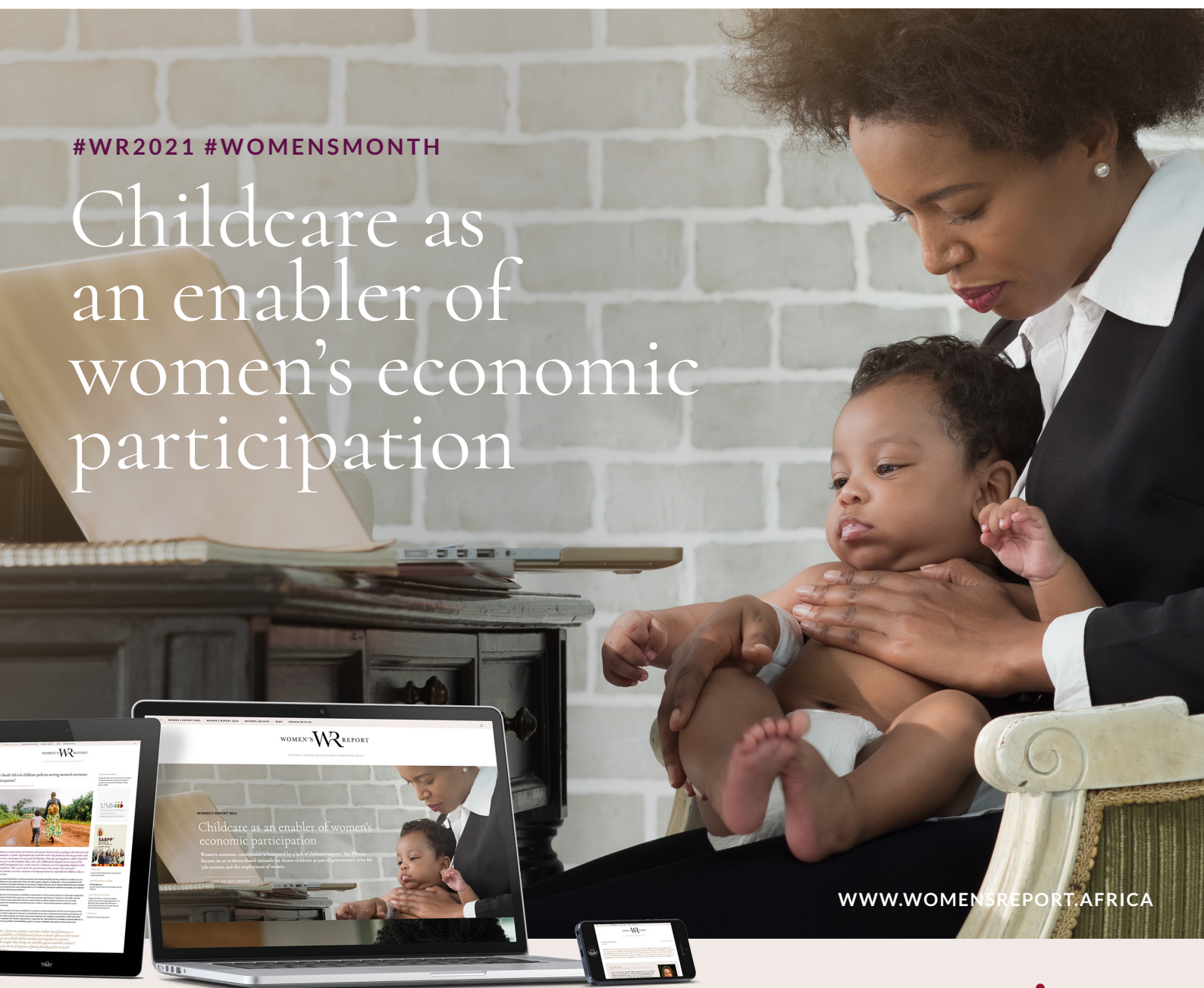


WOMEN'S **WR** REPORT

EVIDENCE-BASED INSIGHTS ABOUT WOMEN AT WORK

#WR2021 #WOMENSMONTH

Childcare as an enabler of women's economic participation



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A message from the Editor

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Dear Women's Report reader

The articles in the 2021 Women's Report make valuable suggestions as to how women's economic empowerment can be facilitated through childcare and related policies. Indeed, the care obligation — often entrusted to and embraced by women — can significantly hamper economic participation and progression.



Childcare responsibilities have an impact on women's educational opportunities and skills development, obtaining relevant occupational experience (due to time availability), and physical availability in jobs that demand work-related travel and presenteeism. Conversely, when a woman is assisted with childcare, her time and emotional capacities are released towards earning an income and developing her skills and talents. When a woman earns money, her family benefits from the proceeds.

Laura Brooks outlines the mechanisms of early childhood development (ECD) and why it can boost women's employment in South Africa. In her article, Laura sets out the complexities of ECD policy and the link between childcare and women's economic empowerment.

Parents, more often women, may be unavailable for paid work due to childcare obligations. When there are children, especially young children and those who remain dependent on their parents due to disability, there is always the need for an adult to tend to the children's safety, food, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, and emotional support. Some women opt out of their careers to care for their young children, and when they are ready to re-enter paid work, getting hired is not easy. Lunga Tukani and Anita Bosch reflect on the perceptions of managers when hiring stay-at-home mothers, illustrating the effect of childcare on women's ability to subsequently access paid work. The article also propositions skills that managers value in stay-at-home mothers.

“At times when parents are working, childcare can be delivered by people other than the parents of a child, such as teachers, grandparents, or other family members.”

Mark Smith's account of being a stay-at-home-father and the engagement of fathers in hands-on childcare outlines the great benefits and hindrances that men encounter when taking the road less travelled. Yet, studies of dual-income families in industrialised nations show that household and care obligations taken up by fathers are more often than not outsourced to women.

In the South African context, the outsourcing of childcare takes many forms, depending on the economic standing of the family and the availability of women in extended family networks. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about differential outcomes for women, as neatly outlined in Jennifer Smout's article. She also provides strategies for reshaping gender relations and support for women.

A message from the Editor

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The financial cost of care is carried by the family, with little to no assistance from the state. In addition, viewed from a traditional gendered perspective, the emotional cost of care is largely shouldered by mothers. In her chapter, Zitha Mokomane points out the glaring reality that the provision of decent childcare to South African working families is not high on government's agenda. She outlines the disjointed policy framework, but also proposes solutions towards alignment.

Whether women work as part of the circular movement of their money towards people who provide childcare, thereby needing to earn and income, or stay at home due to the fact that they do not have childcare support options, there are outcomes for the South African economy. In both instances, women's economic contribution is hampered by a lack of childcare support. The WR2021 focuses on an evidence-based rationale for decent childcare as part of government's drive for job creation and the employment of women.

Wishing you happy reading!



Professor Anita Bosch

USB Research Chair - Women at Work

Associate Professor: Leadership and Organisational Behaviour

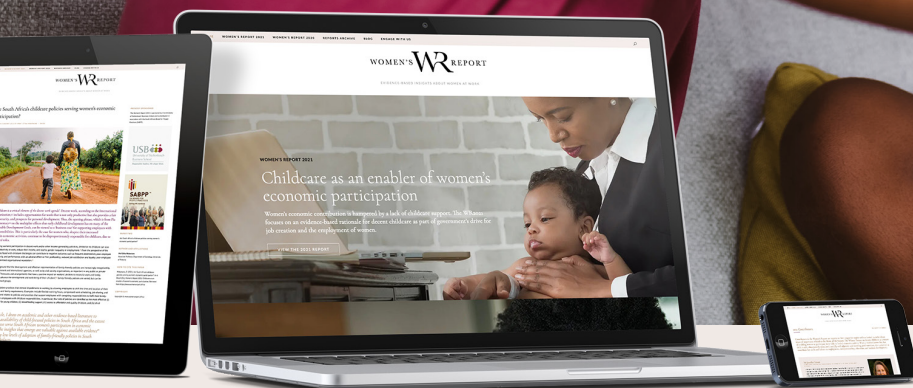
WOMEN'S **WR** REPORT

EVIDENCE-BASED INSIGHTS ABOUT WOMEN AT WORK

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Paper 1: COVID-19 and women's care responsibilities: Opportunities to transform gender relations

by Ms Jennifer Smout



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COVID-19 and women's care responsibilities: opportunities for transforming gender relations

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by Ms Jennifer Smout

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INTRODUCTION

In South Africa and worldwide, women's care responsibilities affect their ability to look for work and remain in employment. COVID-19 has highlighted this trend, with mothers around the world taking on the majority of the domestic burden in the face of school closures and remote working.¹ Tackling childcare inequalities and the structural barriers to working mothers succeeding in the labour force have the potential to transform women's work-life balance and increase their chances of becoming employed and remaining in employment.

Although South Africa has a raft of legislation and policies aimed at promoting women's economic participation and employment, women have consistently been underemployed in comparison to men. Over the last decade, women have experienced higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of labour force participation.² Young women are also more likely than young men not to be in employment, education, or training.³ In addition, the gender wage gap means that, when women do work, they are paid less for work of equal value (women's remuneration is around 75% of that of their male counterparts).⁴

Legislation and policy can only go so far in remedying the situation, and it is vital that families, individuals, and workplaces pursue personal and structural reforms to enhance women's economic empowerment. This includes transforming gender norms of care and domestic labour, and creating workplaces that support both mothers and fathers.

Women and childcare prior to COVID-19

“Gendered norms of childcare are holding women back from full and equal economic participation, and it will take a collective effort by individuals, companies, and government to change this reality.”

Prior to COVID-19, gendered norms of domestic labour meant that South African women undertook most of the (unpaid) household cleaning and childcare.^{5,6} Women spent an average of 107 minutes (one hour and 47 minutes) more per day on this work than men did, and were far more likely than men to say that it was usually or always they who did the laundry, cared for sick family members, shopped for groceries, did the household cleaning, and prepared the meals (Table 1, below, shows these proportions).

- 1 El-Tayeb, K., Nasir, R.Z., & Schulz, K. (2020). Tackling childcare in a global pandemic. *Let's talk development: World Bank blogs*. 17 September 2020 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/tackling-childcare-global-pandemic> [1] Statistics South Africa. (2020a). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2019*. Stats SA. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=7622
- 2 Stats SA. (2020a). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2019*. Stats SA. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=7622
- 3 Stats SA. (2020a).
- 4 Stats SA (2020b). *Labor market dynamics, 2018*. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-02-11-02/Report-02-11-022018.pdf>
- 5 Mokomane, Z., Roberts, B., Struwig, J., & Gordon, S. (2020). *Family matters: Family cohesion, values and strengthening to promote wellbeing*. Human Sciences Research Council.
- 6 Stats SA. (2013). *A survey of time use, 2010*. Stats SA <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-02-02-00/Report-02-02-002010.pdf>

Table 1: Division of household labour⁷

It is always me who...	Proportion of Men	Proportion of Women
...does the laundry	12.1%	82.2%
...cares for sick family members	16%	61.8%
...shops for groceries	14.3%	54.2%
...does the household cleaning	12.7%	78.1%
...prepares the meals	14.8%	85.8%

These gendered patterns of labour start early on, and have an impact on girls' ability to complete their primary and tertiary education. Although the majority of school dropouts is linked to a lack of money for fees for both boys and girls, the second leading cause of girls not attending or finishing school is "family commitments", including getting married, minding children, and pregnancy. This is the least likely reason boys cite for not attending school.^{8,9} Similarly, at university level, young women are more likely than young men to cite family responsibility as the reason for dropping out.¹⁰

Female-headed households tend to be larger and extended, with the result that women frequently care for multiple family members.¹¹ Where parents are not living together, children are far more likely to live with their biological mothers than their biological fathers, though this does not imply that the woman is the only adult in the household.¹² If children do not live with their parents, they are commonly cared for by another female relative.^{13,14}

These gendered norms have long affected women's ability to work and remain in employment. They affect the subjects women take and the careers they can subsequently enter. Women are more likely to enrol in subjects related to care work at university,¹⁵ and the care work labour force in South Africa is profoundly gendered.¹⁶ Women are also more likely than men to cite care responsibilities as having hampered their ability to travel to work.¹⁷ For middle- and upper-income families, some of this care work and domestic labour is likely to be outsourced to another woman, such as a domestic worker or nanny. These women do not have this option, and must either take their children with them or leave them at home with a (likely female) relative.¹⁸

"This was the status quo before COVID-19. Women took on the childcare burden at the expense of employment. COVID-19 exacerbated this."

7 Mokomane et al. (2020).

8 Stats SA. (2020c). General Household Survey 2019. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182019.pdf>

9 Stats SA. (2019a). General Household Survey 2018. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182018.pdf>

10 Stats SA. (2019b). Education Series Volume V: Higher education and skills in South Africa. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-92-01-05/Report-92-01-052017.pdf>

11 Stats SA. (2018). Men, women, children: Findings of the Living Conditions Survey 2014/15. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-02%20/Report-03-10-02%202015.pdf>

12 Hall, K. & Sambu, W. (2018) Demography of South Africa's children. Child Gauge 2018: Children, families and the state. (pp. 132-136) http://www.ci.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/367/Child_Gauge/South_African_Child_Gauge_2018/Chapters/demography%20of%20South%20Africa%27s%20children.pdf

13 Casale, D. & Posel, D. (2020). Gender and the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis in the paid and unpaid economies in South Africa. 15 July 2020. NIDS-CRAM Wave 1. <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Casale-Gender-the-early-effects-of-the-COVID-19-crisis-in-the-paid-unpaid-economies-in-South-Africa.pdf>

14 Hall, K. & Sambu, W. (2018).

15 Stats SA. (2019b).

16 Vetten, L. & Grobbelaar, M. (2020) Rapid assessment on the financial status of non-profit organizations providing social care services: 7 July 2020. Care Work Campaign and National Coalition of Social Services.

17 Stats SA. (2016). Gender Series Volume III: Gender patterns in transport, 2013. Report number 03-10-15. Stats SA. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-10-15/03-10-152013.pdf>

18 Alfjers, L. (2015). WIEGO Child Care Initiative literature review. <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Alfjers-Child-Care-Policy-Employment-Lit-Review.pdf>

COVID-19's impact on women's childcare burden and ability to work

In March 2020, the South African government declared a National State of Disaster¹⁹ and instituted a strict lockdown that was given effect through regulations. These regulations resulted in the closure of schools, universities, and early childhood development (ECD) centres for several months. Many workplaces were closed, and, where feasible, workers were asked to work remotely. Where this was not possible, workers lost their jobs. An estimated 60% of South African workers subsequently experienced a complete loss of or a significant decline in personal income.²⁰

The closure of schools meant that many parents were trying to juggle working from home with schooling and caring for their children. Research shows that, in South Africa²¹ and globally,^{22,23} women bore the weight, with deleterious impacts on their employment, pay, and health.

