

Work-family Conflict and Gender Equality in South Africa

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**Paper prepared for the 26th IUSSP International Population Conference,
Marrakech, Morocco, 27 September—2nd October 2009.**

Abstract

Recent studies have revealed an increase in the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector in South Africa. However, this increase does not necessarily indicate that the welfare of South African women is improving. Like in many parts of the developing world, even as they enter formal employment the women continue to be primarily responsible for the care of minor children and elderly members in their households and families. This paper illustrates how the prevailing socio-economic and demographic changes in the country have the potential to result in widespread work-family conflict among working women and, in the process, perpetuate gender inequality. Existing labour legislations and collective agreements are also critically explored to determine their gaps in addressing this issue. The paper concludes by proposing a research agenda, the findings of which could facilitate working women to adequately balance their work and domestic roles

Introduction

Against the background of various international, continental and national commitments calling for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, the government of South Africa has, since the advent of democracy in 1994, implemented explicit policies and legislation (such as the Labour Relations Act of 1995, the 1997 Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the 1998 Employment Equity Act) banning gender-based discrimination and, among other things, ensuring fair access and equal treatment of women in the labour market. It is largely because of this that there has been a notable increase in female labour force participation rates across all racial groups, and a rapid increase in women's employment, in both absolute and relative terms, since the mid 1990s (Department of Labour, 2006).

These labour market trends do not, however, indicate that the welfare of South African women is necessarily improving. Like their counterparts in many parts of the world, the women continue to be primarily responsible for the general management of their households and for the care of family and household members, particularly minor children, older persons and the infirm. Although having multiple roles (in this case being in the labour force and being the main carer) can provide several resources—such as better financial situation, greater social integration, improved social support, and higher self-esteem—that can be used to promote personal growth and better functioning in

other life domains (Härenstam et al, 2005; Oomens, et al, 2007), a wide strand of literature has consistently shown that it can also lead to work-family conflict, defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the roles pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible” (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985:77).

Work-family conflict is conceptually bi-directional. There can be family-to-work conflict, which occurs when experiences in the family (for example, the presence of young children, primary responsibility for children, elder care responsibilities, interpersonal conflict within the family unit, and unsupportive family members) interfere with work life (Frone et al, 1996). There can also be work-to-family conflict, which occurs when experiences at work (such as extensive, irregular, or inflexible work hours; extensive travel, and unsupportive supervisors or organizations) interfere with family life. Although these two types of interference are strongly correlated, research has found that work roles are more likely to interfere with family roles than vice versa.

The literature has also consistently shown that while work-family conflict can limit men’s ability to be involved in family matters, the pressures and stresses of this conflict are particularly higher for women (Cassirer and Adati, 2007). For example, is it well-documented that combining personal and occupational roles induces depressive symptoms and physical health complaints among women (Oomens et al, 2007). By limiting women’s involvement in other activities, family responsibilities can also constrain women’s ability to maximise income generating opportunities and/or career prospects. This is particularly the case for women from low-income families who cannot afford paid solutions such as domestic help or childcare. It can thus be argued that work-family conflict perpetuates gender inequality, and is a major factor contributing to women’s disadvantage in the labour market (International Labour Organisation, 2004).

Despite the foregoing in South Africa, as in many developing countries, work family conflict does not seem to be perceived as a problem. Overall, care responsibilities are

not placed on the same pedestal as, say, pay and job-security, and as Dancater (2008) observed, “the notion of the ‘ideal worker’ as essentially male and free of domestic responsibilities still permeates the thinking of many employers”. Consequently, many workplaces continue to be structured around the assumption that all workers have a source of unpaid labour to care for their families, or that they will somehow be able to manage their care responsibilities. However, recent transformations in several work, family, and demographic dimensions of the South African society suggest that this is a gross misconception. This paper uses various secondary data to illustrate these changes and their relevance for work-family conflict and gender equality.

