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Title : Is It Only About Child Care? Examining Malawi's Gender Culture and its Effects on Women's Reconciliation of Work and Family Responsibilities

Summary

This article examines Malawi's gender culture and its effects on women's reconciliation of work and family responsibilities drawing from the experiences of Malawian women in formal employment. In this regard, the paper firstly examines the child care arrangements and support with domestics that Malawian women in formal employment have and, for comparison, also those of men. Secondly, considering that child care is not all or even always the main focus of family responsibilities potentially affecting Malawian women's work-life, the paper also examines cultural systems and spousal attitudes. Thirdly, it investigates the expectations placed upon women. This article has argued that it is not just affordable child care that matters in managing the work-and family interface. Spending time with children is valuable but spousal attitudes and community expectations also determine women's reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

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Introduction

Extant literature reveals increased interest in how women combine work and family responsibilities following an increased number of women entering employment, the increase in dual breadwinner families and single parent headed households in societies (ILO. 2009). Despite the global nature of the changes in socio-demographics, existing research on the subject matter is largely based on experiences drawn from western societies. Where socio-economic contexts are similar, evidence from western societies might be applicable but this is less likely where there are variations in cultural values, national policies, availability of employment opportunities, the structure of the families (Annor, 2014), level of national income or pattern of economic development. Therefore experiences with combining work and family responsibilities can be expected to be very different in industrial-led development societies than economies dominated by subsistence agriculture. This makes it difficult to generalise western evidence to non-western contexts, resulting in a literature gap on how gender culture influences employment and the combining of work and family responsibilities in non-western contexts (Steiber and Haas 2012, Annor 2014, Mokomane 2014).

The limited literature on non-western societies is Asian context biased. A recent edited book explores the subject matter in 14 Asia-Pacific countries (Baird, Ford et al. 2017). Chen et al., (2017) on China and argues that wealthier families in urban areas use private childcare and pre-schools to enable parents work. For less well-off women, mostly grand-parents helped with child care. Female domestic workers are also used to provide child care and elder care in China. In the same book, Crinis and Bandali (2017) discussed how Malaysian working women rely on family, informal child care and foreign domestic workers as a way of meeting care needs.

There is limited scholarship on the work–family discourse based on the Sub-Saharan African context. Yet, there is high women’s labour force participation and employment rates among these countries (ILO. 2016). There are also significant challenges especially to women who have to juggle paid and unpaid work due to the cultural expectation for people to marry and have children (Phiri 2007, Kyalo 2012), the high dependency ratio (Index mundi 2017), the high prevalence of HIV (GOM. 2010, World Bank. 2016, Kharsany and Karim 2016) and the limited state’s support especially for working parents. However, there is a rising body of literature that focuses on the importance of cultural context in women’s employment decisions in developing countries like Sudan (Kargwell 2008), Nigeria (Nwagbara and Akanji 2012), and South Africa (Whitehead and Kotze 2003, Lewis, Gambles et al. 2007). Recent efforts include an edited book by Mokomane (2014) which discusses experiences of working parents in reconciling work and family in seven of the 52 Sub-Saharan African countries although Malawi was not included. Nevertheless, there is still limited research into women’s reconciliation of work and family responsibilities in these contexts. For instance, Whitehead and Kotze (2003, p.80) in their study found that their female participants most often experienced “job-parent conflict” even though all had some form of household support for child care and household duties. Now the question that the team did not address was why, despite all this support available to working women in South Africa, they still experience the job-parent conflict. This is a question that can also be raised for all societies outside South Africa that share similar attributes in terms of availability of household support for child care and household duties by considering their gender culture.

This article therefore examines Malawi’s gender culture and its effects on women’s reconciliation of work and family responsibilities drawing from the experiences of Malawian women in formal employment. Specifically, it answers the following research question: What are

the expectations placed upon women with respect to the family and community roles they are expected to fulfil and what resources and support are available to them with respect to child care and other family responsibilities? To answer this question, the paper firstly examines the child care arrangements and support with domestics that Malawian women in formal employment have and, for comparison, also those of men. Secondly, the paper examines cultural systems and spousal attitudes. Thirdly, it investigates the expectations placed upon women. The article is structured as follows: after the introductory section, the second section, discusses Pfau-Effinger's gender culture typology. The third section presents and discusses key findings highlighting the major implications of the study's findings. Then conclusions are made, summarising the study's major findings and their implications.