In South Africa, women's employment losses were larger than men's, and, by October 2020, when lockdown restrictions were eased and some schools reopened, women still lagged behind men in reaching their pre-COVID employment levels.²⁴ Women were also working less hours compared to February 2020, whereas men's hours were back to pre-COVID levels.²⁵ More than twice as many women as men said their childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 lockdown had prevented them from going to work, or had made work very difficult.²⁶

South African women were "disproportionately affected by the 'childcare shock' in April", taking on more additional childcare work, because 1) children were more likely to be living with their mothers, and 2) women living with children took on longer hours of childcare than men.²⁷ In addition, when surveyed about the impact of COVID-19 on their schooling, girls reported being overburdened by chores and having to care for younger siblings.²⁸ This shows how these gendered patterns of childcare are being reinforced for the next generation.

When schools re-opened, both men and women reported less hours spent on childcare, but women's hours reduced by more than men's, highlighting how they had borne the brunt of school closures. Many ECD centres were still closed by October, and women continue to be negatively affected by this. Only 17% of men, compared to 63% of women, said they were looking after their young children by themselves.²⁹

- 19 Government Gazette No. 43096. 15 March 2020. Declaration of a National State of Disaster. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202003/43096gon313.pdf
- 20 UNWomen East and Southern Regional Office. 2021. Impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and women's empowerment in East and Southern Africa. <https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20gender%20equality%20and%20women%20empowerment%20in%20East%20and%20Southern%20Africa.pdf?deliveryName=DM97697>
- 21 Casale, D. & Posel, D. (2020). See also Casale, D. & Shephard, D. (2020). The gendered effects of the ongoing lockdown and school closures in South Africa: Evidence from NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2. NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2. 30 September 2020. <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/5-Casale-D.-Shepherd-D.-2020-The-gendered-effects-of-the-ongoing-lockdown-and-school-closures-in-South-Africa-Evidence-from-NIDS-CRAM-Waves-1-and-2.pdf>
- 22 El-Tayeb et al. (2020).
- 23 Croda, E. & Grossbard, S. (2021). Women pay the price of COVID-19 more than men. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19: 1-9. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11150-021-09549-8>
- 24 Casale, D. & Shepherd, D. (2021). The gendered effects of the COVID-19 crisis and ongoing lockdown in South Africa. Evidence from NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 – 3. NIDS-CRAM Wave 3. 31 January 2021. <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/4-Casale-D.-Shepherd-D.-2021-The-gendered-effects-of-the-Covid-19-crisis-and-ongoing-lockdown-in-South-Africa-Evidence-from-NIDS-CRAM-Waves-1-3.pdf>
- 25 Casale, D. & Shepherd, D. (2021).
- 26 Casale, D. & Shepherd, D. (2021).
- 27 Casale, D. & Shepherd, D. (2021).
- 28 Zero Dropout Campaign. (2021). School dropout. The pandemic edition 2020. <https://zerodropout.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ZERO-DROPOUT-PUBLICATION-2020-final-DIGITAL.pdf>
- 29 Casale, D. & Shepherd, D. (2021).

“COVID-19 has highlighted two things: first, that transforming household and family gendered norms of care and domestic labour is vital for ensuring women's full and equal participation in the economy. Second, it has highlighted the opportunity for workplaces to provide supportive environments for mothers through a range of interventions, such as on-site childcare, flexible working hours, and increased parental leave.”

HOW DO WE SUPPORT A MORE GENDER-EQUITABLE FUTURE?

Work on addressing the childcare shock is taking place around the world, and there are many opportunities that South Africa could learn from, both in the immediate wake of the hard lockdown and for the future.

Provide immediate financial support to mothers

In the short term, more is needed to ensure that women do not lose their jobs in the face of childcare shocks, or are remunerated for unpaid childcare. For instance, some countries (like Italy, Romania, and Algeria) have introduced special/ exceptional childcare leave for working parents, providing them with job security whilst schools are closed.³⁰ In addition, cash transfers may ease the burden of unpaid care work on women, but should be accompanied by accessible childcare facilities,³¹ so that women are not required to continue with care work at the expense of paid employment once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Changing gendered household norms through paternity leave

For the long term, COVID-19 has highlighted women's childcare burden and the need to amend gender norms in the household. One way to encourage male involvement in childcare from birth is to implement equal paid parental leave for all parents. Research shows that women's employment in the private sector is higher in countries that mandate paternity leave.³² South Africa offers fathers just ten days parental leave, sending a clear message that 'childcare is women's work'. Many countries have more generous parental leave than South Africa, and it is frequently paid by employers.³³ In South Africa, companies such as Vodacom Group, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Volvo, and Unilever all offer fathers more than the minimum leave.

Unfortunately, offering the leave does not seem to be enough for men to take it. Gender norms and workplace culture can discourage men from using this leave. Fathers tend to make up only around 20% of those who take parental leave as of 2016.³⁴ However, 'use-it-or-lose-it' leave, sometimes known as 'daddy quotas', has been shown to increase men's uptake of parental leave and improve their participation in care work.^{35,36,37} In Quebec, Canada, these quotas also substantially increased mothers' ability to participate in paid work.³⁸

30 El-Tayeb et al. (2020).

31 Alfjers, L. (2015).

32 Amin, M., Islam, A., & Sakhonchik, A. (2016). Does paternity leave matter for female employment in developing economies? Evidence from firm data. World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper 7588. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23926/DoesPaternityLeaveMatterForFemaleEmploymentInDevelopingEconomies.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

33 International Labour Organization. (2014). Maternity and paternity at work. Law and practice across the world. ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

34 Queisser, M., Adema, W., & Clarke, C. (2016). What dads can do for gender equality. OECD Yearbook 2016. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/gender/what-dads-can-do-for-gender-equality.htm>

35 MenCare. (2016). The MenCare parental leave platform: 10 ways to leave gender inequality behind and give our children the care they need. MenCare: A global fatherhood campaign. <https://men-care.org/resources/?type=publications>

36 Shand, T. (2018). The need for fully paid, non-transferable parental leave: Leaving inequality behind and giving our children the care they need. Background paper for the European parliament. Prepared by Tim Shand, Promundo-US. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/139328/MenCare-Parental-Leave-Platform-Background-Paper-EU-Parliament-21.02.18.pdf>

37 Patnaik, A. (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas. Journal of Labor Economics, 37(4). <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/703115?af=R&mobileUi=0&>

38 Dunatchik, A. & Özcan, B. (2019). Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas. Working Paper 07-19. London School of Economics, Department of Social Policy. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/social-policy/Assets/Documents/PDF/working-paper-series/07-19-Berkay-Ozcan-and-Allison-Dunatchik.pdf>

Parental leave has been shown to have benefits for workplaces too, improving staff retention, morale, and productivity, and reducing absenteeism and turnover.³⁹

Expanding the scope and beneficiaries of the UIF

Of course, employer-sponsored leave benefits are only available to mothers and fathers in formal employment. In South Africa, several categories of workers,⁴⁰ including informal workers and the self-employed, cannot contribute to or draw from the UIF, meaning that some of the most vulnerable workers cannot access the financial support that would tide them over or help them afford childcare. Yet, each year, the UIF records a significant surplus of funds – an expected R3.6 billion over the next three years⁴¹ – that could be used to support these working mothers, and could be extended to improving parental leave for fathers. There is a need for law reform to ensure that all workers can contribute to and draw from the UIF should they become unemployed or need to take extended leave as a result of their childcare responsibilities.

Increasing access to affordable and quality ECD and childcare services

Another challenge for working mothers, especially single mothers, is the availability of high-quality, affordable ECD and childcare in their workplaces and communities. Research from around the world, including developing countries, shows that there is a positive relation between childcare and maternal employment. This includes direct outcomes of reduced time spent caring for children during the work week and increased time for wage- or self-employment. In the medium term, the availability of childcare is linked to increased employment, increased entrepreneurship, and reduced stress. In the long term, this results in an increase in employment rates, income, and the wellbeing of working mothers.⁴²

At present, ECD services are largely offered by private individuals, small companies, and non-governmental organisations. The South African ECD workforce is 95% female.⁴³ The sector receives limited state sponsorship, and is not evenly rolled out across the country. This is already on the government's agenda, with the 2019–2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework noting that “access to quality ECD is needed for all children, especially those in vulnerable groups”.⁴⁴ Government plans to introduce legislation to regulate the ECD landscape and develop new funding models for ECD delivery. The target – an ambitious one – is that 90% of all four-year-olds will have access to ECD by 2024.⁴⁵

Childcare services have been effective around the world, and can take many forms. Laura Alfors (2015) provides a set of examples of best practices from the Global South for the reader interested in more detail.

Employer-supported childcare and family-friendly workplace policies

Research has shown that there are many business benefits for employers who offer their employees childcare. “They can tap into a larger skilled talent pool, reduce absenteeism and turnover, boost employee productivity and satisfaction, attract investors and buyers, and attain ‘employer of choice’ status – all of which can contribute to profits for companies and jobs for women – benefiting economies and societies.”⁴⁶

39 Shand, T. (2018). See also Lyonette, C. & Baldauf, B. (2019). *Family friendly working policies and practices: Motivations, influences, and impacts for employers*. Government Equalities Office, United Kingdom. https://797cabdf-9bad-4185-9bb4-97f77fe11efe.filesusr.com/ugd/90fcb7_2c5930c239784b728524294e388f0cb9.pdf

40 SARS (South African Revenue Service). (2021). *The Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF)*. <https://www.sars.gov.za/TaxTypes/UIF/Pages/default.aspx>

41 Mahlaka, R. (2020). *The UIF has R30bn available for COVID-19 income support to laid-off workers*. Daily Maverick (1 April 2020). <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-01-uif-has-r30bn-available-for-covid-19-income-support-to-laid-off-workers/>

42 Buvinic, M. & O'Donnell, M. (2016). *Revisiting what works: Women, economic empowerment and smart design*. Washington, Centre for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/CGD-Roadmap-Update-2016.pdf>

43 Department of Social Development and Economic Policy Research Institute. (2014) *Audit of Early Childhood Development Centres National Report*. DSD.

44 Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. (2020) *South African Government Medium-term Strategic Framework 2019–2024*. DPME (p. 17).

45 DPME (2020).

46 International Finance Corporation (IFC). (2017). *Tackling childcare: A guide for employer-supported childcare*. International Finance Corporation (p. 7). <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/da7bf72-e4d9-4334-955f-671a104877a7/201911-A-guide-for-employer-supported-childcare.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mVHadh3>

Where workplaces do opt to provide childcare, it is vital that it is quality childcare that is safe, contributes to learning and parental engagement, and is staffed by a qualified workforce.⁴⁷ Such initiatives could take many forms, including⁴⁸

- on-site childcare centres run by the employer or a third party;
- off- or near-site childcare centres sponsored by one or more companies (including community-based childcare centres);
- childcare vouchers, subsidies, etc. to enable workers to use other childcare services; and
- back-up, after-hours, and sick child services.

“When supported by family-friendly policies such as gender-neutral parental leave, flexibility in working hours, and flexible work arrangements, safe transport, and additional care services, workplace childcare policies have the potential to increase both mothers’ and fathers’ employment opportunities.”⁴⁹

Of course, any solution must be context-specific and relevant to parents’ needs, otherwise it could have unintended consequences. Research conducted in Chile, for instance, suggests that mandating private-sector employers to pay for childcare may have negative effects on women, with employers passing on the childcare costs to these female employees.⁵⁰ State subsidisation might alleviate this practice, but more research is needed on the South African context.

Extending the school day to support working mothers

A final alternative is for the state to subsidise childcare by, for instance, extending the school day. This has shown the potential to draw women into the labour force,⁵¹ increase the labour force participation and employment rates of single mothers with eligible children,⁵² increase women's earnings and number of hours worked per week,⁵³ and increase mothers' employment in areas where childcare availability is limited.⁵⁴

We already have a local example of this idea in practice. Molo Mhlaba, a low-fee independent school in Khayelitsha, offers an extended school day, from 7:30 to 16:00, so that working parents can have more time for work. In addition, it creates additional employment opportunities for women in the community.⁵⁵

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- There is no one-size-fits-all solution to supporting women workers. For workplaces, assessing parents’ needs is a first step to developing family-friendly environments that support women's entry and success.⁵⁶
- Supporting informal, part-time, and self-employed working mothers will require innovation and likely legislative reform of the Unemployment Insurance Act.
- Expanding parental leave could help transform the norms of care in the home.

47 IFC. (2017).

48 IFC. (2017).

49 Ibid. ??

50 Buvinic, M. & O'Donnell, M. (2016).

51 Shure, N. (2019). *School hours and maternal labor supply*. *Kyklos*, 72(1): 118-151. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/kykl.12195>

52 Contreras, D. & Sepúlveda, P.C. (2017). *Effect of lengthening the school day on mother's labor supply*. In *World Bank Economic Review*, 31(3). <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1093/wber/lhw003>

53 Padilla-Romo, M. & Cabrera, F.J. (2018). *Easing the constraints of motherhood: The effects of all-day schools on mothers' supply*. *Economic Inquiry*, 57(4) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329079160_Easing_the_Constrants_of_Motherhood_The_Effects_of_All_Day_Schools_on_Mothers'_Labor_Supply

54 Brilli, Y., Del Boca, D., & Pronzato, C.D. (2015). *Does child care availability play a role in maternal employment and children's development? Evidence from Italy*. *Families and Societies Working Paper Series* 31. <http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/WP31BrilliEtAl2015.pdf>

55 Molo Mhlaba. (2021). *Our model*. <https://molomhlaba.org/our-model/>

56 Nasir, R.Z. (2019). *Tackling employer-supported childcare: A journey from why to how*. *World Bank Blogs* (09 August). <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/tackling-employer-supported-childcare-journey-why-how>

CONCLUSION

“Supporting more women to work has innumerable benefits for the economy, their children and families, and for achieving South Africa’s commitment to a more equal society. As it stands now, women shoulder the burden of childcare at the expense of their work. We should not forget that it is men who benefit most from this imbalance.”

If South Africa does not transform the gendered norms of care and the structural barriers in the way of women’s labour force participation and employment, the feminisation of poverty will persist. Addressing this challenge is an opportunity waiting to be seized by both the state and the private sector. There are many options, among them immediate financial support, family-friendly workplace policies, and expanding state-subsidized childcare. The question of what form this should take is important, but perhaps more important is the question of ‘when’. The answer is clearly: as soon as possible.

