

Economic emigration by inhabitants of the city of Opole to other countries in the light of empirical research

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Abstract: Issues related to labor migration are the subject of interest to both scientists and the general public. Despite many researches focused on the problem, many important questions still remain unanswered. One of them is the scale of international migration from the cities of a region with unprecedented scale and significance of economic migration – Opole Voivodeship. Taking this into consideration it was decided to survey the scale and form of emigration of inhabitants of the capital of the province – Opole. Research conducted in the city included a group of approx. 3,600 parents of primary school children. The results of this study helped to determine the scale of the phenomenon both permanent and temporary emigration, differences in the scale of emigration in the various districts of the city and the consequences of economic migration of parents to situations and behavior of their children.

Keywords: economic migration, Opole Voivodeship, the consequences of parent's migration.

JEL: F22, R23

1. Introduction

Poland's accession to the European Union and the resulting opportunities for Polish citizens have led to an increase in the rate of emigration from Poland. Although a decade has passed since Poland joined the EU, the migration of workers from Poland continues to be a subject of interest to both the general public and researchers. This is due to several reasons. One reason is that the patterns of migration are continuously changing – on the one hand, there are lots of stories of migrants returning to Poland, on the other, there is information on the increasing scale of

migration. Another cause for the continued interest in migration processes is that many of the key questions regarding emigration remain unanswered. One of these questions regards economic emigration from Polish cities, and in particular from Opole, the capital of the region with clearly the highest level of economic emigration (Kaczmarczyk 2008: 80). Taking into account the gaps in present knowledge within this field, it was decided to carry out a survey regarding the scale and form of economic emigration among the inhabitants of Opole – specifically, parents of primary school children. This article presents the results of this survey. Its main goal is to describe the consequences of economic emigration, in particular the effects on children of the physical separation of families due to a parent undertaking employment in another country.

2. The study group and study methods

In order to measure the scale of economic emigration among the city's inhabitants, a study was designed to cover the parents of primary school children living in various districts of the city of Opole. The study was carried out in the spring of 2012 in six of Opole's 18 primary schools: the nos. 1, 5, 16, 20, 21 and 24 State Primary Schools. In each of these schools contact was made with the teachers of each class and, based on the information gathered regarding whether parents were employed and where, a survey was undertaken to determine whether, and in what form, parents were employed. The survey was carried out with the cooperation of 84 primary school teachers based on a questionnaire. These teachers ascribed parents, or as appropriate legal guardians, of pupils residing in the city of Opole to one of the five following groups:

- working in Poland,
- working in Poland and seasonally in another country,
- working permanently in another country,
- working seasonally in another country,
- unemployed.

Apart from the field in which parents of the children were employed, the questionnaire also covered the consequences of a parent's emigration on a pupil from the teacher's perspective. Hence, the questionnaire included questions regarding the effect of migration on the behaviour, academic results and material situation of their pupils.

In this way, the study covered a group of 3 596 parents of primary school children, living in Opole and mostly being in the age range 27-45¹. The study also gained specific information regarding the form of employment of parents, both in Poland and other countries, as well as information regarding unemployed parents. However, the article concentrates on presenting the results of the study regarding economic migration and its consequences in the opinion of the teachers.

Section 3 describes the structure of employment of the parents, as well as describing the differences in economic migration according to sex and the school attended by their child. Section 4 describes the effect of economic migration on the behaviour, academic achievements and material situation of the pupils.

3. Level of economic migration among the parents of primary school children from the city of Opole

The study enabled the estimation of the percentages of parents employed in Poland, employed in other countries and unemployed (Fig. 1). It can be seen that a clear majority, 84.3% of the approx.. 3600 parents, work just in Poland. The percentage of parents working in another country was very similar to the percentage unemployed (7.9% and 7.8%, respectively).

¹¹ The class teachers did not have any information regarding the age of the parents of their pupils. It may be assumed that parents were mostly between the ages of 27 and 45, although without doubt there were some parents outside of this age range.

