewski, 2019) in the provisions of the Act (Article 115 of the Act) and to the compliance with the provisions on copyright and related rights, as well as industrial property (Article 128, para. 1 of the Act). In the case of employees in the teaching staff group, the periodic evaluation shall concern the teaching and

learning of students or participation in the training of doctoral students; in the case of research staff, the evaluation shall concern the conduct of scientific activity or participation in the training of doctoral students. The last group of research and teaching staff, on the other hand, is evaluated for conducting scientific activity, educating and teaching students or participating in doctoral education. Moreover, academic staff shall be required to participate in organisational work for their higher education institution and to continuously improve their professional competence (Article 115, section 2 of the Act). The detailed duties of academic staff stem in particular from the provisions of the general labour law and the internal regulations of the university (Pisarczyk, 2015, p. 39 and next). The rules for defining the scope of duties of academic staff for particular staff groups and position types, the types of courses to be taught within the scope of such duties, including the teaching load and other duties for particular positions, and the rules for calculating teaching hours shall be laid down in the work regulations (Article 127, section 4 of the Act).

Academic staff shall be subject to periodic evaluation at least once every four years or at the request of the rector (Article 128, section 2 of the Act). The legislator has provided for exceptions to this general rule, where the deadline for the periodic appraisal may be extended by a certain period of time as a result of absence from work due to maternity leave, leave under conditions of maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, educational leave or leave for health reasons, as well as military service or substitute service. In turn, the criteria for periodic performance appraisal for particular groups of employees and types of positions, as well as the procedure and the entity responsible for performance appraisal shall be specified by the rector after consultation with the senate, trade unions, student self-government and doctoral student self-government (Article 128, section 3 of the Act).

Relatively recently (i.e. since 01.01.2018) new regulations are in force regarding the evaluation of the quality of scientific activity of the whole university in particular scientific disciplines (the first such evaluation will take place already in 2021). The basic criterion for the evaluation of the quality of scientific activity is the scientific or artistic level of the activity. This criterion takes into account publication achievements of the employees of the evaluated entity (scientific articles and scientific monographs — including the editing of monographs) as well as patents granted to the entity for inventions (Ewaluacja, 2021). The evaluation covers the achievements of all employees carrying out scientific activities in entities defined in the Act and will be carried out, in the same way as the periodic evaluation, every 4 years. According to the provisions of the Regulation on data processed in the POL-on Integrated Information System for Higher Education and Science<sup>12</sup> (para. 2 section 5) the list of employees shall include information on the

amount of working time, annual teaching load, the share of working time related to conducting scientific activity in particular disciplines and the number of days during which the employee was on unpaid leave, maternity leave, leave under conditions of maternity leave, paternity leave, child care leave, parental leave or leave for health reasons, received sick leave or rehabilitation benefit in a given year (as of 31 December). In turn, according to para. 17, section 10 of the Regulation on the evaluation of the quality of scientific activity, in the case of employees who, during the evaluation period, were on unpaid leave, on health leave, on any leave related to parenthood, defined in the provisions of the Labour Code, were on sick leave or received rehabilitation benefit in total for at least 24 months or for at least half of the period of employment in the evaluated entity, if they do not authorise the entity to show any of their publications for the purposes of evaluation within the discipline, the sum of unit shares in publications taken into account in the evaluation of the evaluated entity in a given discipline shall not be reduced.

However, these implementing regulations are not adapted to the problems signalled above, i.e. those related to the pandemic situation, as they do not include, for example, the period of excused absence of an employee due to the need to provide care and collect additional care allowance on this account.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the employee must be on sick leave or on rehabilitation benefits for a total period of at least 24 months or for at least half of the period of employment in the entity being evaluated. As a result, an employee who does not meet this condition will be treated in the same way as the others subject to evaluation despite the fact that, for example, for a slightly shorter period (e.g. 23 months) he/she could not conduct scientific activity. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many workers did not make use of their entitlement to carer's allowance or supplementary carer's allowance but, at the same time as providing care, carried out their professional activities remotely. Thus, in order to ensure continuity of learning, lack of arrears and the possibility of taking examinations, academic teachers undertook simultaneous combination of professional and caring duties, which unfortunately in many cases — as the presented research shows — translated into lower scientific productivity, for which, after all, an academic teacher is mainly evaluated. In the case of women working in scientific institutions, this mainly means not having enough time for research and scientific activities, which is reflected in bibliometric data. Research confirms that during the first months of the pandemic, the proportion of articles submitted for publication authored by women either decreased compared to previous periods or increased at a significantly lower rate than those authored by men, and these observations apply to various scientific fields (Andersen, Nielsen, Simone, Lewiss, Jagsi & Meta-Research, 2020; Viglione, 2020; Kibbe, 2020; Squazzoni, Giangiacomo, Grimaldo, Garcia-Costa, Farjam & Mehmani, 2020).