About the author

COVID-19 AND WOMEN'S CARE RESPONSIBILITIES:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMING GENDER RELATIONS

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Every year, we are privileged to have some of the foremost experts in their fields contribute to the Women's Report. Their insights, research, and thoughts on topics provide fresh perspectives on the advancement of gender equality at work. Experts come from the ranks of practitioners and researchers, and topics span women at work and the spill-over of perspectives on gender, at home and in society, on paid work.



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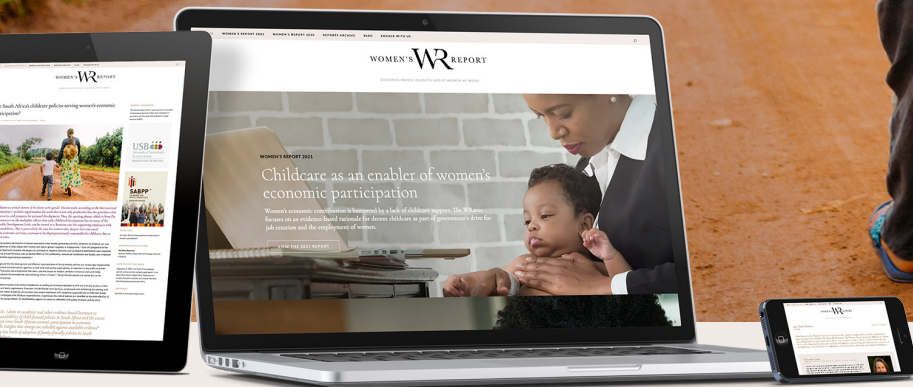
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Paper 2: Are South Africa's childcare policies serving women's economic participation?

by Prof. Zitha Mokomane



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Are South Africa's childcare policies serving women's economic participation?

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“Adequate childcare is a critical element of the decent work agenda”. Decent work, according to the International Labour Organization,¹ includes opportunities for work that is not only productive but also provides a fair income, job security, and prospects for personal development. Thus, the opening phrase, which is from Pia Britto's commentary² on the multiplier effects that early childhood development has on many of the global Sustainable Development Goals, can be viewed as a ‘business case’ for supporting employees with childcare responsibilities. This is particularly the case for women who, despite their increased participation in economic activities, continue to be disproportionately responsible for childcare, due to socially ascribed roles.

In addition to limiting women's participation in decent work and/or other income-generating activities, limited or no childcare can also reduce women's productivity at work, reduce their income, and lead to gender inequality in employment.³ From the perspective of the workplace, employees faced with childcare challenges can contribute to negative outcomes such as frequent absenteeism; poor employee well-being, productivity, and performance, with an adverse effect on firm profitability; reduced job satisfaction and loyalty; poor employee retention; and compromised organisational reputation.⁴

It is against this background that the development and effective implementation of family-friendly policies are increasingly recognised by policymakers in government and international agencies, as well as by civil society organisations, as important in any public or private workplace. Defined as “measures and arrangements that have a positive impact on workers' abilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities – and advance the development and well-being of their children”,⁵ family-friendly policies are varied, but can be categorised into two broad groups.

The first is flexible workplace practices that remove impediments to working by allowing employees to shift the time and location of their work to suit their needs and family requirements. Examples include flexible working hours, compressed work scheduling, job-sharing, and telecommuting. The second relates to policies and practices that support employees with caregiving responsibilities to fulfil their family- and personal needs.⁶ For employees with childcare responsibilities, in particular, four sets of policies are identified as the most effective: (i) paid family leave to care for young children, (ii) breastfeeding support, (iii) access to affordable and quality childcare, and (iv) child benefits.⁷

1 <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>

2 Britto, P. (2015). *Why early childhood development is the foundation for sustainable development*. <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/why-early-childhood-development-is-the-foundation-for-sustainable-development/>

3 ILO (2014). *Work and family responsibilities: What are the problems?* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-travail/documents/publication/wcms_170724.pdf

4 UNICEF (2020). *The family-friendly policies handbook for business* <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/5901/file/Family-Friendly%20Policies.%20Handbook%20for%20Business.pdf>

5 UNICEF (2020). *The family-friendly policies handbook for business* <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/5901/file/Family-Friendly%20Policies.%20Handbook%20for%20Business.pdf>

6 Galea, C., Houkes, I., & De Rijk, A. (2014). *An insider's point of view: How a system of flexible working hours helps employees to strike a proper balance between work and personal life*. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(8): 109-111.

7 UNICEF (2019). *Family-friendly policies: A policy brief redesigning the workplace of the future* <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/unicef-policy-brief-family-friendly-policies-2019.pdf>

“In this article, I draw on academic and other evidence-based literature to explore the availability of child-focused policies in South Africa and the extent to which these serve South African women's participation in economic activities. The insights that emerge are valuable against available evidence⁸ showing very low levels of adoption of family-friendly policies in South African workplaces.”

This is despite government's commitment to making the country's work environment family-friendly through, inter alia, “affording employees their full family-related entitlements and benefits”.⁹ I envisage that the illumination of gaps in childcare policy will propel interventions and practices that can better integrate and include women at work. To set the stage, the article begins with a brief overview of women's economic participation in South Africa.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN

The post-apartheid era has seen notable feminisation of South Africa's labour force. This is reflected, for example, in the rate of women's participation in the labour force increasing from 38% in 1995¹⁰ to 54% in the first quarter of 2020,¹¹ and nearly a third (30%) of women being in informal-sector employment in the first quarter of 2019.¹² Furthermore, the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report¹³ ranked South Africa 92nd out of 158 countries in terms of the active economic participation of, and opportunities available to, women. This indicator is based on three measures: (i) the participation gap (the difference between women's and men's rates of participation in the labour force); (ii) the remuneration gap (the ratio of estimated women's income to that of men, and the level of wage equality between men and women for similar work); and (iii) the advancement gap (the ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials, and managers, and in technical and professional fields).

Legislative instruments that partly explain this improved economic participation of women include the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995,¹⁴ which prohibits unfair discrimination, “directly or indirectly, on any arbitrary ground, including, but not limited to race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language, marital status or family responsibility [emphases added]”, and is applicable to all employees. The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998¹⁵ (EEA) aims to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment. The EEA states:

“No person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practice, on one or more grounds including race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language, and birth (emphasis added).”

8 Dancaster, L. (2012). *State and employer involvement in work-care integration in South Africa*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Australia.

9 Department of Social Development (2012). *White Paper of Families in South Africa*. <https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/documents/category/14-white-papers>.

10 Ntuli, M. (2007). *Determinants of South African women's labour force participation, 1995–2004*. University of Cape Town and IZA Discussion Paper No. 3119. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1031715

11 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2020.pdf>

12 Rogan, M. & Alfjers, L. (2019) *Gendered inequalities in the South African informal economy*. *Agenda*, 33(4): 91-102. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2019.1676163

13 World Economic Forum (2021). *Global Gender Gap Report 2021: Insight report*. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

14 https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/act66-1995labourrelations.pdf

15 https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a55-980.pdf

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CHILDCARE POLICIES AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is noteworthy that South African labour legislation does not specifically deal with employers' obligation to offer childcare support to employees.¹⁶ The only existing legal avenue for the right to request such support is unfair discrimination provisions, particularly in relation to family responsibility, noted above.¹⁷ The country's legislative and policy frameworks do, however, contain regulations providing for family leave, breastfeeding support in the workplace, early childhood education and -care, as well as child benefits. The following sub-sections explore the extent to which these frameworks enable women's economic participation.

Paid family leave to care for young children

Family leave typically encompasses three statutory leave provisions. The first, maternity leave, grants women "a break from employment (usually a statutory entitlement) during pregnancy and/or after childbirth, related to maternal and infant health and welfare; for this reason, it is available only to women, and is usually limited to the period just before and after birth".¹⁸ The second is paternity leave, which is available to fathers for the purpose of childcare in the time immediately after the birth of a child. Parental leave, the third type, entitles parents of any gender time off work when their maternity or paternity leave is exhausted.¹⁹ To the extent that these provisions guarantee parents the right to return to the same work at the end of the leave period, all three types of leave provide a degree of job- and income security.²⁰ The availability and accessibility of such leave is, therefore, one of the main enablers of labour force participation, particularly if the leave is paid. If unpaid, the leave can mean the potential loss of much-needed income, and can thus be a disincentive for taking the (entire period of) leave or for participating in the labour force.

Of particular interest in this article is maternity leave, which, in South Africa, is provided for in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 (BCEA). Under this Act, South African working women are entitled to at least four consecutive months' maternity leave, including a month's leave before the baby's birth, if needed. In terms of duration, this provision is in line with Convention No. 183 of the International Labour Organization (ILO),²¹ which provides for 14 weeks' paid maternity leave. It is noteworthy, however, that South African employers are not under any legal obligation to remunerate employees during this time.

"South Africa's high prevalence of single parenthood, the rising cost of living, and crushing household debt mean that many mothers, particularly those working in the private and non-governmental sectors, may not be able to afford to take leave or take it for the full recommended period. In other words, financial necessity may force women to return to work as soon as possible, thus posing a number of health risks to both mother and child."

Another potentially accessible leave policy for South African women in the labour market is parental leave. Enacted in January 2020,²² this leave provides all parents, including fathers, with 10 days' unpaid leave when their child is born.

16 Ainslie, K. (2013). South Africa – child care obligations. What are an employer's obligations? <https://www.globalworkplaceinsider.com/2013/11/south-africa-child-care-obligations-what-are-an-employers-obligations/>

17 Dancaster, L. (2008). Mom at work. Mail & Guardian Newspaper, September 12-18, Issue: 24.

18 O'Brien, M. (2011). Work-family balance policies. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/BP_WORKFAMILYBALANCE.pdf

19 UNWomen (2019). Families in a changing world: Progress of the world's women 2019–2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3512>

20 Smit, R. (2011). Family-related policies in Southern African countries: Are working parents reaping any benefits? *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 42(1): 15-36.

21 International Labour Organization (2000). C183 – Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX_PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183

22 <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/363416/south-africas-new-paternity-leave-laws-are-here-this-is-what-you-need-to-know/#:~:text=South%20Africa's%20new%20parental%20leave,when%20their%20children%20are%20born>

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Although the leave does not apply to birth mothers, as they are already entitled to maternity leave in terms of the BCEA, it is available to adopting women and surrogate mothers. However, as with maternity leave, parental leave is unpaid, posing the same limitations as unpaid maternity leave. A further constraint is that 10 days' leave is extremely short for the intended purpose.

Breastfeeding support

The benefits of breastfeeding for child health and -survival, maternal health, and early childhood development are widely documented.²³ For this reason, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life, which should ideally continue with appropriate complementary foods until at least two years of age. This recommendation renders breastfeeding a workplace- and labour issue, as it essentially means mothers must breastfeed in the time and space of paid work.²⁴ Indeed, ILO Convention No. 183 recommends "one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work for breastfeeding, which is to be counted as working time and remunerated accordingly. WHO Recommendation No. 191 states that, "where practicable, provision should be made for the establishment of facilities for nursing under adequate hygienic conditions at or near the workplace".²⁵

Not only has South Africa ratified and committed to these and other international initiatives to promote breastfeeding, the country has also domesticated these through an array of legislative instruments, regulations, guidelines, and policies.²⁶ These include the 2011 Tshwane Declaration of Support for Breastfeeding and, perhaps most notably, the Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and After the Birth of a Child. For example, in line with ILO Convention 183, Section 5.13 of the latter urges all workplaces to make arrangements "for employees who are breast-feeding to have breaks of 30 minutes twice per day for breastfeeding or expressing milk each working day for the first six months of the child's life".²⁷ A number of studies have, however, revealed that this code, and the fact that it is legislated, is not widely known by mothers and relevant managers in the country. As a result, it is rarely implemented by employers across all sectors,^{28,29} and South African workplaces typically do not provide breastfeeding facilities such as a private space for mothers to breastfeed or to express and safely store breast milk.³⁰

Where awareness of the code exists, managers often leave it to mothers to request breastfeeding support. However, due to power relations and certain sociocultural factors, mothers often do not request or utilise their available and legislated breastfeeding support, thus foregoing their full maternity benefits.^{31,32} It has been argued that a major contributor to this is mothers' implicit knowledge that, if they breastfeed in line with their legislated benefits, they will "fall short of the ideal worker ideology around which organisations are built. Ideal workers single-mindedly devote their efforts

- 23 Martin-Wiesner, P. (2018). *A policy-friendly environment for breastfeeding: A review of South Africa's progress in systematising its international and national responsibilities to protect, promote and support breastfeeding*. <https://www.wits.ac.za/coe-human/coe-research-grants/coe-research-and-advocacy-on-breastfeeding/breastfeeding-policy-review/>
- 24 Mabasa, B.P., Jaga, A., & Doherty, T. (2020). *Experiences of workplace breastfeeding in a provincial government setting: A qualitative exploratory study among managers and mothers in South Africa*. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 23(15): 100. DOI: 10.1186/s13006-020-00342-4
- 25 World Health Organization (n.d.). *Maternity protection: Compliance with international labour standards*. <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>
- 26 Martin-Wiesner, P. (2018). *A policy-friendly environment for breastfeeding. A review of South Africa's progress in systematising its international and national responsibilities to protect, promote and support breastfeeding*. <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/research/coe-human/documents/Breastfeeding%20policy%20review.pdf>
- 27 <https://www.labourguide.co.za/ccma-informations/43-general/general/515-code-of-good-practice-on-pregnancy-and-afterbirth>
- 28 Martin, P., Hall, K., & Lake, L. (2016). *Supporting families in South Africa: A policy map*. In K. Hall, L. Richter, Z. Mokomane, & L. Lake (Eds), *South African Child Gauge 2018* (pp. 113-128). Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.
- 29 Du Plessis, L., Peer, N., Honikman, S., & English, R. (2016). *Breastfeeding in South Africa: Are we making progress?* *South African Health Review*, 2016(1): 109-123.
- 30 Mabasa, B.P., Jaga, A., & Doherty, T. (2020). *Experiences of workplace breastfeeding in a provincial government setting: A qualitative exploratory study among managers and mothers in South Africa*. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 23(15): 100. DOI: 10.1186/s13006-020-00342-4. PMID: 33228745; PMCID: PMC7684936
- 31 Mabasa, B.P., Jaga, A., & Doherty, T. (2020). *Experiences of workplace breastfeeding in a provincial government setting: A qualitative exploratory study among managers and mothers in South Africa*. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 23(15), 100. DOI: 10.1186/s13006-020-00342-4. PMID: 33228745; PMCID: PMC7684936
- 32 Du Plessis, L., Peer, N., Honikmani, S., & English, R. (2016). *Breastfeeding in South Africa: Are we making progress?* *South African Health Review*, 2016(1): 109-123.