Pfau-Effinger's gender culture typology

Pfau-Effinger (1998) theoretical framework for cross-national gender research proposed looking at the interrelationship between gender order, gender arrangement and gender culture. While gender order refers to structures of gender relations including the gender division of labour, gender arrangement refers to how gender relations are profiled within a particular society (Pfau-Effinger 2004). As Pfau-Effinger (1998, p.150) further notes, "in every modern society certain uniform assumptions exist about the desirable, 'correct' form of gender relations and of the division of labor between women and men." These assumptions become entrenched as norms and are somewhat persistent. The norms and values are called gender culture (Pfau-Effinger,1998). It is gender culture that this paper focuses on.

Gender culture varies among countries depending on historical, political and socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, using institutional explanations in isolation, for understanding the differences in women's employment among countries, may not provide a true picture. Cultural orientations within particular countries are critical for a fuller picture but these orientations may change over time (Pfau-Effinger, 1998). Through her discussion of the modernization paths that the gender culture took in different national socio-cultural and institutional contexts, Pfau-Effinger (1998, 1999, 2004a) proposed a typology using the experiences of Germany, the Netherlands and Finland.

The first modernization path relates to the modernization of the male breadwinner/female carer model towards a male breadwinner/female part-time carer model found in West Germany and the Netherlands although the latter is argued to have further evolved to a dual breadwinner-dual carer model (Pfau-Effinger 1998). In both cases, the traditional male breadwinner/female carer model represents the strict division of labor between men and women in the society's public and private spheres (Pfau-Effinger 1998, Crompton and Harris 1999, Pfau-Effinger 1999). In its pure form, it was based on the notions of men having the primary responsibility to earn a wage and provide for their families and of women being expected to stay home and provide caring services for their family members (Lewis 1992, Crompton 1997, Pfau-Effinger 1998, Lewis 2001, Pfau-Effinger 2004). In the modernized male breadwinner/female part-time carer model, culturally, mothers are expected and are able to do unpaid caring work whilst at the same time engaging in paid part-time employment (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 1999, 2004b). The dual breadwinner/dual carer model which Pfau-Effinger associates with the end point of the Netherlands modernization path, represents "the notion of a symmetrical and equitable integration of both genders into society"(Pfau-Effinger,1998,p.154). There is an assumed equal sharing of domestic work, especially child care and waged labor between spouses (Pfau-Effinger 1998, Pfau-Effinger 1999). However, considering that the Netherlands has the highest gender gap in terms of

working hours in the European union at 27 percent (Warren 2007), indicating that the gender division of labour remains traditional, this suggests that Pfau-Effinger (1998, 2004a) may have been overenthusiastic in arguing that the Netherlands exhibits egalitarian elements of gender equality (Crompton and Harris 1999). In fact, the Netherlands's experiences come close to the one-and-a-half earner model (Ciccio and Bleijenbergh 2014).

The second modernization path in Pfau-Effinger's (1998) original typology was that taken by Finland and originated from a "family economic model and ended with a dual breadwinner/state carer model (Pfau-Effinger, 1998,p.154)." Under the family economic model, both men and women work together, also assisted by older children, to ensure that their family business (farm/craft work) thrives (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 1999). Here the work of women is just as important as that of men for family survival and there is mutual dependency. However, there is still a "strong sexual division of labour...which in fact varies in time and space" (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, p.154). In the 1950s and 60s, the Finland's family economy, started evolving into the dual breadwinner/state carer model characterized by full-time participation in employment by both men and women with both spouses being considered as breadwinners and child care as mainly the responsibility of the welfare state and not primarily that of the family (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 1999, 2004a).

Pfau-Effinger's (1998) view of the possibility of full-time integration of both men and women in the workforce remains an ideal for most societies, although some Nordic countries have moved closer to this arrangement. In most northern European countries (though not in the eastern or southern countries), women still tend to work part-time (Smith, Fagan et al. 1998, Ciccio and Bleijenbergh 2014). This has been associated with child care costs and, limited state support with child care. Child care is still mostly a female responsibility, although there are national differences in the degree of public responsibility for child care and men's participation in care activities (Bazant 2016).