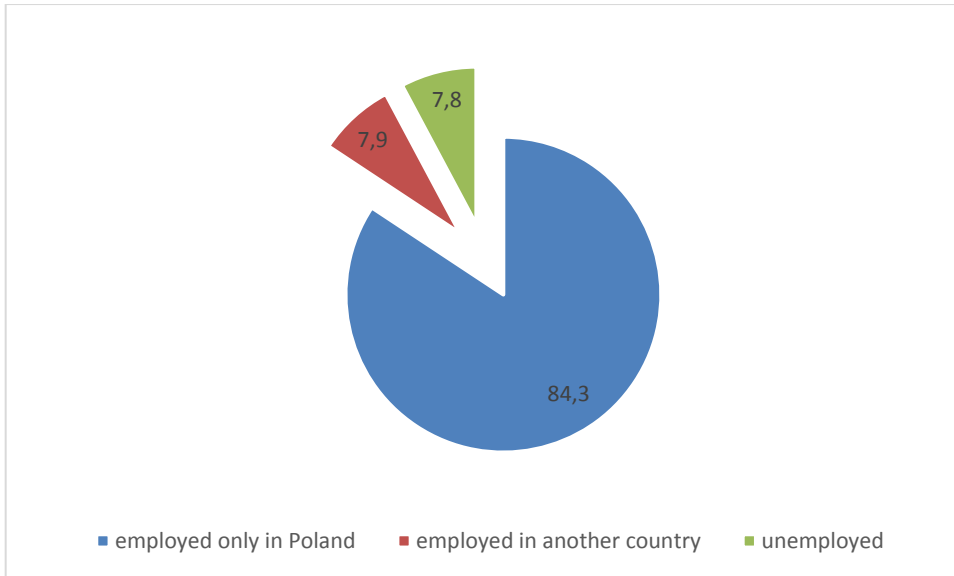


Fig. 1. Proportions of parents employed in Poland, employed in another country and unemployed (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

Since the study is aimed at describing economic migration, the following analysis concentrates on the presentation of results regarding patterns of employment in other countries. (Fig. 2).

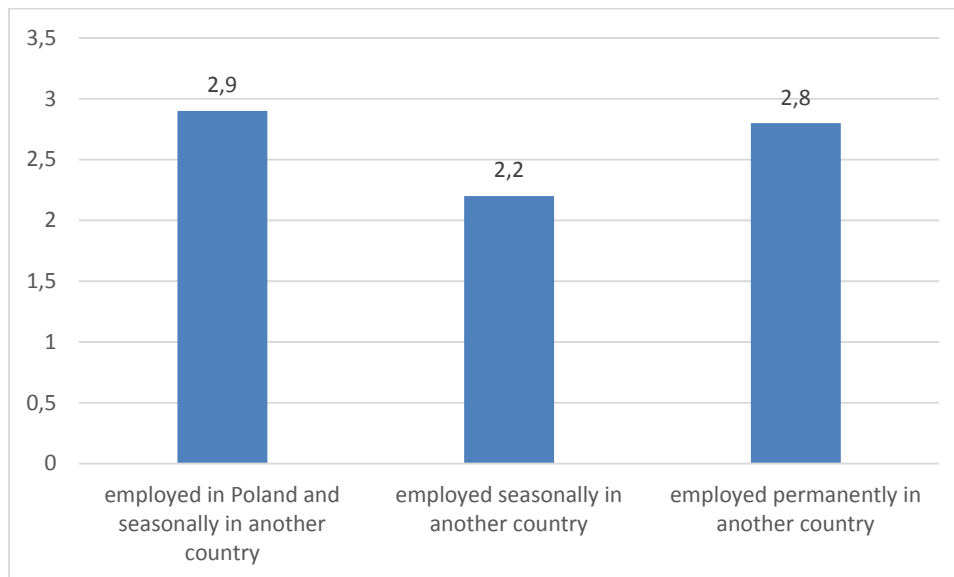


Fig. 2. Proportions of parents in given forms of employment in other countries (as a % of the whole study group)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

It can be seen that the largest group of parents working in another country are employed there seasonally, but also work in Poland (2.9% of the total sample). These parents generally have a permanent job in Poland, but take unpaid leave or use their holiday to work in another country. The proportion of those working permanently in another country is only minimally lower (2.8%). These parents generally return to Poland at regular intervals. As can be seen from Fig. 2, the smallest group of economic migrants consists of those who work in another country seasonally, but are not employed in Poland. These parents are often on parental leave, in a small number of cases those with disability allowance or retired legal guardians. These workers are employed seasonally in catering, tourism, agriculture or construction.

The results of the study confirm that there exists a large difference in the level and form of economic migration according to sex, which results from the differing social and economic roles of males and females. These differences are presented in Fig. 3.

