Chapter 3
Work and Family in a Cross-Cultural Context: A Comparative Review of Work–Family Experiences of Working Mothers in Australia and Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Recent years have seen a growth in research and literature, as well as policy interest in the interface between work and family domains. In particular, this interest has been in women's subjective experiences of the work–family interface, specifically on how they negotiate the demands of their paid work and family. Much of the resultant research evidence has been used as a base for family and employment policies targeted at facilitating women's labor force participation. A major limitation of this work, however, is that it has been carried out in predominantly affluent countries of the West such as the United States, Europe and Australia, and in highly industrialised Asian societies like Japan. It is also based primarily on studies conducted with (oftentimes, largely) white, middle-class workers. Relatively little research, has been done with or in other regions of the world, especially those that are still developing (Poster and Prasad 2005). Yet, as O'Brien (2012, p. 8) notes, "across developing countries and emergent economies, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities is increasingly becoming an important phenomenon with high policy relevance…" Therefore by ignoring developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America the current research on work–family interface is also ignoring a range of global variation (Poster and Prasad 2005).

By exploring the work–family experiences of working mothers in Zimbabwe therefore, this chapter addresses a significant gap in African-based research on work–family interface. As Maerten (2004, p. 3) pointed out, while it can no longer be taken for granted that the public and private spheres do not "necessarily hold a contradiction" for African women the nexus between women's economic and familial roles is still rarely thought about in the region, and it remains neglected in

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analyses women's working lives. All in all, sub-Saharan African scholars have typically studied work and family domains separately. In Zimbabwe, neither feminist literature nor literature on the status of working women have considered the experiences or patterns of working women's work and family life intersection. In consequence very little is known about the work–family experiences of working women in the country. However, given that Zimbabwean women, like most of their counterparts in other parts of the world (see for example Aluko and Alfa 1985; Di Domenico et al. 1987; Fapohunda 1982; Lewis 1982) are traditionally the primary care givers who seek to raise children while earning an income, it is inevitable that like their Western counterparts, they experience the strain of negotiating between work and familial roles (see, Industrial Psychology Consultants 2010; Mapedzahama 2007).

This chapter draws on findings from qualitative interviews conducted with women in Harare, Zimbabwe and Adelaide, Australia to analyse how working women in the two cities negotiate the 'borderlands' between the various work sites of paid work and unpaid familial work. The aim of the study on which the chapter is based was to reveal not only the commonality and diversity of the women's experiences, but also the commonalities that can exist within a diversity of experiences. Bearing in mind the distinct cultural contexts of the two countries, the rationale for comparing the two groups of women drew partly from theories arguing that restricting cross-national comparative research to 'most similar' countries constrains the usefulness of comparative research while selecting countries that differ as much as possible makes it possible for theories and social phenomena to be checked and compared under the most 'unfavourable' conditions at differing stages of economic, political and social development.

While some of the research findings discussed herein confirm and contribute to research undertaken into women's workforce experiences over the past 30 years or so in Australia, the study sheds *new* light on the work–family experiences of working women in Zimbabwe. Perhaps more importantly then, the findings provide an overview of hitherto unknown qualitative data on the nature, consequences, challenges and opportunities presented by the synchronisation of work–family roles by working mothers in Zimbabwe. In that respect, the discussion herein is not only exploratory, but also theory-building for the study of work and family research in Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa in general. The main contention in this chapter is that while negotiating work and family life may not necessarily (re)present the same magnitude of burden or conflict for the Zimbabwean working mothers interviewed for the research (as it does for their Australian counterparts), it still presents them with significant challenges which point to a need for more in-depth sociological investigations.

The chapter progresses in three overlapping sections. The first section: "Data Set" presents an overview of the data sources and a brief overview of the study from which this chapter draws. The Second section: "Work and Family policy context in Zimbabwe and Australia" provides a brief overview of the work and family policy context within which the working mothers in the two sites are located. This section contextualises the discussions presented in this chapter.