This typology is important for recognising that "policies do not shape employment choices in a cultural void: policies interact with culture to influence women's (and men's) choices about managing work and family" (Budig et al., 2012 p.164). As Kremer (2006) points out, literature on female employment which ignores the specific cultural context within which women work may overemphasise the impact of institutional factors on women's employment outcomes. However, Pfau-Effinger (1998) and subsequent authors that focused on the cultural influences shaping female employment (Kremer 2006, Budig, Misra et al. 2012) based their argument and evidence about the influences of culture on western societies, calling the need for further studies on culture in the non-western societies like Malawi.

Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative study in two industries in Malawi (teaching and finance and insurance. The research is based on 55 semi-structured interviews with Malawian women working in formal employment. From the 55 women interviewed, 31 worked in the public education sector and the remainder in the private sector's financial and insurance services. However, for comparison, 24 men from the same sectors were also engaged in the interviews. The criteria used to select employee respondents in both industries was that firstly, respondents should be drawn from different parts of the setting and hierarchical levels. Secondly there was also to be a combination of respondents with different biographical characteristics based on age, marital status, young children and length of service. These were important variables for understanding any similarities or differences in experiences among different groups of respondents. Such a situation

would therefore provide more rich data on the subject matter. This also ensured having as much a representative sample as possible to the targeted population of working men and women (Teddlie and Yu 2007, Ritchie, Lewis et al. 2014). The employer representatives facilitated the selection of interviewees. From the total women interviewed, a majority (29 women) were aged between 40 and 59, with the remainder being aged from 24 to 39. A total of 23 women had children under the age of 14.

Semi-structured interviews, lasting 45 minutes to one hour, allowed similar set of guiding questions to be asked with each interviewee while also being flexible by providing an avenue to discuss each respondent's unique experiences. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face, with only two conducted over Skype and were tape recorded and fully transcribed. The questions focused on motherhood status, child care arrangements and the support that parents had with domestic chores. They were also asked to explain how supportive or not their spouses were in terms of career decisions. Further probing occurred focusing on the expectations placed on women by themselves as well as the community. The data was analysed thematically, and there were three major themes that emerged from the interviews and these guided the presentation and discussion of findings- motherhood status, child care arrangements and support with domestics, cultural systems and spousal attitudes and expectations placed upon women.

Motherhood status, child care arrangements and support with domestics

Table 4 below shows that the majority of female respondents were mothers evidenced by the fact that out of the 55 female respondents, 33 had children under the age of 15 with ages ranging from 6 months to 14 years.

Table 4: Women respondents by motherhood status and number and age of children

Category of respondents	Teaching	Banking and insurance	Total
Total number of women	31	24	55
Women who are mothers	29	15	44
Women with dependent children	22	11	33
Women with under-five children	7	4	11
Women with children aged 5 to 14 years	15	8	23

As Table 6 shows, most mothers used informal childcare in form of unregistered nannies as the main arrangement for babies and toddlers. In table 5, the comparison of usage of nannies between women in teaching and those from banking and insurance shows that it is mostly women from banking and insurance organisations that had nannies for their children. Teachers, due to their lower salaries found it difficult to pay the legal minimum wage, and therefore to retain domestic

workers. Hence, out of all the 22 women teachers with children under the age of 15, only 8 had nannies compared to all 11 mothers in banking and insurance organisations.

Table 5: Usage of nannies and family members as a form of childcare

	Banking and Insurance	Teaching
Mothers with children under the age of 15	11	22
Women using nannies	11	8
Women using family members	0	9

Parents also use informal childcare in combination with nursery care for children under six years old. Informal childcare is used as regular after-school and holiday childcare for school-age children. Table 6 shows that most women used informal child care in the form of unregistered nannies for children under three years.

Malawi can be seen as a society where child care is considered a private family matter but since market-based care is relatively cheap, a majority of the respondents “outsource care tasks”(den Dulk and van Doorne-Huiskes, 2007, p.36) by utilising nannies. The 2017 legal minimum pay per day is MK962.00 (USD 1.33) and the majority of nannies and domestic workers are paid below this, especially those working for low income families. This is the case for most of the teachers who could not afford the minimum daily wage. Outsourcing child care “that is, to pay someone else to do them” (Crompton and Lyonette, 2007, p.116), therefore explains how mothers, especially those in banking and insurance organisations are able to reconcile full time work child care responsibilities. Teachers mostly rely on family members for their child care needs.

