

SURVEY FINDINGS OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF FOUR OCCUPATIONAL GROUPINGS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACES

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ABSTRACT

An increase in the participation of women in the South African labour market makes it imperative that the opinions and experiences of South African working women should be heard. Fair pay, equal treatment and safe and family-friendly workplaces are some of the issues that should be addressed in order to reshape workforce policy so that women can be employed and fulfil their potential.

The purpose of this article is to compare the views of working women on certain issues in the workplace. The women were divided into four categories, namely chartered accountants, human resource management practitioners, nurses and a group representing a variety of other occupations. The major issues dealt with are the extent to which they are experiencing job satisfaction; the extent to which they are experiencing problems in their jobs; their main expectations about their jobs; suggested changes to the workplace; and career barriers. The aim was to establish possible common areas and to compare the results with similar studies carried out in the United States of America and Australia.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's economy only one resource, people, offers an enduring competitive edge. In 1960, South Africa's economically active population consisted of 77 percent men and 23 percent women, but by 1995, men constituted 56 percent and women 44 percent (Barker 1995). The increase in the participation of women in the South African labour market makes it imperative that the opinions and experiences of South African working women should be heard. Fair pay, equal treatment and safe and family-friendly workplaces are some of the issues that should be addressed in order to reshape workforce policy so that women can be employed and fulfil their potential.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the views of working women on certain issues in the workplace. The women were divided into four categories, namely chartered accountants, human resource management practitioners, nurses and a group representing a variety of other occupations. The major issues dealt with are the extent to which they are experiencing job satisfaction; the extent to which they are experiencing problems in their jobs; their main expectations of their jobs; their suggested changes to the workplace; and career barriers. The aim was to establish possible common areas among the various groups.

II. BACKGROUND

The South African population has been estimated (CSS 1995) at approximately 41,5 million people with more than 75 percent Africans, 13 percent White, 9 percent Coloured and 3 percent Indians. Half of the entire population

lives in urban and half in nonurban areas. South Africa has a relatively young and expanding African population, compared with the Coloured and Indian population, and an ageing, shrinking White population. Education has not been equal for all South Africans in the past, therefore educational attainment among South Africans varies not only by race but also by gender.

For all those aged 20 years and over, African females have the lowest educational attainments, followed by African males, whereas White females and males have the highest educational attainments. Among African males and females only 6 percent have obtained post-school qualifications. According to the 1995 October Household Survey, 29 percent of the economically active population were found to be unemployed (CSS 1995). Forty-seven percent of the African women could be rated as being unemployed and 8 percent of White women were unemployed. Among those who were employed in the formal economy, 34 percent of African males and 50 percent of females were working in elementary occupations such as cleaning, garbage collection and agricultural labour. Almost one in five (19 percent) African women were in semi-professional occupations - for example, working as nursing assistants. Fewer than 2 percent of African women and 4 percent of males were in managerial positions. Among the Coloured population 42 percent of women were to be found in elementary occupations but there was a tendency to move into sales and services (16 percent) and clerical jobs (16 percent), and only 1 percent of Coloured women and 3 percent of males were in management jobs. A large proportion (14 percent) of Indian males were found in managerial occupations and about 36 percent of Indian women were working in clerical occupations. The largest group of White women, namely 47 percent, were found mainly in clerical positions, but 8 percent of women were in managerial positions and 7 percent in professional occupations.

When the overall annual disposable incomes of South African households are divided into quintiles, this indicates that African households tend to be the poorest in the country with 26 percent taking home incomes lower than R6 839 per annum, compared with only 12 percent of Coloureds and 2 percent of both Indian and White households. Focusing on the top quintile of R53 092 or higher, 64 percent of White households fall into this category, compared with 45 percent of Indian, 16 percent of Coloured and 9 percent of African households (CSS 1995).