Thereafter, two main study findings are presented in the third section: "Findings". The first theme (The Everyday Context) discusses the strategies that women in the two sites employ in negotiating paid work and family: employing paid domestic workers for employed mothers in Harare, and part time work for women in Australia. The second theme (How the women feel about negotiating work and family) discusses how the participants talk about their own perceptions of work–family negotiations, highlighting the similarities and diversity of women's everyday work–family realities and demonstrating that what can appear as diversity at first can have underlying commonalities. The chapter concludes by (re)articulating the significance of cross-cultural analyses in work–family research for family policy

Data Sources

The data are derived from an exploratory study undertaken between 2004 and 2005 with the aim to uncover the routine, commonplace, day-to-day activities of women's work–family negotiations in a cross-cultural context: Zimbabwe and Australia. The central focus was the women's everyday contexts and everyday experiences, specifically the daily challenges and opportunities the women face as they cope with the demands of paid work and family. Smith's (1987) notion of interpreting the "everyday as problematic" (discussed in detail later in the chapter), provided the framework for focus.

In total, 30 women (15 in each research site) whose ages ranged from 20 to 50 years were interviewed. The target population for the study was employed married or cohabiting women who work no less than 20 h per week and have at least one child of pre-school age (5 years or below). The decision to limit the criteria to married or cohabiting women was made to enable the exploration of questions related to household gender division of labour among spouses or partners. On the other hand, the decision to focus on women with at least one pre-schooler was made against the background of earlier research (see for example, Spitze and Ward 1995, cited in Tsuya and Bumpass 2004; Carlson et al. 1995) showing that relative to older children, the presence of younger children increases the amount of housework to be done and hence as greater demands on parents' time and energy.

The study was located across various sectors: retail industry; hospitality; teaching; nursing; call centre utility industry. In Zimbabwe women engaged in various informal sector activities were also studied. Semi-structured, open-ended, conversational style interviews were used to collect data. According to Reinharz (1992, p. 18), an open-ended interview research "explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to formulate theory"; it thus maximises discovery and description. The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 min in duration, with the average time being one hour. The interviews in Harare tended to be longer than those in Adelaide. This can be attributed to the fact that the women in Harare were talking about, and reflecting on, aspects of their work–family experiences in ways

they had not done before. While all of the interviews in Adelaide were conducted in English, all of the interviews in Harare were conducted mainly in the vernacular, Shona. These were later transcribed and translated to English. It is for this reason that all the excerpts herein are in English.

Findings

Work and Family Policy Context in Zimbabwe and Australia

This section outlines three interventions which can have significant implications for the reconciliation and work and family responsibilities—parental leave policies, flexible work arrangements and childcare—and their availability in Zimbabwe and Australia.

Parental Leave Policies

It is widely agreed that existence of comprehensive parental leave provisions (the paid or unpaid time that parents get off, or are entitled to get off, to care for a child) have a substantial impact on women's labour force participation and work–family balance. It emerged from this study that there are significant differences in the parental leave policies in Zimbabwe and Australia. Like most other sub-Saharan African countries (Mokomane 2011; Smit 2011), Zimbabwe does not have any paternity leave provisions. The only parental leave available is the employer-funded maternity which entitles working pregnant women to at least 21 days before their due date, and 98 days off after the birth of a child, paid at 100 % of their normal pay (see Smit 2011). The paid maternity leave scheme in Zimbabwe also includes a "right to nursing breaks" provision where:

> A female employee breastfeeding her child has the right take at least one hour or two 30 minutes periods for each working day, as she may choose during normal working hours, to nurse her child. However, the grant of such break shall be done without disrupting the normal production processes (Mywage.com/Zimbabwe 2012).

It is noteworthy, however, that since a the large proportion of working women in Zimbabwe are employed in the informal sector (Ngwenya and Luebker 2009), a significant proportion of them do not have access to paid maternity leave as it is typically employer-funded. Conversely, while Australia was, until recently one of only two OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries without any parental leave scheme (Broomhill and Sharp 2012) this changed in 2011 when a national, government funded parental leave scheme was introduced. According to Broomhill and Sharp (2012, p. 1):

> The new Australian arrangements comprise an industrial relations provision for an extended period of unpaid parental leave available for the majority of workers and a separate legislative provision of government financial support equal to the minimum wage for working parents for a lesser period up to 18 weeks.