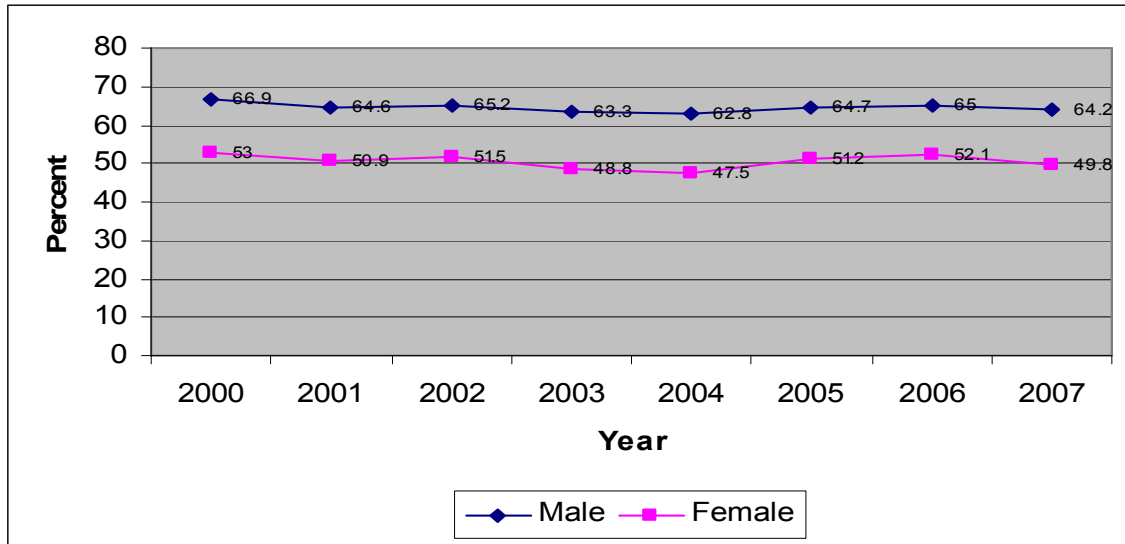
The discussion is set out in three main sections: labour market changes and time use patterns; changes in family and household structure; an ageing population; and high prevalence of HIV and AIDS. The paper concludes with a brief assessment of existing legislation and policies to help workers achieve a work-life balance, as well as a brief proposed research agenda.

Changes in the labour market and time use patterns

Historically, South African women have found themselves subject to various kinds of discriminatory behaviour, attitudes and policies, whether intended or unintended, which have hampered their full integration into the labour market (Department of Labour, 2006). As already stated, the implementation of various policies and legislation has greatly improved this situation over the last 15 years. For example, data from Statistics South Africa show that female labour force participation in the country increased from 38 percent in 1995 to 49.9 percent in 2007, and that while the number of both men and women who were working or willing to work increased over the 2000-2007 period, the increase in the female labour force was greater, accounting for almost 58 percent of the growth in the labour force compared to men’s 42.3 percent (Statistics South Africa, 2009). Overall, despite a slight general decrease in labour force participation in South Africa in recent years (Figure 1), women’s participation rate albeit

still lower than that of men, remain relatively high at around 52.1 in 2006 and 49.8 in 2007.

Figure 1: Labour force participation rates of men and women aged 15 years and above, South Africa 2000-2007



