

Negotiating the New Market: Women, Families, Women's Organizations and the Economic Transition in Poland

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ABSTRACT: Women have been affected more negatively than men by the economic transformation in Poland. They are the majority of the unemployed and the poor, they have a more difficult time finding jobs, and their incomes are significantly lower than men's. The disadvantageous position of women on the labor market, coupled with increasing governmental withdrawal from social provisioning like childcare, health care, and education, has created problems for families, especially for growing numbers of single mothers and two-parent low-income families. The transition to a market economy also has generated a steady growth of women's organizations which have stepped in where the state has withdrawn from social provisioning and provide assistance to women and their families. These organizations are not only helping women and low-income families adjust to the new market situation, but also to negotiate the market so that it better responds to their needs.

KEY WORDS: economic restructuring; families; women's organization; women in Poland.

Since 1989, Poland has been undergoing a shift from a centrally planned to a capitalist market economy. Privatization and modernization of the economy, occurring in the context of pre-existing gender inequalities, have affected women differently and more negatively than men, and have had profound consequences for Polish families. Women constitute the majority of those who are out of work and are much more likely than men to be among the long-term unemployed and the poor. Working women are found mostly in the lower paid sectors of the economy in which they occupy the least advantageous positions. A significant gender pay gap is therefore maintained, with an associated lower standard of living and social status of women. The limited access to childcare facilities in the 1990s and reduction of maternity leaves have further exacerbated the difficult situation for women, who remain the primary caretakers of children. With very low

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average salaries, even when two adults are employed full-time, many families struggle to make ends meet. Government budget cuts and increasing privatization of health care, education, and other social services that underpin the reconciliation of work and family life, place additional burdens on families.

Government policy has not adequately addressed this situation. As Poland is quickly transforming to a market economy, the question of equal status of women and men has been absent from governmental discussions and public debates, and investment in the social sector is progressively shrinking. However, the transition has also generated a steadily growing number of women's organizations. These organizations have stepped in where the state has withdrawn from social provisioning, providing assistance to women who experience problems on the labor market as well as needed information and social services to families.

Based on data contained in the Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000), organizations' documents, and interviews with officers and rank-and-file members of more than 20 women's organizations in Warsaw, Poznan, and Krakow, this paper aims to show how these organizations have responded to the problems generated by the economic transformation in Poland. Rather than simply assisting women to adjust passively to the market economy, women's organizations are helping women and families to negotiate the new market in order to make it more responsive to their needs.

The Transition to a Market Economy and its Effects on Women and Families

Under the socialist system in Poland, the official ideology promoted gender equality in education, labor, leisure, family, and public life. In some spheres, such as the labor market and education, socialist policies were relatively successful. The percentage of women with university degrees increased significantly in the 1950s and by the late 1970s, women were receiving slightly more university degrees than were men (Siemienska, 1990). By the end of the 1980s, 86% of all women between the ages 18 and 60 were working full time (including 75% of all married women), constituting approximately 47% of the work force (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1990).¹ Between 1950 and 1989, the female employment rate increased more rapidly than that of

males and gradually women obtained access to a wide variety of jobs as well as representation in all sectors of the economy.

However, women remained concentrated in low-paid occupations, constituting the majority of workers in several sectors (finance and insurance, health and social welfare, education, trade, and public administration) where wages were relatively low (Fuszara, 1997). Protective legislation, introduced for pregnant women and mothers with children, banned women from more than 90 occupations, mostly in transportation, construction, and extractive industries—sectors of the economy where workers were more highly paid (Uscinska, 1990). Women's wages were on average 30–40% lower than those of men (Domanski, 1992; Regulska, 1992). According to studies conducted in the early 1980s, in all occupational categories except the professions, gender influenced earnings more significantly than education, occupational positions, age, job tenure, or membership in the Communist Party (Siemienska, 1990).

Under socialism in Poland, an issue of great concern for married women with children as well as single mothers was the double burden of reproductive and paid labor. Government policy, while stressing the importance of women as workers, also recognized women's seemingly natural responsibilities as mothers and homemakers (Marody & Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000). During the 1950s and 1960s, pronatalist policies were introduced, including long-term maternity leaves and child payments to mothers. At the same time, popular beliefs that only women could take care of children and households persisted. Women with families were expected both to provide a significant share of the family income and to be largely responsible for childcare and household maintenance (Fuszara, 1997). Given the frequent shortages of goods and often inadequate services under socialism, the double burden carried by Polish women was truly extraordinary.

Since 1989, with the transition to a capitalist market economy, the situation of most women and families in Poland has not improved significantly; indeed, some observers, including this author, have argued that on several indicators the status of women and families has deteriorated (Aulette, 1999; Bystydzienski, 1999; Lobodzinska, 1995, 2000). The restructuring of the economy has taken place in the context of already existing gender inequities in the work place and in families which exacerbated new forms of inequality created by increased economic competition (Zajicek & Calasanti, 1995). Polish researchers generally agree that women have borne more of the costs of the transition toward a market economy than men (Grotowska-Leder,

1995; Reszke, 1995; Kotowska, 1997; Tarkowska, 2001) and that the situation of most families, especially those headed by women, has become materially worse since 1989 (Warzywoda-Kruszynska & Gro-towska-Leder, 1996; Tarkowska, 2001).