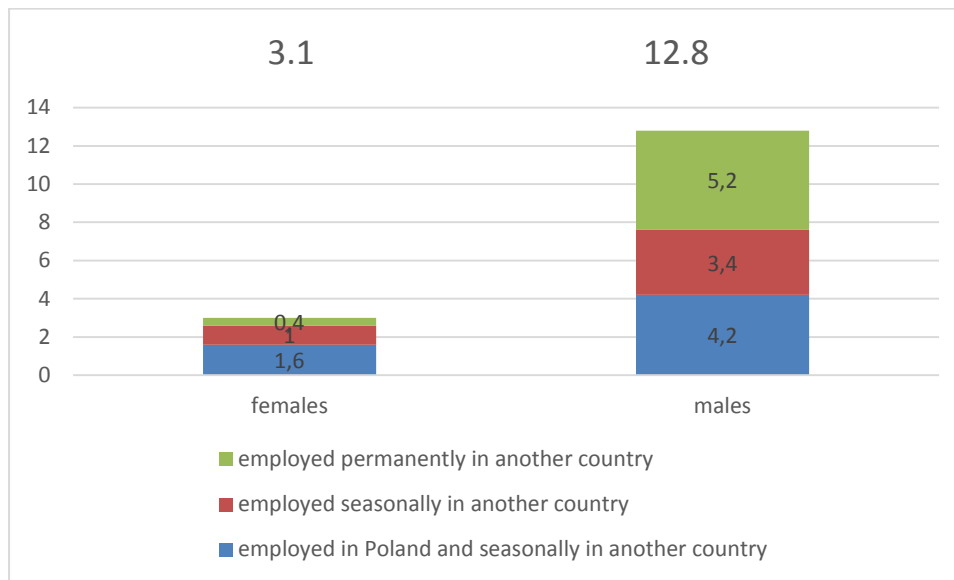


Fig. 3. Proportion of males and females employed in another country

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

The first of the differences between males and females in patterns of economic migration is the overall level. The study indicated that 3.1% of the females worked in another country, compared to 12.8% of the males (more than four times as many). To a large extent, this difference results from the differing family, economic and social roles played by males and females. These differences are also related to other differences in the patterns of economic migration. The majority of females who worked in another country, did so seasonally and were also employed in Poland. Many of these females worked in seasonal employment, particularly in agriculture, during unpaid or annual leave from their job in Poland. A somewhat smaller proportion only worked seasonally in another country. This often applied to women who had not returned to permanent work after giving birth, or were on maternity leave. Women who worked permanently in another country made up a very small percentage of females undertaking economic migration. This fact is unsurprising given that the study covered parents of primary school children.

On the other hand, the largest proportion of males working abroad undertook permanent work, particularly in Germany or the United Kingdom. These workers often were employed on contract or were self-employed. It should be noted that such work is characteristic for men from the Opole region. It enables them to return regularly to Poland, particularly for weekends and holidays, in order to maintain contact with the family and even to take part in family life and rear their children.

A somewhat smaller proportion of males worked in Poland and undertook seasonal work in another country, with the smallest group just being employed in seasonal work in another country.

The results of the survey also indicated other differences in the patterns of economic migration apart from those according to sex. The scale of economic migration depended on the location and reputation of the school attended by the child. The results of the study regarding this question are presented in Fig. 4.