Worthy to note also is that Australia's national parental leave policy incorporates paternity leave. As the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009, p. 1) explains:

> If a primary carer [for example the mother] returns to work before they have received all of their PPL [parental paid leave] entitlement, they may be able to transfer the unused part of their PPL to another caregiver (for example the father) who meets eligibility requirements.

Prior to the introduction of this national scheme, most employees in Australia had access to parental leave "through industrial awards, workplace agreements, company policies or legislation covering public sector employees" (Broomhill and Sharp 2012, p. 4). As such employee entitlements varied significantly. For example, maternity leave conditions were variable with some paid and some unpaid depending on the sector. Employees such as casual workers who were not covered under such agreements had no access to paid maternity leave (Ochiltree 1991).

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to adapt the way they work as well as how and when they work, with the aim to accommodate non-work responsibilities. These arrangements include, for example, job sharing; flexitime; telework or telecommuting; flexible or reduced hours such as part-time or casual work; and compressed work-week (working longer hours for fewer days in the week). While the availability of flexible work arrangements in Zimbabwe is almost non-existent, workers in Australia have access to several flexible work arrangements. For example, the National Employment Standards) introduced by the Labour Government in 2010, "includes a right for certain employees to request flexible working arrangements (such as changes in hours of work) from their employer. "An employer can only refuse such a request on 'reasonable business grounds'" (Fair Work Ombudsman Australia 2012). It is largely because of the availability of flexible work arrangements that women in Australia often choose part time work as a strategy for balancing work and family responsibilities as shall be discussed later in the chapter.

Childcare Centres

Out-of-home childcare in Zimbabwe is not only limited but it is also privatised and there are essentially no government funded childcare centres. As such, out-of-home childcare is very expensive and out of reach for many employees,

particularly those in the low-income bracket. It follows then, that use of out-of-home childcare centres is generally limited to those in the middle or upper classes who can afford the high costs involved. Cheaper, more sustainable childcare practices for most working parents in Zimbabwe involve utilising live-in paid domestic workers or live-in unpaid kin-care. Although in 2005 the Government of Zimbabwe introduced a mandatory early childhood education and care (ECEC) programme with the aim to enable ordinary working parents avoid the high fees in private early childhood development centres, while still making sure their children are cared for, this programme is generally viewed in the country as an "extension of formal education, not childcare" (Johnson et al. 1997, p. 199). Indeed, in their study, Johnson and colleagues found that most Zimbabwean working parents with children in pre-schools reported that they utilised other forms of childcare such as paid domestic workers or kin-care, more than they did with the national ECEC programme.

Conversely, in the Australian context out-of-home childcare is not only the norm but it is also crucial for working parents. Childcare centres in the country are "seen as both a mechanism to support labour force participation and as an important form of early learning and education" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010, p. 2). To this end, the Australian government plays a major role in the provision of childcare, as the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2010, p. 2) further asserts:

> There has been a long history of the Commonwealth [central] Government providing funding to assist families to access early childhood education and child care. The Commonwealth Government first provided financial assistance for child care in 1972. Today, the majority of Commonwealth funding assists families with their child care costs. Early childhood education and child care funding has more than doubled in the last five years, increasing from $1.7 billion in 2004–05 to $3.7 billion in 2008–09 and is expected to further increase to $4.4 billion in 2012–13. During the next four years, the Commonwealth will invest $16.1 billion in early childhood education and child care.

While the "childcare fee relief" that is provided on a sliding scale—with those on the lowest incomes having full entitlement (Ochiltree 1991)—is available to most parents in Australia, the State does not fund all childcare centres. Rather, childcare is provided publicly by the government; by private organisations; or by community or not-for-profit organisations. Irrefutably, therefore, childcare is widely used in Australia and, indeed, the last few decades have seen an increase in the number of children in formal childcare centres (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2010).

The Everyday Context

As earlier stated, the central focus of the study on which this chapter is based is the everyday contexts and experiences of work and family negotiations of working mothers in Harare and Adelaide. Particular interest was on their routine,

commonplace, day-to-day activities of moving between the 'worlds' of paid work and family. According to Smith (1987, p. 89):

> The everyday world is the world we experience directly. It is the world in which we are located physically and socially. Our experience arises in it as conditions, occasions, objects, possibilities, relevancies, presences and so on, organized in and by the practices and methods through which we supply and discover organisation. It is necessarily local—because that is how we must be—and necessarily historical.