Despite their relatively high educational status and workforce participation under socialism, since 1989 Polish women have been disproportionately affected by unemployment and low wages which have put them at high risk for falling into poverty. The reduction of social provisions such as childcare, maternity leave, education, and health-care have increased economic burdens of families, and especially of women who continue to retain the greater share of domestic responsibilities. Economic and social stressors have also increased the risk of domestic violence for women and children.

Unemployment

Beginning in the early 1990s, women were the first and hardest hit victims of the economic transition. As state-owned enterprises began to convert to private ownership, women were disproportionately among those who lost their jobs. As Table 1 indicates, unemployment² increased steadily from 1990 until 1994, then declined and dropped below 10% by 1998, only to increase dramatically by 2002 to 18%.³ The unemployment rate for women has been consistently higher than for men throughout the 1990s.

Women tend to be out of work longer than men and have a more difficult time finding employment. As Table 2 shows, half of the unemployed women were unable to find a job for over a year, while almost one-third were out of work longer than 24 months. Despite the steady increase in numbers of unemployed women, women's share of unemployment benefits has dropped in recent years. For instance, between 1997 and 1998, the number of women entitled to receive the benefits dropped by 6.5% (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999). Since unemployed persons typically lose their entitlement to unemployment benefits after being out of work for 12 months, the trend discussed above is indicative of both the tendency for the length of female unemployment to increase over time and the deteriorating material position of unemployed women.

Another salient fact is that 35.4% of unemployed women have a college or graduate education as compared with 17.1% of unemployed men (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999). While the majority of unemployed women are found in industries and branches of the economy with a concentration of female workers, unemployed women significantly

TABLE 1
Total Unemployment Rates and Rates for Women as Percentage of All Unemployed, Poland 1990–2002

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002
Total Unemployment	7.8	8.9	12.9	14.9	16.5	15.2	14.3	11.5	9.9	11.3	14.5	18.0
Percent Unemployed Women	50.9	52.6	53.4	52.2	52.7	55.1	58.3	60.4	58.5	61.3	63.1	—

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (1999, 2001) and Fisher (2002).

TABLE 2
Percent of Unemployed Women and Men by Length of Time
(as of December 1998)

Gender	Longer than 12 months	Longer than 24 months
Women	49.9	31.0
Men	21.7	12.7

Source: Knothe & Lisowska (1999).

outnumber unemployed men in professional and technical occupations (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1999). Thus, education does not protect women from job loss or necessarily help them to find a new job (Tarkowska, 2001). Though it may be that the higher education system in Poland is not teaching skills required by the new market and that women are less likely than men to have managerial or computer skills,⁴ nevertheless, this cannot be the sole reason for the gender difference in educational levels among the unemployed, but rather has to be attributed at least in part to economic discrimination against women.⁵

As women are forced out of work, they fall back on unemployment and welfare benefits which provide poverty income. While social welfare benefits increased twenty-fold during the period 1990–1998, on average, unemployed women received about 36% of their monthly salary in unemployment benefits during those 8 years and only 23% in 1999 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2001).

Wage Gap

The sex-segregated occupational structure which existed under socialism has not changed significantly under the market system. Throughout the 1990s, women have continued to be found in occupations mainly in the so-called feminized branches of the economy including healthcare, social welfare, hotel and restaurant service, and teaching at the primary and secondary level, while men are significantly more involved in industry, construction, agriculture and forestry, and transportation (Lobodzinska, 2000). Men are also beginning to take over areas that were previously dominated by women (e.g., finance) but are now more important in a market economy.⁶

By the end of the 1990s, the private sector employed 65% of all workers, while 35% worked in the public sector. Women constituted 53% of all persons employed in the public sector, mainly in the fields of

education, healthcare, social security, and culture (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1999). Even though women in the public sector have higher levels of education than men, this is not reflected in the proportion of top positions they occupy: only 28% of senior public servant and managerial jobs are held by women (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999). Over 76% of women (in both the public and private sector) are employed as hired workers, most of whom are clustered in the lower and middle level occupations, and only 18% are self-employed (compared to 70 and 25.3% for men respectively, (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1998). All of these factors contribute to women's significantly lower earnings than men's.

The average remuneration for women during the 1990s remained around 70% of the average income of men (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1999; Chimiak, 2003). Women's earnings as percentage of men's remuneration have varied over the years since 1989, with greater variation in the private than in the public sector. Generally, women's pay in the public sector has been more stable over time and closer to men's than in the private sector (Kowalska, 1996). Moreover, the fewer the women in a given occupational category, the less favorable to them are the differences in earnings. They are especially at a disadvantage in such occupations as industrial worker or medium-level technical officer which are characterized by wage discrimination against women (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999).