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to organisational goals, not allowing distractions such as reproductive needs which are experienced by pregnant and breastfeeding mothers³³. Thus, in preparation for returning to work at the end of their maternity leave, many South African women stop breastfeeding before the recommended six months. It is partly for this reason that, while most mothers in the country (88%) initiate breastfeeding almost immediately after birth, very few babies are breastfed in line with the WHO's recommendation.³⁴ To the extent that babies who are not breastfed are vulnerable to suboptimal feeding and care practices and, ultimately, overall poor health, poor workplace breastfeeding support can hamper women's economic participation by, amongst other things, increasing absenteeism and job dissatisfaction, as well as decreasing productivity and wages.

Access to affordable and quality childcare

For women, who disproportionately bear the unpaid caregiving responsibilities within families, the availability of affordable and high-quality childcare services – particularly when aligned with the work schedules of the mothers and caregivers – has been widely acknowledged as having the potential to enhance women's economic participation.^{35,36} In essence, such childcare makes the combination of work and childcare feasible, increases the number of hours spent in paid work, and reduces absenteeism and work–family conflict, which all ultimately contribute to improved productivity and the profitability of enterprises.^{37,38}

Policies designed to ensure the provision of childcare in South Africa are mainly the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015) and the National Child Care and Protection Policy (2019). These are operationalised by three government departments, with a focus on different age cohorts. These departments are: the Department of Basic Education (focused on children aged 5–9 years), the Department of Social Development (0–4 years), and the Department of Health (0–9 years). Despite their focus on different age groups, these policies, together, aim to attain positive childhood educational and developmental outcomes, mainly through the provision of healthcare and nutrition, as well as psychosocial support. Where mentioned, childcare services and facilities are typically related only to psychosocial support. The foregoing may largely explain why only 38.4% of preschool children (0–4 years) in South Africa are cared for in formal facilities such as pre-schools, nursery schools, crèches, and educare centres, and why the majority (49.2%) are cared for at home by parents or guardians.³⁹

The poor availability of and access to affordable and quality childcare can hamper the economic participation of women in various ways. For example, faced with limited childcare options, women often adopt detrimental coping strategies such as taking children to work with them on a regular basis. While this can address women's immediate childcare responsibilities, it can also reduce the time and other investments that women can put into paid work, leading to low productivity, long working hours, and low wages.⁴⁰ Another strategy is choosing 'mother-friendly jobs', such as informal employment or part-time work, which are more flexible and easier to combine with childcare. In addition to being relatively insecure – and often poorly paid – these jobs also often mean that South African women have relatively longer working hours than men do when both work and care responsibilities are taken into account. In a 2006 review of time use, based on data for five sub-Saharan African countries, South African women were found to spend 13 times more

33 Mabasa, B.P., Jaga, A., & Doherty, T. (2020). *Experiences of workplace breastfeeding in a provincial government setting: A qualitative exploratory study among managers and mothers in South Africa*. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 23(15): 100. DOI: 10.1186/s13006-020-00342-4. PMID: 33228745; PMID: PMC7684936

34 Du Plessis, L., Peer, N., Honikman, S., & English, R. (2016). *Breastfeeding in South Africa: Are we making progress?* *South African Health Review*, 2016(1): 109-123.

35 Mokomane, Z. (2017). *The developing world*. In *Megatrends and social security: Family and gender* (pp. 27-42). International Social Security Association.

36 Mokomane, Z. (2017). *The developing world*. In *Megatrends and social security: Family and gender* (pp. 27-42). International Social Security Association.

37 Esplen, E. (2009). *Gender and care: Overview report*. WIEGO.

38 Addati, L. (n.d.) *New approaches to social protection and gender equality at work: The effect of childcare on the quality of working life for low-income women in Chile and Mexico*. <https://www.ilo.org/legacy/english/protection/travail/pdf/rwpt25b.pdf>

39 *Statistics South Africa (2019). General Household Survey 2018*. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/PO318/PO3182018.pdf>

40 Cassirer, N. & Addati, L. (2007). *Expanding women's employment opportunities: Informal economy workers and the need for childcare*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-travail/documents/publication/wcms_145652.pdf

time than men on this activity.⁴¹ More than 10 years later, the situation has not changed, with the 2019 report⁴² showing that women in South Africa spent, on average, 228 minutes a day on childcare and other household chores, while men spent only 75 minutes.

Child benefits

Child benefits are regular cash transfers provided to the primary caregiver of a child, to ensure the child's access to quality social services.⁴³ In South Africa, these take the form of the Child Support Grant (CSG), an unconditional, means-tested, cash transfer programme aimed at supporting the welfare of eligible children younger than 18 years. First implemented in April 1998, the CSG is the largest social programme in South Africa, reaching close to 13 million recipients by the end of March 2021.⁴⁴

Since its implementation in 1998, the CSG has been lauded for many positive outcomes in children, including enhanced nutrition, health, and educational and schooling performance, as well as a reduction in adolescent risk behaviour and the strengthening of households' resilience to financial shocks.⁴⁵ As an unconditional cash transfer, the CSG has also been shown to enhance the economic participation of women (the main caregivers of children and, hence, recipients of the grant) by providing a source of income that can facilitate the search for employment opportunities by, for example, covering the costs of sending required documents, travelling to interviews, etc.⁴⁶ Drawing on various recent empirical research findings, Tondini⁴⁷ states that, on average, mothers who receive the CSG tend to have better-quality jobs, are more likely to enter the formal sector (which offers more labour protection), and earn relatively higher wages than their counterparts who do not receive the grant. Indications are that these labour market improvements are long-lasting, and tend to continue beyond the child reaching the age of 18 years, when payment of the grant ceases.

"I pay for the child's daycare centres' fees and also pay for her transport"; "I buy food and school uniform for the children and also pay for transport to crèche for one child". These excerpts from a study on the use of the CSG by caregivers⁴⁸ illuminates another pathway by which the grant facilitates women's economic participation in South Africa. In essence, given that access to affordable childcare services and/or facilities is one of the most effective pathways to increasing women's access to employment in developing countries, income from the CSG enables many mothers and other caregivers to pay for childcare, which frees up time for economic participation.

CONCLUSION

This article showed that South Africa has an enabling environment for the four sets of policies consistently shown to be the most effective in enabling women to combine their childcare- and work roles. While, for the most part, these policies do support women's participation, some gaps remain, particularly in relation to the implementation of the policies.

41 Charnes, J. (2006). *A review of empirical evidence on time use in Africa from UN-sponsored surveys*. In C.M. Blackden & Q. Wodon (Eds.), *Gender, time use, and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa*. World Bank Working Paper No. 73.

42 Malta, V., Kolovich, L., Leyva, A.M., & Tavares, M.M. (2019). *Informality and gender gaps going hand in hand*. IMF Working Paper WP/19/112. [file:///C:/Users/u04837127/Downloads/WPIEA2019112%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/u04837127/Downloads/WPIEA2019112%20(1).pdf)

43 UNICEF. (2019). *Family-friendly policies: A policy brief. Redesigning the workplace of the future*. <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/unicef-policy-brief-family-friendly-policies-2019.pdf>

44 <https://www.sassa.gov.za/statistical-reports/Documents/March%202021%20-%20Report%20on%20Social%20Assistance.pdf>

45 Grinspun, A. (2016). *No small change: The multiple impacts of the child support grant on child- and adolescent well-being*. In *Child Gauge 2016: Children and social assistance*. Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

46 Tondini, A. (2020). *Child grants can help mothers get better jobs*. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/child-grants-can-help-mothers-get-better-jobs/>

47 Tondini, A. (2020). *Child grants can help mothers get better jobs*. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/child-grants-can-help-mothers-get-better-jobs/>

48 Khosa, P. & Kaseke, E. (2017). *The utilisation of the child support grant by caregivers: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa municipality in Limpopo Province*. *Social Work*, 53(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15270/52-2-575>.

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Previous research⁴⁹ has shown that these gaps are often due to supervisors' lack of awareness of the benefits these family-friendly policies hold for organisations in terms of employee productivity and profitability. Another explanation is that, given employees' differing care needs, the benefits of these family-friendly policies are not standard for all employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Supervisors need to be sensitised to the legal onus to have policies in place to support the childcare demands of employees, as well as the benefits such policies hold for organisational productivity.
- Instead of 'one-size-fits-all' support, workplaces should consider creating safe spaces for women with childcare responsibilities to discuss with their supervisors the specific workplace support the women need. Such spaces have been shown to lead to a higher perception of company support, lowered intentions to leave the company, enhanced productivity, and overall better quality of life for employees.⁵⁰

49 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/ERP-2015/pdf/ERP-2015-chapter4.pdf>

50 Las Heras, M., Chinchilla, N., & Jimenez, E. (2014). Corporate family responsibility. In S. Nicklin (Ed.), *Family futures*. Tudor Rose (pp. 163-166).

About the author

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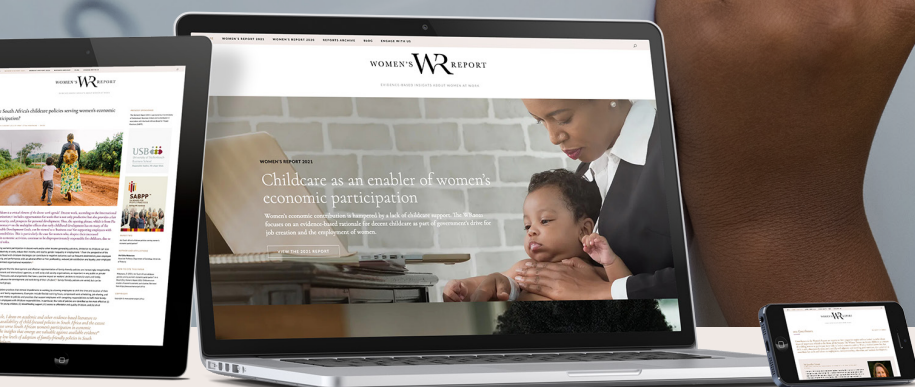
WOMEN'S WR REPORT

EVIDENCE-BASED INSIGHTS ABOUT WOMEN AT WORK

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Paper 3: Early childhood care and education can boost women's employment in South Africa

by Ms Laura Brooks



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by Ms Laura Brooks

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Improving access to high-quality, age-appropriate early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a national imperative, recognised in numerous pieces of legislation and policy in South Africa. While the benefits to children of the proliferation of these services are clear, the associated opportunities for benefits to women are seldom given due attention. This paper seeks to articulate how investment in ECCE services can support another important developmental imperative in South Africa: enabling women to participate meaningfully in the labour force.

ECCE PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy¹ (ECD Policy) recognises various modalities of ECCE programmes for children aged 0 to 5 years, including ECD centres, playgroups, mobile ECD programmes, and toy libraries. The key characteristics and coverage of these different modalities are described in the table below.

Modality	ECD centre	Childminders	Playgroups	Mobile ECD programmes	Toy libraries
Delivery setting	Purpose-built ECD centres or multi-use centres such as homes, community halls, places of worship, etc.	Usually the childminder's home	Generally homes, community halls, and places of worship; some are provided in safe outdoor spaces	Provided from a mobile vehicle, usually set up in an open space or community building such as a place of worship or community hall	Early leaning sessions can be offered at the toy library (fixed structure) or via a mobile- or playgroup model
Dosage	Often daily, for the full day	Often daily, for the full day	Usually 2 or 3 sessions per week, lasting 2 to 4 hours each	Usually 1 or 2 sessions per week, 2 to 4 hours each	Based on demand
Fees charged	Yes	Yes	Sometimes	Rarely	Rarely
# of children	More than 6	6 or fewer	Usually 10 per group	Usually 15 per group	Usually 10 to 15 per group
Key features	ECD centres can offer age-appropriate ECD services across all age cohorts; they provide a daily, structured programme that is well suited to preparing children aged 3 to 4 years for school – They cater for children whose caregivers require full-day care services	Considering young children's age-differentiated learning and social needs, very young children are better suited to being in the care of childminders who can offer a secure, nurturing environment in a home setting ² – These nurturing and trusting relationships are necessary for infants' and toddlers' confidence to explore and actively engage with their surroundings, critical for their learning and development ³	Playgroups are promoted in the ECD Policy as an important early learning programme modality, necessary to drive scale-up of early learning programmes within a variety of community settings ⁴ – Unlike centre-based programmes, playgroups are often free – Playgroups can be targeted at any age cohort, but are particularly suited to children aged 2 to 3 years, when they start learning the concepts of sharing and group interactions	Mobile ECD programmes are generally proposed to cater for children only where other ECD services are unlikely to be provided – A mobile ECD programme is similar to a playgroup, except that the service is provided from outside the area where it is delivered	Toy libraries serve as repositories of toys and learning materials appropriate for children of different ages, different capabilities, and at different developmental stages – Toy libraries sometimes also offer playgroups or mobile ECD sessions

1 RSA. (2015). National integrated early childhood development policy, Government Printers.
2 Ebrahim, H., Seleti, J. & Dawes, A. Learning begins at birth: Improving access to early learning. In Berry, L., Biersteker, L., Dawes, A., Lake, L. & Smith, C. (eds) (2013) South African Child Gauge 2013. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.
3 Page, J., Clare, A. Nutbrown, C. (2013). Working with babies and children from birth to three. Sage Publications Ltd.
4 RSA. (2015). National integrated early childhood development policy, Government Printers, Pretoria.

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Access among children aged 0 to 5 year⁵	Some 2.24 million children aged 0 to 5 years currently access an ECD centre – Access is highest among children aged 4 and 5 years, 60% and 28% of whom attend a community-based ECD centre respectively ⁶	Around 3% of children aged 0 to 5 years currently access a childminder or day mother programme – Attendance is highest among children aged 0 to 2 years, 6% of whom were reported to attend a childminder	Less than 1% of children aged 0 to 5 years currently attend a playgroup	No nationally representative data on access	No nationally representative data on access
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WHO PROVIDES ECCE SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA?

