

INVESTIGATION OF WOMEN'S DISTANCE EMPLOYMENT IN RUSSIAN LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to develop a methodology for evaluating the effectiveness and identifying the issues arising from the growing female distance employment in the Russian labour market. The research is based on statistics, structural-functional method, comparative and narrative analysis. Sociological methods for data collection and processing are the basis of the authors' methodology for studying the problems of female distance employment: content analysis of information (available online) about the job requirements for women in the remote employment segment, and narratives of women working remotely. Based on the pilot study results, we identified the main criteria and ranked the forms of female distance employment in terms of their effectiveness in different labour market areas. Quantitative research methods allowed us to identify the specifics of labour relations with women working remotely, the degree of employees' satisfaction with these forms of employment relations, and problem areas. Narrative analysis allowed us to evaluate the perception of the quality of working life by women in distance employment. The theoretical and methodological result of the study is the developed model for creating an empirical base and analysing information on the impact of female distance employment on the institution of parenthood.

Key words: labour market, women's distance employment, content analysis of Internet resources, narrative analysis, expert survey

JEL Code: J28, M12, M54

Introduction

The relevance of the research focus is due to the transformations occurring in the modern society. The job market in the segment of distance consulting, educational services and remote employment in social networks, is developing very actively, new jobs are emerging, such as social network administrator, group moderator in social networks, content manager, and others. These forms of employment can be harmoniously combined with raising children.

A woman working remotely from home has the opportunity to independently adjust her work schedule and amount of working time and acquire financial independence. Researchers that focus on the issues of distance employment note that this form attracts both employees and employers; there are methods and recommendations for the effective organisation of distance projects for those involved in social and labour relations; there are methods for self-organisation and time management for remote employees.

However, a number of issues, specificities and certain aspects related to the conditions and prospects for distance employment remain underexplored. There is not enough information on the spread, legitimacy, nature and types of female distance employment; the issues of protecting the rights of the participants in this labour market segment, the degree of precarization of this type of employment, its economic and legal consequences, have not been given sufficient attention in modern research. Certain aspects of non-traditional, remote social and labour relations in the context of applying appropriate information and communication technologies are considered in the publications of Strebkov (2016) and others. Gender problems of employment are studied in the works of Wagner (2014), Khusnutdinova, Vorobiev (2015) that also deal with one of the current issues - discrimination in the labour market.

The economic aspects of reproductive behaviour and parenting are widely described in the works of Bagirova's Ural research team (2014) and other studies, among which the work of Schreiber (2014) should be mentioned. The problems related to precarization of employment as a new phenomenon in the society's social and economic life are explored by Standing (2014), Kalleberg (2012), Fyodorova, Katashinskikh and Dvorakova (2016), and others. The presented review evidences the interest of scientists from different countries to such topics as: combining childcare and women's participation in the labour market (Fedorova, Tonkikh and Koropets, 2017); gender aspects of employment policy effectiveness; the influence of family relations and family on women's status on the labour market; the balance of female employment and reproductive functions, gender specifics of professional effectiveness (Tokareva, Tokarev, 2016). Noteworthy are the Ural scientific school representatives' developments related to the methodology for assessing the quality of life, including gender specifics (Kozlova et al., 2015). However, the problem of the influence and spread of distance, remote employment on women's socio-economic and reproductive behaviour, the evaluation of the influence of these processes on the transformation of the institution of parenthood has not been studied in sufficient depth.

1 Methods

In 2015-2016 a series of sociological surveys focusing on the problems of using non-standard forms of employment was conducted in a large industrialised region of Russia with a population of 4.3 million. The study used polls of employers (directors of organisations, their deputies and heads of personnel departments) as the main research method. The object of the study and the general population were organisations and enterprises (legal entities) registered in the Sverdlovsk Region. The survey used the method of quota sampling. The criteria for sample selection and calculation were the size of the organisation and the type of economic activity. According to the first criterion, the sample is divided into 2 groups: small (with the number of staff up to 99 people), medium and large (with more than 100 people on the staff). In accordance with the second criterion (type of activity), nine groups were identified. At the time of the survey, all enterprises were operational and had been functioning continuously for the last 6 months. 309 companies were surveyed.