Poverty

Poland experienced a sharp increase of poverty in the early 1990s, immediately following the fall of communism and introduction of market reforms. While the rate of poverty began to decrease after 1995, women and children have remained disproportionately affected by poverty. It is estimated that about 30% of all of the poor in Poland are children under 14 years of age; adult women constitute about 40% of the poor (Tarkowska, 2001).

The feminization of poverty in Poland is characterized by more women than men receiving social benefits, more single mothers than fathers being poor, the extent of poverty being greater in female-headed households than in those headed by men, the number of poor people being higher in the households of single mothers than in others, and the depth of poverty being greater in female-headed households (Warzywoda-Kruszyska & Grotowska-Leder, 1996). Both the higher rate of unemployment and the lower wages women receive contribute to the higher rates of poverty among women than among men.

The feminization of poverty in Poland also is strongly connected to social assistance. Women are significantly over-represented among those receiving social benefits (Tarkowska, 2001). Compared to men, women who receive social assistance are younger, better educated, more often non-manual workers, and more often employed. Households headed by women, however, receive less social assistance than do those headed by men (Warzywoda-Kruszynska & Grotowska-Leder, 1996).

Reductions in Childcare, Maternity, Education and Health Benefits

Throughout the 1990s, access to family social services in Poland had become greatly reduced. Between 1989 and 1994, 59% of childcare centers and 25% of kindergartens were closed, decreasing the number of places for children by 46.8%. From 1995 to 1997, a further 4% drop in childcare institutions took place, at a time when the number of children per institution increased by 20% (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999).

Under the socialist system, Poland had one of the world's longest maternity leave provisions. Women could stay out of the labor force for up to 6 years, were paid fully during the first six months, and could receive partial benefits for another half year. Currently, maternity leave consists of only six months' reduced pay and up to 3 years unpaid leave with a job guarantee. Even though such benefits may seem generous by US standards, women increasingly do not take advantage of them. Overall, there were 2.6 times fewer women taking maternity leave in 1994 than in 1989 (Kowalska, 1996), while during the 1995–1997 period the number went down by another 18% (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1998). High rates of unemployment as well as women's low wages contribute to this situation.

The increasing privatization of education and healthcare has become an added economic burden for families. Whereas in the past these services were provided universally and free of charge, today private schools, which charge fees inaccessible to most of the population, and private health clinics are creating two separate standards for the rich and the poor. In 1999, the government introduced reforms in education, healthcare, and social security aimed at restructuring these social services to make them more efficient and competitive.⁷ Due to the economic downturn beginning in 2000,⁸ full implementation of the reforms has been delayed; however, substantial cuts in hospital, clinic, and other personnel were made over the course of the last 3 years. The result has been that families are increasingly forced to seek health

care and other services on the private market while their incomes deteriorate.

Self-employment

Many economists argue that a positive effect of the economic transformation in Poland is the emergence of conditions encouraging entrepreneurship, especially in the form of the individually-owned business. By the end of 1998, the number of self-employed women (including women farmers) was about 1.2 million or 37% of all entrepreneurs in Poland (Lisowska, 1999). However, only 18% of all employed women were in this category (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1999).

Women owned businesses are generally small (they employ 5 persons on average) and span the full range of manufacturing, retail, and service enterprises. Twenty-five percent of the women entrepreneurs are unmarried (compared to only 8% of self-employed men), although over 90% have one or two dependent children, and most are aged 40 or older (Lisowska, 1999). The women entrepreneurs typically cite quest for independence and need for reasonable earnings as most important motives for establishing their own businesses (Lisowska, 1999). Given the difficulty women have obtaining well paid jobs and top managerial positions, the self-owned business allows women to break out of the situation where there are no opportunities or prospects for promotion and to counteract unequal treatment in the labor market. However, as Ewa Lisowska points out, the women entrepreneurs experience many problems as they struggle to keep their businesses afloat, including lack of access to capital and information about financing, lack of knowledge about the market, and overcoming their traditional socialization (1999). Given the increasingly volatile economy and the global economic downturn of the last few years, this relatively small group of self-employed women will have an even more difficult time holding onto their gains.

Gender Inequality in Families

During the 1990s, if attitudes regarding women's family responsibilities changed, they did so even more in support of tradition than was the case under socialism. Research on division of work and power by gender within families conducted in Poland throughout the 1990s indicates that women and men continue to follow culturally prescribed roles with women doing most of the childcare and housework while

men are increasingly perceived as the primary breadwinners (regardless of whether women are employed outside the home) (Kowalczywska, 1995; Duch, 2002). Although in most cases women cannot afford not to hold paid employment, since the early 1990s there have been societal pressures on women to stay at home. The image of woman as mother and homemaker has been especially endorsed by the Catholic Church and by men employers in the private sector who prefer not to hire women (Bystydzienski & Lobodzinska, 1998; Knothe & Lisowska, 1999).

