

Women balancing work and family responsibilities in Botswana: Challenges and the way forward

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Abstract: Similar to other regions, the proportion of women working in the formal sector in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased in recent years but their share of household and family responsibilities have not changed when compared to their male counterparts who are employed. Most of the time, women are the ones who undertake household work and other family responsibilities such as parenting, but their hectic work is often un-recognised, under-valued and uncompensated. Combining employment with family responsibilities is quite demanding on women's time, energy, resources and health. Women's ability to balance the demands of work and family would go a long way in improving their quality of life. Guided by social learning theory and rational choice theory, the paper discusses the women's experiences with work demands, family responsibilities, challenges and their efforts to balance work and family responsibilities in the context of Botswana. The article emphasises among other things the need to provide gender responsive labour market policies that will recognise women's multiple roles and create a conducive environment that will recognise their contributions in both the paid work and their unpaid work at family and community levels.

Keywords: family responsibilities, women working, Women's ability, contributions.

1. BACKGROUND

Families in contemporary Botswana have undergone a number of notable changes since colonial times, and this process has been in no way linear. For instance, a study on changing family forms in Botswana indicates that the definition of the family is now so fluid and flexible that it varies according to the purpose it is meant to serve in a given situation (WLSA, 1997). The researchers report the following:

There is a plurality of family forms in Botswana, whose boundaries have the tendency to shift, contract and expand depending on the purposes for which a particular form was defined at a particular point in time (WLSA, 1997: p. 2). This *plurality of family forms* resonates with many post-modern notions about *families* around the world.

Like in many countries, the following family forms exist in Botswana: the nuclear family, one or both spouses may be working outside of the home or be self-employed or unemployed; the dual-career family; extended families; single parent families; child-headed families (i.e. those that are headed by a child or children, in the absence of any parent or other responsible adult; they have increased as a result of high HIV prevalence rates as parents die due to AIDS). Moreover, in Botswana unrelated individuals are likely to live together in loosely fashioned families that are without legal definition, but have meaning, bonds or other family ties that are significant to the participants.

In Botswana, women constitute 52% per cent of the country's population (Maundeni, forthcoming). They are over-represented in the numbers of heads of households. Mokomane (2009) asserts that only 19% of women aged 15-49 years in Botswana were currently married and that marital unions made 52% of all unions during the reporting period. The prevalence of marriage in Botswana is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. Mokomane (2009) associated the low marriage rate in Botswana to factors such as demographic, socio-economic, and cultural forces, operating simultaneously.

From time immemorial, women's lives have been characterised by their involvement in work outside the home as well as in household chores including the raising of children. In traditional Tswana society (before industrialization, modernization, rural-urban migration as well as before the development of the capitalist society). Women used to work in fields and homesteads together with female children, while men went hunting and gathering with male children (Schapera, 1970). During that time there was a thin line between work outside and inside the home since parents spent most of the time with their children. The system also allowed children to bond with their parents as well as to learn various gender-related duties (Schapera, 1970).

As the process of social change evolved, the line between work outside the home and that inside the home widened as both men and women migrated to urban areas and entered employment outside the home. In the context of Botswana as well as in many countries worldwide, as more women got absorbed in formal or paid employment outside the home, they continued to perform the bulk of family and household-related responsibilities. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2005 women who engaged in paid employment represented over 40 per cent of the global labour force, 70% of which were in developed countries, and 60 per cent in developing countries but at global level, men continue to hold a major percentage in the labor force (Van Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams, Martin, 2009).

The rising numbers of women who work outside the home across the globe has been exacerbated by among other things the fact that governments' all over the world are placing an emphasis on labour participation of women. As a result of outside economic pressure to seek employment, support from Governments continues to increase awareness on the necessity of women to be formally employed and encouraging women to get educated.

In Botswana, women's ethnic, educational, and geographical locations influence their approach to and capability to manage both workloads and family responsibilities. Other women engage in income generating projects that keep them away from home just like their counterparts who are formally employed outside the home. It is important to mention that Botswana is one of the African countries that has attained gender parity in education, therefore the numbers of men and women who are employed outside the home are almost equal. However, there are more men than women who hold positions of power in the country (Maudeni, Forthcoming).

