

CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF SA PROFESSIONAL WOMEN WHO TAKE CAREER BREAKS

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a study of career development and return to work of a group of professional South African women with children who work in a wide range of traditional and non traditional careers. The patterns of their career breaks and return to work are investigated alongside their activities during the break. There is a significant tendency to continue academic and professional qualifications and to embark on second careers when they return to work. The implications for Human Resource professionals are noted and factors such as mother tongue, self-employment and age at the birth of the first child that help or hinder the return to work are discussed.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie artikel word die bevindinge van 'n studie gerapporteer wat handel het oor 'n groep professionele Suid-Afrikaanse vroue se loopbaanontwikkeling en hulle terugkeer na die beroepswêreld na 'n werksonderbreking weens die geboortes van hulle kinders. Die vroue se beroepe het oor 'n wye reeks tradisionele en nie-tradisionele werke gestrek. Die studie het spesifiek gekonsentreer op die patroon van loopbaanonderbreking, die aktiwiteite tydens die onderbreking, asook die terugkeer na die werkplek. Die bevindinge dui daarop dat professionele vroue daartoe geneig is om hulle akademiese en professionele kwalifikasies tydens hulle werksonderbreking te verbeter en dat hulle eintlik met 'n tweede loopbaan begin na die hervatting van hulle werksaktiwiteite. Faktore soos huistaal, ouderdom ten tye van die geboorte van die eerste kind en self-geëmplojeerdheid, is van die belangrikste determinante in die bepaling of professionele vroue weer na die beroepswêreld sal terugkeer. Die menslike hulpbronsbestuursimplikasies van die bevindinge word ook in die artikel uitgewys.

Women's re-entry to the workplace was first studied in the USA in the late 1970s and subsequently, there has been increasing international concern about the career development and life span development of women in the baby boom cohort, born between 1945 and 1960. Many of them are highly educated, career orientated and have delayed or sacrificed child bearing in order to establish their careers. It is estimated that by 2000, 70% of American women with children under 18 will work outside the home. Hansen (1997) reviews the traditional approaches to career planning which assume that career choices are made for life. Minimal importance was placed on continuous learning throughout the working life; nowadays an initial qualification is no longer sufficient for the job (Lloyd & Bereznicki, 1998). There is an increasing trend for adults to make five to seven major career changes in a lifetime. Charland (1993) emphasises the importance of retraining and lifelong learning to facilitate career transitions. There are dramatic changes in the availability and nature of work, patterns of employment and the connection between work and family. Bridges (1994) stresses the importance of lifelong learning, adaptability and flexibility especially as adult education becomes more common. Many re-entry women, whether childless or not, form part of dual career couples. The 'traditional' role for women, staying at home to rear children, is being replaced by a 'career-and-family' role for women (Schwartz, 1989). Organisational environments favour those employees who are not constrained by family commitments. The needs of employees, both men and women, who have to balance work and family life have been given little attention by most organisations. Women who take career breaks to have children have found it difficult to resume their careers in the fast-track although some organisations have begun to make plans for retaining their female resources.

In South Africa, much the same pattern of White female employment is evident, although women who re-enter the workforce after a career break have not been as extensively studied as women in the USA or UK. Coloured and Black women in this cohort, excluding those in political exile, are not as highly

qualified as White women nor do they take career breaks (Van der Walt, 1986). Since the early 80's researchers have been concerned with the under-utilisation of the resources vested in women.

Dex (1984) has distinguished several kinds of re-entry women: those who return after all their children are born; or between births but not after every childbirth; or after every birth. Women who have children but who do not break their careers are called 'family formation continuous workers.' Jackson (1990) defines women returnees as a "heterogeneous group who have in common that their careers have been interrupted as a result of having children or caring for handicapped or elderly relatives".

This article outlines briefly the developments in studies of re-entry women abroad and then in the South African context. A group of professional women in South Africa were interviewed in order to establish the career break and re-entry patterns in their working lives. It may be important for organisations that employ and wish to retain highly qualified women to know how professional women integrate motherhood and career breaks into their working lives. Organisations will have to accommodate women who wish to take career breaks, in order to make maximum use of the training and development invested in them.

