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## Women – Home Educators

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## Women – Home Educators

*“I have never let my schooling  
interfere with my education”*

*Mark Twain*

**Abstract:** Homeschooling as an alternative form of education children in Poland, is becoming more popular. Over the past 20 years, the number of homeschooled children in the h in Poland has increased from a few to about three thousand. There is little research on this phenomenon. Until now only two books have been published – first by M. Budajczak and the second by M. P. Zakrzewski. There is, therefore, a need for further scientific exploration of homeschooling. As women are the ones who are mostly involved in homeschooling, even it they are helped by men, it seems to be interesting to describe a contemporary Polish home teaching women.

**Key words:** education, homeschooling, home education, woman, mother, teacher.

### Introduction

The beginnings of home education in contemporary Poland date back to 1995, when prof. Marek Budajczak with his wife Izabella began to teach their two children, 8-year-old Paul and 9-year-old Emily, at home [Czajkowska, *Zalety* ...]. However, the rules in force at that time, even though they theoretically made such a choice possible for parents, in reality, by the token of a regulation involving the discretion of the head teacher of a local school, a consent for this form of learning made home education difficult or even impossible, the consequence being “a wall of incomprehension and hostile reactions of educational officials, every so often involving transgressions of the law” [Marchuk, Grabek 2013]. As a result, prof. Budajczak’s children experienced problems with official confirmation of their educational achievements to the point at which in order to “legalise their

education” they had to “take advantage of nostrification procedures, when both had passed the US “Matura” and obtained US high school certificate” [Marchuk, Grabek 2013].

Despite these obstacles, successive home educators began to appear in Poland, inspired by the experience of the Budajczak family, among others. However, these cases were far and between. With the onset of changes in legislation unfavourable for home educators, the number of children taught at home systematically began to increase. According to prof. M. Budajczak, approx. 50 children received education in this form in 2009, whereas by 2013, this number fluctuated around the number 1500 [Marchuk, Grabek 2013], and now it oscillates at 2500 with annual increase of up approx. 300–400 new children [Gierej 2015]. These data, as indicated by those involved in home education, are estimates and are not reflected in the statistics available from the Ministry of Education.

**Table 1. The number of primary and lower-secondary school children educated at home. On 30 September 2012, 2013, 2014.**

School year	Number of primary school children educated at home	Number of lower-secondary school children educated at home	Total
2012/2013	207	182	389
2013/2014	314	122	436
2014/2015	421	89	510

Source: Statistics prepared on the basis of data contained in the Education Information System, developed and provided by the Department of Research and Analyses MEN (no data on upper-secondary schools).

Yet other data, also obtained from the Ministry of Education by the journalists from “Dziennik. Gazeta Prawna”, indicate that for the first time the statistics include pupils enrolled in state and private schools. Thus, there are approx. 400 state school children currently educated at home and approx. 800 from private schools [Wittenberg, Klinger 2015].

However, the divergence of these data suggests that the figures used by the Ministry of Education are significantly underestimated, as in a single private school catering for home educated children, albeit the largest, there are more than 400 such persons.

Regardless of the exact number of children currently being taught at home in Poland, increased interest in this form of education is evident, which is reflected in discussions in numerous online forums of home educators. This alternative method of teaching has not yet been exactly described in our country, as evidenced by only two monographs on the publishing market, i.e. the first by prof.

M. Budajczak [Budajczak 2004] and the other edited by M. and P. Zakrzewski [Zakrzewscy 2009]. Therefore, this phenomenon requires further, broadband exploration.

### **The legal basis for home education in Poland**

Homeschooling in its modern shape was made possible in Poland after 1991, when new legislation was introduced. Thus, in Chapter 2, “Preschool education and the school duty”, in Art. 16, par. 8 it was stated that “At the request of parents, the head teacher may authorise the fulfilment of school duty outside of the classroom” [Act of 7.09.1991...]. This general regulation was fine-tuned in the following years declaring that “At the request of parents, the head teacher of a state school, in the neighbourhood of which a child resides, may allow the fulfilment of school duty outside of the classroom and determine its terms” [Act of 21.07.1995...]. The amendment proved unfavourable, because it bestowed head teachers with a full discretion to stipulate the conditions and requirements, e.g. the prerequisite for parents to have pedagogical education or to isolate a separate rooms in the flat which would only be used for teaching/learning.