III. WOMEN AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

When one thinks of women in the work environment one of the first questions to be asked is whether women should be managed differently from men. According to Moorhead and Griffen (1995:529), most managers recently assumed that women should be treated the same as men and that their reactions to issues were no different. The purpose of this discussion is not to find an answer to this question, but no-one would challenge the statement that not all women would like to be treated in the same way as men, and vice versa. But what is true is that women cannot be ignored in the workplace because South Africa is experiencing a tremendous shortage of skills. Women do possess special abilities and ways of doing things differently from men but research has shown that there are more similarities than differences between the abilities and attributes of men and women. According to Gerdes (in Prekel 1994:7) there are some differences between men and women and certain of these concern characteristics that tend to be more dominant in one sex than in the other. For example: females are more people-centred, intuitive, holistic thinking, interested in aesthetics, mediating, family-oriented and individual-oriented and emotionally-expressive while men are more object-centred, rational, analytical in their thinking, interested in technology, competitive/aggressive, peer-oriented and group-oriented and emotionally inexpressive. Apart from the aforementioned differences, Wolmarans (1997:26) indicated that there are also differences in the physiology of men and women's brains, for example:

- The female brain functions in a more integrated manner than the male brain.
- Spatial, mathematical and structured thinking is better developed in men whereas the communicative and

emotive areas of women are superior.

- Men are more comfortable with logical problem solving but women generally consider people and feelings.

In a cumulative sample in the USA, Argyris (1997:372) found that women use the same unilaterally controlling, win-lose theories to design and implement their actions as men. Men and women use the same defensive reasoning processes when they are dealing with issues that could be, or are, embarrassing and threatening. Irrespective of the differences and similarities mentioned above, it should be realised that women, like men, play an important role in the workplace. It should, however, be clearly stated that the differences between the sexes should be respected and accommodated. Managements in organisations that treat women as individuals and create equal opportunities for them are likely to attract and keep good and loyal women. Research has shown that higher-level women have lower turnover rates than men at comparable levels and that black women are generally more reliable and less inclined to absenteeism and other problems than their male counterparts (Prekel 1994:7).

Women who work in organisations do not normally choose the nearest organisation to work for; nor do they automatically report for work every day. Women make conscious decisions about their occupations and the organisations they wish to work for. Whether an individual chooses or rejects a particular organisation depends on how attractive the organisation is to him or her. According to Lawler (1994:142), organisations can make work more attractive, for example, by paying higher wages, making jobs more interesting, encouraging the formation of cohesive groups and being more flexible in designing work arrangements.

The degree to which an organisation's work environment is structured will to some extent influence the job satisfaction levels of employees in that organisation. Job satisfaction can be viewed as an attitude that individuals have about their jobs. It is a result of their perception of the job and the degree to which there is a good fit between the individual and the organisation. Job satisfaction stems from various aspects of the job, for example pay, promotion, supervisors, co-workers, policies, working conditions and benefits (Ivancevich & Matteson 1996:129).

Women do face certain problems in organisations and some of these problems include wages that are lower than those of men, the glass ceiling, balancing career and family choices, ensuring employment equity, sexual harassment, stress, lack of skills and working schedules (see Reece & Brandt 1996; Delport 1994; Gooch 1994; Cooper & Lewis 1995; Duncaster 1993; Louw 1994; Higgins, Duxburg & Irving 1992). Although the problems and barriers experienced by women in the workplace are of a general nature, it is believed that they also apply to women in the various professions. The extent to which the above issues apply to the latter will obviously depend on the organisation and its specific culture.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Target population

The target population of this study was as follows:

- female chartered accountants (CAs): 617 responded from a target population of 1 108 (57 percent response rate)
- females in the human resource profession (HRM): 512 responded from a target population of 1 800 (28 percent response rate)
- female nurses (registered and enrolled): 218 responded from a sample of 1 200 (18 percent response rate)
- a group of women in a variety of occupations who belong to the Women's Bureau of South Africa which has 23 000 members: 512 responded from a sample of 1 200 (43 percent response rate)

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire consisted of six main sections addressing issues such as job satisfaction, problems experienced at work, changes that might provide a better workplace, barriers that might influence career prospects and expectations from the job. The scales used for these different sections will be discussed when the results are reported.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and frequencies) were used in this study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program was used to analyse the data. The overall reliability of the questionnaires, as measured by the Alpha Cronbach Coefficient, was 88 percent.

V. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Nurses

A high percentage (41 percent) of respondents were employed by the government and 42 percent were employed in large (5 000 and more) and medium-sized (more than 100 but fewer than 5 000) organisations.

Most of the respondents were employed full-time (87 percent), while only 7 percent were employed part-time.

A large percentage (43 percent) of the target population represented the 30 to 39 year age group and 41 percent were between the ages of 40 and 65 years. The majority of respondents (71 percent) had children under the age of 18 living at home, and 59 percent expressed dissatisfaction with their current child care arrangements.

Regarding the marital status of the population, the distribution was almost equal with 50 percent being married and 51 percent being single, divorced, separated or widowed. The majority (58 percent) of the respondents were black women, while Asian and Coloured groups were represented by only 12 percent. White women constituted 30 percent of the sample. The gross income per month of 61 percent of the respondents was between R2 000 and R4 999, and 28 percent earned less than R1 999 per month. Regarding the place of residence, the highest concentrations of respondents were found in Gauteng (24 percent) and in KwaZulu-Natal (21 percent). The majority of respondents (56 percent) possessed a matriculation certificate, and 25 percent had reached standard 8 level. Only 14 percent had university degrees. The majority of respondents (61 percent) were enrolled nurses and 39 percent were registered nurses.

General group

The majority of women (60 percent) who took part in the survey worked in three occupations, namely as business women (19 percent), as professional women (27 percent) such as lawyers and doctors and as managers (12 percent). Furthermore they had only one paid job and worked between 40 and 50 hours a week. They were also mainly between the ages of 30 and 49 years and they had a degree and/or postgraduate qualification. They earned between R2 000 and R4 999 a month except for a large group (31 percent) which earned between R5 000 and R9 999 per month. Only 6 percent earned more than R15 000 a month. The majority were married (59 percent) and (55 percent) did not have children (55 percent) and those who did had two (75 percent), the youngest child being under 23 years of age (80 percent). The majority were from the White population group (82 percent).

Chartered accountants

The total membership of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants as at 31 December 1997 was 16 313, of whom 1 262 (8 percent) were female. Although this still represents a very small percentage of the total

membership, the number of women in chartered accountancy has grown by 250 percent since 1987, when there were only 351 (3 percent) female members. Over 50 percent of the women CAs who responded worked in business and another 30 percent were employed in public practice. Seventy four percent of the respondents indicated that they worked full-time and only six percent were working part-time. Nearly 43 percent of women CAs had children. Of those women CAs who had children, most were employed in business (42 percent) and in small accounting practices (18 percent).

The majority of women CAs without children were also employed in business, but a greater percentage than those with children were attached to large accounting practices. Also, over 80 percent of women CAs who had children said they were satisfied with the child care arrangements, and only 12 percent indicated dissatisfaction. Almost 40 percent of the respondents interrupted their careers for only three months or less when their children were born, and almost 80 percent were absent from work for less than a year. The majority of women CAs in South Africa were relatively young. Over 86 percent of the respondents were aged 39 or below, with over 28 percent aged 29 or below. More than 70 percent of the respondents earned over R140 000 a year, with those employed in large accounting practices and in business reporting the highest salary packages - well over 60 percent earned in excess of R180 000 per annum.

Human resource profession

The employment profile of the respondents indicated that the majority of respondents (50 percent) were employed in medium-sized organisations (between 100 and 5000) followed by 29 percent in large organisations (5 000 employees and more), and 9 percent in small organisations (fewer than 100 employees). Nearly seven percent were self-employed and the rest were employed in government (2 percent) and academic posts (1 percent).

The majority (89 percent) of the respondents indicated that they work full-time, while 4 percent were part-time workers. A large group (41 percent) was employed in the personnel officer/administrator category, 37 percent as human resource managers/directors, 12 percent as human resource consultants and 10 percent in other categories, for example as secretaries, social workers, researchers, lecturers and administrative workers. This group was included in the study because it was believed that, as members of the IPM (Institute for People Management), they could make a contribution to the study. A large proportion of respondents (47 percent) were between 30 and 39 years of age, and 27 percent of the respondents were under 30 years of age. Nearly 20 percent were between 40 and 49 years of age and close to six percent were over 50 years of age. The majority of respondents (57 percent) were married. The majority of respondents (80 percent) were White, 12 percent black, four percent Indian and three percent Coloured.