“Unlike services in the health- and basic education sectors in South Africa, ECCE programmes are almost exclusively provided by non-government organisations and private individuals”

Providers are either non-profit organisations, subsistence entrepreneurs, or social micro-enterprises. Programmes serving the poorest communities are often small and informal, operating from private homes or rented venues, employing only a small number of employees who earn subsistence stipends and typically do not have formal contracts or employment benefits. Low earnings and lack of social and labour protection for women workers in the childcare sector are common in many countries in the Global South, where ECCE services are primarily provided within the informal economy.⁷

In a survey⁸ of over 8 500 operators of ECCE programmes, conducted in April 2020, respondents reported that only 35% of the workforce was registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund, 13% of programmes were registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, and 45% were registered with the South African Revenue Service. This provides a sense of the level of informality of the sector.

Despite the small size of many ECCE programmes, the cumulative workforce resourcing them is not insignificant. While the exact size of the workforce is not known, a rudimentary estimate can be made based on Statistics South Africa's 2019 General Household Survey (GHS) data. The majority of children who were reported to have attended an ECD programme were either attending an ECD centre or childminder programme. Looking at these programmes alone, and assuming that centres and childminders accommodate an average of 50⁹ and six children respectively, that centres are serviced by an average of six workers each, and that childminders do not have additional support staff, the ECCE workforce is likely to be in excess of 300 000 individuals. Critically, the Department of Social Development's 2014 Audit¹⁰ identified that over 95% of key staff at ECD centres were women. It is safe to assume that this is also true of other programme modalities.

⁵ All figures are based on analysis of the 2019 Statistics South Africa General Household Survey.

⁶ These figures do not include reported attendance of Grade R programmes, which are, in many cases, provided at schools.

⁷ ILO & WIEGO. 2020. *Extending childcare services to workers in the informal economy: Policy lessons from country experiences*. ILO.

⁸ BRIDGE, Ilifa Labantwana, National ECD Alliance, Nelson Mandela Foundation, SmartStart, SA Congress for ECD. (2020). *Survey assessing the impact of COVID on ECD*. April 2020.

⁹ On average, centres identified in the 2014 audit accommodated 53 children. Given that the audit was likely not representative of smaller centres, an average of 50 children was used for simplicity.

¹⁰ Department of Social Development. 2014. *Audit of early childhood development centres: National report*. DSD.

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These figures are summarised in the table below.

	Children attending (reported attendance, GHS 2019)	Estimated number of programmes	Estimated workforce
Centres	2 241 938	44 839	269 033
Childminders	235 506	39 251	39 251
Total	2 477 444	84 090	308 284
# of children	More than 6	6 or fewer	Usually 10 per group

WHY ARE ECCE WORKERS UNDERVALUED?

Across the world, the childcare sector is commonly associated with low status and low pay and, in South Africa, it relies heavily on one of the most marginalised groups in our economy: black women.

A recent ILO study identified that “the vulnerability of childcare workers — assessed by their status of employment and their place of work — is directly related to the level of public financing for childcare services.”¹¹

State subsidisation of ECD programmes in South Africa is minimal at only R17 per child per day, and only 30% of this may be used for salaries. According to the latest data from the Department of Social Development (DSD),¹² only around 626 574 children benefit from the subsidy, which is less than 25% of children reported to be accessing a programme.

Even subsidised programmes' income is not sufficient to support a decent wage without further supplementation through fees payable by parents. Almost all community-based ECD facilities therefore rely on an income from fees. The Public Expenditure Tracking Study¹³ found that the monthly fees charged by a sample of registered centres varied widely between quintiles, from R117 per month in household income Quintile 1 to R1 068 in Quintile 5 (2021 prices), and averaged R228 (2021 prices) per month across three provinces. Fee income can be inconsistent, especially in the poorest communities, as care centres' income is vulnerable to variations in parents' ability to pay and seasonal fluctuations in demand and attendance. The same study found that principals earned an average of R4 099 per month, while the average ECD practitioner earned R2 907 (2021 prices) — well below the national minimum wage, which is presently stipulated as R21.69 per hour.¹⁴

ECD workers are indisputably an important component of our social fabric. They form networks of care and reciprocity that support both the formal and informal economy. There is arguably no community-supported initiative as important and that exists on the same scale as the ECD sector. Yet, like many workers in the care economy, the ECD workforce is grossly undervalued by society.

11 ILO & WIEGO. 2020. *Extending childcare services to workers in the informal economy: Policy lessons from country experiences*. ILO, p. 14.

12 Department of Social Development. (2020). *Media statement, 4 June 2020*. <https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/latest-news/21-latest-news/183-social-development-sets-up-workstreams-to-conduct-risk-assessment-and-state-of-readiness-for-the-early-childhood-development-ecd-centres#:~:text=Of%20this%20number%2C%20800%20654,R17%20per%20child%20per%20day>.

13 Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development, & UNICEF. (2010). *Tracking public expenditure and assessing service quality in early childhood development*. UNICEF.

14 Department of Labour. (2021). *Employment and Labour Minister TW Nxesi announces minimum wage increases*. <http://www.labour.gov.za/employment-and-labour-minister-tw-nxesi-announces-minimum-wage-increases>

“Caring for young children is often seen as the commodification of what women do unpaid, or as part of the welfare system,¹⁵ rather than a component of and precursor to the education system, and a vital investment in human capital and wellbeing.”

Perhaps a contributing factor to this concerning state of affairs stems from the historical evolution of ECCE programmes in South Africa and their location as a responsibility of government. In the early 20th century, the provision of childcare services was modelled on the British welfare system. Later, with the advent of apartheid, differences in the types and quality of services and training in the childcare sector were divided along racial lines, with services for white children benefiting from state funding, formal training, and an evolution that recognised the emerging importance of early learning and stimulation.

Services for black children were largely provided by international NGOs attempting to service the needs of a neglected black majority. From the outset, a distinction was made between daycare centres or crèches and nursery schools, the latter receiving support from provincial education departments and recognised as “adjunct to the national system of education.”¹⁶ Crèches were seen as providing primarily childcare services, rather than serving an educational function.

In 1981, the role of ECD programmes in supporting school throughput was recognised in the report of the De Lange Commission. The report recognised the need for pre-primary education of children of all races from disadvantaged communities, and called for the introduction of programmes to prepare all children for formal schooling.¹⁷ Government recognised these recommendations in principle and in policy, but funding to implement the recommendations did not follow.

The apartheid government continued to reinforce the racial inequity of state provision of ECD programmes.¹⁸ White children enjoyed access to public pre-primary schools and subsidised private pre-schools, governed by the Education Affairs Act of 1988. The Child Care Act (1983) largely served black children by making provision for the registration of childcare facilities or places of care, commonly known as crèches. This served to further entrench the separation of the notions of care and education and enlarged the gap in access to adequate services for the most disadvantaged.

The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP), published in 2012, recognises the central role of ECD in the eradication of poverty and inequality in South Africa. The NDP calls for universal access to two years of pre-school and equitable and secure access to quality ECD services for all young children, with a focus on those living in poverty and with a disability. The NDP is explicit in stating that funding for ECD must be improved, and that current funding mechanisms are not adequate for the expansive ECD programme envisioned by the NDP. The National Integrated ECD Policy was approved by Cabinet in December 2015, committing all ECD sector partners to the provision of access for all infants, young children, and their caregivers to a universally available comprehensive age- and developmental stage-appropriate package of high-quality essential ECD services by 2030. Regrettably, the funding required to bring these policies to fruition has not materialised to date, and ECD services continue to be mired in a welfare services paradigm.

15 BRIDGE, Ilifa Labantwana, National ECD Alliance, Nelson Mandela Foundation, SmartStart, SA Congress for ECD. (2020). *Survey assessing the impact of COVID on ECD*. April 2020.

16 Department of Education. (2001). *The Nationwide Audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa*. DoE.

17 DoE. (2001). *The Nationwide Audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa*. Pretoria: DoE.

18 DoE. (2001). *The Nationwide Audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa*. DoE.

While the ECD Policy recognises the diverse range of ECD programme modalities described above, and indeed promotes the provision of services in homes and communities, the legislative framework governing ECD, including the Children's Act¹⁹ and various local government regulations, is effectively punitive and exclusionary.

The result is that only a relatively small number of programmes, mostly those provided in purpose-built ECD facilities, are able to register with the Department of Social Development,²⁰ and are therefore eligible to receive funding. Importantly, the Children's Act does not distinguish between different types of ECD programmes in its requirements for registration, and therefore does not cater to the reality of most home-based ECD centres, childminders, and playgroups.²¹

The Children's Amendment Bill is currently being considered by Parliament, but proposed amendments to the chapters relating to ECD were widely deemed inadequate, and were subsequently rejected by the Portfolio Committee on Social Development. This decision is considered a small victory by the Real Reform for ECD Campaign, which represents a large number of ECD organisations in South Africa, as the sector now has a chance to improve the Bill.²²

A CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

South Africa's policy vision is for all children aged 0 to 5 years to have access to an age-appropriate ECCE programme by 2030.²³ Currently, less than 40% of children enjoy such access.²⁴ Therefore, there is a recognised need to expand provision, which will require significant growth of the workforce supporting it. Supporting the expansion of services to the unserved 60% of children under 6 years could create more than 450 000 jobs in the care economy. In addition to its obligation to ensure that all young children have access to an ECCE programme, the expansion of economic opportunities for women is a key socio-economic priority.²⁵ It is therefore clear that investment in jobs in the ECCE sector presents an opportunity to simultaneously respond to two critical policy goals.

Beyond the jobs that could be directly created, especially for women, in the ECCE sector, the provision of affordable ECCE services would also enable many more women to participate in the labour force – the mothers, sisters, and grandmothers who are typically responsible for caring for children during the day. By providing safe and convenient childcare for their children, ECCE services will enable these women to engage in paid work.

The triple benefit of sustained investments in ECCE services are: i) the protection and promotion of children's development, ii) the facilitation of women's labour force participation, and iii) the creation of paid jobs in the care economy.²⁶

19 RSA. (2006). *Children's Act No. 38 of 2005*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/46b82aa62.html>

20 The DSD's latest data indicate that 800 654 children are currently accessing registered ECD programmes.

21 SmartStart. 2018. *Rethinking the Children's Act for early childhood development*. <https://www.smartstart.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PDF-1-Rethinking-the-Childrens-Act-for-ECD-JOINT-POSITION-PAPER-FINAL.pdf>

22 <https://www.ecdreform.org.za/>

23 RSA. (2015). *National integrated early childhood development policy*. Government Printers.

24 *Analysis of GHS 2019*

25 RSA. (2020). *State of the Nation Address delivered by President Cyril Ramaphosa to parliament on 13 February 2020*. <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-2020-state-nation-address-13-feb-2020-0000>; RSA. (2021). *State of the Nation Address delivered by President Cyril Ramaphosa to parliament on 11 February 2021*. <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-2021-state-nation-address-11-feb-2021-0000#>.

26 UNWomen. 2015. *Gender equality, child development and job creation: How to reap the 'triple dividend' from early childhood education and care services*. UNWomen.

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While wages may not currently be optimal, there are several other **features of careers in the ECCE sector that make these attractive to women**. ECCE programmes are ideally located within communities, so that young children do not have to travel long distances to attend. According to the DSD's spatial norms, ECD services must be available with a 2km radius from where children live, and the ECD Policy places an emphasis on prioritising home- and community-based services.²⁷ According to the 2014 ECD Audit, ECD centres are, on average, located within 2km from where the attending children live.²⁸ The proximity of ECCE services to homes would therefore also benefit women employees or proprietors through a shorter commute to work, thereby simultaneously lowering the daily risk of violence to which women are exposed when using public transport.

An additional attraction may be that ECCE workers who are mothers can stay with their children while simultaneously earning an income and saving marginally on the cost of their own childcare. This has numerous benefits for mothers and, in particular, children from birth to the age of 3 years. It enables breastfeeding throughout the day, reduces stress and anxiety due to separation for both mother and baby, and promotes healthy emotional regulation.

CONCLUSION

ECCE is a critical community-driven service with a growth imperative that has the potential to allow many more women caregivers to work, which would increase the employment of significant numbers of women in meaningful paid work. To achieve this, government needs to cease confining ECCE programmes to the realm of social welfare services, and begin to see the triple social and economic benefit of supporting the growth and sustainability of informal and community-based ECCE programmes.

This will require an urgent overhaul of the regulatory system for ECCE programmes, to ensure an enabling environment for the provision of programmes operating in the informal sector and those provided from homes and in community spaces. Greater state financing of ECCE programmes is also required to better supplement their income from parents' fees and secure better conditions for workers, which would also enable more meaningful livelihoods and a higher quality of services for children. A potential financing strategy may be to target public employment schemes and enterprise development funding to the ECCE sector, with the specific aim of job creation for women.

²⁷ RSA. (2015). *National integrated early childhood development policy*. Government Printers.

²⁸ Department of Social Development, 2014. *Audit of early childhood development (ECD) centres*. DSD.

About the author

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Every year, we are privileged to have some of the foremost experts in their fields contribute to the Women's Report. Their insights, research, and thoughts on topics provide fresh perspectives on the advancement of gender equality at work. Experts come from the ranks of practitioners and researchers, and topics span women at work and the spill-over of perspectives on gender, at home and in society, on paid work.



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EVIDENCE-BASED INSIGHTS ABOUT WOMEN AT WORK

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Paper 4: On being a stay-at-home dad – a glimpse from the other side

by Ms Jennifer Smout



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On being a stay-at-home dad – a glimpse from the other side

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by Prof. Mark Smith

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Surprised by the doorbell ringing at our new home, I open the door to meet a woman from the village we just moved to in southeast France. We don't know anyone, so who can it be? She has brought a printout of "an easy recipe that children like". She is both welcoming towards the new 'English people' and a bit concerned, having heard about the stay-at-home dad looking after his young children aged two and four years. Our families later became good friends, but her visit portrayed the norms, expectations, and challenges we have around who cares and who works.

Around the world, there is nearly always an implicit, and frequently explicit, assumption that women are the ones who should care for children while men provide via paid work. This persists despite the fact that many households are made up of dual-earner parents.¹ It also leads to the so-called 'double-shift' that many women face as workers and carers.² While these norms characterise the majority of situations, it is by no means automatic, natural, or efficient. Indeed, the effects of these norms around caring constrain everyone – women, men, and their children.

There are many examples of men taking on caring roles. Working in childcare and even teaching are largely female-dominated activities, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. In Europe, teaching was a largely male-dominated activity until the turn of the last century.³ Similarly, working in early childhood care is an almost exclusively female occupation, but variations across countries are significant. Men are far more present in this field in Nordic countries, where higher qualifications are required and professionals are paid well.⁴

There are situations in which circumstances challenge these norms and men take on the primary care role. The English poet Henry Normal tells a moving story of how his father raised him and his siblings after the death of his mother in 1950s Britain, in the absence of formal childcare and even fewer stay-at-home fathers.⁵ Nowadays, around the world, there is a small but growing number of men taking on a more significant caring role.⁶

"This trend sends a signal about modern forms of masculinity, fatherhood, and more egalitarian households."