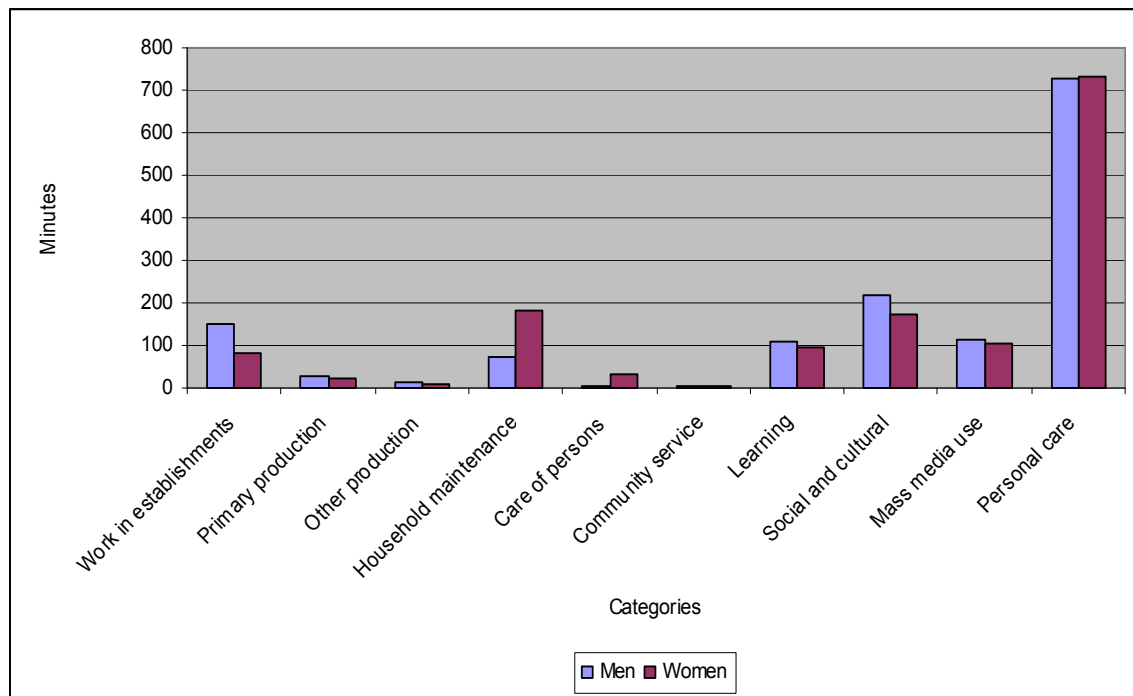
Source: Statistics South Africa (2009). *Labour Force Survey: Historical Revision, September Series 2000 to 2007*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

The increased participation of women in the labour market is further reaffirmed by their decreasing unemployment rates from 26.5 percent in 2000 to 24.3 percent in 2007. By the same token, data from the World Bank shows that the proportion of South African women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (Millennium Development Goal 3) was 43.1 percent in 2007, an increase from 42.7 in 2004 (World Bank, 2009). Indeed, in assessing Southern Africa’s progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Chipika (2007) noted that South Africa was among the few countries in the region which showed notable progress in this MDG goal between 1990 and 2004

These labour market trends are certainly commendable. However, from the point of view of the work-family conflict, the changes suggest that due to their being responsible for both the productive and the care economy, South African women work longer hours than men, when both market and non-market activities are taken into account. Among

other things, this hampers the women’s ability to do other potentially life-enhancing activities such as engaging in income-generating and skills building projects, furthering their education, and attending to other social relationships. Indeed, data from the 2000 Time Use Survey showed that each day South African women spend more than double the time men spent of household maintenance and care of persons, but much less time than men on learning, social and cultural activities, and mass media use (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mean number of minutes per day spent on activities by type of activity and gender



Source: Budlender, D., Chobokoane, N., Mpetsheni, Y. (2001). *Time use in South Africa: Finding out how South Africans spend time*. Statistics Pretoria: South Africa

Although Figure 2 does not refer specifically to employed men and women, Valodia and Devey (2005) showed that the pattern is similar among the employed population. Also using the 2000 Time Use Survey data, Valodia and Devey showed that where both members of the household are employed in the formal sector, on average males spend 18 units of time in paid work compared to women’s 15 (Table 1). The table also shows that when the female member of the household is employed in the informal economy unpaid household work increases to 12.2 time units and (as is to be expected) time spent on paid work falls. This combination contrasts sharply with the opposite work

combination where the male member is in informal work and the female member in formal work – although there is a reduction in time spent on paid work and increase in unpaid work, the changes are not nearly as dramatic as that for informally employed females. The last combination, where both the male and female household member is employed in the informal economy are also noteworthy: compared to the formal: formal combination both members of the household spend less time on paid work and more time on unpaid work. However, female members in informal: informal households spend significantly higher proportions of time on unpaid work while their male counterparts, on average, spend more time on leisure and personal activities (Valodia and Devey, 2005).

