

WOMEN IN CHORNOBYL EXCLUSION ZONE

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We polled 100 female employees of SSE ChSK, and here are the results

Introduction

Chornobyl Exclusion Zone (EZ) is a radioactively contaminated area around the notorious Chornobyl NPP (Ukraine) covering about 1000 square miles, with around 100 million cubic feet of radioactive waste spread within. The Chornobyl Exclusion Zone officially emerged in May 1986, after evacuation of the population from the area which equals the territory of a small European state like Luxembourg. People never returned to their homes, and today Exclusion Zone is an open source of radiation. The radiation background is formed primarily of Cs-137. In the remote future (10 half-lives of Cs-137), the radiation background will be determined by Pu-239 that has a half-life of 24 thousand years. Today it is clear that this territory will not be populated in the nearest centuries. The Exclusion Zone hosts several strategic objects whose responsibilities are to monitor the environment, to prevent leakage of radiation outside the controlled area, and to maintain the territory in an appropriate state so as to reduce the risk of fires. Other than the ChNPP under decommissioning objects within the Exclusion Zone are the Center for Environmental monitoring "Ecocenter", RAW processing plants and storage facilities etc. In addition to these, there are about 800 unauthorized RAW repositories which emerged during an acute period of mitigation of the consequences of the nuclear accident.

Background

The total number of personnel in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone (excluding ChNPP) is around 3,500. The largest employer is SSE "Chornobyl Spetskombinat" (2,066) whose activity covers a wide range of spheres, from RAW characterization and monitoring to the transport service. There are no legal restrictions, except for pregnancy, concerning employment of women in the Exclusion Zone given that they are at least 18 years old and are in good health. Women actively participate in every sphere of activities that are performed here; however, the division of the jobs into "womanly" and "unwomanly" is apparent. For example, the highest percentage of female employees can be seen among the personnel of the local hospital (76.9%) and weather service (62.5%). Construction organizations have 0 to 10% female personnel (as of 2014).

Today, female employees in EZ comprise 21% of total personnel. As long as full-time residence in EZ is prohibited, the personnel works shifts. Typically, it means spending 4 full days in the Zone followed by 3 week-ends at home. The working hours are 8 am – 6 pm. When on shift, the personnel reside on the dormitories which are former apartments of people evacuated in 1986.

Method

In March 2015, we launched a survey among female employees of SSE "Chornobyl Spetskombinat" in order to identify their attitudes and level of satisfaction. The total of 100 women participated in the survey, and the results are presented below.

Working in Exclusion Zone: Reasons for applying for a job



"The Government does not understand the problems of the Exclusion Zone" (N., 55)

"My work is not enough appreciated. I'd like to feel that it's really needed, and that it's stable" (N., 58)

"I want to go home from work every day. I have three kinds!!!" (N., 40)

"I think they should reduce the tension just to let us develop professionally." (N., 45)

"I am a girl, and I don't like the fact that I have to stay here for the night. I don't feel safe" (N., 26)