With improved access to education and employment opportunities for women, has led to an increased number of dual earner families (Reddy et.al, 2010; Thriveni & Rama, 2012; Rao & Indla, 2010; Nizami & Ahmad, 2005). These developments have brought positive changes such as emancipation of women and improved family income. The increased number of women joining the employment sector to earn income in many Sub Saharan countries, Botswana included (O'Brien, 2012; Muasya, 2016) and the escalating dual earner families facilitated awareness on the need to revise employment policies that are not gender neutral that detach men from family responsibilities (O'Brien, 2012). Despite the challenges faced by women at family homes and work places they continue to find ways in which to juggle work and family responsibilities as discussed below. The authors attempt to explain that by integrating social learning and the rationale choice theory to understand the division of family responsibilities.

2. WOMEN, WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES IN BOTSWANA

Work and family life have always been interdependent but with more mothers getting employed, rising family hours of work, service intensive globalizing economy, and the trend toward long work hours, the interdependence has become more visible and more problematic (Bailyn et.al, 2001). Women's roles at home have not changed much as they still shoulder the bulk of household work such as cooking and taking care of the family members. The increased pressure at the work place and the demands at home create role overload, role strain, resulting in work/family conflict results (Thriveni & Rama, 2012).

Women find themselves stretched between the multiple roles that they have to juggle. They have to manage the daily requirements of their family while on the other hand they have to fulfil their daily job requirements. The multiple roles and work load calls for women to balance work and life for a healthy lifestyle. Research indicates that many women are working 40-45 hours per week coupled with this at home they have to put in roughly 15 more hours in a week than men and an extra month of twenty four hour day in a year and this has led to women' failure to achieve work-life-balance (Provide Source).

Lakshmi and Gopinath, (2013) indicate that work-life balance does not mean an equal balance but rather the capacity to schedule the hours of professional and personal life so as to lead a healthy and peaceful life. That is individuals 'successfully' integrate 'life' and work so as to achieve a satisfying quality of life, overall satisfaction and less strain or stress around juggling conflicting role demands (Blunsdon, et al, 2006). It encompasses fulfilment of multiple roles while maintaining a positive quality of life. Work life imbalance on the other hand, results in 'work-family conflict' i.e. the inability to fulfil family responsibilities because of work pressure, and 'family-work conflict' which reflects the inability to fulfil work obligations due to family pressures (Fox & Dwyer, 1999). It also has negative consequences as we shall see later in this paper.

The truth of the matter is that despite noticeable change in both workforce and gender equality, basic practices are still anchored to traditional gender roles. Men and women have the same amount of time at work but the entry of women into the labour force has resulted in additional roles for women rather than a redefinition of gender roles (Leineweber et al, 2012; Malhotra & Sachdeva, 2005, Lotte, 2011). In addition, men generally earn higher wages when compared to women. It is important to note that as much as wage gap exist between men and women there is also a leisure gap between them at home as most men do not share the work load at home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

While work and family dynamics have changed, the public and private policies and practices governing employment remain stuck in the past model of an ideal worker as a male breadwinner, with a supportive wife at home to care for the home front. The culture and organization of paid work, domestic care work, and community organizations remains grounded on the breadwinner-homemaker model (Bailyn et.al, 2001). These are generally shown by rigid non-flexible job expectations that are not considerate of employees' personal family responsibilities. From a Rational choice theory perspective, women continue to seek jobs and participate in the labor force despite the unfavorable conditions and poor work policies that interfere with family responsibilities.

Rational choice theory is of the view that people make decisions on the basis benefits and costs. For example women usually decide to participate in paid employment in addition to their household work for several structural factors. According to Hattery (2001) states that economic need, child costs and childcare availability motivates women to participate in formal employment. The same structural factors are also the basis for multiple tasking and work overload for many women in Botswana. For example, economic need has a strong influence on women's decision to engage in formal employment.