Table 6 provides details of the childcare arrangements per child, but some parents had more than one child and some children had more than one arrangement. Consequently, the number of children is higher than the actual number of respondents with dependent children. With respect to the 11 dependent children aged under five, one was already attending school while 10 still needed pre-school care. Of these, only four children were looked after by a nanny (two by a day nanny, one by a full-time nanny and one by a part-time nanny) although a fifth child (a respondent’s granddaughter) was looked after by a female neighbour who was not working. Three more children were looked after by nannies after participating in some formal childcare (one went to a private nursery, two went to preschool). Another child also needed some care after nursery but this was provided informally, namely she was left “with her friends to play” (with a possibility of the neighbours watching over) as Rachel, her mother returns to work as a Community Day Secondary teacher. One child was taken care of by an older sibling and her father, whilst the respondent was away for studies.

Table 6: Child care arrangements reported by women and men

Reported childcare arrangements – women	Children under 3years	Children 3 - <5year olds	Children aged 5 to 14 year	Total
Not formally employed husband	0	0	0	0
Nursery/preschool	2	1	0	3
Nanny	6	1	22	29
School going	0	1	34	35
Family members (except spouse)	1	0	10	11
Neighbour	1	1	0	2
Attends after school private lessons	0	0	2	2
None	0	1	2	2
Total	10	5	70	85
Reported child care arrangements – men	Children under 3years	Children 3 - <5year olds	Children aged 5 to 14 year	Total
Wife in informal employment	0	0	8	8
Wife in formal employment	2	1	1	4
Housewife	1	1	2	4
Nanny	2	1	9	12
Nursery	0	1	0	1
School	0	0	22	22
Family members	0	0	3	3
Total	5	4	45	54

From the table above, only three women with dependent children reported not having any childcare arrangement after school hours. The first two cases were teachers with older children aged 11 and 13. These stayed at home on their own while their mothers worked. In the first case, their home was within the school premises. The third case was a teacher with a four and a half year old who was already in school. After school hours, the child was taken care of by the respondent as the child's school hours coincided with the respondent's teaching hours.

As Table 4 shows, only eleven mothers did not have dependent children at the time of the interview. Ten of these eleven mothers recalled having had child care support in the form of nannies and family members when their children were young. Only one female secondary school teacher, did not have any form of child care when her child was very young and recalled how she left her child unattended whilst teaching at a rural based primary school:

“From five months, I used to take my son to [work]. Whilst teaching, I would leave him somewhere out where he could be seen and I was able to teach. ...that is how he grew up... (Namada, a 42 year old widow)

Namada further explained that she did not have adequate resources to hire a nanny for her child and the private nursery, which was very cheap at the time, was a great help. Thus the limited (or non-existent) affordable formal child care for those women who cannot afford to have a good nanny make mothers of young children vulnerable to the need to resort to inappropriate child care arrangements like leaving them unattended. Moreover, since women teaching in rural based schools are located away from their extended families, they have less access to family-based childcare. Two respondents, Meryl and Apawo reported that it was their husbands who took care of their children when they were young whilst they worked or went for teacher upgrading courses. Meryl’s husband was a subsistence farmer and could easily combine this work with childcare. Despite Meryl preparing in advance in terms of what the child would need in her absence, people still thought that her husband’s acceptance to take care of children whilst his wife worked was unusual. She reported:

“People thought that maybe I had given my husband some charms, yet his gesture was done out of love” (44 year old Meryl, primary school teacher)

Similarly, 39 year old Apawo, who was undergoing an upgrading course at the time of the interview, left her children with her husband who is also a teacher whilst she went for an eight weeks residential part of the teacher upgrading course she pursued (Diploma). She also left her children with her husband over weekends when she could attend ‘study circles’ where she could meet other students in her zone for course related discussions as part of the course requirements. This was also seen as an abnormal behaviour: She recalled:

“Other women, my neighbours...would [accuse me of using] charms on my husband for him to be allowing me to go wherever I wanted...”

The charm issue notwithstanding, what is evident from these extracts is that the prevailing gender culture meant that people disapproved of the inversion of traditional gender roles. They did not see fathers looking after children as part of their responsibilities whilst the mothers pursued career related endeavours. This highlights the gendered nature of child care provision (Hays, 1998).

With reference to the men’s child care arrangements, Table 6 also shows that wives provided the most of the childcare for under-five children even though most of them were also employed; to a lesser extent nannies were also important providers of childcare in the case of men.