A large percentage (46 percent) of the respondents earned between R5 000 and R9 899 per month, 18 percent between R10 000 and R14 999 per month and nine percent more than R15 000 per month. A small percentage (9 percent) earned between R2 000 and R4 999 per month and three percent earned less than R2 000 per month. Over 72 percent of the respondents earned more than R5 000 per month and about 27 percent earned more than R10 000 per month. Forty-seven percent of respondents lived in Gauteng, followed by the Western Cape (22 percent) and KwaZulu-Natal (17 percent). Over 86 percent of the respondents lived in the above-mentioned areas and very few (between 1 and 5 percent) lived in other provinces.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Job Satisfaction

In this section the respondents had to indicate on a five-point scale, where one equals "strongly disagree" and five equals "strongly agree", how various aspects contributed to their job satisfaction. The aspect which contributed most to job satisfaction was the fact that the respondents liked what they do ($\bar{x}=4.13$). This was followed by: they enjoyed the company of co-workers ($\bar{x}=4.02$), they were learning new things ($x=3.99$) and they had job security ($\bar{x}=3.73$) and job training opportunities ($\bar{x}=3.43$). The aspects that contributed least to job satisfaction were pay ($\bar{x}=3.0$), flexible working hours ($\bar{x}=3.11$), working as part of a team ($x=3.156$) and benefits received ($\bar{x}=3.180$). When the different groups are compared with each other the following come to the fore:

- *"I like what I do, enjoy the company of co-workers and learn new things."* The four groups generally felt the same about the contribution these aspects made to their job satisfaction. "I liked what I do", as indicated earlier, was the biggest contributor to job satisfaction, followed by enjoyment of the company of co-workers and the opportunity to learn new things. In the study in the United States of America (Working Women Count 1994), the majority of the respondents also indicated that the company of their co-workers was the aspect they liked most about their jobs.
- *Job security.* The CAs felt that this aspect contributed more to their job satisfaction than the other three groups did. On the whole this aspect was the fourth highest contributor to job satisfaction for the four groups.
- *Job training opportunities.* The general group felt that job training opportunities contributed more to job satisfaction than the other three groups did. Job training opportunities were the fifth highest contributor to job satisfaction.
- *"I get paid well."* There seemed to be agreement among HRM, CAs and the general group about the role pay played in contributing to job satisfaction. Nurses indicated very clearly that they differ significantly from the rest of the three groups in that pay did not contribute to their job satisfaction. As indicated earlier, pay contributed least to job satisfaction compared with the other aspects on the list of job satisfaction items for the four groups as a whole. A similar survey in the United States of America showed similar results, with 49 percent of the respondents indicating that pay was a serious problem in their jobs, and also rating it as the second biggest work-related problem (Working Women Count 1994).
- *Flexible working hours.* Nurses and the general group seemed to be in agreement compared to the HRM and CA groups, who felt that this aspect provided more job satisfaction. Flexible working hours were, however, the third lowest contributor to job satisfaction for the four groups as a whole.
- *Working as part of a team.* The HRM, general and CA groups generally felt the same about the contribution this aspect made to their job satisfaction. Nurses felt that working as part of a team contributed highly to their job satisfaction and thus played a more important role in their job satisfaction than in the case of the other groups. For the four groups as a whole, this aspect was the third lowest contributor to job satisfaction.
- *"I have good benefits."* Here again, as with pay, nurses indicated that they differ from the CAs, HRMs and general group in that the benefits they received did not contribute to their job satisfaction. It is clear, however, that the general group and the CAs felt that benefits contributed more to job satisfaction than the HRM group did. Benefits on a whole were still not a high contributor to job satisfaction.