As it has been noted in the discussion above, women continue to shoulder the bulk of household duties compared to their male counterparts. This is so regardless of their age, educational, marital or cultural background. In Botswana most of the sources of the unequal allocation of duties could be associated to social and structural factors because the unequal division of labour in the home prevails regardless of the family type. Socialization process which is mainly accounted for by social learning theory plays a key role in the unequal division of labour between females and males in Botswana.

According to Social learning theory, people learn by observation and imitation. Children often learn some behaviours in their childhood through the process of socialization that becomes visible in childhood. From a very early age female children are assigned household duties that carry a high level of responsibilities while their male counterparts are not exposed to such duties. Participants in a male empowerment workshop that one of the authors conducted in 2012 lamented about how the way they were raised disadvantaged them. One of the participants said:

"You know one can't give what one does not have or one cannot do what he/she has not been taught. Some of us grew around with sisters, aunts and other females who performed almost everything in the household"

Formal employment is also a way of earning income in order to fend for their children and families. For example some of the income is used to pay child care costs because nowadays informal child care that used to be provided by relatives is scarce.

Therefore women are burdened with both their work loads and the care of children. In the context of Botswana, as well as in some countries, duties of a career wife with kids, for example include attending chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping for groceries, washing, taking care of children and the elderly, supervising children's homework, etc. Most men do not share household duties with their partners or other family members. For example, their contribution to household work is mostly limited to transporting children to and from school.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF WORK OVERLOAD ON WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND WOMEN'S LIFESTYLE

The fact that females shoulder the bulk load of household duties compared to their male counterparts has several implications both for the better and for the worst. First, on a positive note, it gives women the ability to multi-task, hence they become more empowered, more innovative, and more responsible than their male counterparts. Consequently, they excel even when they run their household single-handedly (i.e. without men). One of the participants in the, empowerment workshop said:

“You know even some of us who are married, we just relax coz we know that our wives will run the household. I for one, am very lucky and I think most of you are also very lucky coz Botswana women are hard workers, they work outside the home as well as inside. You know when we arrive home from work, my wife is always all over the house, helping kids with homework, bathing the kids and cooking at the same time. She is doing very well. She also initiates and coordinates family projects, as you might have seen our women in Botswana are very hard-working. I also know some friends of mine whose wives are coordinating and supervising family projects”

Although the words of the above man seem to indicate that the wife is managing, it is not clear whether the wife holds a similar view.

Moreover, women, especially those in urban areas participate in numerous activities outside the work and family environments that consume a lot of time. These include church activities¹, tertiary education², and social activities such as weddings, bridal showers, baby showers, house warming celebrations, kitchen and garden top-up parties as well as funerals. In social gatherings such as weddings and funerals, for example, women shoulder the bulk of responsibilities, just like in the home. In the context of Botswana, for example, men largely bring firewood, kill cattle and goats and then cook one dish of meat, while women are responsible for performing multiple duties such as cooking, washing and other social logistics.

On a negative note, a few participants asserted that when women perform the bulk of household duties together with their employment outside the home, this is not good because of several reasons. First, it gives children the impression that it is okay for women to do that and for men to just sit back. Second, it results in idleness for men and idleness breeds challenges in the family. For example, one of the men in the workshop said:

“You know what Prof, someone like me has a lot of time outside work, I send messages, I read newspapers, watch TV and sometimes I feel bored coz my wife always says she is tired even at night when I want to spend quality time with her”

The above quote implies that if a woman performs the bulk of the duties at home it negatively affects her physical and emotional health, affecting her ability to nourish her intimate relationship hence creates tension between herself and her partner. Butler et.al (2005) also highlights that conflicts due to work and family demands affect career satisfaction as well as fulfilment of marital roles.

Third, it adversely affects women's ability to spend quality time with family members (Annor, 2014) such as children. Tight work schedules together with long commuting time between home and work mean that employees have to arrive home late. Female participants in a workshop that one of the authors facilitated on family life³ lamented of the lack of quality time with their children. They said that because they perform multiple roles such as employee, student, wife, parent, sister-in law, daughter in law, etc, they are usually exhausted, tired short-temperedness, lack patience when dealing with children. They discussed how pressures from heavy workloads impacted negatively on their family obligations. Some of them mentioned that the pressure to excel at work made them exhausted thereby limiting their ability to perform effectively in the family arena.