- 1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019). *Children in households by employment status*. Social Policy Division: Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm
- 2 Bratberg, E., Dahl, S., & Risa, A.E. (2002). 'The double burden': Do combinations of career and family obligations increase sickness absence among women? *European Sociological Review*, 18(2): 233-249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/18.2.233>
- 3 Johnson, S. (2008). *The status of male teachers in public education today*. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy Education Policy Brief, 6(4).
- 4 Carroll, M., Smith, M., Oliver, G., & Sung, S. (2009). *Recruitment and retention in front-line services: The case of childcare*. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(1): 59-74.
- 5 Normal, H. (2021). *Henry Normal*. <http://henrynormal.com/biog/>
- 6 Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2016). Which fathers are involved in caring for pre-school age children in the United Kingdom? A longitudinal analysis of the influence of work hours in employment on shared childcare arrangements in couple households. In E. Ruspini & I. Crespi (Eds.), *Balancing work and family in a changing society: The fathers' perspective* (pp. 83-98). *Global Masculinities*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53354-8_6

THE GLOBAL PICTURE

Around the world, parenthood has a more significant impact on women's employment patterns than men's. In Europe, fathers' employment rates tend to be higher than those of non-fathers, while mothers' employment rates are lower than those of non-mothers.⁷ Furthermore, mothers are much more likely to work part-time.⁸ To add to this picture, evidence suggests that fathers' remuneration is generally higher than that of their childless counterparts; however, this is not the case with mothers.⁹ This is known as 'the motherhood penalty' amongst economists.

These patterns are borne out by statistics. Women, compared to men, spend between two and 10 times as much time on unpaid care work.¹⁰ The gap is largest in the Middle East and North Africa – less than one hour for men and almost six for women, and smallest in Europe and North America, where men spend just over two hours and women around four on caregiving.

Income inequalities exacerbate this gender gap in time spent on care work. A more detailed study found variations in care time across countries according to the level of support provided by childcare services, and it was found that greater support did not alter the significant gap between women and men in time spent on unpaid care work.¹¹ While fathers spend around an hour per day caring for children in Australia, Denmark, Italy, and France, women spend between 2.5 and four hours engaged in childcare.

These patterns and norms tend to impact greatly on women's role as carers and how they interact with paid work. For example, research from Australia showed how women use non-standard working patterns to work around their care responsibilities.¹² When men work non-standard hours, mothers tend to pick up even more of the care work. This picture is repeated around the world, as women are more likely to adjust their working times or -patterns when they have children.¹³

DADS THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

In spite of these powerful social norms, the share of fathers taking an active role in the care of their children is rising. Research from the USA suggests that there were 190 000 stay-at-home fathers in 2018. While women still account for four-fifths of stay-at-home parents, the number of fathers not in the labour force due to providing primary care for their children has more than doubled since 2000.¹⁴ These figures include only those mothers and fathers outside the labour market who are providing full-time care, yet we know there are many more who work part-time. In the USA, a broader definition of a stay-at-home father includes men who work part-time, suggesting that there are men in this situation.

- 7 Office for National Statistics. (2021). *Working and workless households in the UK*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/workingandworklesshouseholds/previousReleases>
- 8 European Statistical Office. (2021). *European Statistical Recovery Dashboard*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>; Office for National Statistics. (2019). *Families and the labour market*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2019>
- 9 Fuller, S. & Cooke, L.P. (2018) *Workplace variation in fatherhood wage premiums: Do formalization and performance pay matter? Work, Employment and Society*, 32(4): 768-788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017018764534>
- 10 Ferrant, G., Pesando, M.L., & Nowacka, K. (2014, December). *Unpaid care work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- 11 Craig, L. & Mullan, K. (2011). *How mothers and fathers share childcare: A cross-national time-use comparison*. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6): 834-861. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411427673>
- 12 Craig, L. & Powell, A. (2011). *Non-standard work schedules, work-family balance and the gendered division of childcare*. *Work, Employment and Society*, 25(2): 274-291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017011398894>
- 13 European Statistical Office. (2021). *European Statistical Recovery Dashboard*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Children in households by employment status*. Social Policy Division, Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Family Database. www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm
- 14 Lee, S.J., Lee, J.Y., & Chang O.D. (2020). *The characteristics and lived experiences of modern stay-at-home fathers*. In H.E. Fitzgerald, K. von Klitzing, N.J. Cabrera, J. Scarano de Mendonça, & T. Skjøthaug. (Eds.), *Handbook of fathers and child development: Prenatal to preschool* (pp. 537-549). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51027-5>

Across the European Union, mothers are much more likely to work part-time than fathers – 33% compared to just 5%.¹⁵ However, the variations across countries are considerable. Whereas 83% of mothers of at least one child work part-time in the Netherlands, this share falls to less than 10% in nine of the 28 member states. In the UK, the share is 49%. More fathers work part-time in the Netherlands (16%) than mothers in 12 of the 28 European member states. Indeed, the Netherlands has been described as the world's first part-time economy.¹⁶

It is important to contextualise the phenomenon. There remain relatively few men who are stay-at-home dads, even in the most egalitarian of countries, such as those categorised as Nordic. In Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, the model of dual-earning suggests that it is not a case of simply exchanging stay-at-home mothers for stay-at-home fathers, but a move to a model of dual working and dual caring. We can see this in the very high employment rates of mothers and fathers in these countries and the low number of women who work part-time in Finland, for example.¹⁷ There is no one-size-fits-all model.

Cross-national studies¹⁸ show that, on average, there are limited differences in the time fathers spend on childcare, whether they are the only parent working, in a dual-working household, or even when they do not work at all. These studies show higher female employment at the national level, associated with slightly higher levels of unpaid work by men. Such results underline that stay-at-home dads are not those without work, but rather those who have made the choice to actively engage in caring for their children. For example, Tamm¹⁹ has shown that men who choose to take paternity leave do more unpaid care tasks even after they have returned to work.

There is, furthermore, a qualitative dimension to this engagement. Being engaged in childcare means doing the full gamut of activities. Research tends to show that women are left with routine care tasks and activities with the child.²⁰ When men do get involved, it is often for non-routine tasks and those performed in the company of the mother. The routine and individualised caring tasks are more likely to impact paid-work schedules and availability in the office, and also to be incompatible with other multitasking possibilities.

“These are care tasks that require real engagement, with less scope for combining it with paid work. Being a stay-at-home father should mean doing both types of activities.”

UNDERSTANDING THE PICTURE

Why are we seeing a change in these norms and behaviours, albeit varied, across countries? There are a number of drivers at home and in the labour market.

While the norms around masculinity have shaped men's expectations around care, these norms are not static. There is the personal choice to care for the family and be an active father, but also wider changes in society around the expectations of men, as well as men's desire to be actively involved in the lives of their children. Some have linked this to younger generations, who seek a different kind of balance between care and work. There is also a class dimension.

15 European Statistical Office. (2021). European Statistical Recovery Dashboard. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

16 Visser, J. (2002). The first part-time economy in the world: A model to be followed? *Journal of European Social Policy* 12(1): 23-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952872002012001561>

17 European Statistical Office. (2021). European Statistical Recovery Dashboard. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

18 Craig, L. & Mullan, K. (2011). How mothers and fathers share childcare: A cross-national time-use comparison. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6): 834-861. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411427673>; Pablo Gracia, P. & Esping-Andersen, G. (2015). Fathers' child care time and mothers' paid work: A cross-national study of Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom. *Family Science*, 6(1): 270-281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620.2015.1082336>

19 Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.007>

20 Pablo Gracia, P. & Esping-Andersen, G. (2015). Fathers' child care time and mothers' paid work: A cross-national study of Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom. *Family Science*, 6(1): 270-281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620.2015.1082336>

Those with a tertiary education and those in higher-level occupations have greater means and thus more options in being active fathers.²¹ For some men, it may not be an option at all.

Research has shown that fathers' active involvement in care responsibilities is positively related to the child attaining a higher level of education, the father's attitude to equality, and the mother's number of working hours.²² However, even though research shows that fathers may reduce their hours when the mother is working, when asked for their own working time preferences, taking care of children is not a consideration.²³ This suggests that men either do not want to work shorter hours when they have children (while many do, indeed, reduce their working time), or they may feel unable to report this preference when asked.

“The rarity of being a stay-at-home father can pose certain challenges for men, not least of which is that the social structures that exist for stay-at-home mothers may not be open to men in the same way, for example, mother-and-toddler groups.”

Indeed, I was a member of the “English-speaking Mothers' Group” in France when my children were small. The chief operating officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, is well known for promoting more equal parenting, but she herself recognises that women need to support men who break the norm.

Studies suggest that some stay-at-home fathers face psychological challenges and discomfort in interacting with other adults, possibly reflecting sensitivity to stereotypes around the role, even though they are happy spending time with their children.²⁴

“Across the world, women's increased participation in employment has been a common feature of labour market trends in recent years. There are numerous reasons for this, ranging from increased investment in education, failing marriages, women's emancipation, and changing demands in the labour market.”

One of the outcomes of these trends is that women have gained access to more top jobs, and, while significant gender pay gaps remain, there is an increase in the share of households in which women are the primary earners, thus reversing some of the foundations of the 'male breadwinner model'.²⁵

The changes in the labour market have also increased job insecurity and raised the likelihood of men in dual-earner households losing their jobs. This trend was first observed in the financial crisis of 2008,²⁶ and is again noticeable in the

- 21 Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2016). Which fathers are involved in caring for pre-school age children in the United Kingdom? A longitudinal analysis of the influence of work hours in employment on shared childcare arrangements in couple households. In E. Ruspini & I. Crespi (Eds.), *Balancing work and family in a changing society: The fathers' perspective* (pp. 83-98). Global Masculinities. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53354-8_6
- 22 Norman, H. & Elliot, M. (2015). Measuring paternal involvement in childcare and housework. *Sociological Research Online*, 20(2): Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3590>
- 23 Hoherz, S. & Bryan, M. (2020). Provider or father? British men's work hours and work hour preferences after the birth of a child. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(2): 193-210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019870752>
- 24 Holmes, E.K., Wikle, J., Thomas, C.R., Jorgensen, M.A., & Egginton B.R. (2020). Social contact, time alone, and parental subjective well-being: A focus on stay-at-home fathers using the American Time Use Survey. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000321>
- 25 Bettio, F., & Plantenga, J., & Smith, M. (2013). A new vision of gender equality in Europe? In F. Bettio, J. Plantenga, & M. Smith (Eds.) *Gender and the European labour market*. Routledge.
- 26 Villa, P. & Smith, M. (2013). Policy in the time of crisis: Employment policy and gender equality in Europe. *Women and Austerity*: 295-316

COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷ While dual-earning provides some cushioning in the instance of individual job loss within the household when the man loses his job, it creates a de facto female breadwinner. However, whether this creates a male carer or stay-at-home father ultimately depends on the circumstances and the expectations of the couple.²⁸ Similarly, illness and disability in men may cause them to become carers, as they are unable to undertake paid work.

Although less common in South Africa, same-sex couples having children has become a widespread phenomenon in some European countries and the USA.²⁹ In a male same-sex relationship where one parent chooses to become a stay-at-home parent, there is a de facto stay-at-home father. While not common in all countries, this is yet another example of society's changing norms leading to a greater diversity of male primary carers.

THE BENEFITS

As a father who spent time as a stay-at-home dad, I know how lucky I am to have had the privilege of spending time with my children. I enjoyed breaking the norm and being the odd one out. However, for many, this option is not available, due to their household resources, circumstances, or the sheer weight of societal norms regarding who should provide childcare. The trend of fathers playing a more active role in their children's lives is gaining traction, but progress is slow.

“Beyond the joy of spending quality time with our children, there are additional reasons why women, men, children, and wider society can benefit from more active parenting by fathers. The first is the most important. The rewards of being an active father and building a lifelong relationship with one's children are priceless.”

In a study of the top five regrets of the dying, author Ware (2012)³⁰ found that nobody said they wished they had worked more, but many reported reflecting on time not spent with their loved ones. Our children are often at the top of this list.

We need to actively help men challenge gender identity norms, as these constrain both men and women, and, ultimately, gender equality. Moving towards a fairer distribution of paid and unpaid work holds multiple benefits, ranging from reducing the double shift women work, to sharing household income risks in times of uncertainty, to supporting a greater variety of household forms in society that help normalise this diversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for the economy and society. On the one hand, the pandemic has reversed some of the gains that women have made in the labour market and negated the benefits of regular schooling, as their children have had to be home-schooled (a task falling heavily upon women). On the other hand, job loss among men is increasingly creating households with no earners or with female breadwinners.³¹ Men need an environment in which their roles, perhaps as unpaid carers, is recognised and valued by society, not only to support them in their roles as fathers, but also to maintain their self-esteem and support household stability.

27 Rubery, J. & Tavora, I. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis and gender equality: Risks and opportunities. In B. Vahercke, S. Spasova, & B. Fronteddu (Eds.), *Social policy in the European Union: State of play 2020* (pp. 71-96). <https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/06-Chapter4-The%20Covid%E2%80%9119%20crisis%20and%20gender%20equality.pdf>

28 Speakman, S. & Marchington, M. (1999). Ambivalent patriarchs: Shiftworkers, 'breadwinners' and housework. *Work, Employment and Society*, 13(1): 83-105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500179922117809>

29 Takács, J., Szalma, I., & Bartus, T. (2016). Social attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples in Europe. *Archives for Sexual Behavior*, (45): 1787-1798. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0691-9>

30 Ware, B. (2012). *The top five regrets of the dying: A life transformed by the dearly departing*. Hay House.

31 Magaria, A. (2021). Fathers, childcare and COVID-19. *Feminist Legal Studies*, (29): 133-144. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-021-09454-6>

Fourth, dual earning is the reality that many households now face. The model of a stay-at-home mother, in fact, has a short history, and some form of dual earning has become the norm. Falling male breadwinner wages and rising costs mean that dual earning may be the only means of survival. A model of dual caring and dual working ensures shared risks at the household level³² and supports prelateship stability³³ and wellbeing.³⁴ Valuing men as carers as well as workers can support sustainable dual-earning households, as it will help normalise both paid and unpaid work being undertaken by women and men.