Table 1: Time Use Patterns by Gender and Employment (30 minutes time units), South Africa 2000

Employment combination		Paid work		Unpaid work		Leisure and Personal	
Male:	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Formal :	Formal	18.0	15.3	2.4	7.9	34.3	32.9
Formal:	Informal	17.3	8.8	2.3	12.2	34.2	34.5
Informal :	Formal	16.8	14.0	2.9	7.2	34.8	32.8
Informal :	Informal	10.8	9.1	2.9	12.5	40.0	34.2

Source: Adapted from Valodia and Devey (2005). *Gender, Employment and Time Use: Some Issues in South Africa*. Paper prepared for the Conference on Unpaid work, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals, Bard College, October 1-3

Among other things, the women’s time use patterns can result in what Budig and England (2001) describe as ‘the wage penalty of motherhood’. That is, mothers (and indeed other women with caring responsibilities) are likely to earn less than what they could actually earn because they spend more time at home attending to their caring responsibilities, and interrupting their job experience or, at least, interrupting fulltime employment (Budig and England, 2001). To the extent that experience and seniority have positive returns because they involve on-the-job training that makes workers more productive (Becker, 1964), the time-use patterns of working women in South Africa imply that the women will continue to earn less (see Muller, 2008) because they spend more time in attending to domestic tasks, and less time on productive activities.

The literature has also shown that working women may also earn lower wages because their caring responsibilities leave them exhausted or distracted at work, making them less productive (Budig and England, 2001). As a result, these women may be penalised because the image persists that they are not committed to their jobs and careers. For these same reasons, managers may also hesitate to hire women for certain types of jobs, often those with better career prospects, and/or to invest on their training (International Labour Organisation, 2004; Heymann et al, 2007).

Work-family conflict may also contribute to women’s lower wages when women trade off higher wages for “mother friendly” jobs that are easier to combine with parenting and care work, the most common of these being part-time work (Budig and England, 2001). Recent studies (for example, Muller, 2006; Mutedi, 2003) suggest that this might already be happening in South Africa. Muller (2006) for example, posits that more than 20 percent of the women’s increase in wage employment between 1995 and 2006 can be attributed to the growth in part-time wage employment. Table 2 below also shows that the proportion of those employed part-time who are women increased notably from 51.4 percent in 1995 to 65.4 percent in 2006. Conversely, men’s employment in part-time work accounted for only about 6 percent of the total increase in male employment over the period.

Table 2: Part-time wage employment (000s) by gender, South Africa 1995-2006

	1995	1999	2001	2006
Women				
Total wage employment	2 829	3 632	3 795	4 323
Part-time wage employment	279	552	573	583
Proportion of part-time wage employed who are women	51.5	58.1	60.1	65.4
Proportion of employed women who work part-time	9.9	15.2	15.1	13.6
Men				
Total wage employment	5 325	4 986	5 310	6 016
Part-time wage employment	263	397	380	309
Proportion who work part-time	4.9	8.0	7.2	5.2

Sources: Muller, C. (2008). *Trends in the gender wage gap and gender discrimination among part-time and fulltime workers in post-apartheid South Africa*. Development Policy Research Unit, School of Economics, University of Cape Town: pp. 21

Although this pattern of part-time can not be assumed to be directly related to work-family conflict, analysis of various national surveys shows that female part-time workers in South Africa are more likely to live in households under which children (those aged 0-14 years age-group) also live (Muller, 2008), thus suggesting that work-family conflict may be a major contributory factor.

From the point of view equity, it is evident that women doing part-time-work face inferior conditions in comparison to men and women working fulltime (Table 3). For example, in 2006, only 7 percent of women working part-time reported that they were receiving medical aid contributions from their employer, compared to 11 percent of their male counterparts. Women working part-time were also less likely have pension fund contributions and paid leave than women working full-time (Table 3). By the same token, and consistent with Budg and Engand’s notion of the ‘wage penalty of motherhood’ women working part-time typically earn significantly less than men in terms of both average hourly and monthly wages as well as much less than their counterparts who work full-time (see Muller, 2008)

Table 3: Conditions of Employment, part-time and full rime workers by gender, South Africa, 2001-2006

Proportion of all wage employed	Part-time				Full-time			
	2001		2006		2001		2006	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Written contract	0.35	0.31	0.45	0.43	0.58	0.49	0.74	0.71*
Temporary or casual work	0.49	0.51	0.55	0.51	0.14	0.16	0.20	0.21
Pension fund contribution	0.32	0.20*	0.22	0.15	0.56	0.47*	0.55	0.50*
Medical insurance	0.16	0.12*	0.11	0.07*	0.32	0.28*	0.26	0.25
Paid leave	0.33	0.29	0.25	0.29	0.63	0.59*	0.63	0.61
UIF contribution	0.37	0.30*	0.99	0.99	0.62	0.54*	0.99	0.99
Trade Union Member	0.25	0.13	0.13	0.07*	0.39	0.31*	0.33	0.29*