The finding that employment outside the home adversely affects parents' ability to spend quality time with children is not a new one. It has also been noted by previous researchers. For example, Bailyn et.al (2001) indicate that outside the impact on health, there is the aspect of time squeeze, which means that many working adults, particularly single parents

¹There are more women than men in Botswana churches as well as across the globe.

²A majority of students who enrol for evening classes in Botswana's institutions of higher learning are women (.Maudeni, T. 2010)

³The workshop was organised by social workers in Mahalapye in 2013.

have difficulty providing the ordinary daily attention needed for the well-being of family members. Many other aspects of life outside work such as schools, medical services operate on the assumption that someone (more especially a woman) is available during a workday to care for children after school, to take family members as hours of operation fall with hours of work. Many working women at times find themselves with no one to care for the children with those who cannot afford childcare having to leave the children alone, with serious consequences for safety, health, learning, supervision, and nurturance. In some instances even those who can afford childcare face an inadequate supply of stable, quality help (Bailyn et.al 2001).

Fourth, because women are so used to performing the bulk of family-responsibilities, some actually end up becoming perfectionists (Provide Supporting Evidence or Reference) While this can be viewed in positive terms, it also has far-reaching repercussions. For instance, it can lead women to criticise, blame and discourage men when they try to assist. Some men who participated in the male empowerment workshop that has been mentioned earlier lamented how their efforts to assist their wives with household and child care chores have been met by criticism because the wives are hardly satisfied or appreciative of their efforts to offer a helping hand. One of the married participants at the workshop lamented:

“You know my wife is a perfectionist, she even supervises me when I am playing or holding the kids or changing the kids’ diapers and this makes me discouraged, yet she often blames me for not helping”

Fifth, time spent on family responsibilities is a major constraint on women’s work (Annor, 2014). Some participants on a Ghanaian study of managing work and family demands indicated that women with young children (under 10 years) experienced interruptions to their work as a result of family responsibilities such as the time they spend taking children to and from school, as well as in attending to sick children (Provide Source). This finding is similar to sentiments that were expressed by some women who participated in a leadership seminar for women at the University of Botswana in that was held in March 2012⁴. One of them said:

“You know as a career woman with young children it is not easy. I have enrolled them in pre-school, but you find that they often get sick (such as catching the flu virus from one another), and I end up taking some time off work to nurse them.....”

The above quote corroborate Hyman, Scholarios and Baldry (2005)’ assertion that women think it is their responsibility to take care of a sick child, especially if both parents are working. Lastly, extended overtime work-family imbalance may lead to poor mental and physical health, higher levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, panic attacks, insomnia, poor appetite, fatigue, regular ‘flu and colds, likelihood to engage in problem drinking, increased levels of anxiety and depression (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003; Frone et.al, 1996, Allen, 2000 Rose et.al, 2007).

4. WOMEN’S COPING STRATEGIES

It is important to acknowledge that by and large most women are aware that combining work and family is not easy, however, they continue to do so because of several factors. These include: the knowledge that maternal employment does not have detrimental effects on children, while poverty which is associated with unemployment is harmful to children (Halpern & Cheung, 2008); the desire to fend for their families, and the desire to serve as role models to children. As a result, women utilize the following strategies to cope with the work load:

Domestic workers and child care services

In Botswana, rural-urban migration of women in search for employment also plays a part in increase women’s work. Working mothers move from rural to urban areas leaving behind members of the extended family who in the past were able to assist in household and childcare duties. Relatives such as siblings, mothers, grandmothers, friends, and neighbours that working women (married or single mothers) relied on in the past are themselves now in the labour force or live in elsewhere. So women find themselves having to juggle all the responsibilities (Moen, 2001; Heymann, 2000 as quoted by Bailyn et.al, 2001). The high cost of living also makes it difficult to stay with relatives (Kooijman, 1978). Women have to find the means to care for their children and that include sourcing both domestic workers and sending children to formal care services.

⁴ The seminar was organised by the then Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs who was a lady Professor. It was meant to empower women at the University of Botswana about how they can balance family and work-life. The second author was a participant in that seminar.