The fact that they liked what they do, liked the company of co-workers and they learnt new things indicated that factors inherent in the job itself contributed most to job satisfaction. The factors which contributed least to job satisfaction were the benefits they received, pay and flexible working hours. Regardless of the above, a general inference that can be drawn from the results is that the majority of respondents agreed that they are satisfied with their jobs. This has an important bearing on their contribution to organisational success. A satisfied employee will tend to be absent less often, will stay with the organisation longer, will make a positive contribution, and her

organisational commitment will increase. It should, however, be noted that high levels of job satisfaction do not necessarily lead to higher levels of performance (Moorhead & Griffin 1995:64).

Methods that managers of organisations could employ to improve the job satisfaction levels of the respondents are to improve their pay and benefits, but more importantly, to introduce a far more flexible system of working hours. Factors that could be considered are half-day jobs, flexitime and job sharing. Women who experience job satisfaction and have concomitant job performance will also contribute significantly to organisational success.

Employers can further improve the job satisfaction of women by giving them opportunities to contribute to the success of the organisation as a whole by providing recognition, support and promotion where it is due. They could further acknowledge the special leadership styles women possess - such as transformational leadership, charisma and networking (Wolmarans 1997:27) - to ensure organisational transformation, giving the status of managers to those women who earn it and also giving women managers the freedom to manage.

Women should, however, not be subjected to an overwhelmingly male-dominated organisational environment. They should create opportunities and accept the challenges offered to them by focusing on their strengths, proving that women can contribute to organisational outputs just as well as their male counterparts. Teamwork and greater participation among employees in organisations could be among the elements that will make South Africa a more competitive nation. The philosophy of *ubuntu* "A person is only a person because of other people" (Boon 1996:32) which is inborn in black people in South Africa may to some extent contribute more to employees' job satisfaction. Black women managers seem to be in a better position to cultivate the philosophy of participation in organisations than White managers because they have an inherent need for *ubuntu* and because the majority of workers in most large organisations belong to the black race group or will do so in future. It is believed that these strengths should be developed and applied in the context of other organisational realities like financial constraints.

Problems at work

Respondents were asked to indicate the seriousness of various problems experienced in the workplace by using a scale where one equals "not at all serious" and five "one of the most serious". Three groups responded to this question, namely human resource practitioners, the general group and nurses. On average the respondents felt that the most serious problems they experienced were that they needed more benefits ($\bar{x}=2.66$), were under too much stress ($\bar{x}=2.36$), they were not paid enough ($\bar{x}=2.17$) and that they worked too many hours ($\bar{x}=1.91$). Aspects which did not apply or were not serious at all were sexual harassment ($\bar{x}=0.30$), the fact that they had lost a job or promotion owing to the fact that they were women ($\bar{x}=1.14$) and they travelled too much ($\bar{x}=1.15$). The comparisons of the different groups are in reveal the following:

- "*I need better benefits.*" Here again there was no agreement among the three groups. Nurses again felt that this aspect was a big problem, followed by HRM and the general group. To some extent this aspect is closely related to the pay problem. On the whole this aspect seemed to be the biggest problem the three groups experienced.
- "*I am under too much stress.*" Nurses experience more stress than HRM and the general group. On average this aspect was the second biggest problem experienced by the group as a whole.
- "*I am not paid what my job is worth.*" The three groups differed in their responses. Nurses felt that this was a big problem followed by HRM and the general group. The general group was of the opinion that it was not applicable to them and this might be the case because they generally belong to well-paid occupational groups

such as lawyers, businesswomen and managers. Nurses on the other hand represent an occupational group which has been complaining about low pay for many years. On average this was the third biggest problem experienced by the three groups. In the "Working Women Count" survey in the United States of America, women overwhelmingly cited "improving pay scales" as their top career concern (Bill 1997:10).

- "*I work too many hours.*" No agreement existed among the three groups. Nurses felt it was a big problem, followed by the general group and HRM. On the whole this was the fourth biggest problem for the three groups.
- "*I am sexually harassed.*" The three groups were generally in agreement that this aspect was not a problem.
- "*I have lost a job or promotion because of my gender.*" Nurses were of the opinion that this was a bigger problem than the HRM group and the general group felt it to be. On the whole it did not seem to be a problem. The fact that the respondents from the nursing profession regarded this as a big problem was surprising, as most employees in the nursing profession are female.