Even if women were to prefer leaving the labor market in favor of full-time mothering (in part because this is sometimes seen as a privilege that was denied under socialism), it is not financially possible for most women. Two incomes are indispensable to maintain most households. Without women's incomes, two-breadwinner families are often thrown into poverty, and even when women are employed, their typically low wages make it hard for families to make ends meet.⁹

Domestic Violence

The economic and social dislocations accompanying the transition to a market economy have also increased the risk of women and children to domestic violence. The combined factors of high unemployment, low incomes, traditional gender roles, and high rates of alcoholism and violent crime among men create a situation where women and children are likely to become victims of abuse (Bystydzienski, 1995). A 1993 survey of Polish women found that 18% of married or divorced respondents were regularly or occasionally beaten by husbands, while 41% reported personal knowledge of other women who were victims of domestic violence (Szymanczak, 1995). Studies conducted in Poland on the extent to which alcoholism contributed to divorce indicate that alcoholism of the husband in virtually all cases was associated with physical and psychological abuse of wives and children (Szymanczak, 1995).

Governmental Neglect

Government policy has not addressed in any significant way the severe problems faced by women and families in the transition to a market economy. Measures to combat unemployment and poverty have not taken into account the distribution of unemployment between men and women or the feminization of poverty, and the needs

of families for daycare and other social services that allow women and men to reconcile paid labor and family life have been largely ignored. Although Poland entered the European Union in 2004, the government has been slow to adopt required anti-discriminatory regulations in the work force that could help improve the economic status of women (National Women's Information Center, 2003).

The Role of Women's Organizations

As the Polish state has ignored the discriminatory treatment of women on the labor market and progressively retreated during the 1990s from providing social welfare services for women and families, these problems have been increasingly addressed by women's organizations. Independent women's organizations¹⁰ first became mobilized in Poland in 1989 when a draft of an anti-abortion act was submitted in Parliament. From a handful of women's groups, organized specifically around reproductive rights, the number of registered women's organizations grew in 1993 to 59 (Center for the Advancement of Women, 1993), increasing to about 100 by 1997, and 148 in 2000 (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000).¹¹

In this section, I categorize and describe these organizations and show how they are addressing the economic and related problems (as discussed above) facing women and families in contemporary Poland. I specifically show what the organizations are doing with and for women who are unemployed, receive low wages and/or are in poverty, the social services the organizations provide in the absence of state provisioning, how they promote women's self-employment and challenge gender inequality, and how they help women negotiate the new market.

Data and Methods

The data analyzed in this section come from three sources: (1) information on 148 registered women's organizations as contained in the Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000); (2) documents of 23 organizations¹² (including pamphlets, constitutions, by-laws, and reports) based in Warsaw, Poznan, and Krakow; and (3) interviews conducted between 1997 and 2002 with officers and rank-and-file members of the 23 organizations in the three cities.¹³

I conducted personal interviews with at least two officers of each organization and group interviews with members. The interviews were semi-structured; all interviewees were asked about their organizational participation, the activities of their organizations, what they saw as the most pressing problems for women in Poland, and whether their organizations were addressing these problems and how. For this paper, I categorized the organizations according to type as well as the problems and needs of Polish women and families they were addressing. I analyzed the documents and interview transcripts with a focus on strategies employed by the organizations to ameliorate these problems.

Types and Characteristics of Women's Organizations

Polish women's organizations that have emerged during the transition are very diverse and include associations, federations, clubs, foundations, charitable organizations, religious groups, sections of political parties and trade unions, women's studies centers (based in universities), and organizations that include activities addressed specifically to women (see Table 3). Most of these organizations are small, ranging in size from five to 30 members; a few have several hundred members. The majority have constituted themselves to be grassroots, flexible, nonhierarchical, and committed to preserving their own internally democratic governance (Limanowska, 1998).

Many of the newly created women's organizations are classified as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that orient their activities to foreign donor agencies (Chimiak, 2003). This creates numerous problems ranging from economic dependency and acceptance of funders' rhetoric to use of Western techniques of organization and definitions of problems. Nevertheless, as recent case studies have indicated, East Central European NGOs, including those in Poland, often appropriate, rework, and reinterpret ideas obtained from the West in their own contexts and for their own purposes (Aulette, 1999; Grunberg, 2000; Zielinska, 2000). While Polish NGOs may be fraught with problems, they nevertheless have brought significant resources into the country, have contributed to the development of civil society, and have been an important source of support for women and families.

As growing women's unemployment, poverty, and sex segregation of the labor market have resulted in a deteriorating situation for women, many women's organizations have directed their energies to providing aid to women who are experiencing problems at work, seeking

TABLE 3
Women's Organizations in Poland by Type and Women's/Family Problems/Needs Addressed

Organization Type ¹	Unemployment	Poverty/Social Services	Low Wages	Self-employment/ Entrepreneurship	Domestic Violence	Challenge Gender Inequality/ Raise Awareness
Asscn/Fed/Clubs (82)	46		72	65	52	33
Govt. Sponsored Agencies (6)	2		4	3	2	1
Foundations (22)	15		17	20	17	12
Religious Asscns. (8)	3		4	—	—	3
Women's sections	4		3	2	3	1
Trade Unions/Pol. Parties (7)						
Women's Studies Centers (8)	2		2	5	3	4
Organizations including Activities for Women (15)	5		12	9	9	4
Total Number						
Organizations = 148						
Totals ²	77 (52%)		114 (77%)	105 (70%)	86 (58%)	58 (39%)

¹Classification used by Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland (2000).
²Since many organizations address more than one of the problems/needs, their functions overlap and thus the total percentages for the five columns do not add up to 100.

employment, or who want to start their own businesses. Other organizations have stepped in where the state has retreated, providing social services to destitute families, developing anti-domestic violence initiatives, and establishing assistance and shelters for victims of domestic abuse.