Literature review

Devanna (1987) reports that women in the USA have been able to gain equal access to career tracks previously considered to be White male preserves as a result of education and changes in social mores. Nevertheless, women in a matched cohort of men and women MBA graduates with continuous work histories experienced different rates of success, advanced more slowly, and were not equally rewarded when they demonstrated comparable performance. Yet Devanna says that women in the USA are not more likely than men to choose their family above a career. The increasing numbers of women in organisations does not necessarily diminish resistance to their upward mobility. Okanlowan (1994) cites research by Coyle (1989) and Hammond (1992) which shows that as women reach about 15

per cent of middle management ranks, resistance to their progress increases and their upward mobility in organisations is limited. However, changes in demographics will provide pressure for better representation at the top from women and minorities. As the number of women increases in an organisational department or function, the power within the function diminishes. Women are asked to pay a price for success that is not demanded of men: they will limit the probability of marriage and children and they will continue to lack the same clear paths and role models enjoyed by men (Devanna, 1987). Their advancement in the organisational hierarchy is slower and fewer women reach top positions.

Guinn (1989) cites Fortune magazine estimates that 75 per cent of all families in the USA will be dual-career families by the year 2000, compared to about 55 per cent at the end of 1989. More than 60 per cent of all employee transfers involve two career couples; 24 per cent of employees refuse to take transfers because dual-career couples risk dismantling a support system which allows them to balance work and family life.

Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) discuss the rapidly growing corporate interest in work-and-family issues for four principle business reasons. Firstly, changing workforce demographics; the population is not growing after the baby boom. Secondly, employee perceptions are changing as women and men in dual-career or single-parent families become more able to identify corporate policies that allow them to act responsibly towards their families and yet satisfy their professional ambitions. Thirdly, it appears that organisational inflexibility has an adverse effect on productivity. Fourthly, American children appear to have worsening literacy, obesity, suicide rates and general intelligence scores.

Thomas (1990) reports that women now comprise a sufficiently large part of UK organisations like Ernst & Young and Unilever to make these organisations vulnerable to women's departure. Women who wish to return to the work arena are no longer regarded as "one-off" cases. Career-break schemes for maternity or personal development of up to five years are available from some UK accountancy firms.

Schwartz (1989) makes the distinction between career-primary women and career-and-family women. Career-primary women put their careers first and remain single or childless, or have their children raised by others. The majority of women, however, are career-and-family women who want to have serious careers whilst nevertheless actively rearing their children. Schwartz claims that it is imperative that organisations manage maternity, in order to retain high-level women and keep them productive. The unpredictable length of individual maternity leave makes employers uncomfortable and creates genuine problems for organisations. Yet many organisations make it impossible for women to return part-time, by setting arbitrary dates for full-time return or resignation. Because organisations are also unresponsive to women's childcare needs and few offer flexible working hours, they lose valuable resources when women take career breaks or put their careers "on hold". Very few organisations make it easy for women to return to work.

Appelbaum (1980) in her pioneer work on the determinants of successful re-entry of women in the USA between 1968 and 1977 shows that the ability to make a successful re-entry is enhanced by the number of years of education or schooling; by the choice of academic field particularly those requiring science, mathematics or liberal arts as majors; by participation in post-school training programmes and by the kind of job held early in the career.

Watkins (1988) addresses the issues of supporting women's re-entry to the work place. Re-entrants include displaced homemakers – women who are suddenly widowed or divorced. The economic consequences of career interruptions appear to increase if women stay out of the labour force for more than three years. Companies which acknowledge that women pro-

fessionals are the future of business provide benefits which include policies for expanded maternity leave, paternity leave, and modified paid personal or sick leave to stay at home with sick children or older frail adults. Innovative and flexible childcare benefits are the most supportive of company benefits which include the provision of vouchers toward childcare, subsidies for places at local childcare centres, information and referral services and on-site childcare. Less expensive forms of support include more serious work place norms like the provision of a childcare room for use during school holidays; relaxation of telephone policies and the establishing of routine work breaks for parents to telephone home and check on children after school. Flexitime and job sharing have also met with some support from organisations and work-at-home options have also increased significantly.