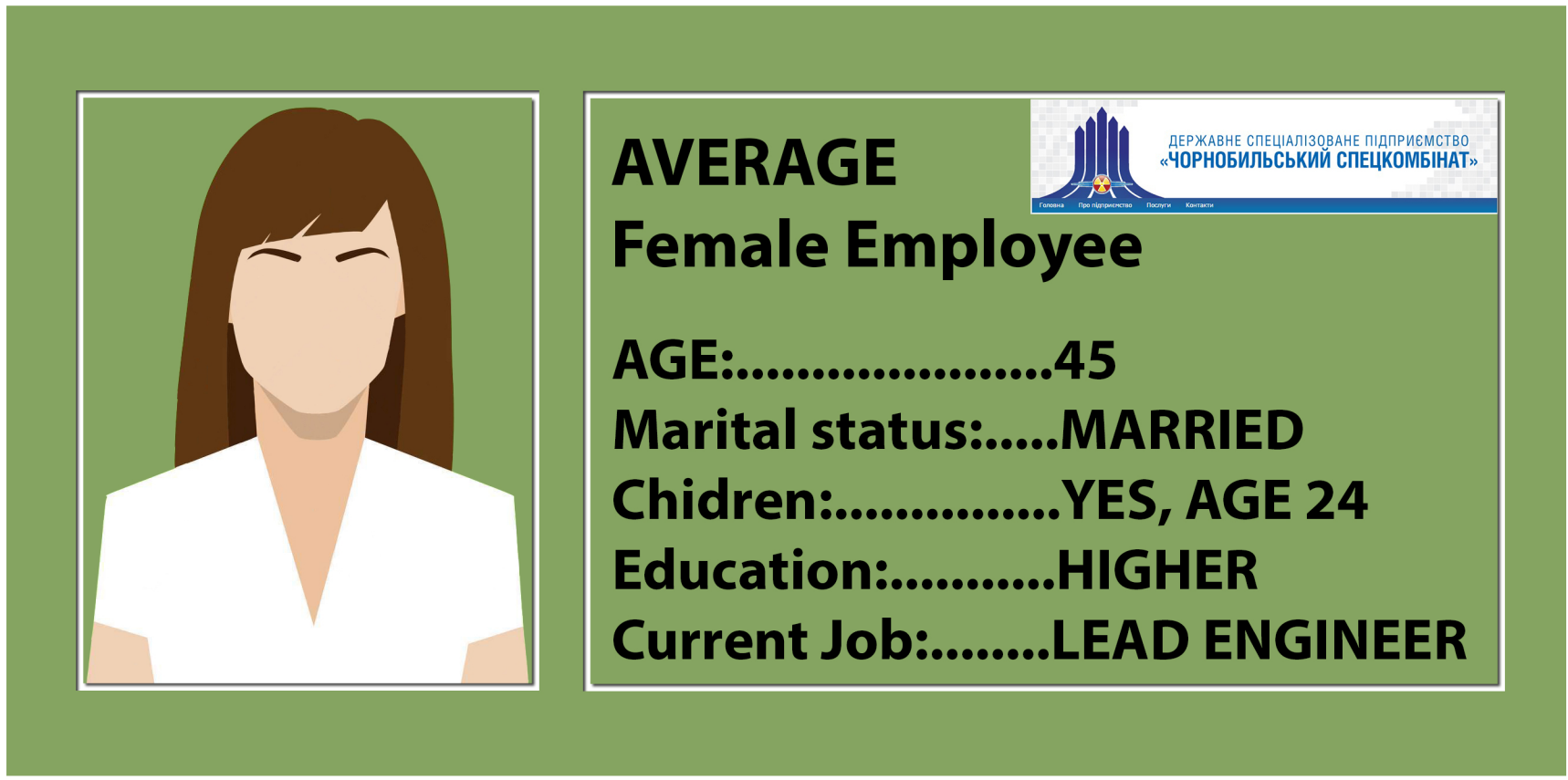
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the age of the youngest and the oldest respondents