In the case of a decision that is unsatisfactory for the parents, they were entitled to submit an appeal, pursuant to administrative procedures, to the appropriate school superintendent, who did not have the authority to make a different decision, but to refer the case back for post-diagnosis to the head teacher in question. Such regulations consequently led to violations of parental rights within their liberties to make their own choices about the education of their children.

It was only in 2009 when favourable changes occurred. Art. 16 paragraph. 8 read as follows: “At the request of parents, the head teacher of a state or private preschool, primary, lower secondary or secondary school to which a child has been admitted, may authorise the child to fulfil its school obligation, as referred to in Art.14 par.3, outside of the preschool, preschool branch, another form of preschool education or outside of a school classroom” [Law of 19. 03. 2009].

In the same year, Art. 16 was amended by paragraphs 10-14, important for home educators, which clarified the conditions for authorisation, i.e. submission of an application by 31 May, attaching a psychological/educational opinion as well as parents’ declarations with regard to provision of the necessary conditions for the implementation of the core curriculum applicable on a given stage of education. In addition, parents were committed to declare that in each school year their child would participate in annual classification examinations.

The legislator also determined that the authorisation for the implementation of home education may be withdrawn at the request of the parents of the child or if the child fails to participate in or pass the aforementioned examinations without a valid excuse. Withdrawal of a positive decision may also be instituted

in the case when the authorisation was issued in violation of the law [Law of 19.03.2009].

The most recent changes in legislation relating to home educators were introduced in 2014, when in Art. 16 par. 10 acquired a new form, in which the permission was possible to obtain before or during the school year under the conditions that parents have submitted relevant documentation [Law of 24 April 2014].

These changes, in particular allowing parents to choose the school in which they wish to enrol their child and the removal of 31 May deadline resulted in a significant increase in the number of children educated at home, from several dozen in the early twenty-first century to several hundred, or even to approx. 3 000 today, as estimated by home educators themselves.

### **Polish women – home educators**

Homeschooling as a form of teaching children out of school, requires a great deal of parental involvement, as parents, apart from natural parental responsibilities, take on the additional obligation to educate their children. A special role in this regard falls particularly to mothers, as “the mother-child relationship is a prototype of all social contacts. Opening or closing of these interactions is consequential for the rest of children’s lives, because your mother is the first YOU” [Błasiak, Dybowska 2010, p. 111]. Thus, it is mothers’ attitudes that largely determine how children perceive themselves and the surrounding world, and how they interact with other people.

In order to familiarise with women who are contemporary Polish home educators, the author posted information about the ongoing research on online forums grouping home educators or directly sent e-mail messages. 28 women aged 32–51 positively responded to the proposal to participate in the study, 57% of whom had higher education and 43% secondary. There were no women with education level lower than secondary. All were married and brought up from 2 to 5 children ranging in age from 7 months to 15 years. Children older than 5 years of age underwent compulsory pre-school preparation or primary and lower-secondary education at home.

86% of respondents declared that they were religious, 4% identified themselves as non-religious and 10% did not provide information on the subject. 82% of women were involved only in running the household, but only 18% worked professionally. Most respondents – as many as 64% taught their children with their husbands and 32% of mothers were involved in teaching children on their own. 4% supported their efforts with external tutors.