As Table 7 below shows, a majority of the married women (28 out of 31) had their male partners in professional and other full-time jobs. From the 13 married men interviewed, six had spouses in formal employment whereas three had their spouses in informal employment such as running a small business for example selling food stuffs and other merchandise at a small scale. The remaining four described their wives as housewives. The same table also shows that 10 male respondents and 24 female respondents were either single, divorced or widowed and that the majority of married respondents in this study (41 out of 44) were based in dual earner households confirming that most households in Malawi are dual earner households.

Table 7: What were the spouses of the married respondents engaged in?

What their partners engaged in	Male respondents	Female respondents
Professional and other full time jobs	5	28
Professional part-time jobs	1	0
House wives	4	0

Informal employment-small business	3	3
Total married respondents	13	31
Single/divorced/widowed respondents	10	24
Total respondents	23	55

This suggests that in Malawi as the case is elsewhere, “women are more likely to have a spouse who is also a professional compared to their male counterparts” (Young et al., 2015, p.1763). Yet those women may still be expected to do a greater proportion of the domestic work.

Since all the female respondents had full-time jobs, I explored the support they had with domestic work. For those that had childcare responsibilities, their domestic workers combined child care and some domestic chores. Table 8 below shows that 23 out of 55 women interviewed had full-time domestic workers and just one had a part-time domestic worker. Thus for a majority of respondents, support with domestic tasks, like childcare, is outsourced (Crompton and Lyonette 2007). The second largest category was those without support (19 out of 55) followed by those who rely on other family members (12). Again, a majority of those without support were teachers. For comparison, the table also shows the major source of support with domestic work among men. Most men rely on their spouses in informal employment for carrying out domestic tasks.

Table 8: Major source of support with domestic work

Major source of support	Number of women	Number of men
Full time domestic workers	23	5
Part time domestic workers	1	0
Spouses	0	11
Other Family members	12	2
No support	19	6
Total respondents	55	24

Considering the pivotal role played by domestic workers in a context of little state support, improved legal protections for domestic workers are welcome but this will have implications in terms of their affordability. Women who are also in relatively low-paid employment, such as primary school teachers, may not be able to continue working after having children if they cannot afford domestic workers to look after their children. For example, Patrick reported that following his wife’s maternity leave, he will ask her to resign from her low paying job as a shop assistant. As her pay is almost the same as the minimum wage that would have to be paid to a nanny, he considered his wife would be better off resigning to take care of their child herself. Although this one example is not a basis on which to predict future behaviour in the face of the rising cost of domestic workers, it is an important insight into what may happen in future if the affordability of domestic workers (who also have their own economic and child care needs) does not form part of the policy agendas regarding domestic work and women’s employment. Moving of women out of the formal sector where they are already in minority is not good for both the economy in general and specifically the advancement of the gender equality agenda. Raising costs of domestic work

in the absence of a wider gender equality agenda may alternatively result in an increase in inadequate child care arrangements if women were to continue working in formal employment.

Cultural systems and spousal attitudes

Since child care is not all or even always the main focus of family responsibilities potentially affecting Malawian women’s work-life, this article also focuses on cultural systems and spousal attitudes. Table 9 below shows the distribution of female respondents according to their cultural system. Among the female respondents, there were 38 from matrilineal tribes and 16 from patrilineal tribes. This is not to suggest that more people from matrilineal societies are more likely to be employed than those from patrilineal groups. Instead this reflects the majority of matrilineal groups in the national population¹.

Table 9: Respondents distributed by cultural system

Respondents	Matrilineal	Patrilineal	Not Asked the question	Total
Women	38	16	1	55
Men	16	3	5	24
Total	54	19	6	79

In terms of spousal attitudes, fifty out of fifty-five women reported that their husbands fully supported their careers, regardless of their cultural system. Specifically, most of the women from the patrilineal society reported having the support of their husbands towards achieving career goals as extracts below show:

[...] maybe I married a better Tumbuka² who is more understanding. He is the one that supported me [even financially] when I was in college ... (46 years old Janet, female manager, local bank).

“[My] husband has been encouraging me to go to school...” (42 year old Malita, female teacher).

“[my husband is very, very supportive [...] bearing in the mind that most of the times I finish work late and most of the times I find that he is already home... he is understanding, he does not complain about this...” (42 year old Happiness, the local bank).

“My husband supports my career. In fact for me to reach this stage, it is because of him. I got married before I started working. I joined the teaching profession whilst married.” (38 year old Chisomo, teacher).