66

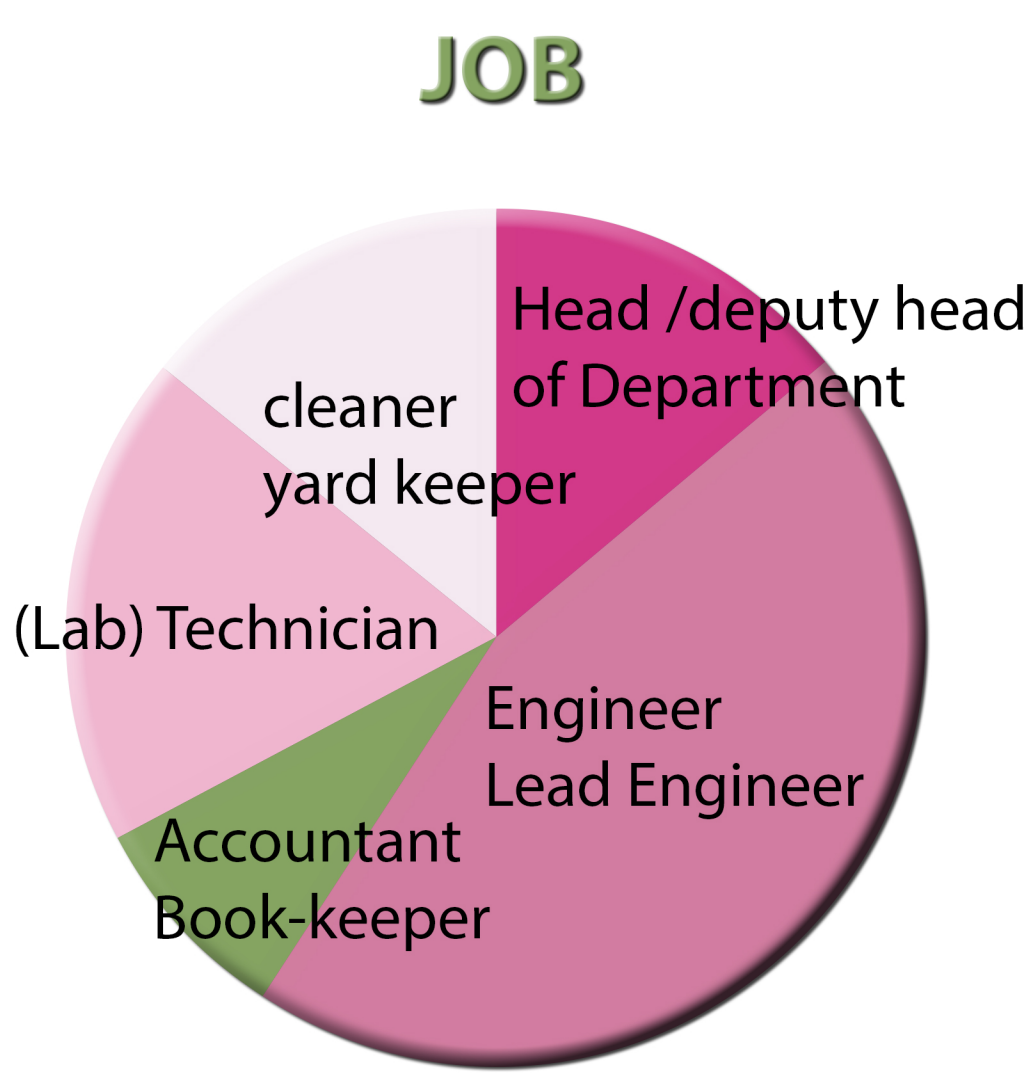
"Taking into account my liquidator's experience, I have no difficulties working here" (N., 48)

"To improve the situation, everyone must start with themselves" (N., 54)