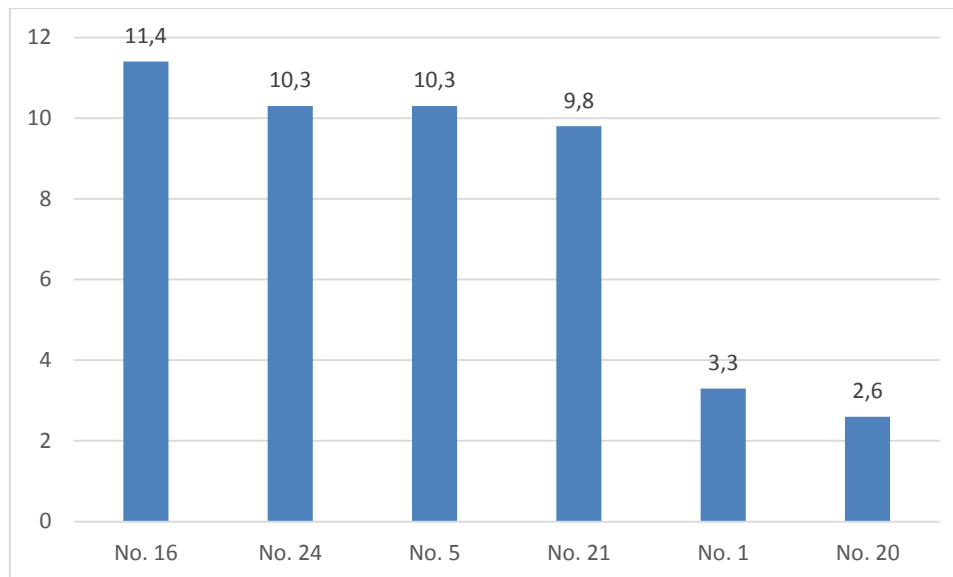


Fig 4. Proportion of parents undertaking economic migration according to the school attended by the child

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

The study indicated that the highest rate of economic migration was observed among parents of children from the following primary schools: no. 16, no. 24, no. 21 and no. 5.

The no. 16 and no. 24 primary schools are located in districts of the city where a very large proportion of the residents have dual nationality – Polish and German. This group has always been characterised by a high level of economic migration. Additionally, a very large proportion of fathers (or legal male guardians) of pupils from both of these schools worked in another country – around 16%, while there was a relatively large proportion of mothers (female legal guardians) who did not have any form of work – around 24%. This indicates that males working in another country is associated with lower activity of their partners on the employment market. These female partners often do not search for work, partly because their male partners earn relatively high wages in another country and partly in order to care for children and the household, since their male partners spend the majority of their time away from home.

The large proportion of parents of pupils from primary schools no. 21 and no. 5 working in another country did not result from the fact that they possessed dual nationality. It may be assumed that the scale of economic migration of the parents of pupils from these schools may also be observed in typical households within the Opole region.

The level of economic migration was clearly the lowest among parents of pupils from primary schools no. 1 and no. 20. These are schools with a very good reputation. In both cases, over 90% of parents were employed in Poland, there were sporadic cases of parents working abroad and very few were unemployed. This low level of economic migration resulted from the generally good economic situation of such families. A large proportion of these parents had their own businesses or well-paid work in Poland. This meant that economic migration was unattractive to these families.

4. The effect of economic migration by parents on the behaviour, attendance and material situation of pupils

One of the goals of the study was to determine the effect of economic migration by parents on the behaviour of pupils and their material situation in the opinion of the class teacher. Therefore, apart from being asked about how parents were employed, these teachers were also questioned on the effect of parents working in another country on a pupil's level of attendance, behaviour, academic achievements, material situation, dress, as well as whether they possess gadgets and the necessary stationery.

Fig. 5 presents results regarding the association between the economic migration of parents and the level of school attendance by their children. The majority of the 84 class teachers (62.5%) stated that economic migration had no effect on the level of attendance of pupils. On the other hand, 33.3% of the class teachers stated that any type of economic migration by either parent had a negative effect on the level of attendance by pupils. This situation occurred most often when at least one of the parents worked permanently in another country, which led to a lower level of parental control.

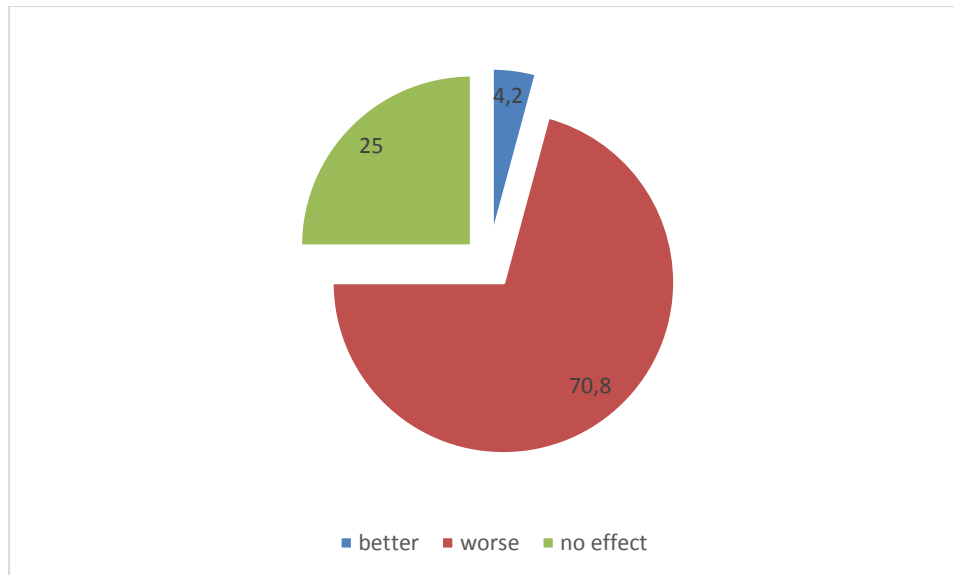


Fig. 5. Effect of parents' economic migration on the level of school attendance by children according to the class teacher (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