In the study, interpreting the "everyday" was significant not only because it located the women in their "bodily and material existence" (Smith 1987, p. 97) but it also provided an interconnection between their 'public' and the 'private' worlds. This facilitated the in-depth analyses of the struggles and resistance that the women encounter on a daily basis. Thus, the experiences presented in this section provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of the women's everyday work and family experiences.

An important finding of the study reaffirmed other findings on women's work and gendered household division of labour in both Zimbabwe and Australia. In essence it was evident that women in both countries are still responsible for the major share of housework. While most of the women in Adelaide reported that their husbands did some share of the housework, they also reported that it was still the women who, in the words of Hochschild (1989, p. 20) did the "lion's share of work at home, do most of the daily chores and take responsibility for the running of the home" The women in Harare on the other hand, reported that men virtually did not do *any* share of the housework and/or childcare.

Despite of the similarity in the burden of care, the women in both sites use different strategies to negotiate the demands of work and family life. Three strategies particularly stood out in the two study sites: reliance on paid domestic workers and on unpaid kin help in Zimbabwe, and part-time work in Australia.

Paid Domestic Workers

For all the participants in Harare, negotiating between paid work and family was facilitated by the presence of a live-in paid domestic worker who assisted with household chores and childcare. This is consistent with previous research showing that in many developing countries couples are more likely to outsource domestic tasks to assist them in their work–family negotiations if both spouses or partners work full-time (see for example, Venn 2003). This is made particularly feasible by the fact that in most of these countries labour is relatively cheap and the high unemployment levels tend to force people into poorly paid, unregulated jobs such as domestic work. In their work on women's work and child-bearing in Ghana, for example, Blanc and Lloyd (1994) noted that child-bearing and child-rearing are not necessarily synonymous, and that the opportunities for cash available to women as domestic workers make paid domestic work a readily available source of childcare. It is not surprising then, that for most working mothers in Zimbabwe

paid domestic workers were found to be the most common strategy used to negotiate the demands of paid work and family life.

All in all, in contemporary Zimbabwe where urbanisation has significantly changed the extended family structure, working mothers no longer have ready access to traditional sources of help. Thus unlike their counterparts in the more industrialised countries who devise childcare arrangements from a limited range of out-of-home, privatised childcare facilities, many Zimbabwean women often left their children—including infants—at home with a female helper who would care for the children while the mother was away. Sometimes, as in the case of informal sector cross-border trading women (see Mapedzahama 2007, 2009), the time away can be several weeks:

> When I left him [the son] the first time he wasn't quite two months old, yes, two months… There was nothing else I could do; I had to go across the border to Botswana for trade. Luckily the paid domestic worker I had, actually she is the same one that I still have … She is a mature woman and she very competent with children. So she took good care of him for me (Mother of five, informal sector cross-border trader, Harare).

All in all the employment of live-in paid domestic workers is a phenomenon that has been normalised within Zimbabwean culture. Having another female in the household who can take care of some of the household chores seems to suggest that women in Zimbabwe can engage in full-time labour force participation, perhaps because the women are relieved of some domestic duties.

Nevertheless, a closer analysis of the relationship between the women in the Harare group, their paid domestic workers, and the implications for the participants' work family interface exposes two important paradoxes. The first is that of the additional responsibilities of 'supervisor' inherent in the employment of a domestic worker. While all of the participants in Harare acknowledged that their work–family negotiations would be virtually unmanageable without assistance from paid domestic workers, they still did not think of paid domestic workers as competent enough to manage the household without constant supervision. The women's narratives of how paid domestic workers assist in their work–family negotiations suggest that as much as employing paid domestic workers helps ease the burden of negotiating work and family, it also adds to the burden of housework by adding another role: that of 'supervisor'. One woman in Harare explained her situation as follows:

> When I come home from [my paid] work I have to check everything in the house, so I am starting another job. Even though the domestic worker is doing some of the work, I am also working because when I get home I have to inspect [what the domestic worker has done] as well. Checking if she has done her job, the duties for the day, I check that everything has been done properly. What about this or that? Has the laundry been done properly? … So I am doing some work too, it is work as well (Mother of four, teacher, Harare).