The spread of distance employment (the share of enterprises where this type of labour relations is applied) is suggested as an economic criterion for the effectiveness of using distance employment. The survey data for 2018 were supplemented by content analysis: quantitative and qualitative evaluation of documents (CVs and job announcement) for permanent job seekers and freelancers on the distance labour market. The documents studied were those retrieved from specialised Russian job search and recruitment sites. The most popular and effective Russian online resources were selected: freelance.ru, hh.ru, rabota66.ru, the State Employment Service site. When studying these documents, jobs that would be suitable for women were identified, for which purpose simple quantitative assessment would not be appropriate: since sex-based discrimination in employment is illegal in Russia, employers are cautious about writing openly that they are looking for a female applicant.

As for the social criterion of distance employment effectiveness, the authors suggested using women's subjective satisfaction with distance work, which was assessed by studying the perception of the working life quality in written narratives. The narrative method made it possible to identify the advantages and disadvantages of distance employment most often mentioned, hence, meaningful for the respondents. When coding, the qualitative data were assigned a category and a positive, negative or neutral value, depending on the emotional colouring of statements reflecting the quality of working life. Episodic text segments were the basis for categorisation.

2 Results of company managers survey and content analysis of job advertisements for female distance employment

The study showed that distance employment ranks fifth among the twelve non-standard forms of employment (Table 1), that is, according to the economic criterion, the application of distance employment forms is quite effective.

Tab. 1: Distance employment rating among non-standard forms of employment in the Russian labour market, %

Types of employment	Secondary job	Independent contractor	Informal employment	Short-term employment contracts (up to 1 year)	Distance employment	Working from home	Outstaffing	Smartstaffing	Part-time employment	Reduced working time	Hyperemployment (over 40 hours a week)	Freelance
Spread of non-standard forms of employment (share of respondents who use them)	42.7	24.0	8.7	24.0	12.0	1.3	7.3	3.3	19.3	7.3	14.7	9.3

Source: Authors

Distance employment is currently prevalent among office workers, with the largest share belonging to professionals with the highest level of qualification (52%); it is not so common among service, support personnel and blue-collar workers. The authors managed to rank the forms of female distance employment according to their effectiveness (prevalence) in various areas of the labour market (Table 2).

The social effectiveness of using distance forms of employment was evaluated through employers' satisfaction, which amounted to 83%. Satisfaction was determined by the number of legal and non-legal conflicts. According to the employers' ranking of problems arising from using remote forms of female employment, the following were the most common: technical (record-keeping); weaker control over the timing and quality of services; low manageability and responsibility; high staff turnover; low employee discipline; lack of motivation.

Tab. 2: Most featured distance job openings for women (in descending order)

Online source	Job, function
hh.ru rabota66.ru	call-centre operator, sales manager; research paper writer, customer support officer, recruiter, online teacher of English, editor, purchasing manager, moderator, content-manager, social networks manager, copywriter
freelance.ru	education and consulting; translation; word processing (typing); copywriters; voicework (dubbing), videos, game development