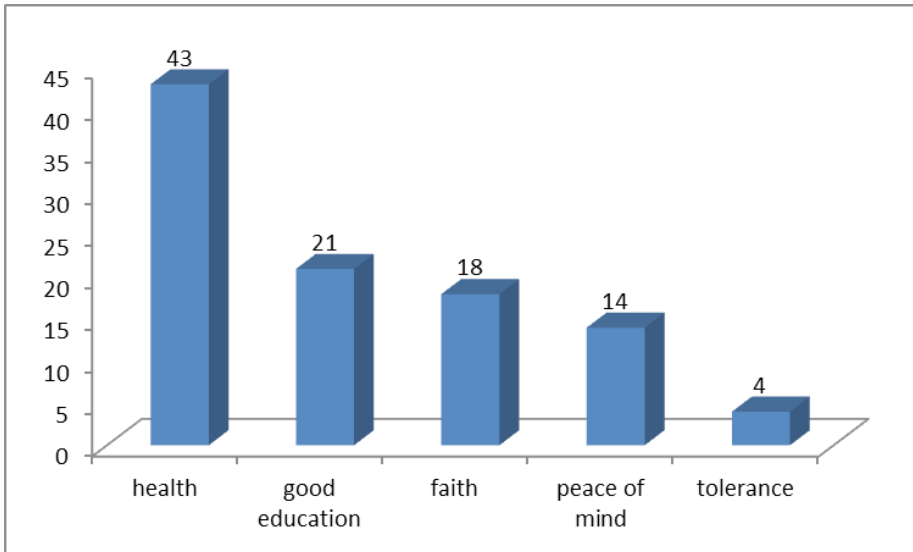
64% of the respondents identified their financial situation as very good, 20% as good and 16% as average.

### Analysis of own research

Those home educators who agreed to participate in the research filled in an open and close question questionnaire, with an aim to generate a portrait of a contemporary Polish home educator and to identify the characteristics of this group of women.

The first question related to the preferred values, where the respondents enumerated ten most important values. All home educators put family in the first place: “The family is all my life. It’s beautiful what you fate can give you. I am grateful to God for such a wonderful husband and children. They are the meaning of my life”. However, subsequent elections varied, as is depicted in the figure below.

**Figure 1. The most desirable values – the second choice**



Source: own research.

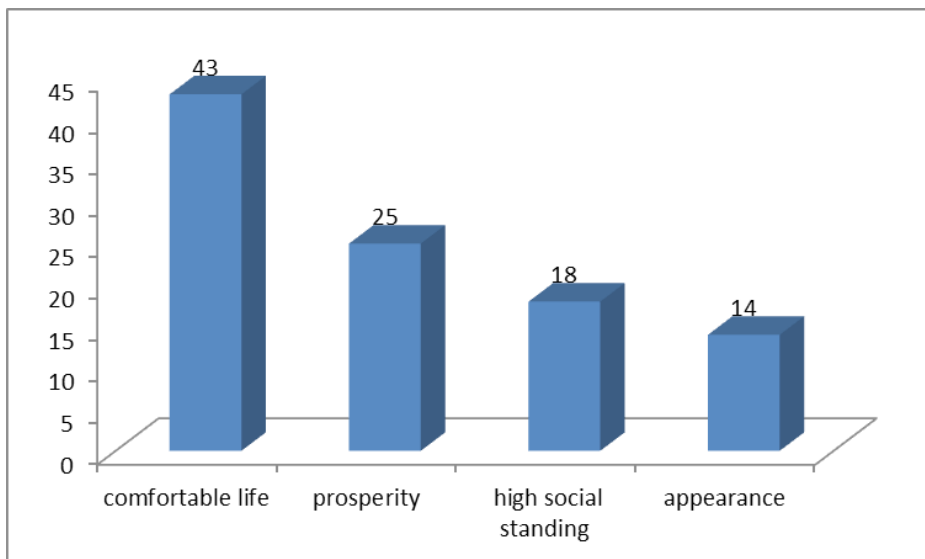
Health was also considered as important: “You cannot buy health. You have to take care of it every day and every hour. Health concern denotes physical activity and conscious nutrition choices”. The respondents also appreciate good education, “What I will now give my children will pay in their future adult lives, so I try to be consistent and “not ignore” anything in teaching. I believe it is my duty as mother. Good education is very important for everyone”.

Faith is another important value: “I give each day to God, faith helps me in the hardships of everyday life, gives strength and motivation in difficult times,

present in each human's life", as well as peace of mind "I think that every day is actually similar to another. On each day the same steps, the same beginnings and endings. But it is not a routine, it is rather peacefulness which makes our lives harmonious, blissful". Some emphasise the importance of tolerance: "I think it is important to have tolerance to the choices of others. Although I often hear praise from strangers for my well behaved children, my mother (a teacher) still cannot understand why her grandchildren do not go to school and jumps at every opportunity to criticise our choice".