Only a small proportion of the teachers stated that parents' economic migration had a positive effect on a pupil's level of attendance. It thus seems that in sporadic cases when one or more of the parents is working in another country, the remaining parent or guardian intensifies their interest in the child's progress, which leads to an increased attendance rate.

The class teachers were also asked what effect parents' economic migration has on the behaviour of pupils. The distribution of the answer to this question is presented on Fig. 6.

The data indicate that most class teachers (almost 75%) felt that the behaviour of pupils is negatively affected by parents' economic migration. When interviewed, teachers stated that this bad behaviour often resulted from a desire to attract attention, which complicated the relations of the affected pupils with both the teacher and other pupils. Many of the children separated from parents due to economic migration exhibited hyperactivity and problems adapting to their classmates.

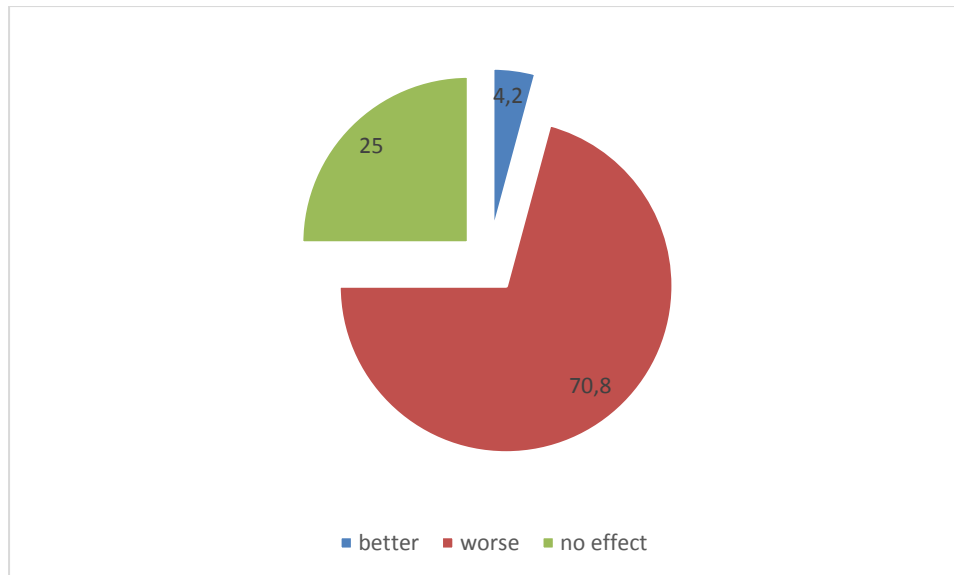


Fig. 6. Effect of parents' economic migration on pupil's behaviour in school according to class teachers (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

As can be seen from the results of the survey, a much smaller proportion of teachers (25%) stated that parents' economic migration did not have any effect on pupils' behaviour. As in the case of the question regarding attendance, a small proportion of teachers (4.2%) observed that parents' economic migration had a positive effect on a pupil's behaviour in school.

Another interesting research question regards the effect of parents' economic migration on the academic results of their children. Results regarding this question are presented in Fig. 7.

A half of the class teachers stated that the academic results of pupils who were affected by parents' economic migration were worse than those of children whose parents worked in Poland. The source of these problems lies not just in parents being overloaded with duties and not being able to devote time to their children, but also in pupils' lack of motivation and neglect for schoolwork.