The biggest problems expressed were benefits, stress and pay. When one considers the three groups who responded, it is clear that nurses had the biggest problem in this area. Although they perform an essential service in the community, the majority of them are paid by the State and it is well known that they are not paid as well as nurses in the private sector.

Stress seems to be a general problem and managers in organisations should introduce programmes to alleviate stress related problems. If not dealt with adequately it may lead to lower productivity and low morale among employees.

Suggested changes to the workplace

In this section respondents were provided with a list of possible changes in the workplace and they had to indicate on a rating scale of one (not important) to ten (very important) the importance of these changes to ensure a better workplace. Three groups responded to this question, namely human resource practitioners, the general group and nurses. The suggested changes in the workplace in order of priority are stated below (the arithmetic mean (\bar{x}) per item is given in brackets) (see Table 1).

- 1 On-the-job training opportunities to learn new skills ($\bar{x} = 6,69$)
- 2 Job-sharing opportunities ($\bar{x} = 6,61$)
- 3 Giving employees more responsibility to do their jobs ($\bar{x} = 6,48$)
- 4 Ensuring equal opportunity in the workplace ($\bar{x} = 5,95$)
- 5 Improving pay scales ($\bar{x} = 5,94$)
- 6 Student loans to enable employees to acquire new job skills ($\bar{x} = 5,90$)
- 7 Informing men about gender discrimination ($\bar{x} = 5,74$)
- 8 More flexible working hours ($\bar{x} = 5,38$)
- 9 Paid leave to care for newborns or seriously ill relatives ($\bar{x} = 5,34$)
- 10 Retraining opportunities ($\bar{x} = 4,43$)
- 11 Information about support for child or dependent care ($\bar{x} = 4,17$)

TABLE 1: CHANGES TO WORKPLACE: HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS (HRM), NURSES AND GENERAL GROUP

Items	HRM \bar{x}^*	General \bar{x}^*	Nurses \bar{x}^*	Total Average \bar{x}^*
More flexible working hours	2,93	6,15	7,05	5,38
Info on child/dependent care	2,20	3,67	6,63	4,17
Equal opportunity	2,55	7,68	7,63	5,95
Paid leave - newborns etc	2,94	5,62	7,46	5,34
On the job training opportunities	3,34	7,82	8,90	6,69
Student loans	2,89	6,77	8,03	5,90
More responsibility	3,80	7,78	7,85	6,48
Improved pay scales	2,59	6,69	8,55	5,94
Job sharing	3,12	7,60	9,26	6,61
Retraining	3,08	4,36	5,86	4,43
Informing men about gender discrimination	3,31	6,15	7,75	5,74

* \bar{x} = arithmetic mean

The item highest on the list of priorities is that they would like on-the-job training opportunities to learn new skills ($\bar{x} = 6,69$) in the workplace. Formal on-the-job training does not normally form part of many organisations' training endeavour, but there is a clear indication here that it should be introduced. The rapidly changing environment and the fact that the job requires incumbents to adapt to new circumstances and challenges will not allow them to be taken off the job to be trained for any length of time nor can the off-the-job training always provide the necessary skills. More attention should therefore be given to more formal on-the-job training initiatives and this could be done in conjunction with institutions for higher education. Job sharing opportunities are also considered to be high on the priority list. The group with the highest need for job sharing opportunities was nurses. They felt very strongly ($\bar{x} = 9.26$) about job sharing. This could possibly allow more people to work and earn an income. There is, however, no clarity on whether they would be prepared to sacrifice income to make this change possible.

Another important change in the workplace was that the respondents felt that employees should be given more responsibility to do their jobs. This could be a reflection of a feeling on the part of the respondents that they are capable of carrying more responsible jobs in the organisation and are due for promotion or that they are not given the responsibility to do their jobs properly. Regardless of the reason, women employees are clearly stating that they are willing and able to take on more responsibility at work and this opportunity should be utilised by employers to

the benefit of the organisation. They would also like equal opportunities in the workplace to be guaranteed. This could suggest that a male culture is still prevalent in the workplace and these respondents still feel that women are discriminated against. It should, however, be noted that equal opportunities do not only refer to promotion only but also include equal training opportunities, equal pay, equal promotion and appointment opportunities. One respondent commented that "women in senior positions must not treat female subordinates unfairly". The latter would suggest that female managers should also ensure that they treat subordinates fairly and that the responsibility for ensuring equality lies with all managers/supervisors in the organisation, irrespective of their gender.