A study by Muasya (2016) to examine the work-family balance options of women working in Kenyan Universities within the context of changing national domestic workers' legislation revealed that women with older children preferred to send their children to day care centres while those with young children preferred to higher domestic workers to look after children and some women who cannot cope with the cost of employing domestic workers on a full time basis sought domestic workers on a part time basis depending on their needs (Muasya, 2016). Similar to women in Kenya (Muasya, 2016) , women in Botswana generally attempt to ensure that they meet the demands of both work and child parenting by sourcing the help of domestic workers and when they are at work as well as sending children to formal day care centres (Mapedzahama, 2014; Ntshwarang, In Progress). The employment of domestic workers in for household help is also widely practiced in Botswana (MacDonald & Mogwe, 1996; Letsie-Taole, 1993; Tshwaane, 1998). Domestic workers are mostly live-in helpers who perform chores such as cooking, cleaning, and bathing children. It is important to note that in sub-Saharan African, Botswana included, many households including female headed households, can afford to have a live in household helper because domestic labour is cheap.

Unpaid kin help

Despite the general claim that kinship help has deteriorated as a result of dismantling extended family structure, many employed women in Sub Saharan Africa such as Botswana still get help from relatives in the care of children and undertaking household work. For example, in a situation where parents cannot afford paid domestic work, they usually source the help of female relatives who would provide help in the household without any expectation to be paid (Mapedzahama, 2014; Ntshwarang, In Progress). A study on work and family in Zimbabwe also revealed that female relatives are an immediate social support, where working mothers cannot afford formal child care services.

5. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Work life balance and the problems that its mismatch causes for working families more especially women and the economy will not go away, nor will they be solved if each of the key role players who should share responsibilities for addressing them continue to ignore the issue or work alone in trying to address the challenges. Nor will it be easy to return to work and family life of the past. Reluctance to recognize that the problems of work and family are societal has relegated responsibility for dealing with these issues to individuals and families who are now showing signs that they cannot do it on their own. It is therefore important to note that integrating work and family life requires collaborative efforts on the part of all the key actors who have vested interest in the issue to be able to see meaningful difference. Unless the government, implement work related policies that ensures implementation of strategies that are sensitive to the needs of families, employers will continue to assume that families, especially women have adequate resources to balance work-family demands (Muasya, 2016).

Therefore there is need to provide gender responsive labour market policies that will recognise women's multiple roles and create a conducive environment that will recognise their contributions in both the paid work and their unpaid work at family and community level.

Employers, unions, professional associations and advocacy groups, government, and communities all play a critical role integrating work and family life, but independently none of them can solve the problem. The government of Botswana more especially must become a catalyst for innovation, change and facilitate the different actors in the work-family interface by enacting comprehensive family friendly policies and guidelines that facilitate work life balance and ensure compliance (Bailyn et.al 2001). Establishment and implementation of the policies will encourage flexible work practice that unions, professional associations and advocacy groups can be custodians of.

Hechanova (2008) further adds that work-life balance is dependent upon two salient concepts of flexibility and choice regardless of how work-life balance is defined. Flexibility has to do with a person's ability to meet the demands of work and family responsibilities while choice is related to a person's control over work and family arrangements. Duxbury and Higgins (2001) adds that perceived flexibility has positive effect on work to family interference as it enables employees to better co-ordinate their work and non-work activities. They further suggest that employers support also plays an important role as a supportive manager who is a good communicator and focuses on output rather than hours, generates goodwill and respect from employees. This in turn make the employee to feel that the management is supporting them in career development hence enabling the employees to balance work and family responsibilities.

At personal level, women should utilize and maximise readily available resources. For example, women can create work-family balance by establishing support groups in their neighbourhoods and communities where they can share ideas on how to balance work and family demands. Such groups can be a source of both social and emotional support.

It is important to note that without empirical research on balancing work and family life in Botswana it will be difficult to establish programs or policies that address the challenges experienced by working mothers and other women. Further research is necessary to identify gaps in the social system as well as at personal levels in order to successfully assist working women to achieve work-life balance. Action research can play a critical role in establishing ways in which women can be supported in their struggle to have work-family balance.

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