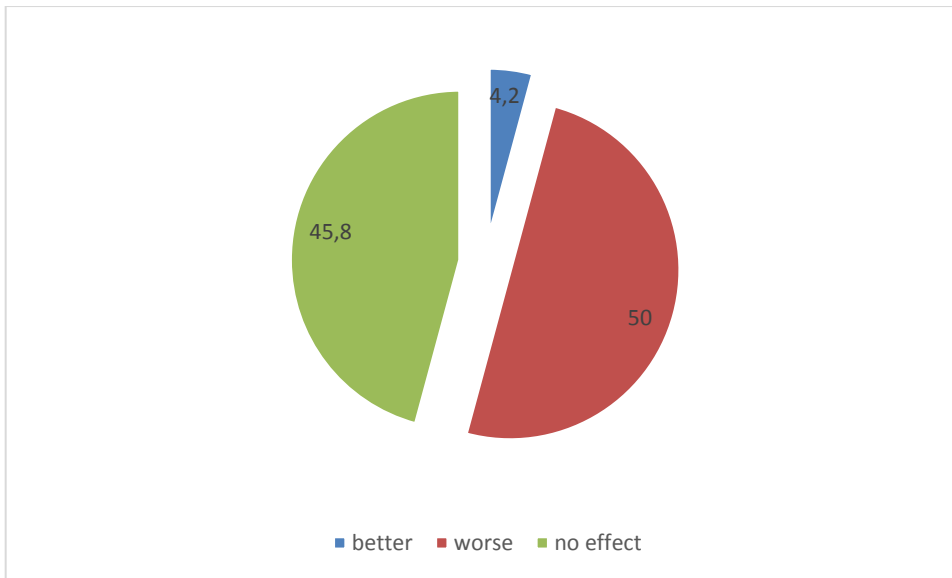


Fig. 7. Effect of economic migration on the academic results of pupils according to the opinion of class teachers (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

The results of the survey showed that nearly half of the teachers stated that parents' economic migration had no effect on the academic results of pupils, i.e. that such pupils achieved similar results to those whose parents worked in Poland.

Only a very small proportion of teachers stated that parents' economic migration had a positive effect on pupils' academic results. Such a situation might occur in a family where the emigration of one of parents improved the material situation of the household, or when the absence of one of the parents had a positive influence on the atmosphere at home.

Economic migration does not just affect the behaviour or academic results of a pupil touched by it, but above all affects the material situation of the family as a whole. This was confirmed by the results of the analysis regarding the association of parents' economic migration with families' material situation and hence the dress of pupils and the stationery and gadgets that they possess. The opinions of the class teachers on the effect of parents' economic migration on the material situation of a household is presented in Fig. 8.

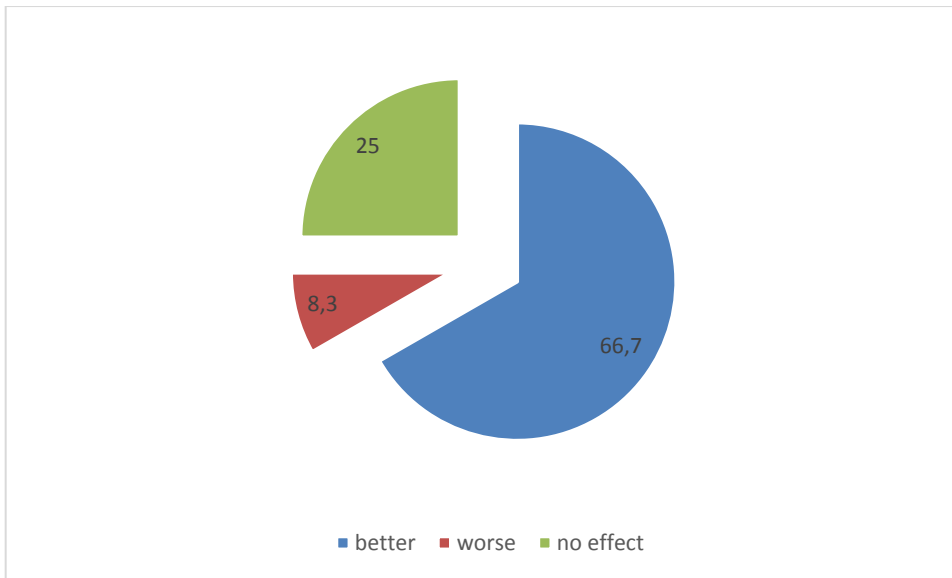


Fig. 8. Effect of parents' economic migration on the material situation of children according to class teachers (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

The results of the survey confirm one's initial hypothesis – two thirds of the teachers stated that parents' economic migration had a positive effect on the material situation of pupils. On the other hand, a quarter of the class teachers did not observe any difference between the material situation of children whose parents migrated and of children whose parents worked in Poland. Most likely, these class teachers taught in classes where the parents of the pupils had relatively well-paid jobs in Poland and could provide a high standard of living and consumer goods for their children.