Barriers in the workplace

In this section respondents were also requested to indicate what type of barriers retarded their career prospects. Various possibilities in the form of statements were provided and they had to indicate on a scale from "one to ten", where one equals "not important" and ten equals "very important", the importance of the statements as regards the effect they had on their careers. Three groups responded to this question, namely nurses, chartered accountants and human resource practitioners (see Table 2). The barriers which are perceived to exist, in order of priority from most important to least important (the arithmetic mean (\bar{x}) per item is provided in brackets), are the following (see Table 2):

- 1 Lack of recognition and respect for work completed ($\bar{x} = 7,06$)
- 2 Restriction on types of work given, thus limiting experience ($\bar{x} = 5,37$)
- 3 Lack of female mentor support ($\bar{x} = 5,16$)
- 4 Lack of flexibility in working hours ($\bar{x} = 5,12$)
- 5 Low salaries which cannot support child-care payments ($\bar{x} = 4,50$).
- 6 Little allowance made for family commitments ($\bar{x} = 4,37$)
- 7 Male culture within the organisation ($\bar{x} = 4,25$)
- 8 Required to long work hours ($\bar{x} = 4,20$)
- 9 Gender bias by supervisors ($\bar{x} = 3,51$)

The most important barrier to women's success is perceived to be lack of recognition and respect for work completed. This is followed by restriction on types of work given, which limits experience, and the lack of female mentor support. Women seemed not to view male culture in the organisation, low salaries which cannot support child-care payments, a requirement to work long hours and gender bias as job barriers. When the different groups are compared (see Table 2) the following is important:

Chartered accountants viewed the lack of recognition and the lack of flexibility as the most important job barriers. Those in human resource management were of the opinion that a male culture and the lack of recognition were the most important barriers and nurses viewed the lack of recognition and the restriction on types of work, which limit their experience, as their most important barriers. Lack of recognition seems to be a dominant career barrier for all three groups and it is no surprise that it is the most important barrier for all three groups. This was followed by inbuilt limitations in their jobs, which limited their experience; the third barrier was a lack of female mentor support. In a survey among female chartered accountants in Australia, the three most frequently cited career barriers were a male culture within organisations, lack of female mentor support and requirements for working long hours (Kelsall & Leung 1995:10). Male culture was a problem for those in the human resource profession and was not as dominant for chartered accountants in South Africa. Lack of female mentor support seems to be a problem in Australia (chartered accountants) and for these groups in South Africa. According to Burke and Mckeen (1995:33), the absence of female mentors, sponsors or role models might be translated into less career satisfaction coupled with lowered career aspirations. This, however, highlights the responsibility of women managers in organisations to act as role models for younger women in the organisations who need to climb the corporate ladder.

In general, people feel good when their achievements are recognised and conversely become upset when they are not recognised. Recognition for work "well done" can be a powerful motivator if used correctly. Managements must take notice of this need that women experience and if recognition is given where deserved it can lead to better work output and greater job satisfaction. This barrier experienced by women may also be explained by the male dominance in the work environment women find themselves in. Men may be reluctant to acknowledge the fact that women do perform well and might be hesitant to openly give them recognition because they might be too busy or be too preoccupied with their own concerns and in the process overlook the accomplishments of others. Recognition is a very important reward preference and often ranked higher than monetary rewards and job security (Reece & Brandt 1996:280).