Organizations Addressing Women's Unemployment

As Table 3 shows, 77 women's organizations (52%) of the 148 listed in the Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland devote all or some of their activities to helping women who are unemployed (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000). The largest number of organizations working to redress women's unemployment are associations, federations, clubs, and foundations which include such groups as the Center for the Advancement of Women (Warsaw), the Center for Women's Employment Activation (Warsaw), Democratic Union of Women (with branches in 23 Polish cities and towns), Association Women for Women (Poznan), and Association Women's Forum (Warmia and Mazury region). The activities of these organizations range from holding meetings, support groups, workshops, and discussions for unemployed and under-employed women, to providing courses, programs, vocational counseling, and telephone hotlines, to conducting surveys on women and the labor market, using the media and conferences for disseminating information about the problem, and lobbying Parliament to create legislation aimed at improving the situation of women in the new economy.

One example of an organization that focuses most of its activities on combating women's unemployment is the Center for the Advancement of Women (Fundacja Centrum Promocji Kobiet). Established in 1991 and formally registered as an NGO in 1993, from the beginning the organization focused on problems women experienced on the labor market. The organization's mission is "to help women handle difficulties and obstacles emerging as [the] result of economic and social transformations" (Center for the Advancement of Women, n.d., p. 1). According to the Center's director, as the number of unemployed women has risen during the 1990s, the NGO has expanded its career and personal development programs and at least 1,000 women have participated in these programs since their inception. About 60% of these women have gone on to find employment (D. Sowinska-Milewska, personal communication, May, 2002).

Among the current programs provided by the Center is a vocational development program which aims to teach participants how to look for a job effectively (including writing a CV and letters of application, teaching how to use newspaper and Internet advertisements, and providing psychological and vocational counseling), a training program for unemployed women that specifically targets single mothers (provides typing and computer skills, basics of accounting, and information on how to set up one's own business), a telephone hotline for unemployed women, a Job Club where women can share with others their experiences of job seeking, an Open Door program that gives unemployed women free access to a computer, telephone and fax, newspapers and magazines, and project Telework that seeks to create new job opportunities for women in tele-commuting. The Center offers several personal development programs including one called Springboard, a program designed in Great Britain and adapted to Polish circumstances, that aims to help women develop better communication and other human relations skills. This organization also conducts surveys on the situation of women on the job market and periodically publishes reports and disseminates the findings through the media.

In 2002, the Center started to offer training sessions for employment agency counselors to increase their awareness of discrimination against women on the labor market in order to change their attitudes and practices. According to a staff member who conducts workshops at the Center:

In the last few years especially, we have more women coming in who are university-educated and can't find jobs. They often tell us how discouraged they are with employment counselors who don't understand the problems they [the unemployed women] encounter as they try to find a job...So, we recently decided to find a way to work with the counselors so that they are better informed and more sensitive to women's issues (Witkowska, personal communication, May, 2002).

Other organizations also are developing and implementing more active strategies aimed at changing attitudes of the market gatekeepers rather than only focusing on their female clients. For instance, the Center for Women's Employment Activation (Centrum Aktywizacji Zatrudnienia Kobiet) aims to "reduce the negative impact of women's unemployment and to help create new employment opportunities for women in a changing labor market and under new working and living conditions" (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000, p. 25). This organization not only provides support groups

for unemployed women and single mothers, employment counseling, and a Job Club, but also actively intervenes on behalf of their unemployed clients by negotiating with employers to create new job opportunities for women. According to the Center's president:

Our staff seeks out employers and works with them to create jobs for our clients. We talk with potential employers and find matches for them from among our clients and then establish agreements with them. We have managed to develop good relations with many firms in Warsaw—they find that the women we recommend to them are very capable and hard working and so now they sometimes call us and ask for referrals (J. Jozikowska, personal communication, September, 2001).

Between 1999 and 2001, the organization successfully helped at least 100 women find employment in Warsaw by using this interventionist strategy.

Organizations Addressing Poverty by Providing Direct Social Assistance

As Table 3 indicates, more than 75% (114 out of 148) of the women's organizations address women's/family low wages and poverty and provide some form of social and material assistance to families. The activities of these organizations include the provision of social welfare assistance in the areas of homelessness, substance abuse, and vocational training; helping single women with children, free-of-charge, with legal matters, court proceedings, and finding housing; giving small monetary grants to women in particularly difficult economic situations; maintaining food banks; providing legal and medical services to women and their children; offering free summer holidays and excursions for children of families in difficult situations; and providing hairdressing services, in-kind donations, and counseling services. Most of these organizations also collect used clothing and household items for distribution to needy families and conduct fundraising events for charitable purposes.