Comfortable life was classified as the least important: "Do I want to proverbially lie down and smell nicely? Certainly not! I love this mess of mine, constant hustle and bustle. Comfortable, lazy life is not for me", similarly to prosperity: "We live at a moderate level. We are not lacking anything, but we don't live in the lap of luxury, either. I know that if I worked and the kids were in school, we'd be living on a higher level, but this is not the most-important".

**Figure 2. The least desirable values**



Source: own research.

The respondents standoffishly related to the benefits of high social standing: "I know that my friends from the university are surprised that I do not work and even more so that I have four children. I think they are even sorry for me and believe me that I have wasted my life, because I haven't a career path like they did. But really, are they happier than me in their beautiful costumes and beautifully applied makeup? Probably not".

Beauty was not an important value for the respondents, which did not stop them from taking care of their own appearance, “I like to take care of myself, e.g. visit the hairdresser, beautician, buy a new piece of clothing or meet people who are important for me. Sometimes it is difficult to find time for these things if you have a large family, but I am learning to choose what is essential and what is less important. Consequently, some things, such as ‘dressing to kill’ must wait”.

Educators indicated that they basically did not have any free time. Few of them manage to organise approx. 1 hour a day just for themselves, but most of them claim that they have no time for their own needs: “With three children and a working husband, free time does not actually exist. Maybe one day, when children get older and will be able to help at home, I will find a moment for myself. This does not mean, however, that I give up my passion or development. I keep thinking about it, but just now there is simply no time for this”.

These choices are consistent with the fact that 86% of respondents identified their families as traditional and only 14% as modern. Women living in traditional families emphasised that there was a clear division of roles and tasks associated with male and female members in their homes: “I feel fully realised devoting most of my attention and time to raising children and creating a warm hearth. It is important for my husband, who during this time works for us, to relieve him from the stresses of everyday life”.

In their view, it is the father who should provide for the family and the mother who should take of the house and children: “I do not work professionally and I don’t miss it. I realise myself at home as wife, mother, and I’m okay with that, I would not want to change anything”. In addition, almost all the women declared that they took on almost all household chores related to the preparation of meals, cleaning, washing, shopping and childcare. With husbands, they share their children’s education and cede to them minor repairs.

The respondents who identified their families as modern feel that spouses should be partners in all areas of life, i.e. they should mutually help each other in the home, in the care and education of children, and together contribute to the maintenance of the house: “We understand each other, we get along, cooperate for the common good of the whole family, as well as in our jointly operated business. It seems to me that we have created a partnership”.

However, even those women who think of themselves as full-fledged partners of their husbands rarely mention their expectations towards the husband: “As a wife, I also want attention and care from my husband. That’s why we give ourselves a day half an hour of attention to each other. Usually in the evening, when all is quiet, we have time to tell each other what has happened during the day. I want to tell him about everything and share my joys or sorrows, or to have my husband for a moment exclusively to myself”.



Occasionally, women also emphasised their own autonomy: “I am independent (apart from restrictions resulting from the fact that I have a husband, children and work). I realise my passions, meet my needs, implement various projects. It is important for me, because through this, I feel that I am in place and can fully “spread my wings” as a human and as a woman”.

The respondents, when describing themselves as a woman, often emphasised satisfaction that they derive from life: “I feel attractive and fulfilled. I live in harmony with myself. At this stage of my life, I am not struggling with serious health or emotional problems. Life is Beautiful”.

According to their statements, they frequently suggested that the choice they had made to fulfil the role of wife, mother and teacher had been fully conscious and that they derive true satisfaction from their lives: “I have met my need for self-actualisation, personal development (constantly stimulated by children’s curiosity). I have many more dreams, but the largest and most important of them have already come true”.

Against this background, a statement of a woman who described her inner dilemma clearly stood out: “I fight with complexes, lack of love for myself. I often put others first. I’m learning how to accept and start liking myself. It has become important to me since I had my children as I have realised that if they follow my example, they may face the same problems in the future”.

This narrative differed from the others and the author seems to be far from an ideal of the archetypal “Polish mother”, always happy, dedicated to children and family, which may arise from the statements of other home educators. At the same time, these words indicate at the effect of mothers on the emerging personality of the child and the shaping of its self-image [Błasiak, Dybowska 2010, p. 111].