Source: Authors

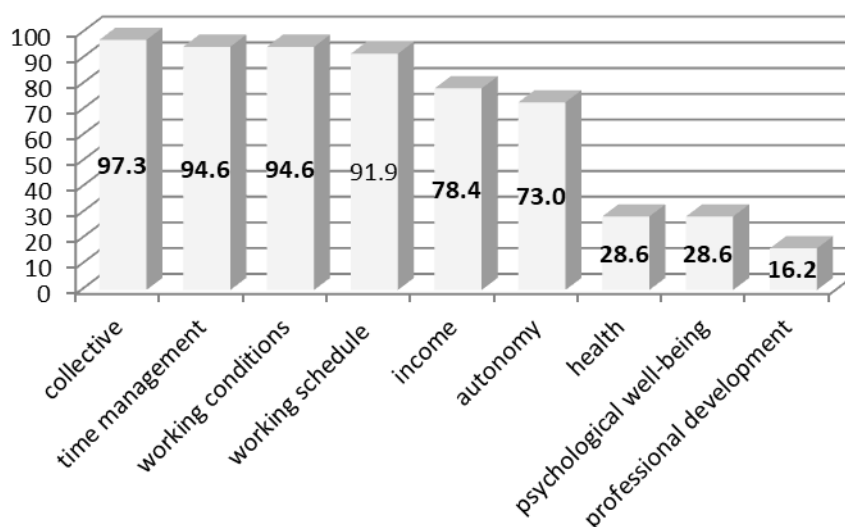
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3 Analysis of narratives by women working remotely

The results of narrative analysis are presented as fragments of utterances, transcripts and descriptions. We studied the written narratives of 37 women in distance employment, aged 25 to 42. The distribution according to the type of distance employment of women under consideration is as follows: freelancers – 62.2%, working for a permanent employer – 32.4%, combining these types of employment – 5.4%. Their jobs are the following: copywriters, translators, teachers, network marketers, business trainers, business consultants, content managers, web designers, call centre operators. The importance for respondents of certain categories when evaluating the quality of working life is reflected in Figure 1.

Women mentioned a more peaceful state of mind, improved health status, a certain freedom, autonomy, the opportunity to manage working time and their income level as the advantages of distance employment. The main shortcoming of distance employment, which directly affects the quality of working life, was the absence of a group of co-workers. The results of emotional perception of various aspects of the distance employment quality are presented in Table 3.

Fig. 1: Share of women who in their narratives mentioned distance employment characteristics as being important, %



Source: Authors

Tab. 3: Emotional perception by women of the identified features of distance employment, %

Criteria	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Collective	5.6	86.1	8.3
Time management	88.6	11.4	0.0
Working conditions	85.7	0.0	14.3
Working schedule	82.3	11.8	5.9
Income	62.1	27.6	10.3
Autonomy	100.0	0.0	0.0
Health	80.0	20.0	0.0
Psychological well-being	70.6	23.5	5.9
Professional development	66.7	33.3	0.0