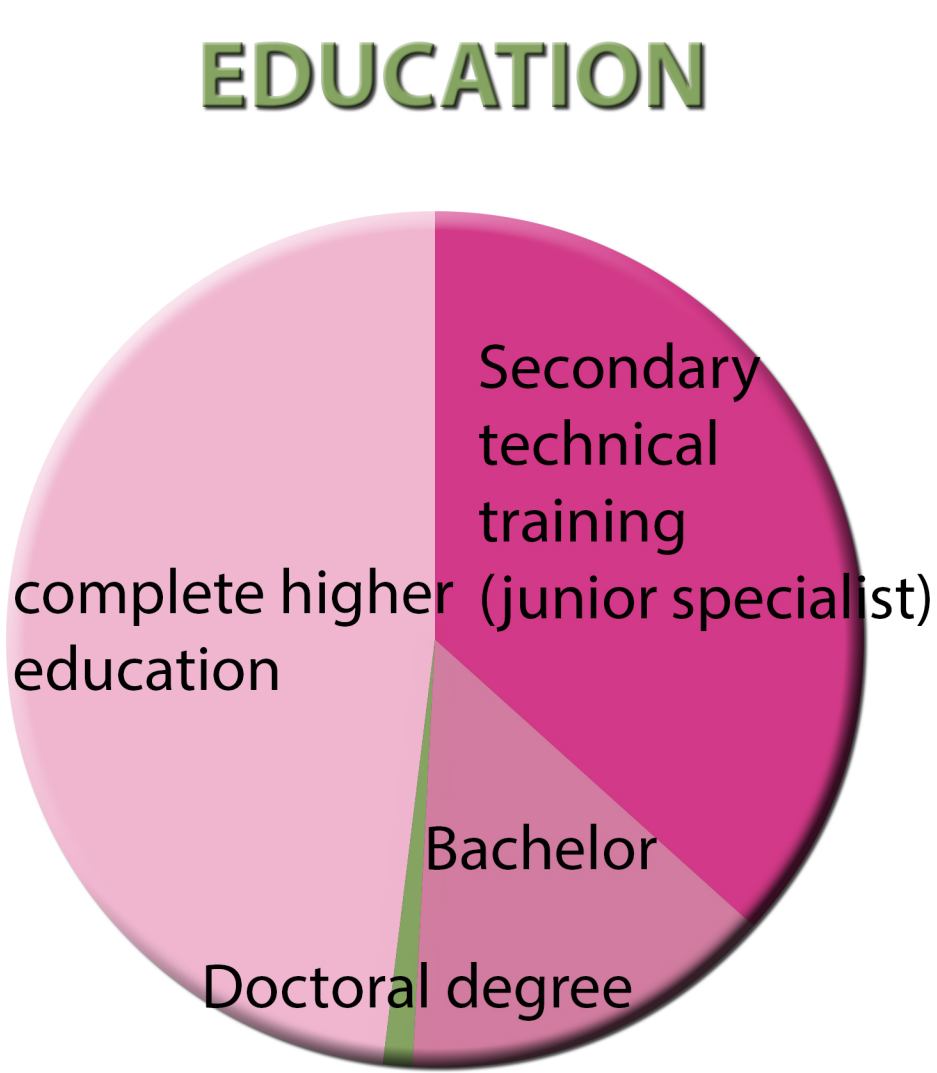
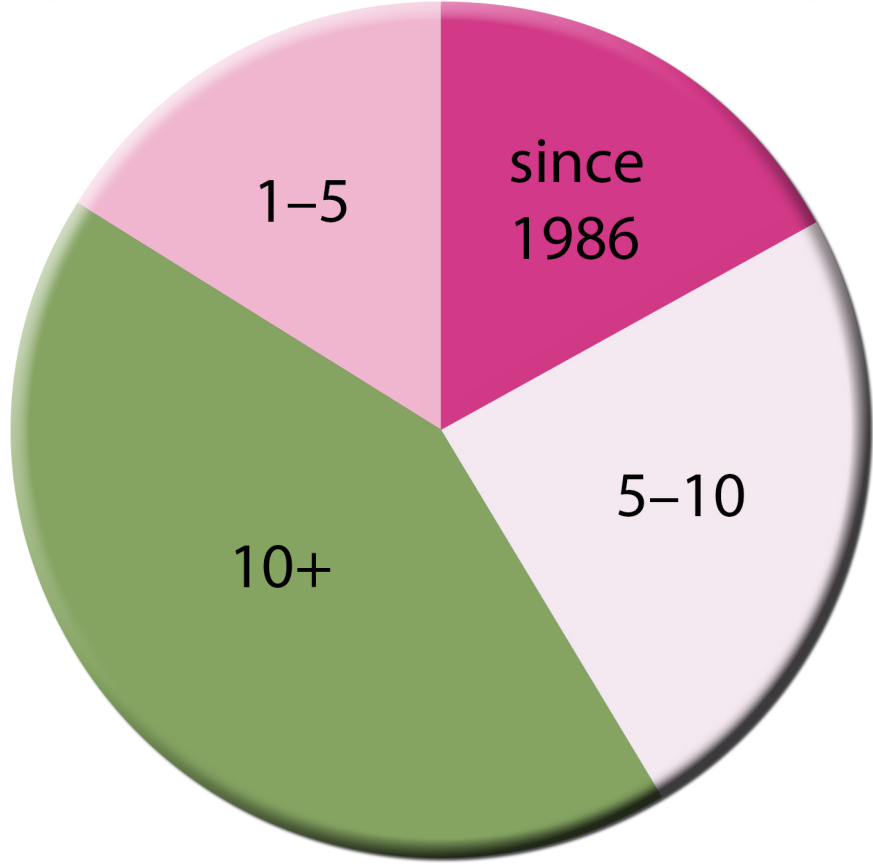


Working and living conditions

3% only are satisfied with living conditions in EZ
29% feel physically unsafe
75% are sure that working in EZ is harmful due to ionizing radiation
47% of the above believe this harm is considerable



WORKING EXPERIENCE (in Exclusion Zone)



Career Opportunities & Discrimination

49% believe that male employees have more career opportunities
44% don't feel being discriminated at work
40% consider this factor unimportant
6% claim facing direct gender discrimination and harassment

"Exclusion Zone is my Motherland. I am happy to work here, and I want to keep working. I am against making Exclusion Zone a free access territory" (N., 59)

General satisfaction

82% find working atmosphere generally positive
66% like their job in EZ
8% would like to get new job outside EZ

"We are still using the furniture brought from Pripyat for work and sleep. I guess it's time to replace it with something new" (N., 46)

Working in Exclusion Zone: Top advantages and disadvantages