The statements are consistent with the narratives concerning the description of the role of wife. In fact, each and every statement emphasises a close relationship with the husband: “As wife, I feel that I complement my husband and he complements me, i.e. together we interact as two poles of human nature, building each other, while creating an area for peaceful growth and maturing of our children”.

Another respondent pointed to her duties towards her husband, wondering if she did not neglect him: “I have to be careful within the hustle and bustle of home affairs and responsibilities at home and at work, that my husband does not feel rejected. I often have the feeling that I’m mother more than wife and I try to work on it”.

In another statement, although indirectly, the dominant role of the husband in the family is highlighted: “I have been wife for 22 years. My husband is the closest person to me, and when we have a problem and discuss it, after the presentation of my view, I leave it to him to take the definitive decision”.

In this context, an opinion which suggests partnership between spouses, and even a special role of the woman in the relationship is rather unique: “I am important and close for my husband. I receive acceptance, respect and a sense of security from him. We have many common dreams, but the most important ones have already been fulfilled. For the implementation of the remaining ones we still fight every day”.

Also, self-descriptions of the role of mother appear to be idealistic: “I feel fulfilled as a mother. As a girl, I dreamed of creating a happy family with a bundle of little’uns. Thank God this dream has come true. I am glad that my journey through life is accompanied by such friends as my husband, son and four daughters. Nothing better could have befallen me. People around me ask if I’d like to have more children. I couldn’t not enjoy another miracle, in which I could participate. Children are the fruit of love for me, they teach love and above all bestow unusual love, which gives true meaning to life”.

Few educators confessed to the smallest failures that may be encountered in everyday life: “I very often struggle with the feeling of not being a very good mother to my children. As mother, I am aware that cannot control many things on my own. Therefore, I give every day to God, knowing that He will support me in my motherhood. Sometimes I have days that I classify as failures, but there are times where I’m happy with every day spent among the children”.

For many women, being a mother is a constant concern for the life of the offspring: “I often wonder about the future of my children. I want them to find their path in life, a passion as soon as it is possible, so that they know what they want to do and who to be. I want to make it possible for them to discover their interests and aptitudes. I reinforce them in their decisions and work on their self-esteem”.

One narrative was distinctly divergent with the mainstream, in which the mother failed to present herself as altruist and failed to identify the care for children as her life’s mission and constant joy, but as a specific job to be done, with accompanying benefits: “I am an adoption, foster mother – I was never able to get pregnant. I mention this because my relationship with children is a bit different from that of biological mothers. They are not my whole life. I am for them and they are my job. Of course, I love them very much, I want the best for them, but they also cater for my various internal needs (to be a mother)”.

The respondents also describe themselves as home educators: “I believe that this is a way for me to get to know my own emotions, behaviours and characteristics, demanding work and acceptance, possibly changes with the help of God. This shared time with children teaches me to be humble and trust in this that this gift in the form of the offspring does not belong to me, but only is given to me for some time, with full confidence. Working in an atmosphere of home

education definitely frees us from own expectations in relation to children and pursuing own ambitions. For me this, is a way to freedom and the discovery that it is not me who controls my life, but God”.

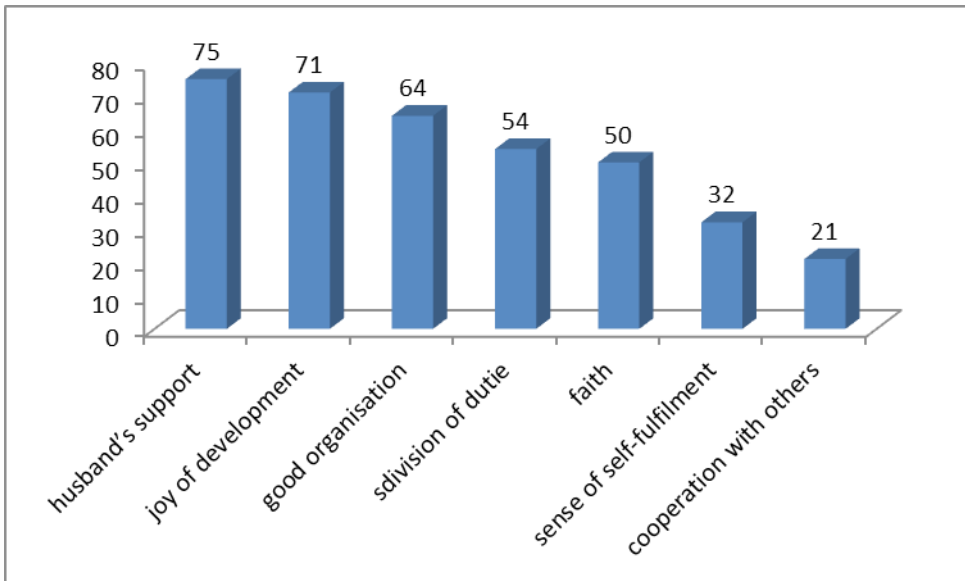
In contrast to the response to previous questions, in the following narratives there was more realism: “I have been home educator for just two years for two children. This is not such a simple thing! I’m learning all the time and putting in my head what life is all about and why we do it this way. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the weight of responsibility (which does not disappear when children learn at school, as school only apparently takes over the responsibility), sometimes I’m discouraged by children’s resistance (school definitely frees you from handling their resistance). Sometimes I’m worried whether they have enough friends. The only thing I’m not worried about (i.e. after the rearrangement in my head) is whether they will have some gaps in knowledge”.