Sources: Muller, C. (2008). *Trends in the gender wage gap and gender discrimination among part-time and fulltime workers in post-apartheid South Africa*. Development Policy Research Unit, School of Economics, University of Cape Town: pp. 22

Changes in family formation and household structure

The foregoing changes in the labour market have occurred against the backdrop of transformations in family composition and structure, largely brought about by a late

marriage pattern and decreasing prevalence of marriage in contemporary South Africa. Using census data Kalule-Sabiti et al (2007) showed that the singulate mean age at first marriage (SMAM) for males was 31.0 years and 30.5 years in 1996 and 2001 respectively. The corresponding figures for females were 28.7 and 27.7 respectively. In terms of marriage prevalence, Table 4 below shows that while the number of registered marriages generally increased between 1998 and 2001, Crude Marriage Rate has remained relatively low, hovering between 3.8 and 3.9 per has 1000 population in recent years.

Table 4: Trends in marriage, South Africa 1998-2007

Year	No. of Registered Marriages	Crude Marriage rate
1998	146 741	3.5
1999	140 458	3.3
2000	143 391	3.3
2001	134 581	3.0
2002	177 202	3.9
2003	178 689	3.8
2004	176 521	3.8
2005	180 657	3.9
2006	184 860	3.9
2007	183 030	3.8

Source: Statistics South Africa (2008). *Marriages and divorces: 2007*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa

Largely due to these nuptiality patterns, South Africa has one of the highest proportions of female-headed households in Africa, reported to be 41.9 percent at the time of the 1998 Demographic and Health Survey. It can therefore be concluded that, overall, many working women in South Africa are assuming responsibility alone as the economic provider and caregiver for their children. Indeed, as Table 5 below shows, the proportion of children living with their mother only increased steadily between 2002 and 2007, across all racial groups in South Africa.

Table 5 Proportion of children aged 17 years or younger living with biological parents by race, South Africa 2002 and 2007

2002				
Race	Both parents	Mother only	Father only	Neither parents
African	31.8	41.1	3.1	24.0
Coloured	52.1	34.3	2.4	11.3
Indian	85.6	85.6	10.5	1.2
White	83.6	12.2	1.8	2.3
South Africa	37.8	38.1	2.9	21.1
2007				
Race	Both parents	Mother only	Father only	Neither parents
African	28.6	42.6	2.8	26.0
Coloured	52.0	35.1	2.0	10.9
Indian	82.3	10.4	2.4	4.9
White	79.8	13.8	4.5	2.0
South Africa	34.3	39.9	2.8	23.0

Source: South African Institute of Race Relations (2009). *Fast Facts*. Marshalltown: South African Institute of Race Relations

The situation is aggravated by the decreasing household sizes. Data from Statistics South Africa shows that while the total number of households in South Africa increased from 9 059 571 in 1996 to 12 500 609 in 2007, the average household size (excluding collective living quarters) decreased from 4.6 persons to 3.9 persons during the same time period (Statistics South Africa, 2007). Among other things, this decrease can be attributed to rapid rural-urban migration and urbanisation, and the weakened the traditional kinship mode of residential settlement. Therefore, even when extended families are close by, the capacity of family members to help each other out is weakening. Additionally, growing economic need, particularly among the poor, is also compelling many adult family members to engage in income-earning activities (Cassirer and Addati, 2007).

Overall, therefore, the traditional family support for care roles and domestic tasks, while still frequent, is becoming less available (International Labour Organisation, 2004). Furthermore, and similar to what Sorj (2004) noted in Brazil, the availability of grandparents to allocate a good part of their time to helping their adult children in housework and child care may be changing as a new generation of grandmothers is now emerging. This new generation is better educated, more socialised in the world of work

and more active in terms of social life. It is also likely that this generation will continue to be engaged in the public world; even in later stages of life.