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the scale of the problems associated with the specific nature of the work of an academic teacher, and this is particularly evident in the work of women in higher education. In the realities of remote working, the burden of additional responsibilities that do not have a significant impact on academic assessment, evaluation or career development remains particularly heavy for women.

The work of an academic teacher, considered both from the legal perspective and in the context of sociological sciences, draws attention to the scale of problems related to these topics, such as gender inequality in the academic environment, the phenomenon of unpaid (invisible) work and its significant impact on academic careers and the consequent need for transformations within academic institutions. For the legal sciences, it is important to refer to the approach known in sociology which focuses on the study of the 'gaps' between the law contained 'in the books' (Acts) and 'law in action' and therefore in its social functioning. Therefore, further research should primarily

focus on a deeper analysis of the phenomenon of invisible (unpaid) work, its dimensions and inequalities occurring within it, both with regard to gender, but also age or type of position held. In turn, the results of these studies should become the basis for the creation of such legal solutions (both at the national level and within the internal regulations of a given university), which, while not being discriminatory, would take into account to a greater extent the social expectations expressed in the presented sociological research.

The analysis of the impact of contemporary challenges on the professional activity of academic teachers is much more complicated, as it may burden employees to a different extent, revealing the influence of variables other than only gender, such as age, position held, stage of professional career, etc. An important problem concerns the definition of the so-called invisible work and finding an answer to the question whether invisible work is only work performed (unpaid) at home or also work performed as part of professional duties, but which does not have any impact on professional promotion and periodic evaluation of academic teachers.

## Notes/Przypisy

\* The publication was funded by the Priority Research Area Society of the Future under the program "Excellence Initiative — Research University" at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

<sup>1</sup> Act of 20 July 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science (Dz. U. 2021.478 consolidated text of 16.03.2021).

<sup>2</sup> The data was collected as part of the project which received funding from the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 788204.

<sup>3</sup> The GEAM study conducted at the Jagiellonian University was based on a non-representative, voluntary response sample. It was attended by 486 employees, 342 of whom work in a research and teaching position at various departments of the Jagiellonian University — both faculties of humanities, social sciences and those related to science, biology and medicine. Among this category, 29% are male, 66% are female, and 4% of the people surveyed did not want to answer the gender question. Those aged 31–45 (56%) and 46–65 (36%) were the most represented. About half of those surveyed (47%) are also carers or guardians of children under 18 or an adult.

<sup>4</sup> Remote work was introduced by the Act of 02.03.2020 on specific solutions related to prevention, counteraction and combating COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them (Dz. U., item 374 as amended), the so-called "anti-crisis shield" (1.0) and has been the subject of several amendments.

<sup>5</sup> At this point it should only be indicated (due to the fact that the scope of the problem significantly exceeds the subject of this paper) that the legal language, while remaining neutral, remains *de facto* blind to gender, because by using only the masculine form to denote an employee it masks problems that in fact concern mostly women. The language of the two scientific disciplines, i.e. legal sciences and sociological sciences, does not remain consistent in this respect, so it may be necessary to consider introducing feminatives into the legal language as well, especially where the social role of women remains dominant.

<sup>6</sup> Official Journal of the European Union, L 188 of 12.07.2019, in accordance with Article 20(2) of Directive 2019/1158, only in respect of pay or benefits when workers take parental leave may Member States bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive two years later, i.e. by 02.08.2024.

<sup>7</sup> Although virtually the same number of men and women (41% and 38% respectively) declared that they are a parent or a legal guardian of children below 18 years old, leave for childcare was used much more often by women (36% of female employees compared to 9% of male employees surveyed). At the same time, the respondents confirmed that women's greater involvement in caring work is a hindrance to their academic careers. In their responses to the open-ended question about the presence of gender bias, they point out that having children can objectively slow down their career development and advancement due to greater time constraints compared to those who do not do this work.