Stoner and Hartman (1990) report that 80 percent of their sample of 633 women managers felt that their careers were hurt by home and family responsibilities. Organisational advancement is 'held up' because of maternity leave, and career momentum is lost as women move out of the mainstream temporarily and away from managerial focus. At best, maternity leave represents temporary career stagnation and at worst, a breach or thwarting of career progress. Women with families have to alter their lofty career ideals and adjust their careers because of family responsibilities so that the intensity of their career involvement is reduced. But organisations view their career adjustment as a dramatic change in organisational commitment, which most women felt, was not true. Placing a career "on hold" has an irreversible negative impact on a woman's career. Management feels comfortable with traditional "career-over-family" focus in women managers. Women who choose not to have children send an important message to management about the prominence and priority of their careers. Bosses see women with children as mothers first and members of management second. Companies assume that family situations will preclude mothers from attending after-hours meetings and extra work functions so these managers are excluded. This is seen as unwarranted, because career-orientated women often spend considerable time and money structuring and arranging family commitments to prevent or minimise this kind of interference. Many organisations blatantly assume that returning managers will be unable to work at pre-pregnancy levels; women resent having to prove themselves again to bosses with a "starting over" mentality. Additional stress is created by such attitudes.

Cramer and Pearce (1990) maintain that work-and-family corporate policies and support programs considered heretical a few years ago are now acknowledged as key tools for corporate productivity. Companies cannot escape the change in workforce demographics, 63 per cent of the work-force comprises dual-career families, single parents and those with dependent parents. The success of the implementation of work and family policies depends on corporate management. Older managers from more traditional families may block the way for progress. Management training in sensitivity to work and family demands is what most working parents want in a changed work environment. Family issues are often not regarded as legitimate concerns. IBM, Johnson and Johnson and few other companies in the USA, leading the field in innovative work and family policies, are adamant that managerial training is essential for the success of support programs.

Wessels (1982) in her research findings concerning South African graduate women's job expectations and job rewards, revealed that of her sample of 9065, more than half of the married women were employed and 21.4 per cent were waiting to re-enter the workforce. She reports that married women do not always have a free choice between working and not working. The majority of women stop working or wish to stop working after the birth of the first child but plan to return to their careers when their children are older. More than 94 per cent of the entire sample were paid employees. South African women were ambivalent about being career women, only about 60 per cent of never-married women were interested in

advancing to managerial level, whereas almost 44 per cent of full-time employed married graduates were not seeking promotion because of domestic reasons including family planning, double work load and husband's employment mobility. Regardless of the number of children still in the home, married women with high career orientations reject promotion because of family obligations, especially if the children are pre-schoolers.

Erwee (1988) reports that training programmes and career management programmes for women are offered by less than 34 per cent of companies surveyed. She states that these trends confirm that many women are still not recognised as high level resources and as a result have restricted access to supervisory and managerial training, limiting their upward mobility. Erwee (1989) notes with concern that although some South African companies are formulating strategies for Black advancement, very few mention the advancement of women. The perceptions and attitudes of managers in applying Equal Employment Opportunities to women will influence their support of such policies.

Hiebert (1987) reports that many women, during the early re-entry stage, question their ability to be successful in a professional role. Whilst they are relieved to be rid of their previous lifestyle, some of them are troubled about their failure to adapt to the traditional mould. Others fear that they will be unable to be successful in either the conventional or the unconventional role – a feeling that is heightened by their sense of 'not belonging'. A secure economic position can impede a woman's successful re-entry because society still expects a married woman, especially one with children and few financial concerns, to make her primary commitment to her family rather than to her own professional development.