TABLE 2: JOB BARRIERS: CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (CA), HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS (HRM) AND NURSES

Items	CA (\bar{x})*	HRM (\bar{x})*	Nurses (\bar{x})*	Total Average (\bar{x})*
Lack of flexibility	5,16	4,04	6,16	5,12
Long working hours	3,16	3,82	5,63	4,20
Family commitments	1,90	4,38	6,84	4,37
Lack of female mentor support	4,65	5,16	5,68	5,16
Low salary-child-care payments	1,54	3,61	8,34	4,50
Limitations on experience	4,42	4,83	6,85	5,37
Lack of recognition	7,25	5,75	8,18	7,06
Male culture	3,68	6,37	2,70	4,25
Gender bias by supervisors	1,08	5,34	4,10	3,51

* \bar{x} = arithmetic mean

Career expectations

Three groups of respondents, namely nurses, chartered accountants and human resource practitioners, also had to indicate what their main career expectations were. The majority (79 percent) of respondents indicated that they wanted promotion, followed by professional support (76 percent), a balanced professional and private life (71 percent), job satisfaction (57 percent), power and status (52 percent) and better pay (29 percent) (see Table 3). Similarly, in a survey among female chartered accountants in Australia, job satisfaction (96%), balanced professional and private life (89%) and remuneration (70%) were the three most preferred career expectations (Kelsall & Leung 1995:7). In an earlier section, the various components of job satisfaction were discussed and it is clear from this survey that the respondents felt very positive about their jobs and were experiencing a great deal of job satisfaction. However, they did not receive the promotion and professional support they deserved. A balanced professional and private life seemed to be a very high expectation. This can, however, only be achieved if organisations change their work rules to accommodate more women in the workplace and acknowledge their significant contribution. An apt example here is Pick 'n Pay which grants women six months' maternity leave and grants men paternity leave as well, and Rennies Travel which has a women executive director (Mittner 1997: 68). The introduction of the new Basic Conditions of Employment Act may also to some extent help to fulfil women's expectations.

Rand Merchant Bank is also considering the possibility of establishing a crèche (Naude 1998:15). At the same bank, the IT section is run by women who work half-day. It seems, however, that South African companies, generally, fall short in helping female employees meet their family-related obligations. Nevertheless, one should realise that it is not always easy for companies to make these facilities available at the workplace.

TABLE 3: CAREER EXPECTATIONS: CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (CA), HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS (HRM) AND NURSES

Item	Nurses (%)	HRM (%)	CAs (%)	Total Average (%)
Job satisfaction	73,9	64,3	33,7	57,3
Promotion	67,8	84,9	83,7	78,7
Balanced professional/private life	60,7	85,2	68,7	71,4
Remuneration	36,0	32,0	20,0	29,0
Power & status	75,4	59,2	22,8	52,4
Professional support	81,5	88,1	59,6	76,4

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this article the results of a survey among four groups of women were reported, namely chartered accountants, human resource practitioners, nurses and a general group of female employees. Their feelings on job satisfaction issues, problems at work, suggested changes to the workplace, barriers in the workplace and career expectations

were discussed. Areas of difference and areas where they agreed were highlighted. While it is accepted that on certain issues these groups will differ significantly, an endeavour was also made to indicate in which areas they do agree and those areas may be considered to apply generally to women in these professions at least. One cannot generalise, but the following comments may help to improve the lot of women in the workplace.

Managements of organisations do have a responsibility to adhere to legislation but the real attitude change will start to take place when women, like men in their professions, can prove that they can make a significant contribution to organisational success. Furthermore, the managements of organisations should try not to take workers for granted. State clear goals, provide training and development opportunities and deal with human resource matters holistically. Women should not allow problems they experience to cloud their judgment and should endeavour to take active steps to avoid or minimise stress in the workplace. The way organisations are managed is on the verge of fundamental change because of international competition and local demands and women in the professions are in the unique position of being able to take the lead.

Employers should further consider the following if they wish to fulfil the expectations of women. Firstly, motivate and trust them; secondly, reward them equally, thirdly, flatten the organisational structures to avoid too much competition in terms of promotion and to ensure effectiveness; fourthly, provide opportunities for training; fifthly, provide intellectual stimulation and feedback; and lastly, improve pay, flexibility of working hours and the work environment. Policies, practices and work processes which enables people to achieve balance between their work and personal lives reduces stress, which in turn reduces absenteeism, enhances productivity and creativity, and decreases employee turnover.

Organisations that wish to retain women workers and actively address their problems should therefore focus on changing human resource policies and practices and creating a culture to support and effectively use their talents and motivate their continued achievement.

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