South Africa's birth rate is burgeoning while, around the world, from Austria to Hungary and China to Germany, birth rates are falling. Population maintenance is key to ensuring an adequate labour supply and bolstering economic development. While population growth could be a boost for the African economy, in conditions where caring and working are not compatible, families do not resort to the old model of a male breadwinner, but, instead, have fewer or no children. Worldwide, social reproduction takes second place to economic security and a rewarding career, so it is the responsibility of men and women to make both working and caring possible at the household level.

Men's greater involvement in the raising of their children will make them present fathers who can act as role models for the good of society. As well as running a major mining corporation, Mike Teke has made it one of his missions to promote active fatherhood in South Africa.³⁵ Raised by his grandmother, he did not benefit from an active father, and is acutely aware of the consequences of boys growing up without engagement with their fathers. A future generation of boys who grow up having known, loved, and been loved by their fathers could hold significant societal benefits for future generations, including respect for care work and greater equality amongst the sexes.

Overall, the opportunities offered to men who take up some of the duties in the unpaid and often unrecorded work of caring will bring this valuable responsibility out of the shadows. It will also provide numerous opportunities for society. For men, perhaps the greatest gift is to themselves and their children.

32 Bettio, F., Plantenga, J., & Smith, M. (2013). *A new vision of gender equality in Europe?* In F. Bettio, J. Plantenga, & M. Smith (Eds.) *Gender and the European labour market*. Routledge.

33 Norman, H., Eliot, M., & Fagan, C. (2018). *Does fathers' involvement in childcare and housework affect couples' relationship stability?* *Social Science Quarterly*, 99(5): 1599-1613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12523>

34 Li, J., Johnson, S.E., Han, W., Andrews, S., Kendall, G., Strazdins, L., & Dockery, A. (2014). *Parents' nonstandard work schedules and child well-being: A critical review of the literature.* *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 35(1): 53-73. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10935-013-0318-z>

35 TED (2020, November 16) *Dynamically shaping the future.* Mike Teke [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL6sQGpPUW4>

About the author

ON BEING A STAY-AT-HOME DAD - A GLIMPSE FROM THE OTHER SIDE

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Every year, we are privileged to have some of the foremost experts in their fields contribute to the Women's Report. Their insights, research, and thoughts on topics provide fresh perspectives on the advancement of gender equality at work. Experts come from the ranks of practitioners and researchers, and topics span women at work and the spill-over of perspectives on gender, at home and in society, on paid work.



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WOMEN'S WR REPORT

EVIDENCE-BASED INSIGHTS ABOUT WOMEN AT WORK

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Paper 5: Hiring stay-at-home mothers: Managers' perceptions

by Mr Lunga Tukani & Prof. Anita Bosch

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Hiring stay-at-home mothers: Managers' perceptions

PAGE 39

by Mr Lunga Tukani & Prof. Anita Bosch

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The perceived tension between motherhood and a career is a threat to many women's well-being.¹ USA and UK data showed that as much as 50% of women feel frustrated by this conflict, and a concerning 18% suffer depression.² Research has shown that 49% of mothers intend to take up employment in the near future.³ This figure is as high as 67% of stay-at-home mothers in Eastern and Western Europe.⁴

"Pregnancy, maternity leave, and childcare are often watershed events in women's lives, and juggling a career and motherhood is undeniably difficult, as the two identities each has its own, often conflicting, demands."

Women suffer psychological difficulties during the time they are not at work while looking after a child, in the form of an identity crisis – being torn between being a professional and a mother. This is particularly prevalent in the early phase of motherhood, and is particularly difficult for women with demanding careers. They cope with the loss of their professional identity and separation from employment by moving back and forth across the line between work and home, a phenomenon called sense-making.⁵ Women employ this sense-making to establish a new identity to end the tug of war between the two identities of dedicated mother vs dedicated employee.⁶

The scenario is further complicated by the discrimination women still face in the workplace. Only 49% of women who intend returning to work are successful.⁷ Highly qualified women are more successful in this endeavour; 73% are able to secure employment, but it is cause for concern that only 40% are able to secure full-time or comparable employment.⁸

- 1 Lovejoy, M. & Stone, P. (2012). Opting back in: The influence of time at home on professional women's career redirection after opting out. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 631-653. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00550.x
- 2 Lovejoy, M. & Stone, P. (2012). Opting back in: The influence of time at home on professional women's career redirection after opting out. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 631-653. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00550.x
- 3 Gauthier, A.H., Emery, T., & Bartova, A. (2016). The labour market intentions and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers in Western and Eastern Europe. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 30: 1-15. doi: 10.1016/j.alcr.2015.12.002
- 4 Gauthier, A.H., Emery, T., & Bartova, A. (2016). The labour market intentions and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers in Western and Eastern Europe. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 30: 1-15. doi: 10.1016/j.alcr.2015.12.002
- 5 Kanji, S. & Cahusac, E. (2015). Who am I? Mothers' shifting identities, loss and sensemaking after workplace exit. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726714557336>
- 6 Blair-Loy, M. (2006). *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives*. Harvard University Press. doi: 10.1177/0170840606061832
- 7 Kanji, S. & Cahusac, E. (2015). Who am I? Mothers' shifting identities, loss and sensemaking after workplace exit. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726714557336>
- 8 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

In South Africa, the workforce is not representative of the population. While women account for 51% of the population, they accounted for 44% of the total employment rate in the first quarter of 2021.⁹ In addition, women continue to be under-represented in senior positions, occupying only 31% of managerial jobs in South Africa, and are overrepresented in the roles of domestic worker, clerk, and technician.¹⁰

Women who wish to return to work after giving birth often face prolonged unemployment, or are forced to accept lower-level jobs,¹¹ especially younger mothers and mothers of three or more children.¹² Women who take career breaks interrupt their accumulation of skills, and pay a penalty in the form of lower wages, except when the career break is for work-related purposes, such as obtaining an advanced degree.¹³

A study of professional women in the USA who took time out of their careers to have a child and sought to return found that only 74% were able to find employment.¹⁴ A study by Clark¹⁵ found that only 40% of women overall managed to secure full-time employment after taking a career break. Though no data is available on the percentages in South Africa, the 44% representation of women in the workplace¹⁶ is concerning, as the majority of graduates in South Africa are women.¹⁷

The number of children has been shown not to have a significant statistical effect on work intention, but the age of the child does. Mothers with children between the ages of 3 and 5 years are more likely to take up a job in the near future than those with newborn babies and children up to the age of 2 years.¹⁸ Another study found that only 5% of highly skilled women wished to return to their former employers. Furthermore, more than half (54%) wanted to change their profession or career.¹⁹

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM(S)?

Society holds the view that a good mother is one who invests most of her time and energy in her child,²⁰ and women who choose to stay at home for a period to raise a child are viewed as undesirable employees²¹ and as needing onerous accommodations at work.²²

9 Statistics South Africa. (2021). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. Stats SA.

10 Stats SA. (2021). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. Stats SA.

11 Gafni, D. & Siniver, E. (2015). Is there a motherhood wage penalty for highly skilled women? *B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy*, 15(3): 1353-1380. doi: 10.1515/bejeap-2013-0191

12 Kahn, J.R., Garcia-Mangano, J., & Bianchi, S.M. (2014). The motherhood penalty at midlife: Long-term effects of children on women's careers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(1): 56-72. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12086

13 McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A., & Dabir-Alai, P. (2012). Motherhood and its impact on career progression. *Gender in Management*, 27(5): 346-364. doi: 10.1108/17542411211252651

14 Lovejoy, M. & Stone, P. (2012). Opting back in: The influence of time at home on professional women's career redirection after opting out. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 631-653. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00550.x

15 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

16 Stats SA. (2021). *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. Stats SA.

17 Department of Higher Education and Training. (2020). *2019/20 Annual Report*.

18 Kanji, S. & Cahusac, E. (2015). Who am I? Mothers' shifting identities, loss and sensemaking after workplace exit. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726714557336>

19 Lovejoy, M. & Stone, P. (2012). Opting back in: The influence of time at home on professional women's career redirection after opting out. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 631-653. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00550.x

20 Blair-Loy, M. (2006). *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives*. Harvard University Press. doi: 10.1177/0170840606061832

21 Correll, S.J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5): 1297-1339. https://sociology.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj9501/f/publications/getting_a_job_is_there_a_motherhood_penalty.pdf

22 Rosen, E. (2005). Intermission over? Now to raise the curtain on the career, Act 2. *New York Times*, June 5, pp. 1-3.

Furthermore, the corporate culture of socialising after work hours excludes mothers from such activities.²³ This intensifies the perception of stay-at-home mothers as not fitting the profile of a committed employee. There is a widely held view that a good employee is one who is 'married' to the job and willing to work long hours.²⁴

“This then highlights the problem inherent in the fact that women dedicate much more time to child-rearing over the course of their careers than men with similar skills and level of education do.²⁵ Women spend three hours more than men on unpaid work such as childcare activities in developing countries, and two hours more in developed countries.²⁶”

Another concern is the negative perceptions of family-friendly policies. Countries that do not have family-friendly policies often justify their decision on the grounds that such policies undermine the country's future competitiveness.²⁷ Therefore, a woman taking a career break to care for an infant may be encouraged by society but perceived negatively as an employee, which strengthens negative workplace gender stereotypes.²⁸

Although women surpass men in educational attainment,²⁹ this advantage is lost due to the notion that the ideal worker and a good mother are incompatible. The explanation offered by some is that women who hold demanding jobs struggle to find a balance between work and family. It is concerning that the gender that has invested the most in education is perceived unworthy of higher positions, and that women's contribution to organisations is underestimated simply because they have taken a career break to care for a child.

It therefore appears that support for women in the form of laws and policies is ineffective in countering prevailing cultural and social norms. Women are thus, in effect, being punished for having children.

The greatest obstacle faced by stay-at-home mothers wishing to re-enter the labour market after taking a career break is the perceptions of managers who appoint staff. In an MBA study, Lunga Tukani wanted to understand hiring managers' perceptions of these women.

THE STUDY

The sample of this qualitative exploratory study was 12 line managers (six men and four women, and two who chose non-disclosure) of teams or departments with whom the final hiring decision had rested for a period of at least five years, and to whom mothers who had stayed at home for a minimum of 12 months would report. The full study write-up is available from the University of Stellenbosch Business School.

Participants were contacted via LinkedIn, a professional network on the Internet with more than 756 000 000 members,³⁰ and asked to write short, essay-style responses to open-ended questions. Content analysis was used to analyse the data, augmented by quantification.

23 Kanji, S. & Cahusac, E. (2015). *Who am I? Mothers' shifting identities, loss and sensemaking after workplace exit*. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726714557336>

24 Goldin, C. (2014). *A grand gender convergence: Its last chapter*. *American Economic Review*, 104(4): 1091-1119. doi: 10.1257/aer.104.4.1091

25 Juhn, C. & McCue, K. (2017). *Specialization then and now: Marriage, children, and the gender earnings gap across cohorts*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1): 183-204. doi: 10.1257/jep.31.1.183

26 United Nations. (2015). *The World's Women 2015*. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/worldswomen2015_report.pdf

27 Earle, A., Mokomane, Z., & Heymann, J. (2011). *International perspectives on work-family policies: Lessons from the world's most competitive economies*. *Future of Children*, 21(2): 191-210. doi: 10.1353/foc.2011.0014

28 Juhn, C. & McCue, K. (2017). *Specialization then and now: Marriage, children, and the gender earnings gap across cohorts*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), 183-204. doi: 10.1257/jep.31.1.183

29 Goldin, C., Katz, L.F., & Kuziemko, I. (2006). *The homecoming of American college women: The reversal of the college gender gap*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.20.4.133>

30 LinkedIn (2021). <https://about.linkedin.com/>

The questionnaire contained six questions. These are listed below, each followed by the findings, accompanied by supporting verbatim quotes.

What comes to mind when considering the curriculum vitae of a stay-at-home mother applying for a position?

Three main categories emerged from the data on managers' impressions: competence, time, and divided attention.

Some participants noted the concern that the weight of childcare duties negatively impacts women's workplace performance. This finding confirms the notion of ideal employees being married to their work and willing to work long hours.³¹ With regard to competence, cultural beliefs hold that motherhood negatively affects a woman's competence³² and commitment as an employee, due to contradicting conceptualisations of dedication to family and work commitment.³³

“Will she be able to manage the job and her mother duties? Will the company get full value for what it pays? (Participant)”

With regard to time, cultural beliefs about the role of a mother create expectations that mothers should place the needs of the child above any other activity, and that they should always be available and attentive to the child's needs. Therefore, good mothers are not ideal workers, as workers who demonstrate intensive effort at work appear to sacrifice all other interests.³⁴ Examples given by Willett are employees who are willing to drop everything at a moment's notice for a new work demand, devoting considerable time to working late nights and weekends. Other participants mentioned time in the context of full-time work, indicating that they perceived stay-at-home mothers as unwilling to commit to full-time hours.

“I see a candidate that has demanding family responsibilities and a balancing act. (Participant)”

In terms of divided attention, there is a perception of mothers' attention being divided between work and childcare. Theoretically, the role of motherhood and the notion of the ideal employee are in conflict.

“Divided attention between work and kids, and extra time-offs. (Participant).”

Observation: The concern is that, if these perceptions govern the employer's decisions when considering applications, a stay-at-home mother, competent as she may be, and despite the fact that she had made childcare arrangements, will not be successful in her application.

Skills of Stay-at-Home Mothers

Participants identified four categories of skills: team-building, administration, competence, and efficiency. Team-building emerged as a strong category, indicating that these women are seen as team players and having the ability to grow team strength and cohesion. Participants described them with words such as “maturity”, “patience”, “emotional intelligence”, and “caring”, to mention a few, which refer to attributes, rather than a particular skill.

Observation: Overall, the participants held positive perceptions of the skills of stay-at-home mothers.

31 Goldin, C. (2014). *A grand gender convergence: Its last chapter*. *American Economic Review*, 104(4): 1091-1119. doi: 10.1257/aer.104.4.1091

32 Gringeri, C.E. (2002). *Book review: The price of motherhood: Why the most important job in the world is still the least valued*. *Affilia*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109902173010>

33 Blair-Loy, M. (2006). *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives*. Harvard University Press. doi: 10.1177/0170840606061832

34 Willett, C. (2004). *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it (Review)*. *Hypatia*. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hyp.2004.0064>

What kinds of positions in your organisation are best suited to stay-at-home mothers?

The categories identified were: all positions, administration, limited travel, flexible working hours, and none. Only four participants (33%) noted being willing to employ stay-at-home mothers in any position, but one participant added a proviso:

“All positions, but most suitable is administrative posts that create a flexible working time.”