From the above extracts, husbands from patrilineal societies can hold positive attitudes about the careers of wives within the context of it being to the overall good of the family. Although

¹ The study did not deliberately include ethnic grouping as a sampling criteria

² One of the patrilineal ethnic groups in Malawi

some husbands in matrilineal societies were also reported to be supportive and that they held positive attitudes towards women's career orientations, 5 of the 38 women from matrilineal societies reported that their spouses had negative attitudes regarding their careers, especially when it meant staying away from their families for longer periods. These were mostly those that had decided to upgrade their qualifications that meant staying away from home for long periods. This is not to say with certainty that husbands in matrilineal societies do not support their spouses' careers due to limited evidence in that regard. Also, it may be due to a tendency for women from matrilineal societies to be more independent minded, ambitious and more likely to challenge gender stereotypes which in turn could generate greater resistance from husbands. However, this finding offers an important lead into investigating further the differences in the two cultural systems as regards spouse's attitudes towards their wives' careers. One of the women from the matrilineal society recalled her experience when she had gone for an upgrading course:

“My husband ... did not allow me pursue the course. [He threatened] that my failure to listen to him could lead to the end of our marriage, I ... [told him that I will] proceed with my studies because this was my once in a life time chance. ...he argued “the way you are behaving now, the moment you [complete] this course ... you [will be] taking [over] the role of a husband”... [We indeed separated] but we are now living together again after being apart for two years...” (Daina, 41 year old female secondary school teacher)

Martha, a 28 year old female primary school teacher from the matrilineal cultural system, reflecting on factors that hinder career progression of women, despite not directly talking about her experience argued:

“What I see is that when you have a husband who is at a lower level of education than you, as I said my husband is a business man and here I am working for government...some men will be jealous and would not want you to upgrade professionally for fear that when you get [better] educated than them, you will start belittling them. As a result, when there is an opportunity for you to advance your career, they can say you shouldn't take that opportunity... they will do whatever they can to frustrate you...”

Apawo recalled her experience with studying on the distance mode which required her to be in college during specific periods for the residential learning and in study clusters over weekends:

“...it was tough on my family, you know as women, we are supposed to be home caring for the home, the children and the husband...but then we were spending 8 weeks [in college] because the residential period was for 8 weeks so it meant leaving the family. [Additionally] each and every weekend we were supposed to go for study circles ...sometimes [my] husband would say, “No, today I think you should be home, do this and that but in most cases he could say go, ... but not always willingly ... there could be some conflicts here and there...” (Apawo, 39 year old secondary school teacher, under upgrading training]

Two out of four married women interviewed whilst undergoing a teaching upgrading course at Domasi College reported that their partners were unfaithful during their period away in college. Such experiences or their anticipation may prevent women from making progressive career related decisions. Cognisant of the fact that this sample is too small to make any realistic conclusions, this is also an important lead into understanding the attitudes and behaviours of male partners of

women who decide to re-enter higher education for the sake of progressing in their careers. This is so because spouse's positive attitude and emotional support have the greatest influence on reducing the conflict between career and family that professional women face (Whitehead and Kotze 2003, O'Neil, Kanyongolo et al. 2016). Yet most of the studies that focus on the family challenges highlight child care issues (Home 1997, Lin 2016). As this article argues, child care challenges may not tell the full story as regards reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

From the analysis, there is evidence, albeit limited, that husbands from patrilineal societies though supportive of their wives' careers, also appeared to have had a greater influence on women's career decisions. Three female teachers said that their partners had influenced their decisions regarding what course to study. These respondents reported that they had wanted to pursue other professions other than teaching.

Two other respondents (one from matrilineal society) reported how their husbands did not allow them to quit the jobs that they thought had no progression prospects. For instance, 42 year old Malita reported that her husband influenced her decision regarding when to go for further studies and what kind of further studies she was to do. Malita ended up doing a course that had not earned her any recognition in her profession as a teacher, as she did a degree in Human Resource Management. The argument presented by the husband was that she could study a degree in Human Resource Management which is offered over weekends whilst working as a teacher and staying in a free institutional house. If she had decided to pursue a relevant qualification for a teaching job, involving attending lectures during the week, the family would have had to vacate the institutional house. Looking for a house to rent at a market value, was an idea that the husband did not support due to his financial status at the time. Also, almost five years since she graduated with the degree in Human Resource Management and despite not getting any recognition following her new qualification acquisition in her teaching job, she has also not been able to apply for a new job. Her husband had told her to put this on hold until he gets a good job that will make him earn decently so as to be able to pay the house rent somewhere else. Although this decision could be considered as jointly made, on the basis of mostly securing sufficient income for the family against the risk of changing jobs, this respondent seemed unhappy with this decision (which may imply that the husband dominated the decision making process) and she explained that this was the only reason why she "was still stuck in teaching."