Evidence from other parts of the developing world shows that faced with inadequate public and family support for care responsibilities many working women adopt various strategies, many of which have implications for gender equality. One is to take up informal employment or subsistence farming as these might offer the only work that provides enough flexibility, autonomy, and geographic proximity to home to allow them to combine paid economic activity with family responsibilities (Casiirer and Addati, 2007). However, as with part-time work discussed earlier, these types of jobs provide little or no economic security whether in terms of income, savings, insurance or social protection (International Labour Organisation, 2004), and can thus perpetuate women's lower socio-economic status.

Women also often attempt to solve their work-family concerns by adopting less than satisfactory solutions such as taking children with them to work or taking an older sibling out of school to look after younger children. Taking children to work does not only have the potential of exposing them to hazardous environments in the workplace, but it can also decrease the time and investments that women can put into paid work, thus hampering their overall productivity and hence career prospects and development. Taking an older sibling out of school also has clear implications for gender inequality as it is often older sisters that are taken out of school to provide care. This has a negative impact on their long-term educational opportunities, and it reduces their prospects for decent work opportunities (Cassirer and Addati, 2007).

High HIV and AIDS Prevalence

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS South Africa is one of the most seriously HIV-affected countries in the world, with 2007 estimates indicating that 18.1 percent of the adult population was living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2008). As part of the

national response, and consistent with the practice in other parts of Africa, there has been a shift in the model of care of people living with HIV and AIDS from hospital care to home-based care (Akintola, 2004). While this has partly helped to reduce pressure on public hospitals that do not have adequate staff and space to care for HIV and AIDS patients, it is done with the assumption that there is adequate community and family support to meet the patients' need. However as the paper has shown so far, this is not necessarily the case. The reality is that with about 91 percent of HIV and AIDS caregivers in South Africa being women (Southern Africa Partnership Programme, 2005), home-based care has significantly increased the burden of care for many women, and exacerbated the levels of work-family conflict among those who are working. Various fact sheets developed by Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) succinctly summarised the implications for gender equality of this type HIV and AIDS care as follows:

- The vast majority of women and girls who shoulder the HIV and AIDS care burden receive little or no remuneration, training, and other necessary resources, thus intensifying the feminisation of poverty
- The role played by women in the care economy intensifies their poverty and economic insecurity as opportunities for income generation in both the formal and informal sector are lost.
- The more the burden of care falls to women in communities and households, the less women are able to engage in activities that have the potential to empower women in relation to families, communities and markets. literacy and skills building, schooling and leisure time activities
- The combined physical and emotional burden of caring for members of household affected by HIV and AIDS inevitably results in women neglecting their own health and well-being.

GEMSA also pointed out that given the long-standing gender imbalances and discrimination in education, girls are often the first to be withdrawn from school when families become affected by HIV and AIDS. However, these girl child caregivers become especially vulnerable as they are not in the traditional income earning age bracket, and are frequently not protected by policies or support programmes, as they are often 'invisible' to authorities (GEMSA, 2009).

Labour legislation and collective labour agreement

From the foregoing sections, it is evident that getting the work-family balance right is not only vital to enhance the wellbeing female workers but it can also have a positive impact on gender equality, and on equity of opportunity between men and women by reducing the interruption of careers that are most often lost to women due to caring responsibilities (International Labour Organisation, 2004). Labour legislation and collective labour agreements present some of the main measures that can be used to facilitate the equilibrium between work and family (Sorj, 2004). These can take two forms: (1) statutory and on-statutory leave such maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and temporary leave periods for employees to take care of children and other dependent family members and (2) flexible working hour arrangements such as flexibility in work schedules, working from home, and telecommuting (Pavalko and Henderson, 2006; Oomens et al, 2007).

To what extent has South Africa adopted these "family-friendly policies"? Perhaps the most comprehensive and analytical review of this question is the work of Lisa Dancaster (see for example, Dancaster, 2006; 2008) who has pointed out that the Basic Conditions of Employment Act recognises only one of leave in its "pure" form: maternity leave. Dancaster argues that paternity leave and emergency care leave, on the other hand, are unsatisfactorily combined into a catch-all leave provision known as "family responsibility leave". This leave, however, is very narrow in scope, taking into account the large number of sick adults in the context of HIV and AIDS. For example, it does not provide

for the absence of an employee to attend to a sick or elderly adult relative. The other key limitations of the family responsibility leave are:

- It covers only leave to attend to sick children (and the birth and death of defined individuals).
- legislated provision of three days of paid leave a year is simply too short, given that this is a multi-purpose leave to be used for the birth, death and illness of defined relatives, and considering the context of care demands in South Africa, as discussed in this paper.
- The leave is only available to employees who work four days a week and who have worked for their employer for at least four months.