Source: Authors

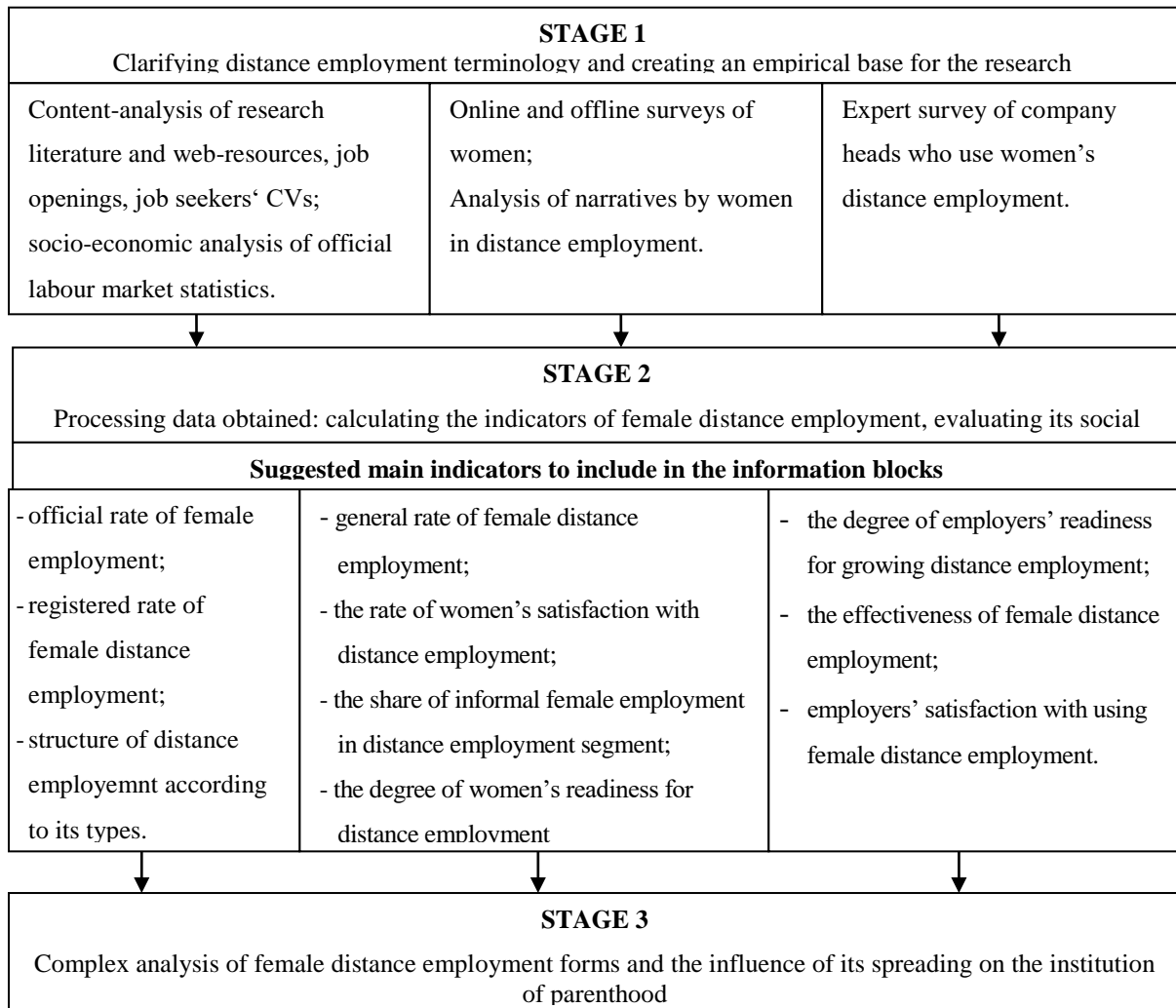
For example, Yulia, 29, points out: “I work from home doing translation work. Before that I worked in an office, in a group of co-workers, and stayed at the office from 9 to 5, punching the time clock. Now, I’m really enjoying it: I don’t have to rush anywhere, to report to anyone, to make excuses – I do the amount of work I’m supposed to and then I’m free to do anything I like.”

Thus, the narrative analysis results lead to the conclusion that women are sufficiently satisfied with most categories of distance employment, with the exception of certain few aspects.

3 A model for analysing the effect of female distance employment on the institution of parenthood

The research results allowed the authors to develop a model designed to identify and evaluate the effect of distance employment on transforming the combination of parenting and socially meaningful labour.

Fig. 2: The suggested model for creating an empirical base and analysing data on the influence of female distance employment on the institution of parenthood



Source: Authors

At the final stage of the model under consideration, it is suggested to assess the nature of the impact of growing female distance employment on the transformation of the institution of parenthood, the change in socio-economic attitudes in the sphere of women's reproductive behaviour.

Conclusion

The authors' vision of methodological aspects and tools for assessing the role of distance employment in transformational socio-economic processes described in the article can be attributed to new areas of research in the field of non-standard social and labour relations. The practical application of the model is aimed at finding the answer to the question of how the opportunity of distance employment will affect women's demographic (marriage, divorce, and birth rates) and social behaviour (employment, education, social life, hobbies, health). The presented model is novel and original, in our opinion, due to the following:

first, the theoretical and methodological approaches to studying and analysing the distance segment of the female labour market were developed, which will serve as the basis for forecasting the development of non-standard forms of social and labour relations and devising an effective state policy for promoting women's employment;

second, the types and forms of female distance employment used in the labour market were analysed and systematised, which will allow for discovering the socio-economic nature of the phenomenon under study, determining the extent and nature of the impact of growing female distance employment on the institution of parenthood.

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