The above mother's statement seems to imply that she does not see her role of 'supervising' the paid domestic worker as any different from supervising staff in more formal workplaces. In this way, supervising the paid domestic worker

constitutes the "second shift" that Hochschild (1989) discussed in relation to Western women's paid work and familial responsibilities. Moreover, given that the "stalled revolution"[1] that Hochschild proposed in the 1980s seems to still persist, working mothers in Zimbabwe are still expected to do housework, and when they cannot fulfil this expectation due to paid work commitments, the role of supervising paid domestic workers falls to them. This role, as the interviewed women concurred, adds to their burden of the second shift. Hence, while it could be argued that the presence of an additional adult female helper means that the women in Harare are able to utilise a strategy which reduces anxiety and distress, it also means additional responsibilities for the women.

The second paradox relates to the perceived implications of having a paid domestic worker for one's image as a wife and mother. The women admitted that while having doemstic help was instrumental in their ability to participate in paid work, they also felt that employing a domestic worker to do what are societal expectations of them as women, mothers and wives has negative implications for their socio-cultural images:

> It does help a lot (having a live-in domestic helper); it's just that as a married woman you don't want the helper to do all the work for you; it seems like you are shifting your responsibilities to her. So whatever you can do yourself when you are home, you do (Mother of one, teacher, Harare).

The above mother's statement not only highlights the strength and persistence of gender roles, it also exposes the contradiction of societal expectations and change. There is a slow but emerging shift in societal expectations that if a mother is in the paid workforce she can enlist the help of paid domestic workers to assist with housework. At the same time, however, there is still a sense of the stigma attached to not fully meeting traditional gender role expectations of motherhood, wifehood and womanhood. The mother in the above quotation, for example, is fully aware of the persistence of cultural constructs and expectations of motherhood, womanhood and wifehood that still construct women as responsible for housework, hence the feeling that getting someone else to help with the housework is "like shifting responsibilities". It is largely for this reasons that many Zimbabwean working mothers still endeavour to adhere to cultural expectations: they continue to strive to do household chores and provide care for their family members even when participating in full time paid work. The following statement by another mother illustrates:

> It is a mother's duty to teach her children the norms, morals and values of our culture. Like here in the cities it's very tricky because it is easy for children to pick up on lots of other

[1] According to Hochschild (1989) a 'stalled' gender roles and gender behaviour revolution refers to the disjuncture between the rate at which women have entered the (full time) labour market (the increase in female labour force participation) and men's participation in unpaid household and care work that still leaves women overburdened with paid work and familial responsibilities. Even though men are taking on more responsibility for domestic work than before, women still do the bigger share, even when engaged in full time work.

> bad values and norms, so a mother has to make sure that the children grow up with proper values and are well-mannered… But it's like when you are not there most of the time—like in my case I go out of the country—it becomes difficult. You leave the children with the domestic worker and that is when they (the children) misbehave a lot, because they can say that the domestic worker is only just a worker, "so she cannot tell us (to do) anything because she is not our mother"… Some things a father can do like teaching his son men's duties such as cattle herding… or chopping firewood… but for a lot of the things, it is still expected that as the mother, you are the one who is with the children most of the time (looking after them), so you should teach them the cultural values, women's duties and men's duties.

This mother believes that it is a key role of a mother to socialise her children in the norms and morals of their culture, and she does not think that either her husband or the domestic worker who looks after her children while she is away can do so adequately in her absence. In a way this finding also exposes a division of labour in the socialisation of children in many African societies, which reinforces 'mother' as the primary carer regardless of her economic responsibilities.

