**ABSTRACT**

We are witnessing considerable changes in the labor market in today’s economy, which is based on knowledge. Labor awareness is growing in the society and it is accompanied by the problem of equal professional opportunities for women and men.

The purpose of the present work is to assess the relation existing between selected socialdemographic features such as: age, sex, marital status, education, size of the place of residence, family status, professional situation before starting one’s own activity, and the motivation to set up one’s own enterprise. The factors having a crucial influence on establishing one’s own economic activity have been divided into external and internal ones. Amongst the external factors, the following ones have been listed: convenient market circumstances, lack of other possibilities, lack of satisfaction with the previous work, lack of growth possibilities, unemployment, parental model, family relations, the „glass ceiling” effect, flexible work time and the crisis. On the other hand, internal factors included: pursuit of independence, the internal need for action, the need of fair earnings, the need to be „one’s own boss “, the need to fulfill one’s personal ambition, the need to dominate, the need to prove value, the disposition to take risk, the values inculcated at home. In the present work, the author compared the influence of selected features in the enterprises run both by women and men.

The empirical material was collected amongst male and female owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (employing up to 249 people) established before 2008 in Poland. The substantive data concern the period 2008-2010. The survey research in the form of a direct interview (240 questionnaires) was carried out in the first half of 2011 by the students of the 2nd grade studies at the Poznań University of Economics. The collected material has been processed by the methods of descriptive statistics and the method of correlation and regression.