Lemmer (1990) in an investigation of women aged 36–64, lists factors influencing re-entry into the South African labour force such as age and birth cohort; family situation; marital status; motherhood, age and number of offspring, timing and spacing of births; family income; spouse support; education and the utilisation and retention of knowledge and skills during the career break. Those in the cohort 36–64 were brought up to value the traditional role of women and did not plan for a full working life or even a return to work after family formation, re-entry into employment being powerfully influenced by the needs of family members. Since the 1960's, marriage has no longer been considered a significant reason to end employment. Motherhood rather than marriage, is the most powerful inhibitor of the labour-market participation of women. A current or previous divorce dramatically increases the probability of a woman's employment in order to support herself and her dependent children. After re-marriage, women are more likely to be employed because of their increased awareness of the tenuousness of a husband's economic support. Widows are often described as displaced homemakers who are catapulted into the labour-market without adequate career preparation, especially if they were widowed relatively late.

Motherhood has the most significant effect of women's employment patterns; most women interrupt their employment when their first child is born. Fewer women with children under six are employed than women with children between six and seventeen. Women are least likely to re-enter employment when their children are under three. According to Yohalem (1979), the inhibiting effect of dependent children on their mother's employment is often modified by the mother's own strong career commitment and aspirations. Women with doctorates, professional degrees or those who chose non-traditional careers demonstrate a greater determination to follow a career (despite the number and age of their children) than women with similar families who have made a smaller investment in career preparation. Young women who become mothers in early adulthood are more likely to return to work than those who delayed motherhood. Women are increasingly returning to work between births and return earlier after each birth. The smaller the family, the greater the likelihood that a woman will work outside the home.

Most women work to provide income for themselves or their families although increasingly young educated mothers work to support a two-income lifestyle and because they have developed a 'taste' for employment. Positive support of a husband is often a decisive determinant of a woman's decision to re-enter the labour market and is the single best predictor of the extent of the wife's actual occupational involvement. The more education a woman has received at every level, the more likely she is to work outside the home and the higher her earnings and chances of occupational mobility at re-entry.

The nature of a woman's activities during her career break may be crucial in her ability to re-enter the labour market. The longer the career break, the greater the likelihood that knowledge will become outdated and skills will deteriorate, thus adversely affecting women's opportunities at re-entry. Alban-Metcalf and West (1990) suggest that skills acquired during homemaking, such as budgeting, organising, delegating, decision-making, child-care skills and volunteer work, may be important skills in finding suitable employment at re-entry. These are often not given sufficient recognition by employers nor do women consider them for inclusion in their curriculum vitae.

The outcomes of re-entry have been little researched. Some positive outcomes listed by Lemmer (1990) include increased family income and a higher standard of living. Re-entry ensures the retention and utilisation of trained manpower. Many women experience great personal development and some report an improved marital relationship. Re-entry women often embark on second careers indicating a significant career change at re-entry. Re-entry may imply a fresh start or change in direction not envisaged during the first phase of their working lives (Lemmer 1990). No South African studies specifically concerned with career break and patterns of re-entry to the workplace of professional women were discovered in the literature.

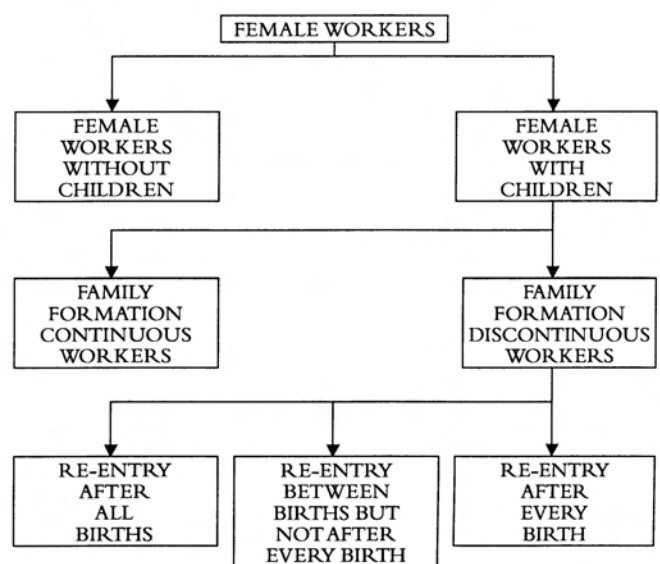
METHOD

The sample

There are fifty-one women in this sample, who have completed three or more years of tertiary education. All the women in this sample have been married and all of them have children. All of them were working at the time of the study, either full-time or part-time and fit into the categories described by Dex (1984).