In connection with various problems and reflections appearing during homeschooling, some of educators yield to the thought that maybe one day their children will attend school: “I am ready to send my children to school, should the circumstances be adequate, or when we decide with my husband that this is what one of our children needs at a given point”.

When listing the factors facilitating work as home educators, the women indicated at the support of their husbands, the joy of the children’s development, good organisation, both in terms of time as well as the distribution of the curriculum, the division of responsibilities between family members, and the faith that gives strength to overcome small and large difficulties occurring in varying degrees and different frequency within the teaching-learning process organised at home. In their view, daily chores are easier to overcome when accompanied by a sense of accomplishment, and when in the course of learning, you can collaborate with others, exchanging services, e.g. a parent who is a teacher of English teaches his or her co-educators’ children or an artistically talented mum runs art workshops.

The respondents also pointed to factors hindering homeschooling, at the first place indicating excessive formalities which educators have to face to obtain permits. Although their situation has undergone considerable improvements in the wake of amendments in education law, women still believe that it is not up to scratch. Some educators recognised annual classification exam procedures unnecessary. In the context of their statements, for example. “I do not see the point of implementing the core curriculum in all subjects. Already at the lower secondary level, I notice that a lot of unnecessary content is forced into children’s minds, to which they will probably never return after the completion of the course”. It seems that these respondents are followers of the so-called unschooling, assuming complete freedom of teaching, both in terms of its form and content.

Figure 3. Factors facilitating home education



Source: own research.

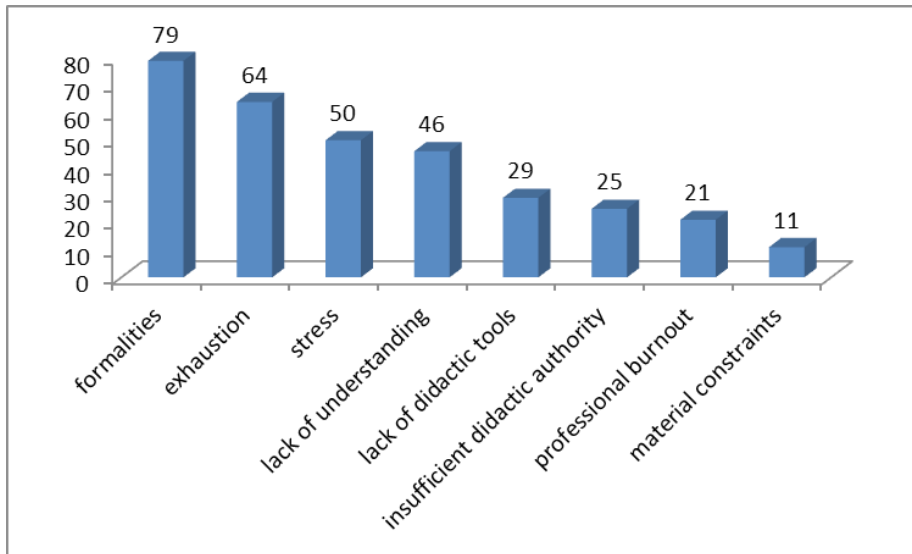
Fatigue is a problem for many, which, however, does not usually affect the effectiveness of the work with the child: “Although I fall asleep and wake up tired, I do not give up, because I know that I am helping my children in discovering the surrounding world, in the acquisition of knowledge as well as in the process of becoming increasingly independent”.