Unpaid Kin Help

Where a working mothers' salary or wage does not allow for the employment of a paid domestic worker—as if often the case due to the increasing costs associated with hiring such help in light of the economic crisis in the country—the help of relative is often sought. The relative is typically a young girl who, like a domestic worker, "lives-in" with the family. This is in line with the customary practice in Zimbabwe, as in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa where women were helped with household chores by their older daughters and younger female relatives. This is even more so in contemporary Zimbabwe, with "the absence of well-developed and established formal social support systems to help the … [working mothers], the … family has become the main provider of these services" (Takyi 2011, p. 1). Somewhat similarly, some of the women in the Adelaide group also mentioned that they regularly receive help from extended family, particularly their own mothers. This finding is consistent with other research in Australia (for example, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005; Goodfellow 2003; Goodfellow and Laverty 2003) that points to an increase in 'grand caring' or grandparent care. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) for example, in 2002 grandparents provided 31 % of the total hours of childcare provided in the week the survey was conducted.

The key difference between the participants in the two groups of women, however, is that those in Harare typically provided food and board in exchange for their relatives' assistance with domestic chores and childcare. Conversely, for the women in the Adelaide group grandparent help was provided at no cost, whatsoever, to the women. Indeed, none of the women interviewed spoke of paying (or giving gifts to) their mothers for the childcare. Another difference is that the historic low use of domestic help by working women in Australia (Wolcott and Glezer 1995) seems to continue even though the majority of women are now likely

to be in paid work. Evidence shows that there is still little indication that working mothers are employing household help to assist with domestic and caregiving chores and fact, none of the women expressed any wish to employ or even to look for paid domestic workers. Only after being prompted on the topic did some of the women say that it would be a 'nice' thing to do, and that it could make their role juggling easier. However, the women cited the expenses involved in employing a paid domestic helper as the major deterrent and many explained that they would not be able to justify employing a domestic helper since they worked part-time. One of the participants commented that:

> I do all that (household chores) myself. I would [get paid domestic help] if I worked full-time. I'd get someone into do it … like basically if I worked 5 days a week, I'd get someone into do my washing and that … Yeah, coz I could afford it … Also if I worked full-time I would not have the time to do all that sort of stuff … (Mother of two, call centre worker, Adelaide).

Part-Time Work

Due to relatively strict labour laws (governing wages and working conditions for paid domestic work) the employment of domestic workers is rare in Australia. Indeed, none of the women interviewed in Adelaide reported that she had a paid domestic worker. Rather, an important strategy that the women employ to confront their challenges of combining work and family roles challenges is part time work. Most women (13 of the 15 interviewed) worked part-time, ranging from a minimum of 20 h to a maximum of 30 h per week. In contrast, all of the women interviewed in Harare worked full-time. Explaining why part-time work was her option, a mother of two in Adelaide responded as follows:

> I just find that working part-time is really a good compromise for me at the moment. I guess it just means that I can look after my family, my kids, but at the same time continue to work. I love my job, I love working in customer service (Mother of two, call centre worker, Adelaide).

While part-time work seems to offer women the "best of both worlds" (Higgins et al. 2000; Pocock 2001) some of those in this type of employment lament the hectic pace involved in balancing work and family life:

> Yeah, the only thing about working part-time is that it seems there is never enough time. I mean I go to work in the morning, finish up, say at 3 p.m., pick up the kids from school or after school care or day care or whatever, start on tea as soon as I get home and stuff like that… so there's really no time in there for anything else, it's always either work or kids' stuff. So it's like you are working part-time but you are even busier … (Mother of three, nurse, Adelaide).

The above statement affirms the view of some commentators such as Higgins, et al. (2000, p. 19) who state that when women work part-time, they "figure … they can do *everything* (my emphasis)… yet, looking at their everyday lives, they were never not working". In the same vein, Watson et al. (2003, p. 49) argued that,

the "mere existence of reduced hours in a job does not mean that part-time work… can fully meet the needs of the workers who seek reduced hours". Overall, therefore, it is noteworthy that while part-time work can, in some cases, facilitate easier work–family negotiations, it can also enhance time-poverty and increase burnout among working women.