Diagram 1

Categories of re-entry women (sourced from Dex, 1984)



The sample may be termed a sample of convenience drawn from professional working women resident in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area of the Transvaal and is therefore not a random sample of professional women in South Africa. Consequently the findings of this study only apply to women in the sample and cannot be applied to professional women in general. Black professional women were not included because they are mostly crowded into teaching and nursing. Most other professional categories are represented by women in political exile and they could not be interviewed in South Africa.

The women were approached telephonically and invited to participate in the study; the nature of the study was described and the assurance of anonymity was given; a report back on the findings was offered and a group report-back meeting was held in October 1991, sponsored by a financial institution.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed after a review of the literature and personal conversations with researchers in the field. The categories enumerated by Dex (1984) formed the basis underlying the structure of the questionnaire in order to ascertain the extent to which South African professional women fall into the categories and to investigate their activities during family formation and career breaks. Much of the literature reviewed can be viewed in the light of this model particularly as re-entry women are a heterogeneous group. The model was used to assess the career break patterns of professional women in South Africa.

The Hypotheses of the Study

Professional women do not pursue their careers seriously after motherhood.

Professional women who do pursue their careers seriously after motherhood are likely to:

- take relatively short career breaks
- engage in activities during the career break which will assist them when they return to work
- negotiate the conditions of their employment when they return to work.

Interview Procedure

Each woman in the sample was interviewed individually by the researcher. The interview followed a semi-structured format and all the questions which appear in the questionnaire were asked during the interview. The interviews lasted approximately 90-120 minutes each.

Statistical Methods Used

The data gathered was analysed in the following way: relevant biographical data was tabulated to give a demographic description of the sample. All the information was subjected to analysis on Chi-square tests on the SAS (1985) program on an IBM compatible mainframe computer.

RESULTS

The family formation stage in the lives of the women in this study occurred between 1970 and 1990. Dex (1984) describes family formation and re-entry patterns of working women. In her classification, she implies a model which is typical of women's career break patterns which was used in this study and is depicted in Diagram 1. The model was used because it reflects the major re-entry patterns typical of the 'baby boom' cohort from which the sample derives. It is clear that many women consider raising of their children to be so important that they will stop working and forego that source of income in order to spend time with infants and young children. In the case of professional women, many put their careers on-hold during the family formation stage.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

The statistical analysis of the data revealed that the biographi-

cal data was significantly related only in part to other variables investigated. The biographical data of significance relates to the respondent's age at the birth of the first child, the length of the career break, the respondent's age at re-entry, the gaining of additional qualifications after motherhood and home language of respondents.

In this study of professional women it is apparent that obtaining academic qualifications at a postgraduate level is an important aspect of women's professional lives. Further study at postgraduate level is significantly related to three variables: full-time or part-time work at re-entry (Table 1), full-time or part-time work at the time of the investigation (Table 2), and the age at which the women re-entered the work place (Table 3).

Table 1
Further studies and type of work at re-entry

	FURTHER STUDIES IN THE FIELD					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	%
	N	%	N	%		
Full Time Work	14	27,24	10	19,61	24	46,06
Part Time Work	5	9,80	22	43,14	27	52,94
Total	19	37,25	32	62,75	51	100,00
		$\chi^2 = 8,4$		$p = 0,003$		$df = 1$

Table 2
Work and studies during the investigation

	FURTHER STUDIES IN THE FIELD					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	%
	N	%	N	%		
Full Time Work	17	33,33	16	31,37	33	64,71
Part Time Work	2	3,92	16	31,37	18	35,29
Total	19	37,25	32	62,75	51	100,00
		$\chi^2 = 9,11$		$p = 0,004$		$df = 1$