In terms of flexible work arrangements, there is no separate legislative right for employees to request flexible working arrangements in South Africa. The only existing legal avenue for the right to request an adaptation of working hours for the purposes care is through the unfair discrimination provisions of the Employment Equity Act. However this option has not been utilised and it remains cumbersome and costly for employees (Dancaster 2006; 2008).

Conclusion

This paper highlighted how the socio-economic and demographic transformations currently taking place in South Africa have potential implications for work-family conflict and gender equality in the country. It particularly argued that changing labour force participation patterns, household structures and the high HIV and AIDS prevalence are increasing the burden of care faced by working women as they try to balance the demands of their work and domestic roles. The conclusion is that there is need to put in place mechanisms to facilitate working women to adequately manage work-family conflict. As Dancaster (2008) argues:

To acknowledge the critical need for care in South Africa, we need to recognise the role of employees as caregivers through legislative provisions encompassing a range of leave circumstances, with the right to request flexible working arrangements. These measures are a means of valuing women as the main providers of this vital societal function and are necessary considerations if there is to be true equality of opportunity in the workplace

It is imperative, however, for the mechanisms to be evidence-based and context-specific. As Korenman and Kaester (2005) caution, considerable care is needed before assuming that the more “family friendly” institutional arrangements present on western countries would be desirable for Africa. Therefore, as a first step, South African stakeholders and scholars need to support and undertake in-depth research to address some basic questions that can inform the formulation of relevant policies. Among the basic questions that need attention are:

- *Changes in family and household structure.* Previous studies have shown that the structure of families and households have important implications for work-family conflict. For example, working women with young children tend to experience more work-family conflict relative to those with older children and non-parents. Large families are also likely to be more time demanding than small families. Therefore to provide the context within which the challenges of work-family reconciliation can be evaluated, there is need to document family systems, the structure and composition of households, as well as the role, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of household members.
- *Labour force participation and work patterns.* There is need to examine the patterns and forms of work and the opportunities and challenges they offer women for combining work and family roles. For example, how much does dedication to the family prejudice the opportunities in the labour market in terms of employment, career progression, opportunities for further training, earnings?
- *The sources and types of work-family conflict.* There is need for evidence regarding what determines work burdens as well as whether women of diverse social and

cultural backgrounds are affected differently by their work burden and their capacity to cope with it.

- *Support mechanisms for families.* There is need for research to study the support mechanisms that women are currently using to achieve a work-life balance, and the gaps that exist between the needs for work-family reconciliation and the existing support measures.
- *Labour legislation and collective labour agreement.* What gaps exist between the needs for workers and their families and the existing labour legislations and collective labour agreements? It would also be important to examine the views of employers (in both the private and public sectors) and trade union on work-family balance policies and flexitime arrangements.
- *Men's role.* There is also need to address the gap in work-family research in which working men and fathers are underrepresented. The following questions are particularly worth addressing: How do working men and fathers compare with their female counterparts on key measures of work and family characteristics, and work-family conflict? What work-family adaptive strategies do working men currently use and how do these compare with those of working women? What are the work and family characteristics that significantly predict work-family conflict and balance for working men? How do measures of work-family for and responsibility for childcare differ among working fathers and working mothers?

Doing such research will not only inform policy formulation, but through it South Africa will also be fulfilling its obligation to the SADC¹ Protocol on Gender and Development which it signed in August 2008. Articles 16 and 27 of the Protocol read as follows:

Article 16 "State Parties shall conduct time use studies by 2015 and adopt policy measures to ease the burden of the multiple roles played by women"

¹ This refers to the Southern African Development Community, a regional economic community comprising of 15 Southern and East African countries: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Article 27, 3(c) “State parties shall, by 2015 “develop and implement policies and programmes to ensure appropriate recognition of the work carried by care givers, majority of whom are women...”.

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