Also, stress and lack of understanding on the part of the environment often accompanies the work of home educators: “I take full responsibility for the education of my children, although I know that I am exposed to harsh environmental assessment. I realise that higher demands are placed on me and my children and any deficiency or lack in some skills are discussed and evaluated. It is quite stressful”.

Teaching in the home, especially in the case of older children, is hampered by the lack of suitable didactical tools, useful when teaching e.g. Biology, Physics or Chemistry. It rarely happens that families can borrow what they need from the school in which the child is enrolled.

Sometimes, teaching their own children is made difficult - as the respondents say – by their limited authority as teachers: “There had never been any problems with teaching my older daughter. These started with the twins. When one “clowns around” while learning, the other immediately follows suit. Sometimes, they begin to work only when I say that I would complain to their dad”.

Figure 4. Factors hindering home education



Source: own research.

This problem is connected to a type of burnout, also appearing in home educators: “There appear increasing doubts whether I make a good teacher. At times, it seems to me that there is no enthusiasm and strength in me anymore. I am not passive, and I’m glad that I can accompany children in learning letters, books, multiplication tables etc., but I have less and less strength and will. This makes me very worried”.

Also, inadequate space at the disposal of families may hinder the implementation of home schooling: “Now that there are two more of us than when we started teaching at home, lack of room has become a problem. There is no room for quiet learning of the older children, no playroom for the little’uns and no corner in which to hide when in need of silence”.

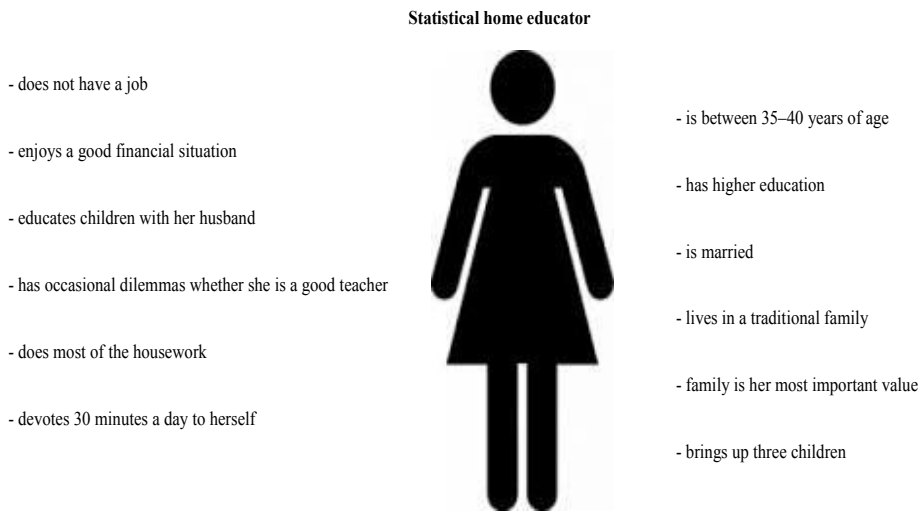
The analysis of the responses above allows us to build a model of a contemporary Polish home educator. The author is aware of the fact that these studies were of fragmentary nature (this why they are still in progress), but even so, on their basis, some generalisations can be made.

Thus, women involved in home education in Poland, although they differ from each other, they have a great deal of common features, such as, primarily, a peculiar sense of mission in which they participate. Being wife and mother defines their basic life roles, which they perform well, and to this identity they subordinate all other aspects of their lives. They accept their usually very traditional, large

families, with tasks assigned separately to women and men. Although they are well educated, they do not strive for self-fulfilment through career.

Home is their main living space, in which they not only bring up, but also teach their children, although they sometimes are not sure if they do it well. They see themselves as proverbial guardians of the hearth. They care about the well-being of their husbands, who in turn secure prosperous life for their families. Usually, they take on the whole burden of household duties, devoting little time to their own needs.