There was also a small group of teachers who stated that the material situation of pupils affected by parents' economic migration was worse than the material situation of children not touched by such migration. This mostly relates to families who had been struggling financially and economic migration was used as a way out of such a problem.

A child's clothes or possession of stationery and gadgets is also an indicator of the family's material situation (see Figs. 9 and 10). The majority of the class teachers stated that parents' economic migration resulted in pupils being dressed better and having a wider range of stationery and gadgets compared to those families in which parents did not work in other countries.

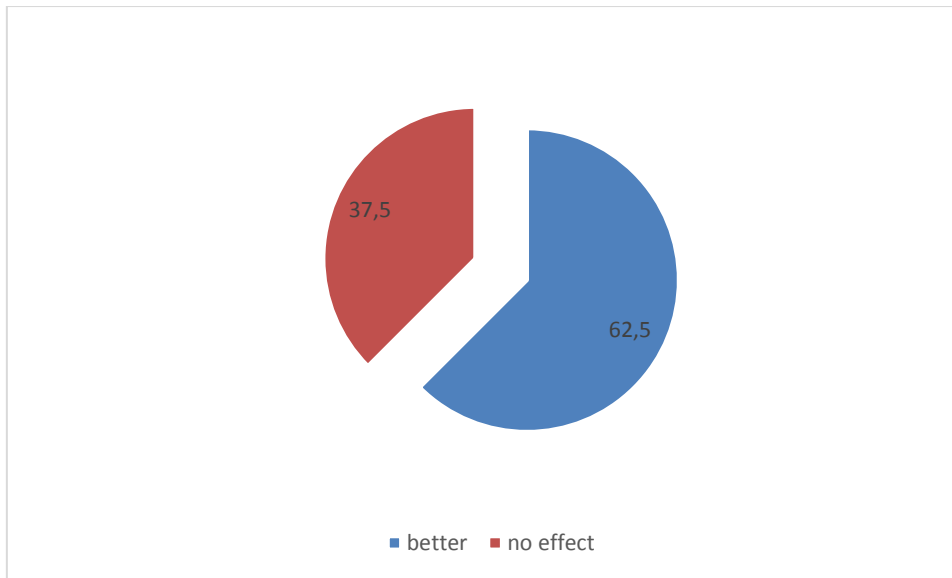


Fig. 9. Effect of parents' economic migration on the dress of pupils according to class teachers (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

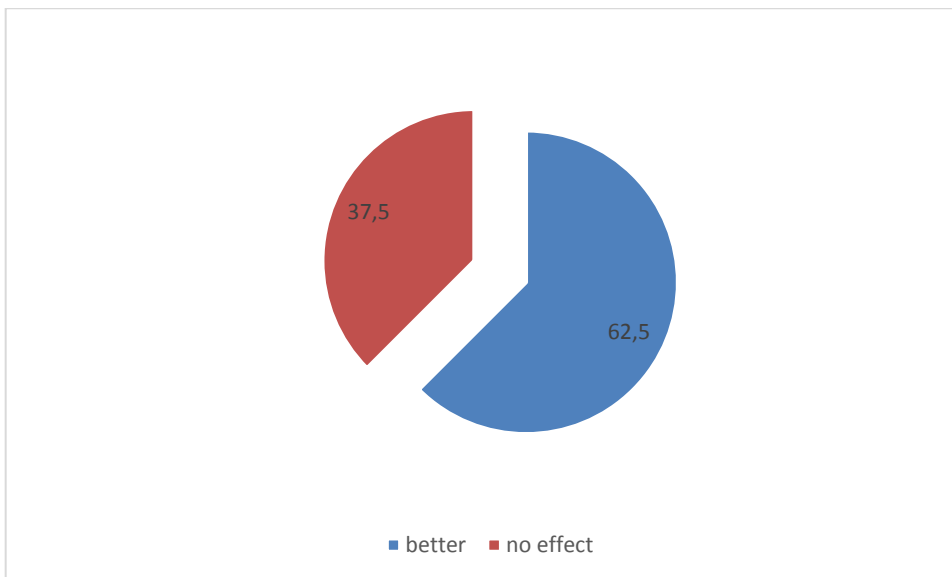


Fig. 10. Effect of parents' economic migration on the possession of stationery and gadgets by pupils according to class teachers (in %)

Source: Based on the results of the questionnaire

Nevertheless, around one third of the teachers observed that parents' economic migration had no effect on the dress of pupils or their possession of stationery and gadgets.