Furthermore, many part-time jobs are characterised by routine tasks, employment insecurity and negative perceptions that "part-time [workers] are committed primarily to their families rather than to their work … [and therefore] lack career ambition" (Charlesworth and Whittenbury 2007, p. 39). Such negative perceptions result in part-time work being characterised by limited advancement opportunities that "threaten to ghettoise the women who work these schedules" (Higgins et al. 2000, p. 18). Linked to this is the financial disadvantage or inadequate income associated with working part-time. Women with family responsibilities "are forced to make trade-offs when taking up part-time employment" (Watson et al. 2003, p. 149), trading off the reduced hours they seek for poorer wages and poorer conditions.

In the African context, informal sector work has been cited for providing a somewhat similar level of flexibility as part-time work. Some scholars argue that by doing informal sector work located in the home or close to the home, women are better able to combine economic work with childcare; care of old, disabled or sick family members; as well as other domestic responsibilities (Elder and Schmidt 2004; Lingam 2005; Loewenson 1998). However, the findings from this study do not seem to full support this notion and as I have reported elsewhere (Mapedzahama 2007, p. 201):

> The reality for women in the informal sector is that their roles cannot be easily compartmentalised into domestic and public lives, instead, they are constantly intertwined … Women in the informal economy also perform a juggling act that is constantly changing. In fact … the dilemma of work and family can be "serious for women… [in the informal sector] as they are responsible for the success of their own…" (Kim & Ling 2001, p.204) as well as the welfare and survival of their families.

How Women Feel About Negotiating Work and Family

The interviews in both Adelaide and Harare probed the women to talk about how they felt about the way they negotiated between work and family. The women generally reported feeling that their day is divided into specific blocks of time units: dropping off children at school or childcare; picking them up; rushing them to some extra-curricular activity; doing the shopping or being at work. They felt that they always had to rush to be somewhere or that they were doing something all the time. The overall feeling was that negotiating work and family responsibilities was difficult. The following statement summarises the women's sentiments in this regard:

> It is a very hard thing to do [negotiating paid work and family] I won't lie. It is very hard. And it will never be easy doing this work that we do. But there is nothing else you can do. Because as mothers, the reason we work is to try and meet the cost [of living], but even that is still difficult to do, the prices for everything keep going up. But if you put in more time at work so that you can earn more money, the home front suffers, and then sometimes you just have to take some time off work to concentrate on your family responsibilities [sighs]. Raising a family is very hard; you have to be strong as a mother to sustain both sides [paid working and family responsibility]. (Mother of five, informal sector cross border trader, Harare).

Additionally, the women in both sites talked about the burden of feeling like they were always in "thinking mode … planning the next move" (mother of two, Adelaide), and (re)arranging the lives of their families, figuring out who needs what, who needs to go where and what the family will eat. Hence, even though women in both sites felt the effects of engaging in paid work were more positive than negative for them (especially for financial purposes), they still spoke of the negatives in terms of work–family interaction. An important similarity in the way the women in both sites talked about this challenge is the management of time. Most of the women spoke of the importance of 'managing' their time well so that they could perform daily tasks or duties. For example, one woman in Adelaide explained that:

> You have to be organised: I think every mum is a time manager to the maximum. You've gotta be always thinking about things in advance: always thinking, making lists. That's what I have got to do. (Mother of one, retail worker, Adelaide).

The women in Harare echoed similar sentiments. They explained that, in spite of the support they got from extended family and paid domestic workers, they were still solely responsible for all the planning for the household, particularly in terms of the day-to-day management including the supervision of domestic workers. As one participant pointed out:

> You have to be good at planning. Even with the paid domestic worker you still have to lay out what needs to be done for the day while you are at work, otherwise nothing really gets done. (Mother of one, data capturing clerk, Harare).

Another Harare participant concurred:

> Aah, the situation (working motherhood) really needs for you to be a good time planner because the paid domestic worker does not plan anything; that is the mother's role. Her [the domestic worker] role is to carry out whatever you have planned for her … It's hard … making sure that things don't turn into chaos when you are not there. (Mother of three, receptionist, Harare).

The women in Harare felt that the role of 'household planner' added to the burden of everyday negotiations. Some women even talked about regularly calling their homes from work to either advise the paid domestic worker about tasks that need completing, or to confirm that tasks have been performed. One could argue that this is an important example of the blurring of the boundaries between familial responsibilities and paid work, or what Western literature on work–family interface cites as family interference with work.