**Figure 5. Statistical home educator**



Source: own research.

The fact that home educators are a very specific group of women is additionally confirmed by an attempt to compare them to seven groups of modern Poles, isolated by K. Pawlikowska and D. Maison. Based on the survey, they divided women into the following groups:

1. Unfulfilled Strugglers (24%) – are women for whom life’s priorities are family, work and good looks. Only their combined ownership guarantees them the joy of life. They are approx. 40 years old on average, are well educated and almost all work, though sometimes occupy positions that are below their aspirations. They remain in permanent relationships with men as wives or in informal, but lasting relationships. They have 1–2 children. They do most of the housework on their own, which when combined with professional activity causes frequ-

- ent fatigue. They have little time for themselves, and when they are able to save some, they spend it actively. They are modern women. They often use the multimedia, but with little excitement.
2. Eager Consumers (17%) – i.e. women who subordinate their lives to consumption, possession of material goods, and see the world through the prism of consumption. They enjoy a good financial situation. They do not save money, but rather spend it because they buy many unnecessary things. They truly care about their appearance, so they spend significant amounts on clothes and cosmetics. They are predominantly married, have 1–2 children, are in favour of the traditional family model, with the husband as provider and the woman engaged in the home. If they work, they do so primarily for money. They are familiar with modern technologies and willingly use them.
  3. Citizens of the World (14%) – mostly young women under 30 years of age, who still learn or have just started their careers. They do not have their own families and form informal childless relationships. They are open and modern, use the multimedia, are active on social networking sites. They are satisfied with their lives, including their appearance and the manner of dressing. They enjoy a rather good material situation. Contacts with other people are the greatest value for them. They are surrounded by a circle of friends, shun being alone.
  4. Family-Oriented Housewives (13%) – are typically between 40–50 years of age. They are married, and only half of them are employed. These women are happy with the role of housewife and mother, raise on average 2 to 4 children. Home and the family give purpose and meaning to their lives. They do not pay attention to their appearance. It is not important for them. They are not interested in fashion. The revenue in their families is rather low. They do not use the multimedia.
  5. The Disillusioned with Life (12%) – are women who regard their lives as a losing streak. They are not satisfied with any aspects of their lives. Predominantly, they are not well-educated, elderly, retired. Only some of them work, hence they have relatively low incomes. Most of them are lone women, divorced or widows. They consider themselves experienced by fate, often feel sad, lonely or abandoned. They do not socialise, but experience attraction to relationships with other people. They little care about their appearance and do not use modern technologies.
  6. Bereaved Conservatives (10%) – are usually elderly women, over 55 years of age, poorly educated. Most of them are either married or widows. They are not satisfied with life in all its aspects. They have very radical political views and are against any changes. They have conservative attitudes to family and are intolerant of any manifestations of otherness. Religion, family life and work are important for them, but at the same time, these aspects fail to constitute a source

of joy and satisfaction, but are rather only associated with duties.

7. Satisfied Professionals (10%) – are women who are characterised by the need for self-realisation and self-development. They are well educated as a direct consequence of their internal drive and can use their competence in everyday life. They achieve self-fulfilment through work. Family is also important for them, but their husband's and children's needs are situated below their own. Life gives them a lot of satisfaction, also because they subordinate their free time to their own needs [Pawlikowska, Maison 2014, pp. 20–48].

Basically, home educators are not eligible for any of the above groups. Some of their features may be found in two groups – Family-Oriented Housewives and Unfulfilled Strugglers, the connecting features being for the former, their self-realisation in the role of wife, mother and housewife and the fact that most of them do not work professionally. Both groups often raise children in families with many children and do not spend long time caring about appearance. However, home educators are younger, usually have a good financial situation and use modern technology in everyday life, even if with limitations, also while teaching.

In turn, the Unfulfilled Strugglers are linked to home educators by their definition of family as the highest value as well as by good education, devotion to housework and frequent feeling of fatigue. However, women teaching at home differ from them in this that they do not live in informal relationships, have a greater number of children and do not need stimuli from work and good looks to achieve satisfaction in life.

Thus, educators constitute a special group, which not only fails to fit in with the profiles of modern Poles, but also with the statistics related to women currently residing in our country.

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