The Wielkopolska Women's Club, established in 1997 (see its list of activities in Table 4), has been especially active in helping poor women and families in the Poznan region. The organization has 15 core members (some of whom are former clients of the Club). The staff have been very successful in fundraising through the organizing of cultural events with the participation of well-known Polish artists and entertainers. As the Club president stated:

TABLE 4

Selected Polish Women's Organizations, Problems Addressed, Activities, and Strategies Employed

Organization	Problems Addressed	Activities	Strategies
Center for Advancement of Women	Unemployment, entrepreneurship, gender inequality	Vocational development programs, programs for single mothers, telephone hot line, job club, surveys, publications, training for employment agency counselors	Career and personal development, skill building, access to resources, disseminating info. on women and labour market, raising awareness of market gate-keepers to gender inequality, lobbying legislators
Wielkopolska Women's Club	Low income/poverty, social assistance, unemployment, gender inequality	Legal & medical counseling & services, aid to most needy, disabled, homeless, support groups & meetings fundraising	Provide relief to women & children in need, use fundraising events to raise public awareness, empower clients by offering opportunities in organization
Polish Asscn. of Women Business Owners	Entrepreneurship, poverty/low income, unemployment, gender inequality	Workshops & training programs, meetings & support groups, meetings w/political & business leaders, fundraising for charity, lobbying	Building women's self-confidence, strengthening position of women's firms on the market, providing support & networking information sharing, increasing women's participation in public life
"Promyk" Asscn. Against Family Violence	Domestic violence, gender inequality, unemployment/low wages	Psychological & legal counseling, support groups, telephone hot line, referral services, public presentations, cooperation w/potential employers for clients	Assistance to victims & families, empowerment of women to seek economic independence, raising public awareness about family violence

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Organization	Problems Addressed	Activities	Strategies
KARAT	Gender inequality, unemployment/low wages/poverty, lack of government support for women's issues	Monitoring implementation of international agreements, regional & international meetings, conferences & seminars, training courses, publishing documents & reports, lobbying	Raise women's status through improved legislation, improve women's economic literacy, press govt. to adopt EU standards, collaborate w/NGOs in Poland & abroad, disseminate info. on intrntl., agreements re-gender inequality

Our fundraising events are very popular and they allow us to raise enough money to maintain several programs for destitute women and children. We thus are able to offer free-of-charge legal and medical counseling, monetary grants to women and families in need, as well as some free medical services. As we go out and raise funds, we also try to make people aware that there is growing poverty, especially among women and children, and that as a society, we need to find better solutions to this very serious problem (W. Szperlinska, personal communication, September, 2001).

Like numerous other organizations, the Wielkopolska Women's Club targets several problems facing women and their families and employs many initiatives and strategies to address these problems.

Organizations Focused on Women's Entrepreneurship

Numerous women's organizations (105 or 70%) concern themselves with helping women to develop business skills and to establish their own enterprises. One of these organizations is the Polish Association of Women Business Owners (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Wlascielek Firm—PSWF). Founded in 1998 in Warsaw by successful women entrepreneurs who wanted to share their business experience with other women, PSWF's mission is "to build women's prestige in [the] business community and to strengthen [the] market position of their companies" (PSWF, n.d., p. 1). In addition to its headquarters in Warsaw, the Association has four other regional branches in Lodz, Krakow, Bialystok, Gdansk, and Katowice and is a member of the World Association of Women Entrepreneurs. In 2002, PSWF had a

membership of approximately 200 (Kaluza, personal communication, May, 2002) (PSWF's activities are listed in Table 4).

A discussion with several members of PSWF¹⁴ (personal communication, May, 2002) revealed that the organization provided them with social support for their difficult work as women entrepreneurs in a male dominated business world, that it was a source of practical information for how to conduct business in Poland and sometimes even with foreign partners, and that it helped to promote their own enterprises among the organizational members and beyond the Association. For these women also, membership in PSWF led to an increase in their participation in public life. Through gaining self-confidence and by networking with political and economic leaders, they themselves had developed leadership skills and had become more active in their local communities.

Domestic Violence

Of the 148 organizations listed in the 2000 Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland, more than one-half (86) address the issue of family violence and 46 have specific programs to assist women and other victims of domestic abuse (Center for the Advancement of Women, 2000). These programs include telephone hotlines, counseling and referrals, courses in self-esteem and self-defense, and shelters for victims of domestic violence.