Interestingly, while the mothers in both Harare and Adelaide talk about time-management, only mothers in Adelaide reported 'feeling rushed'. A notable number (ten) of the women in Adelaide, but none in the Harare group, talked of feeling that they were 'always in a rush' or 'in a hurry' to be somewhere or to get things done, as one explained:

> Oh, you know working as well, it's like running here and running there … sometimes I think oh, it's all too much, running here and running there. But … I'm a pretty organised person as well … when you are a working mum and you've got kids, and you're running here and there, you've gotta be organised (Mother of two, call centre worker, Adelaide).

The difference in 'time-poverty' between the two groups of women can be attributed to the availability of *live-in* paid domestic workers or *live-in kin* to women in Harare. The extended family networks in Zimbabwe, and the relative ease with which childcare is outsourced or obtained (for example when grandmothers, other relatives and older children take care of the young), provide mothers with additional help that eases feelings and experiences of time-poverty. One could speculate here that it is because African mothers do not present as 'time-poor' as their western counterparts, that some scholars argue that childcare and paid work are compatible and that the work–family debate is a non-issue for African women. Clearly, the availability of paid and unpaid household assistance makes it easier for the Zimbabwean women to *better* manage paid work and family responsibilities compared to their Australian counterparts. However, this cannot be taken to imply that paid work and family in Zimbabwe are easily compatible or that they do not present a problem for the women.

Conclusion

The data presented and discussed in this chapter reaffirms debates that "the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities is increasingly becoming an important phenomenon with high policy relevance in many sub-Saharan Africa" (Mokomane 2011, p. 5), as it has been in most Western contexts. The comparative approach in the broader study highlighted that regardless of their socio-economic status, or the degree of hardship they endure, working mothers in developing and developed countries experience surprisingly similar everyday work–family realities, although they tend to employ different coping strategies. Overall the findings show that the "duality of [women's] roles is universal, [it is only] the *magnitude of burden* [that] distinguishes the woman of the south from her sister in the north" (Mbire-Barungi 1999, p. 438). Although some cultural and national differences may exist that result in differences in the way women juggle between work and family, there are still some elemental relationships between the 'worlds' of paid work and familial relationships across national boundaries that lead to similar outcomes in the way that women negotiate the two.

By drawing out the commonalities of work–family experiences of the Harare women and Adelaide women, the chapter reaffirms, as Bulbeck (1998, p. 6) argues, that "sometimes we find similarities where they are not expected", therefore, feminism's pre-occupation "with difference as a retort to the universalising claims of categories like 'sisterhood'… [can result]…in danger of losing sight of the commonalities and connections between women".

The similarity of the women's work–family experiences further exposes the complex nature of the work and family interface for women in Zimbabwe. It can no longer be unproblematically claimed for example, that the availability of live-in kin who can assist with domestic responsibilities, or a pool of cheap labour from which working mothers can employ live-in paid domestic workers, presents "societal mechanisms through which the conflict over time arising from women's multiple roles may be alleviated" (Blanc and Lloyd 1994, p. 124). Or that the possible conflict over time management could be lessened in a setting in which kin ties are strong and there exists a strong belief that costs and benefits of child-rearing are appropriately shared among kin groups.

Overall this chapter has underscored the need for attention to the Zimbabwean and sub-Saharan women's work–family realities as part of social-economic research on working women's lives in the sub-continent. The experiences of the Harare women further suggest that the issues of concern and research on women's working lives in sub-Saharan Africa should not be simply ones of survival because women's everyday contexts are also characterised by challenging work and family negotiations that warrant critical examination. Finally, the comparative analyses formulated in this chapter suggest that, notwithstanding the diversity of women as a result of socio-economic, political and cultural contexts, and significant differences in the ways in which women take on paid work and family responsibilities, there are sufficient commonalities among women and their work–family realities to warrant discussions at an international level. Though the results of this micro-level qualitative study do not claim to be representative of women's experiences in the West or in sub-Saharan Africa, they still point to the usefulness and need for global alliances on women, work and family. The aim in forming such global alliances is not to arrive at a universal definition of women's experiences, but to incorporate issues of relevance to under-researched, underrepresented, non-western women.

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