Table 3
Type of employment related to age at re-entry

AGE AT RE-ENTRY	EMPLOYED BY OTHERS		SELF EMPLOYED		TOTAL	%
	N	%	N	%		
20-29	10	21,74	9	19,57	19	41,30
30-35	16	34,78	2	4,35	18	39,13
36-45	8	17,39	1	2,17	9	19,57
Total	34	73,91	12	26,09	46	100,00
		$\chi^2 = 6,97$		$p = 0,022$		$df = 2$

The timing of the further study is also significantly related to other variables. When additional qualifications are obtained after the career break, they are significantly related to four variables namely full-time or part-time work at re-entry and at the time of the study (Table 4), home language (Table 5), and the women's age at the birth of her first child (Table 6).

Table 4
Additional qualifications after re-entry related to type of work

	ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AFTER RE-ENTRY					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	%
	N	%	N	%		
Full Time Work	21	41,18	12	23,33	33	64,71
Part Time Work	4	7,84	14	27,45	18	35,29
Total	25	49,02	26	50,98	51	100,00
		$\chi^2 = 8,59$		$p = 0,005$		$df = 1$

Table 5
Additional qualifications after re-entry related to home language

	ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AFTER RE-ENTRY					
	YES		NO			
	N	%	N	%	TOTAL	%
Afrikaans	14	27,45	6	11,76	20	39,22
English	11	21,57	20	39,22	31	60,78
Total	25	49,02	26	50,98	51	100,00

$\chi^2 = 5,34$ $p = 0,016$ $df = 1$

Table 6
Additional qualifications after re-entry related to age at birth of first child

	ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AFTER RE-ENTRY					
	YES		NO			
AGE AT BIRTH OF FIRST CHILD	N	%	N	%	TOTAL	%
19-29	22	43,14	15	29,41	37	72,55
30-37	3	5,88	11	21,57	14	27,45
Total	25	49,02	26	50,98	51	100,00

$\chi^2 = 6,31$ $p = 0,015$ $df = 1$

Self-employment, as opposed to organizational employment of professional women, is significantly related to two variables, namely age at re-entry and length of the career break (Table 7).

Table 7
Type of employment related to age at re-entry

	EMPLOYED BY OTHERS		SELF EMPLOYED			
	N	%	N	%	TOTAL	%
No break	2	3,92	5	9,80	7	13,73
Less than 1 year	9	17,65	5	9,80	14	27,45
1-6 years	14	27,45	2	3,92	16	31,37
6 years or more	12	23,53	2	3,92	14	27,45
Total	37	72,55	14	27,45	51	100,00

$\chi^2 = 8,33$ $p = 0,022$ $df = 3$

DISCUSSION

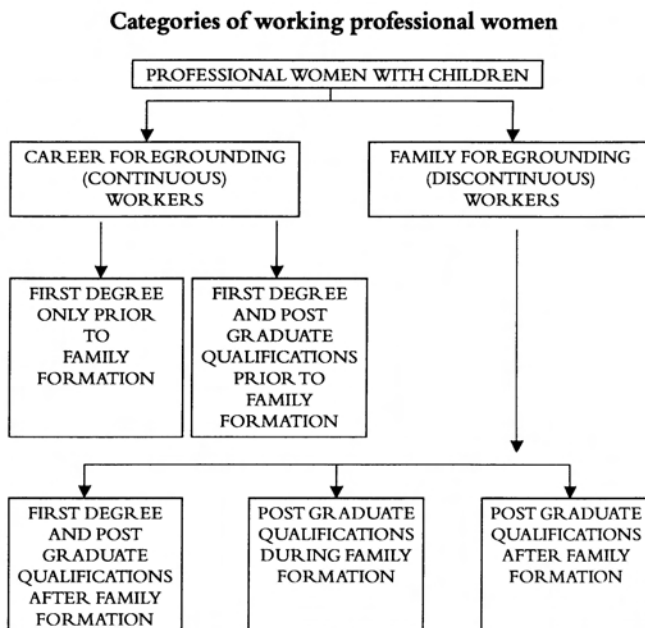
The model derived from Dex (1984) in Diagram1 only partially explained the career break patterns of professional women in this study. The findings in this study are too complex to be fitted to that model. It became clear that some career-break patterns could be better explained if the qualifications of women were taken into account.