One of the organizations that focus exclusively on domestic violence is Promyk Association Against Violence in the Family (Stowarzyszenie Przeciw Przemocy w Rodzinie) established in 1995 in Krakow. Promyk provides services to persons living in abusive families including support groups, psychological and legal counseling, a telephone hotline, and referral services. The organization also works to raise awareness about family violence by distributing leaflets in public places and giving presentations in schools and community centers. According to Promyk's president:

Family violence is a problem that has grown in the last decade and yet there is little awareness and understanding in Poland about how pervasive and destructive a problem this is. My organization is doing a lot of work to increase people's awareness about the issue as well as helping the victims, mostly women and children (G. Klimasara, May, 2000).

Promyk's staff works with the City Council for Family Affairs in the mayor's office, the municipal social welfare office, and with the municipal police department to increase awareness regarding domestic violence and sensitivity in dealing with victims.

Other women's organizations that provide assistance to victims of domestic violence manage crisis intervention centers that offer free psychological, legal, and social assistance for victims of family abuse, assistance in dealing with court proceedings and with police and prosecutors' offices, mediation in crisis situations, and crisis intervention with individuals who use violence in their families. Still other organizations in this category operate shelters for women and children victims of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse and for battered and homeless women and their children. Most of these organizations also seek ways to help women find jobs and become re-integrated into communities. As a Promyk staff member indicated:

My organization is not only interested in providing temporary assistance to those who are victims of violence, but we also want to be able to give women the support so that they can become independent and can support themselves and their children. So we are always looking for ways to cooperate with different organizations and businesses (Matyniak, personal communication, May, 2000).

Promyk, like many of the other organizations dealing with domestic violence in Poland, makes the connection between the economic situation of women and their vulnerability to violence and thus actively seeks to provide assistance in both areas.

Challenging Gender Inequality and Raising Awareness

Many of the women's organizations also want to educate the wider public about the economic and social inequities that women have experienced in the transition, and in so doing to change attitudes and practices. Close to 40% of the organizations produce publications and/or conduct outreach activities aimed at raising awareness among Poles of the problems experienced by women in contemporary society. Their goals are often listed as promoting gender equality and improving conditions for women and their families. The leaders of the organizations are keenly aware that these goals cannot be met unless people's views of women and their roles and capabilities begin to change. As the director of the Center for the Advancement of Women stated:

Our biggest challenge is to get through to the public that the economic changes have not been good for many women, that they have been more negative for women than for men. And that as long as people continue to see women as inferior and that jobs should be reserved for men, Poland will not really progress (Sowinska-Milewska, personal communication, May, 2002).

The women's organizations also recognize that changes in government policy regarding women's status and the situation of families are urgently needed. A number of the organizations have been involved in government lobbying efforts to improve the economic and social status for women. One example is KARAT Coalition for Gender Equal Status (*Koalicja KARAT na Rzecz Rownego Statusu Plci*) established in 1997 (see list of its activities in Table 4). KARAT monitors the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other international agreements signed by the Polish government and lobbies for the needs and concerns of women (KARAT, 2000). Members of the Coalition include several Polish women's organizations as well as NGOs from 13 countries of East Central Europe and the former Soviet states. KARAT has been especially active recently in using the process of Poland's preparation for entry into the European Union (EU) to strengthen women's economic rights. Among its many initiatives are conferences and workshops aimed at increasing women's economic literacy and numerous reports on how the EU standards of employment affect gender. KARAT also has worked with many other women's organizations lobbying the Polish Parliament to pass anti-discriminatory labor legislation (A. Seibert, personal communication, May, 2002).

Discussion

The proliferation of women's organizations in Poland since 1989 has been clearly in response to difficulties that the economic transformation has created for women and their families in the absence of adequate government policies. The majority of the organizations acknowledge this in their mission statements or goals: more than 70% state that they aim to help women (usually as members of families) deal with the transition to a market economy. While most of the foundations and associations use language like "help women adjust to the new economy" or "understand the impact of the economic changes," as the above description of the activities of these organizations indicates, they are not solely interested in making women fit the new economy but also in influencing the economic and political order so

that it is more equitable and responsive to women's and their families' needs. This is especially so in the case of the more overtly interventionist organizations that actively help women negotiate the new economy as in working with employers to create new job opportunities or to train unemployment agency counselors to be more aware of the discrimination women experience on the labor market and not to perpetuate discriminatory practices.

As the summary profiles of five selected organizations in Table 4 show, Polish women's organizations have developed numerous activities and employ multiple strategies for achieving their goals to improve the economic and social conditions for women and their families. While the organizations sometimes use different approaches to attain similar goals, they make clear connections between the problems they address. They work to enhance women's social capital (knowledge, skills, abilities, and self-confidence) so that they are better prepared for the new market, to heighten public awareness of the current problems experienced by women and families, and to influence the government to enact legislation to ameliorate these problems. For example, by lobbying the government to pass legislation to remedy discriminatory treatment, some women's organizations have been actively working to bring about economic changes more favorable to women. Increasingly, these organizations are forming broad coalitions around issues rather than acting alone.