Expectations placed upon women

With respect to expectations placed upon women, the interview analysis suggests that despite having support with domestic work, women still reported that they needed to do some household tasks themselves as in the following extracts:

"I normally wake up at 5 am and I do my household chores, of course I have a [domestic] worker but some of the things I need to do on my own, I make sure my kids are up at six, I get them ready...for school" (45 year old Takondwa, multinational insurance company)

"...you have to do your chores at home, then you do the work at school, you prepare your [class lesson] and there are times when they say, no teacher should [go home] before [completing] their lesson plans... that was really difficult...By the time you get home, you

are very tired,...[but] there is no way a husband would come and find a wife seated on the sofa, he would want to eat something prepared by the wife.”(61 year old Tinyade, retired primary school teacher but working on month to month arrangements).

Victor (aged 36), a male respondent in the multinational insurance whose wife was also in formal employment, expected her to cook his food although he reported having a maid. He argued:

“...Where I grew up, a wife is supposed to be cooking for the family. ... when I am there, she is supposed to cook...”

Happiness, (aged 44), one of the female bankers in the local bank, explained her experience with finding her husband at home upon her return from work:

“I finish work late and most of the times I find that my husband is already home, it’s embarrassing as a woman to find your husband at home because culturally it’s a woman who is supposed to be home first... he complains, jokingly that [it seems] “it’s you who “married me” ...because I am always the one who opens the door for you these days.”

“Married me” in Happiness’ interview extract above has been deliberately put in quotation marks. This phrase, when presented in western contexts may not show any hierarchical relationships between a man and a woman in a marital relationship. However, its literal translation into vernacular, Chichewa connotes the power relationship between a man and woman in a marital relationship. In the local language there are different word derivations from ‘marry’ to differentiate between men and women. It is a man who ‘marries’ a woman and a woman gets ‘married to’ a man. In the above extract therefore, Happiness, by working long hours and finding her husband already at home is being seen as altering the power relationships- she should be the one opening the door for her husband and not vice versa.

This finding therefore highlights the importance of societal views which are embedded in gender culture about women’s role which can make women have problems managing work and family responsibilities even in cases where there is support with childcare or domestic work (Whitehead and Kotze, 2003). Societal views about their roles can also affect their self-esteem and identity as they feel they are not fitting the description of a good wife or mother as socially defined and expected. For some of the women without maids or other forms of support with domestic chores, the domestic division of labour was still traditional as the women practically did all the domestic tasks:

“... I am one of the busiest woman ... [at this school] because, am married and I don’t have a maid at home, so I do all the work.... I wake up by half four or five am. I sweep the surroundings of the house, mop, then I let my husband have a bath then ... I prepare my eleven years old child for school, then I prepare breakfast and I am the last one to have a bath to come to [work]... I am expected to be here by seven o’clock and I spend the whole day here at school. ... in between, I sneak out, go home and prepare lunch for my dear husband and for myself...when I finish work at five I make sure that I have [food] ready for [the next day]... if there is ironing to be done[I do]. But usually the washing and the ironing, I do that over the week-end.” (52 years old Norah, Female secondary school teacher).

A 30 year old Apatsa, a female secondary school teacher, explicitly expressed that she did not expect her husband to participate in domestic chores since she was there and they had a maid to help out too. Another female teacher, 42 year old Grace reported that her husband could not do anything because from his patrilineal ethnic grouping, Ngoni... “men are kings” as such they wait to be served always. Joyce, from the local bank echoed this view:

“... Mine is a typical African [man], he does not do anything... At one time, I had a two days trip to Lilongwe and when I walked [into the house], I was asked, “where are my handkerchiefs?” and I was like mmh! ... For my husband, you do everything for him, he is my big baby...”

This therefore is consistent with a study by O’Neil, Kanyongolo et al. (2016) involving Malawian female members of parliament who argued that culturally, a woman is expected to be responsible for all domestic tasks regardless of the public office she holds, even if this is only to do with overseeing domestic workers.