Diagram 2 shows a model which incorporates qualifications and career-breaks and is a process model rather than a classification one. It is a model of lifelong learning and career pursuit in professional women and for that reason Dex's descriptive labels for her categories of working women have been changed. Family Formation Continuous Workers are called Career Foregrounding (Continuous) Workers and Family Formation Discontinuous Workers are called Family Foregrounding (Discontinuous) Workers.

The professional woman of the second half of the twentieth century is a woman who fulfils the roles of career-and-family

and lifelong learner. She is a woman who foregrounds her family during family formation and who foregrounds her career and professional development both before and after family formation.

Diagram 2



Professional women are often members of dual-career couples. 80 per cent of the women in this sample are members of dual-career couples. The remaining 20 per cent are single parents by virtue of widowhood or divorce. According to the terminology used by Schwartz (1980) all the women in this sample can be termed "career-and-family" rather than "career-primary" women. 51 per cent of the sample put their careers "on hold" (Schwartz 1989) whilst they raised their children; their career breaks lasted between one and fifteen years. The findings of this study do not support Devanna (1987) who reports that women are no more likely than men to choose family above career. There is support for the finding of Wessels (1982) that the majority of women stop working after the birth of the first child (See Table).

13,7 per cent of the sample took no break at all and 71 per cent of these continuous workers (Dex, 1984) were self-employed (See Table 7). 85 per cent of these women work in non-traditional fields and most are very highly qualified thus supporting the findings of Yohalem (1979) that these women demonstrate a greater determination to follow a career despite the number and age of their children than women with similar families who have made a smaller investment in career preparation.

All the remarried women in this sample (all of them were previously divorced) have studied further and therefore this finding supports Lemmer (1990) who suggests that they have an increased awareness of the tenuousness of a husband's support and are likely to be employed. 75 per cent of the divorced women have also studied further, both before and after motherhood.

Some women in the study were ambivalent about being career women. Some respondents stated clearly that they were not career women despite being highly qualified working mothers. They often experience great anxiety about leaving young children to return to work, and find employment stressful even if it is part-time. Wessels (1982) reported that South African women were ambivalent about being career women.

The women in this study who are married to economically secure husbands experienced great stress about returning to

work because their peers and families find it unacceptable. Hiebert (1987) reports that some women are troubled about their failure to adapt to the traditional role which their peers are happy to adopt. Economically secure women in this study found that the pressure applied by their social groups was so great that they felt selfish and guilty about returning to work and experienced great personal tumult about pursuing their careers.

The most significant results which have emerged from this study concern the continued pursuit of a career by the professional women in this sample.

Table 8
Career break & professional development patterns

	NO CAREER BREAK		CAREER BREAKS		
	Continuous Workers	Discontinuous Workers	Re-entry after all births	Re-entry between births but not after every birth	Re-entry after every birth
First Degree Only Prior To Family Formation – No Further Quals	5 98%	8 13.7%	5 11.9%	–	3 7.1%
Degree Plus Post Graduate Quals Prior To Family Formation	4 7.8%	20 39.2%	8 19%	2 4.7%	10 23.8%
Post Graduate Quals During Family Formation	X	2 3.95%	2 4.7%	–	–
Post Graduate Quals After Family Formation	X	10 19.6%	5 11.9%	1 2.3%	4 9.5%
All Quals After Family Formation	X	2 3.9%	2 4.7%	–	–
TOTAL	9	42	22	3	17
Percentage	17.6%	82.4%	52.4%	7.1%	40.5%

Serious continued career pursuit is indicated, firstly, by further study after an initial three year post-matriculation degree or diploma. Secondly, if additional qualifications had not been obtained before motherhood, serious career pursuit would be indicated by obtaining additional qualifications after the career break. Thirdly, serious career pursuit would be indicated by the type of work which women engage in after their re-entry to the work place. Sometimes women re-enter the work place on a part-time basis while their children are very young and take up full-time work when their children are older.