Three noted that they would offer these women only administrative jobs. Suggestions included office-bound positions that require little travel, and

“Flexible-hour jobs. (Participant)”

A total of eight (67%) participants thus attached some form of condition to employing these women. Some examples of positions the participants considered suitable are:

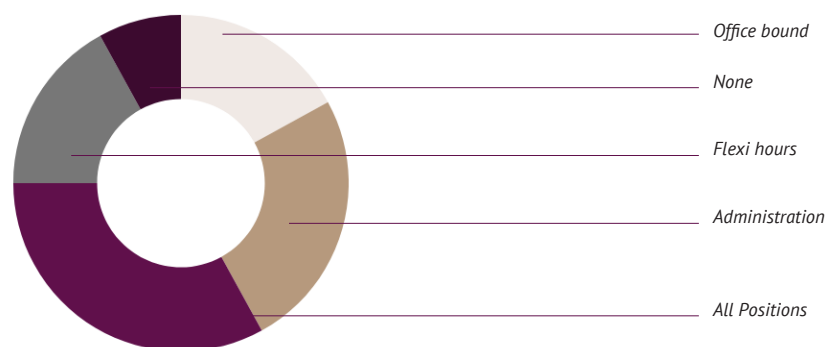
“Data capturing, report writing. (Participant)”

“Office-bound positions, for example, IT, QA, Finance, HR, GM. (Participant)”

The concern of time is evident in the suggestions, and three participants indicated that they would limit employment of these women to administrative roles. The words “administration”, “hours”, and “limited travel” all imply some form of limitation on stay-at-home mothers' ability to contribute in the workplace. Furthermore, administrative roles are often associated with low earnings.

Observation: Sadly, only one participant did not place any limitations on the positions suitable for stay-at-home mothers. It is also worth noting that one participant responded that “no position is suitable for stay-at-home mothers”, implying that this stereotypical notion may still be deeply entrenched.

Responses regarding suitable jobs for stay-at-home mothers



What skills do stay-at-home mothers possess that your organisation can use?

The three main categories that emerged were *team-building, competence, and efficiency*. On the positive side, none of the participants indicated that stay-at-home mothers do not have any skills. However, a few implied that these women are only capable of fulfilling lesser administrative roles, using words such as “co-ordinate”, “organise”, “filing”, and “assisting”. The participants used phrases like “bringing teams together”, “building a caring family culture in the workplace”, and “patience.” However, these attributes appear to contradict the view that stay-at-home mothers are best suited to

administrative jobs such as filing and data capturing, as these do not require teamwork. The participants' views in this regard are consistent with the view that parents make effective managers. Successful managers express care, practise patience, leverage the unique strengths of the different role players in the team, develop individuals' capabilities, and set appropriate expectations and boundaries for their team members.³⁵

Observation: Therefore, the skills of stay-at-home mothers may fill a need in the workplace, and it seems short-sighted to limit their capabilities to menial tasks.

What have been the problems encountered in hiring women who had recently been stay-at-home mothers?

The issue of time was a pervasive complaint, but it was interesting to note that, for this question, the notion of rustiness manifested to a greater degree. In this regard, Becker³⁶ defines human capital as knowledge and skills acquired through education, on-the-job training, and the activity of doing the job. During employment breaks, this acquired human capital may lose some value; new procedures replace old ones, and people may simply forget what they have learned.³⁷

Observation: Women taking extended work breaks should guard against losing their previous investment in human capital to the point of becoming obsolete and irrelevant in the world of work.

A participant stated that stay-at-home mothers may take too long to adjust and learn new skills specific to the workplace. The perception of five (42%) participants was that stay-at-home mothers' work skills become rusty. This finding is related to the theme competence, and the two themes combined represent 50% of participants' views.

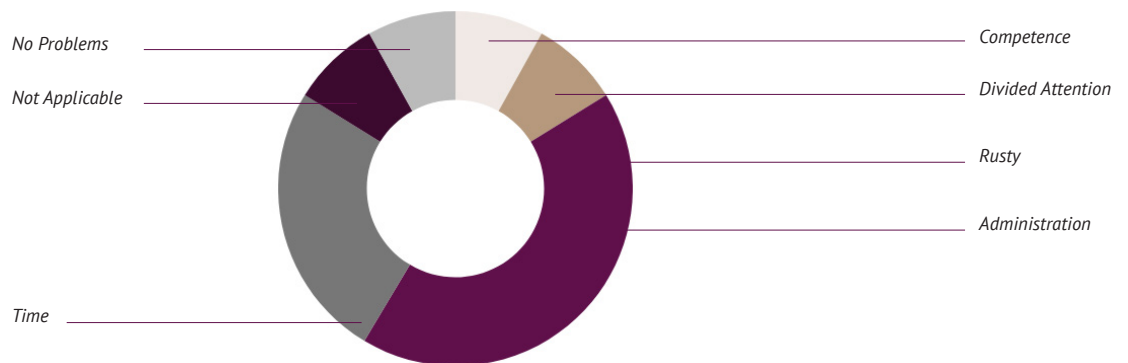
Time was the next significant category, and was mentioned in various contexts:

“Adapt to working full-time. (Participant)”
“Not able to get to work on time. (Participant)”
“Mostly time management. (Participant)”

Only one participant noted not having encountered any problems in hiring stay-at-home mothers.

Observation: The identified preconceived and biased notions of rustiness deny the organisation useful skills that could contribute to its success.

Problems participants had encountered in hiring stay-at-home mothers



35 Bregman, P. (2009). *Why parents make great managers*. Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2009/11/why-parents-make-great-manager.html>
 36 Becker, G.S. (1994). *Human capital revisited*. In *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. University of Chicago Press.
 37 Evertsson, M. (2016). *Parental leave and careers: Women's and men's wages after parental leave in Sweden*. *Advances in Life Course Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2016.02.002>

What have been the benefits of hiring women who had recently been stay-at-home mothers?

The main themes that emerged were *attitude and team-building*. Participants believed that stay-at-home mothers are caring, patient, mature, and proficient at uniting teams, which are aspects of team-building. A few participants mentioned innovation and efficiency. With regard to the theme attitude, participants commented:

“Dedicated, and know that they and willing to fight for it. (Participant)”

“Motivated to perform and bring change to the business. Full of ideas, creativity. (Participant)”

“They want to be back in the workplace. There is a drive to succeed, due to the added family responsibility. (Participant)”

“Some may be enthusiastic to get back to work and start adding value. (Participant)”

“Have a much better understanding of being unemployed and taking the new job seriously. (Participant)”

The themes that manifested from this question are associated with the view that women value connectedness with others³⁸ and are relational.

Observation: Stay-at-home mothers are perceived to be well suited to working in roles where a high level of teamwork is required, and where conflict has to be resolved.

One of the participants explained that the added responsibility of providing for a child is the reason for these mothers' positive attitudes. Another noted that stay-at-home mothers' understanding of being unemployed for a period of time is behind their positive outlook when they secure a job.

Some participants mentioned stay-at-home mothers' innovation and efficiency. Dinardi notes that focusing on feelings can reawaken one's creativity.³⁹ He⁴⁰ further states that neuroscientists have found that rational thoughts and emotions involve different hemispheres of the brain, and that innovation requires both.

Observation: It may therefore be that time spent with their children holds positive outcomes for mothers, from which the workplace could benefit.

Overall, participants' perceptions in this regard were positive. It therefore appears that stay-at-home mothers could be more successful in applying to organisations and managers who hire employees with the right attitude, rather than skills, despite the perception of the skills of stay-at-home mothers being rusty.

What can be done to increase the number of stay-at-home mothers returning to the workplace?

Three themes emerged, namely *intervention, time, and policy*. The findings also indicate a need to create awareness and promote dialogue. In this regard, a participant suggested that employers need to be educated on the topic under study.

38 Cabrera, E.F. (2007). *Opting out and opting in: Understanding the complexities of women's career transitions*. *Career Development International*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430710745872>

39 Dinardi, G. (2019). *Why you should work less and spend more time on hobbies*. *Harvard Business Review*.

40 Dinardi, G. (2019). *Why you should work less and spend more time on hobbies*. *Harvard Business Review*.

The majority of the participants mentioned mothers' need for flexibility, which resorts, in part, under intervention. However, operational constraints may void this accommodation. Half of the participants were of the view that intervention in some form is needed:

“Introduce flexi-work hours, increase focus on results, not on office presence. (Participant)”

“Give stay-at-home mothers opportunities and change perceptions about stay-at-home mothers. (Participant)”

“Flexible working hours and change of perspective by managers. (Participant)”

“There must not be a negative perception from those doing the hiring. (Participant)”

While not all participants were specific about the type of intervention, they indicated that they saw a need for a change in organisational culture. Three (25%) of the participants indicated that perceptions of stay-at-home mothers need to change, which implies that these women are currently seen in a negative light. The theme time once more emerged, with participants referring to the need for flexible hours to accommodate mothers. Two (17%) participants felt that organisations need policies to effect the required change. Lastly, a participant indicated a need for legislation that ensures equal opportunities for stay-at-home mothers seeking employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The recommendations are focused on the four most pervasive themes that emerged from the data, namely time, competence, rustiness, and divided attention.

Time

Human resources policies have historically been formulated for men's vocations, and do not cater for the complexities of women's social roles and careers. One of the key traditional measures of a good employee is 'face time' at the office, which has traditionally served as an indication of employee performance and commitment.⁴¹ Managers who subscribe to this notion will therefore tend to perceive women with household responsibilities as underperformers who are not committed to their work.

Progressive companies are now focusing on measuring and rewarding actual performance, regardless of where and when the work is done, and not the hours spent at the office.⁴² This focus encourages organisations to be flexible with regard to working hours and the use of technology to work from home, even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological advancements therefore make it easier to break some of the barriers inherent in the traditional models, and companies should consider ways in which they could use technology to bring about flexibility in the workplace, in order to accommodate the needs of stay-at-home mothers. In this regard, one of the participants aptly noted that employing stay-at-home mothers saves costly office space.

Managers' perceptions need to change. Stay-at-home mothers should be given the opportunity of an interview, during which they could indicate what contingency plans are in place, to ease the employers' concerns.

41 Sullivan, S.E. & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422307310110>

42 Sullivan, S.E. & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422307310110>

Competence

Sullivan and Mainiero⁴³ developed the Kaleidoscope Career Model as an alternative way to view women's careers. According to this model, women shift their career patterns by rotating various aspects of their lives to accommodate roles and relationships.⁴⁴ Three parameters, namely authenticity, balance, and challenge, shift over the course of their careers; they are always present, but have different levels of importance, depending on the events in a woman's life at a particular point in time.

According to Sullivan and Mainiero,⁴⁵ competent women sometimes leave the workplace due to the job being boring and not offering advancement opportunities. In this regard, the view of some participants that only certain jobs are suitable for stay-at-home mothers could result in organisations losing scarce skills.

It is important that organisations recognise the drain of female talent. A number of high-profile companies have instituted leave programmes that enable women to retain their company links and return to their jobs after an extended period of maternity leave.⁴⁶ Employers need to offer this support in order to retain talent, and women should consider such benefits when deciding where to work if they are planning to have children in the future.

Stay-at-home mothers need to be aware of the skills they acquired through motherhood, and position themselves positively in interactions with prospective employers. Those doing the hiring need to be equally aware of the attributes of stay-at-home mothers.

Rustiness

Literature suggests that companies benefit from employees taking sabbaticals. These individuals are able to rest and regain focus, while the company is able to stress-test other employees' willingness to cope with a smaller staff complement and take up leadership roles.⁴⁷

Clark⁴⁸ suggests that mothers keep their professional network current, and also demonstrate that their skills are current at the time of returning to work. This will help allay the employer's fears about rustiness, while a current professional network will keep the stay-at-home mother abreast of new developments in the field.

Clark⁴⁹ advises that women can increase the likelihood of securing employment by ensuring that their skills remain current. Maintaining a public profile of activities, such as publishing articles on her field of specialisation, for example, will indicate to prospective employers that she has kept abreast of developments in the industry. Stay-at-home mothers should also take part in workshops or take a course to bridge any knowledge gaps they may have developed while they were on leave.⁵⁰

43 Sullivan, S.E. & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422307310110>

44 Sullivan, S.E. & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422307310110>

45 Sullivan, S.E. & Mainiero, L. (2008). Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to understand the changing patterns of women's careers: Designing HRD programs that attract and retain women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422307310110>

46 Lovejoy, M. & Stone, P. (2012). Opting back in: The influence of time at home on professional women's career redirection after opting out. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 631-653. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00550.x

47 Burkus, D. (2017). Research shows that organizations benefit when employees take sabbaticals. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/08/research-shows-that-organizations-benefit-when-employees-take-sabbaticals>

48 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

49 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

50 Konrad, W. (2009). Press restart on your career. *Money*, 38: 63-65.

Clark⁵¹ and Konrad⁵² both highlight the importance of maintaining an industry network, as most people find work through personal contacts. Clark⁵³ also advises women to explain to prospective employers why they have chosen that particular time to return to work, thereby repositioning themselves through an expression of ambition and interests, as well as highlighting the contribution they are able to make using up-to-date and newly acquired skills.

Divided attention

Simultaneously playing the roles of employee, parent, and spouse may result in conflict and stress.⁵⁴ Women therefore need to make suitable childcare arrangements and contingency plans, and clearly communicate this to the organisation, to allay fears of her attention being divided.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the findings of this study that managers who oversee hiring have perceptions of stay-at-home mothers that are not in alignment with the Employment Equity Act. This study has revealed some of these perceptions, and shown the need to create awareness and take action. Managers need to perform honest introspection regarding biases that appear to cloud their decision-making in the hiring process. Further, they need to commit to creating a workplace environment and culture that ensure an equitable and representative workforce.

51 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

52 Konrad, W. (2009). Press restart on your career. *Money*, 38: 63-65.

53 Clark, D. (2017). How stay-at-home parents can transition back to work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-stay-at-home-parents-can-transition-back-to-work>

54 Theunissen, B., Van Vuuren, L.J., & Visser, D. (2003). Communication of job-related information and work-family conflict in dual-career couples. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v29i1.81>

About the authors

HIRING STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS: MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS

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Every year, we are privileged to have some of the foremost experts in their fields contribute to the Women's Report. Their insights, research, and thoughts on topics provide fresh perspectives on the advancement of gender equality at work. Experts come from the ranks of practitioners and researchers, and topics span women at work and the spill-over of perspectives on gender, at home and in society, on paid work.



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