<sup>8</sup> It was every second person from this group participating in the survey who declared that home conditions made it difficult for them to work. Similarly, more than 40% indicated that they had less time for academic work due to caring responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research workers who are parents of children under the age of 18 and/or have others in their care were more likely to report an invisible workload than those without such responsibilities. 68% of them (compared to 36% of the group not declaring a caring relationship) said that home conditions made it difficult for them to work, and 67% of academics with caring duties indicated having less time for research work due to caring responsibilities (compared to 15% of those who did not declare caring for children or other adults).

<sup>9</sup> This is confirmed by the results of a survey carried out at the Jagiellonian University, which showed that almost half (46%) of research workers very often work more than 10 hours a day, 65% — on Saturdays, 56% on Sundays and 41% at night, for at least 2 hours between 10 pm and 5 am. Again, gender plays a role. While weekend work was reported by nearly equal proportions of men and women, more female employees than male employees (75% and 67% respectively) work more than 10 hours a day, and in turn more male employees than female employees (83% and 78% respectively) work night hours.

<sup>10</sup> Judgment of the Supreme Court of 11.02.2008, II PK 167/07, LEX No 492978.

<sup>11</sup> The invisibility understood in this way also has a gender dimension, as it was complained about more often by the women surveyed: 44% of them (and 30% of men) felt that their contribution to work is sometimes or often overlooked or undervalued. Additionally 32% of women (and 18% of men), felt that the people they work with do not pay attention to them or do not see their opinions as relevant. Moreover, 47% of women (as compared to 10% of men) indicated that men can more often enjoy the recognition of their intellectual contribution at meetings, conferences, workshops, and 40% of them (as compared to 4% of men) assessed that men can more often count on awards and recognition of outstanding achievements.

<sup>12</sup> Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 6 March 2019 (Dz. U. 2019.496.) on data processed in the POL-on Integrated Information System on Higher Education and Science.

<sup>13</sup> The Act of 02.03.2020 on special arrangements to prevent, counteract and combat COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them (Dz. U. of 2020.1842 consolidated text of 20.10.2020 in para. 4 introduced an additional care allowance from 28 June 2020, the possibility to draw the supplementary care allowance has been extended until 23 May 2021 in accordance with the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of 6 May 2021 on defining a longer period of drawing the supplementary care allowance to counteract COVID-19 (Dz. U. 2021.863 of 07.05.2021).

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**Dr Paulina Sekuła**, adiunkt w Instytucie Socjologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie. Jej zainteresowania badawcze dotyczą równości płci, szczególnie w obszarze badań naukowych i szkolnictwa wyższego, kultury politycznej i teorii demokracji. Od kilku lat jest zaangażowana jako badaczka w projekty dotyczące zmian strukturalnych w instytucjach szkolnictwa wyższego, w tym w projekty H2020 (GENERA, ACT i MINDtheGEPs) oraz w projekt Fundacji Alexandra von Humboldta Study of the potential of international mobile women scientists. Obecnie jest również współfacylitorką ACT Community of Practice for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe.

**Dr Ewa Krzaklewska**, adiunkt w Instytucie Socjologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie. Jej zainteresowania badawcze dotyczą socjologii młodzieży, mobilności akademickiej, studiów nad rodziną i równości płci. Jest lokalnym koordynatorem projektu ACT „Communities of Practice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe” (Horyzont 2020).

**Dr Marta Warat**, socjolog, adiunkt w Instytucie Socjologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie. Jej zainteresowania naukowe koncentrują się wokół powiązań między płcią a polityką, nierównościami społecznymi, demokracją i obywatelstwem. Była koordynatorką i badaczką w kilku międzynarodowych i krajowych badaniach dotyczących (nie)równości płci, obywatelstwa i polityk publicznych. Obecnie jest badaczką w ACT (Communities of Practice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe, 2018–2021, H2020), EU3D (EU Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy, 2019–2023, H2020), MiC (Men in Care: Wsparcie w miejscu pracy dla męskości opiekuńczej, program na rzecz zatrudnienia i innowacji społecznych na lata 2019–2021).