It is also interesting to note that twice as many Afrikaans speaking women as English speaking women obtained additional qualifications after their career break. This may be attributable to a cultural emphasis on academic achievement which is very highly prized in the community. For women, it may also imply a need for credibility in the work place.

This study does not confirm the hypothesis that professional women do not pursue their careers seriously after motherhood. Professional women do take relatively short career breaks particularly if they are not employed by others. Professional women embark on further academic studies which may enhance their career prospects after re-entry. Increased symp-

toms of stress are experienced by many women after re-entry but these are not significantly related to any of the other variables discussed.

Implications for Human Resources and Manpower Planning and Development

The implications of this study for organisations which employ highly qualified women primarily concern the planning and management of women's career breaks.

Some organisations offer women maternity leave of six weeks to three months. Not one organisation which employed the women in this study offered or negotiated an extended career break with them. Those who felt that they could not return to work after the maternity leave period simply resigned; some became self-employed.

Some women who did return to the organisations where they were originally employed did so at a lower level thus confirming the findings of Stoner and Hartman (1990) that the presence of children hurt women's careers. This has also occurred where women returned to work in other organisations.

The women who fared best when returning to work were those who either took no break at all, those who used annual personal leave as maternity leave or those who took a short maternity leave period of three months or less.

If organisations were in a better position to judge how seriously their women employees intended to pursue their careers, they would be able to select and recruit those who are seriously career minded. They would also be able to give these women more opportunity for training and development and be more likely to retain them after their career break. Only 21,56 per cent of the women in this study have received training within their organisations. Many women have felt the need for further training and have consequently provided it for themselves, and often at their own expense.

Retraining programmes for returning women do not appear to exist in South Africa. Many organisations in the UK and in the USA have designed retraining programmes for returning women and some organisations are beginning to make re-entry easier for women by being less rigid in their demands and more aware of the need for employees to balance work-and-family demands.

Flexible, more innovative organisational policies dealing with maternity leave, flexible working hours and half-time or part-time work at re-entry need to be developed by companies in South Africa. South African organisations should also ascertain how many workers in their labour force are members of dual-career couples or families in order to become more responsive to their needs.

Some of the professional women in this study have devised innovative and creative ways of dealing with work-and-family demands. One woman works two full days a week and devotes the rest of the time to her family. Another works full-day every second week and half-day for the remaining time. Nevertheless, there is a clear move away from part-time work after re-entry that is seen as unsatisfactory in terms of earnings, career advancement or status in the organisation.

The managing of career breaks and arranging alternative work schedules may require some careful planning and creativity by organisations but the benefits to organisations could be enormous in terms of retained investment in training and development of women employees.

In further research, some measure of women's determination to follow a career could be developed for use in the recruitment and selection procedure. There is data available in this study which could be used to investigate those variables which indicate strong career commitment, so that an objective pre-

dictive measure of serious career pursuit can be developed. The value to organisations would be immense if they were able to separate career women from those who want "just a job" to provide some additional income for the family.

Conclusion

The women in this study who invested a great deal of time in their studies, either before motherhood or afterwards, show a tenacity in pursuing their careers which women of lesser education do not. The presence of children may cause them to defer the serious pursuit of a career until their mid-thirties or later, yet nevertheless, once they re-enter the work place they pursue their careers with great determination and desire to achieve excellence at work. South African women may feel ambivalent about leaving their children to return to work before the children are old enough to attend school, yet they do return to work despite the many social and organisational pressures which make re-entry difficult.

This is the first part of a longitudinal study of the sample. The career development of the group will be studied in the light of the dramatic changes in the political arena since 1994 and the subsequent changes in legislation affecting maternity leave, employment equity and the changes in the Constitution protecting women's rights.

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