With Poland entering the European Union, coalitions of women's organizations have seized the opportunity to lobby the government to follow labor and human rights standards adopted by the EU. Some of this work is beginning to bear fruit. For instance, in January 2002, the government passed a Labor Code change that makes it illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of sex. This legislation conforms to the EU standard which places the burden of proof on the employer, rather than on the employee, that he/she did not discriminate. Women's NGOs are continuing to lobby legislators to develop enforcement mechanisms for the new code (M. Platek, personal communication, May, 2002).¹⁵ Moreover, owing to the pressure of a broad coalition of women's organizations who argued that Poland should follow the model of other EU nations, in 2001 Polish government created the position of Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men. Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, who assumed the position, has a strong commitment to economic justice for women and an awareness of the need for gender equality within families (KARAT, 2002).

Conclusion

The processes of economic transformation that Poland and other countries of East Central Europe have experienced since the collapse of socialism have been deeply gendered (Gal & Kligman, 2000); women and men have been affected differently by the emerging market economy and the resulting inequalities have had negative consequences for Polish families. The disadvantageous position of women on the labor market, coupled with increasing governmental withdrawal from social provisioning, has created hardships for their families, especially for single mothers and the growing number of two-parent low-income families.

Since 1989, women's organizations in Poland have been struggling to assist women and low-income families in their quest to improve their economic situations. Many of these organizations have engaged in a kind of negotiation process whereby they help women adjust to the new economy but also try to change attitudes, laws, and practices so that the market may become more responsive to the needs of women and their families. The number of women's organizations is steadily growing, and although they are still relatively few, they have been able to provide aid to many women and families. However, their efforts are limited given the magnitude of the economic problems facing Poland and the deeply ingrained attitudes and views regarding the natural roles of women and men and resulting discriminatory practices against women.

With Poland's entry into the European Union, many of the women's organizations are hopeful that government policies will be forced to change to conform to the EU standards and that a gender equality perspective will be included in the economic guidelines of the accession to counteract the negative effects on women and families of privatization and cuts in social programs. Polish women's NGOs are currently working to strengthen the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men and to establish strong national machinery to implement economic gender justice policies.

Notes

1. This figure does not include women occupied in family farming.
2. I am relying here on official unemployment statistics which are based on numbers of registered unemployed. Some researchers suggest that the official statistics tend to under-report actual numbers of people who are out of work and seeking employment (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999; Tarkowska, 2001).

3. In the first quarter of 2003, Poland's unemployment rate increased to 20% (Bernstein, 2003).
4. The majority of women university students continue to major in the humanities with only 19% obtaining degrees in engineering, management, and technical sciences (Fuszara, 2000).
5. Clear evidence of such discrimination is found in job advertisements. Content analyses of newspaper job listings indicate that positions available are 4 to 1 in favor of men and that employment ads addressed specifically to women typically call for young, attractive women to apply for traditionally female jobs, while better paid managerial positions are reserved for men (Bystydzienski, 1999). An analysis of Warsaw newspaper advertisements conducted in 1998 indicated that increasingly, ads are appearing with the gender-neutral wording "wanted for the office ..., the machine shop ..., salesc ..., " etc., followed by a list of the qualifications required (Knothe & Lisowska, 1999, pp. 25–26).
6. In 1988, 84.2% of workers in finances and insurance were women; by 1997, their share of the finance and insurance sector had dropped to 74% (Lobodzinska, 2000).
7. For instance, in 1999, the Polish government introduced a Health Fund system aimed at reforming the quality and scope of healthcare in Poland. The Health Fund, or general health insurance, is responsible for the collection of insurance contributions and payments of benefits. The funding for this system is to come from a 7.5% tax on personal income of those covered by the system. The Fund then contracts medical services from both public and private health service providers (Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, 1999).
8. While economic growth during the mid-1990s was about 7%, it was down to only 1% in 2001. A number of the large, privatized industries like the Gdansk shipyard went bankrupt, and the unemployment rate shot up to 18% (Fisher, 2002).
9. Employed women often contribute to incomes of their families of origin (e.g., adult daughters who live with their parents and/or other relatives). With a growing number of single-parent families headed by women, women are often the only breadwinner. Between 1988 and 1995, female-headed, single parent families increased by 80% (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2001). Although inflation has been curtailed and the currency stabilized, salaries and wages continue to be very low and women's earnings have been consistently significantly lower than the national average. While food and other products are now abundantly present in supermarkets and shops, food prices are generally high relative to average wages and salaries, and the cost of housing (rent and utilities) has skyrocketed.
10. Before 1989, there were women's organizations in Poland, but they were active under the auspices of the Communist Party and could not develop independently. For a more detailed discussion of the development of an autonomous women's movement and organizations in Poland, see Bystydzienski, 2001.
11. According to another source, the Index of women NGOs in Poland published in 2000 by Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobiectych (OSKA), there are about 330 NGOs (including local branches and networks), initiatives and research institutes in Poland whose activities at least partially address women's issues.
12. All 23 of these organizations are included in the 2000 Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland.
13. Warsaw, Poznan, and Krakow were chosen because they have the highest concentrations of women's organizations.
14. After an organized meeting of PSWF, I spoke with a group of women business owners.
15. This interview took place with Monika Platek, chair of the Polish Association for Legal Education.

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