For comparison, I asked the men whether they did any domestic chores or not. A majority of men indicated that they did not have to do any domestic chores, some indicating they may help over weekends when the wife is busy. The extracts thus allude to the same point: men play a limited role in domestic chores:

“... To be honest ... when I wake up I just think of dropping off my kids to school and then coming to work.... (Bizwick, 38 years old, married, male, Multinational Insurance Company)

“The maid is there but[our] bedroom can only be cleaned by my wife. If [my wife] is not available, it will remain like that” (40 year old Lameck, married, the local bank)

“I cook on Sundays, out of interest” (36 year old Victor, a male respondent from the multinational insurance company)

Apart from expectations placed on women by their spouses, “...there are also other societal expectations on women that are posed on them regardless of marital status...” (Sandra, 40 years old, Manager, Multinational Insurance Company). In this case, women, unlike men are socially expected to participate in other community based activities and they do spend more time in such activities than men. Women are expected for instance to participate in cooking during funerals, weddings and other similar community based activities.

Conclusion

This article aimed at answering the following research question “What are the expectations placed upon women with respect to the family and community roles they are expected to fulfil and what resources and support are available to them with respect to child care and other family responsibilities.” In this case, the paper investigated the child care arrangements used by the interviewed women, the support they had with domestic work, spousal attitudes and wider social expectations of women’s roles. Domestic workers and family members were found to provide support with domestic work and child care enabling the women, despite having family responsibilities, to be permanently in the workforce. For some time, the national labour law in protecting domestic workers’ rights has not been strictly applied and therefore many were paid below the minimum wage and worked long hours. Domestic workers also rarely organised themselves or participated in trade unions.

This limited protection has made it easier for women in formal employment to combine paid work and unpaid work as domestic assistance was relatively affordable. These arrangements have reduced social pressures for change resulting in limited policy debates on child care. The available pro-gender policies and legislation focusses primarily on gender quotas in recruitment and promotion, non-discrimination (GOM. 1994, GOM 2012) and gender based violence (GOM. 2011, GOM. 2014) rather than care policies. Trade unions have also not advocated improvements in paid maternity leave or breastfeeding rights for working mothers.

However, currently, there is an increased uneasiness about the increase in the minimum wage that also applies to domestic workers, and pressure to extend the labour laws to domestic worker employers. This is a response to the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011(No. 189) which came into force in 2013, extending basic labour rights to domestic workers around the globe (ILO. 2013). Women in formal employment are now concerned about the affordability of domestic workers as indicated by discussions in social media. Recent newspaper reports also show that some civil servants regard the revised minimum wage for domestic workers to be high considering the low pay that civil servants themselves receive (Nkhulembe 2017). While not in any sense advocating less protection nor lower pay for domestic workers, what this research reveals is the need for a more coordinated gender equality policy. Efforts to uplift one group of women may bring undesirable effects on another group of women. Improved working conditions for domestic workers makes it difficult for women in formal employment to afford them and therefore raises new problems over how to combine paid and unpaid work. There is a need for proper policy reflections on this to prevent serious implications on women's future employment behaviour.

Additionally, despite having support with child care and domestic work, the women interviewees felt they still had to perform certain tasks themselves and their spouses also had expectations over what tasks their wives should do themselves rather than delegate to domestic workers. Moreover, the women were also socially expected to participate in community based activities, spending more time than men. Similar observations were made by Aborampah (1999) in relation to women's roles in funeral celebrations of the Akan of Ghana, where women are considered key to providing the support network for the bereaved. Similarly, Mphande (2014), also writing in the context of Malawi, noted that providing support to the bereaved in any form demonstrates communal responsibility towards the bereaved family. These wider roles are typical of women's community life in developing contexts as Falola and Amponsah (2012) noted in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Their counterparts in developed societies do not necessarily have to play this community role, due to greater individualisation and to the availability of market substitutes for services that women in developing contexts provide on behalf of their communities.

Additionally, the reviewed literature on work-life balance places the main emphasis on child care (Lewis 2001, Crompton and Lyonette 2006), implying that professional women with access to reasonably cheap childcare are less likely to have problems with managing work and family responsibilities. Contrary to this dominant view, this article has shown that it is not just affordable child care that matters in managing the work-and family interface. Spending time with children is valuable but spousal attitudes and community expectations also determine what women should do. These are equally important factors in understanding reconciliation of work and family responsibilities in developing economies.

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