5. Concluding remarks

The results of the study indicate that the effects of economic migration remain an important question. Until recently, it had seemed that economic migration touched mainly the inhabitants of rural areas in the Opole region (Jończy, Poskart 2011). However, the results of this study show that the level of economic migration among the inhabitants of the city of Opole is only marginally lower. Around 8% of the study group, parents of children attending primary school in Opole, undertook economic migration. The results of the analysis indicated significant differences in parents' migration rate according to the school attended by a child. In several of the schools the proportion of parents who worked in another country was around 11% and the proportion of fathers (male guardians) working in another country even exceeded 16%.

As anticipated, the scale and form of economic migration is strongly associated with sex. As the data show, males are much more likely to undertake such migration. Around 12% of males worked in another country, while only 3% of females did so. Undoubtedly, the fact that the survey studied the parents of pupils of primary schools in Opole exaggerates this difference to some degree. The low level of participation of females in economic migration results from cultural and sociological constraints, since it is expected that mothers play a larger role in raising young children and thus leave their families less often in order to search for work. If there is a need for one of the partners to work in another country, in a large majority of cases it will be the father who plays this role, since he is expected to be the major earner in the family. These cultural norms also explain why, out of the fathers who work in another country, the largest proportion work there permanently, while those females who work in another country most often combine seasonal migration with regular employment in Poland.

The results presented in this article indicate that the separation resulting from parents' economic migration often has a noticeable effect on the school life of children. In the opinion of class teachers, parents' economic migration only has a minor effect on pupils' level of attendance and academic achievement. However, it has a major psychological impact on children, which is evident in the behavioural problems of such pupils. The data from the study show that the majority of the class teachers state that the children of economic migrants cause disruption more

often than children from families where neither parent undertook economic migration (Rauziński, Szczygielski 2008; Rostropowicz-Miśko 2007).

The results of the survey also confirmed that parents' economic migration had a positive effect on the material situation of families and that the children of economic migrants tended to be better dressed and had better stationery and gadgets than the children of parents who did not work in another country. Nevertheless, this was not uniformly the case. Class teachers from schools with a particularly good reputation or located in the more desirable residential districts of Opole observed that there was no difference between the material situation of pupils according to whether their parents migrated or not. Although the majority of teachers observed that economic migration had a positive effect on the material situation of their pupils, families in which at least one of the parents had a well-paid job in Poland had at least a comparable and sometimes even better standard of living.

Independently of the economic consequences of parents' economic migration, the resulting long-term separation leads to significant problems for primary school children. The surveys carried out in Opole and the surrounding region indicate that a large number of fathers undertake permanent employment in another country. Such a phenomenon may be termed "partial orphaning" and in the short-term can lead to a child losing the experience of normal family life. In the long-term, these children may have problems in later life when trying to set up their own families.

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ZAGRANICZNE MIGRACJE ZAROBKOWE MIESZKAŃCÓW MIASTA OPOLE W ŚWIETLE BADAŃ EMPIRYCZNYCH

Streszczenie:

Zagadnienia związane z migracją zarobkową cieszą się nadal dużym zainteresowaniem zarówno środowiska naukowców jak i opinii publicznej. Mimo przeprowadzenia wielu badań koncentrujących się wokół problematyki migracji wiele istotnych pytań wciąż pozostaje bez odpowiedzi. Jednym z nich jest skala migracji zagranicznej z miast z województwa opolskiego – regionu o bezprecedensowej skali i znaczeniu wyjazdów zarobkowych za granicę. Biorąc to pod uwagę zdecydowano się przeprowadzić badania dotyczące skali oraz form emigracji zarobkowej mieszkańców stolicy tego województwa – miasta Opola. Badaniami przeprowadzonymi na terenie miasta objęto grupę ok. 3600 rodziców uczniów szkół podstawowych Opola. Wyniki tych badań pozwoliły określić zarówno skalę zjawiska stałej i okresowej emigracji zarobkowej badanych, zróżnicowania skali emigracji w poszczególnych dzielnicach miasta oraz konsekwencje wyjazdów zarobkowych rodziców na sytuację i zachowania ich dzieci.

Słowa kluczowe: emigracja zarobkowa, województwo opolskie, konsekwencje emigracji rodziców

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