

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The study is about managing problems and pressures facing single working mothers in management and professional occupations in South African organisations. Given their numbers in terms of South Africa's demography, single working mothers are under-researched in South Africa, as in many other countries. The phenomenal rise in the number of women in the labour market in South Africa since the 1990s means that the challenge of maintaining the delicate balance between women's personal and professional lives can no longer be ignored. The ability of women in general, and of single mothers in particular, to succeed in their economic pursuits depends, amongst other things, on their psychosocial well-being. It was therefore an important motivation for this study to ensure that the goals of economic emancipation and the potential contributions of women, and especially single mothers, in management and professional occupations, are not undermined by the psychosocial dysfunctions that women face in the workplace. To ensure employee well-being, organisations need to develop supporting policies and benefits that could shield working mothers against negative work-family interaction. Otherwise, the hope of poverty eradication and of the increased contributions by women to national development will remain a mere pipedream.

In this chapter, the objectives of the study and the methodology used are briefly re-stated, followed by a summary of the results and a discussion of the main findings of the study. The managerial implications are indicated and recommendations are made based on the findings.

6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study specifically sought to measure the pressures and the stressors which single mothers working in management and professional occupations in South Africa encounter and to determine whether single mothers in management and professional occupations experience more pressures and stress than married mothers in related positions. Furthermore, the study sought to examine the difference between single and married working mothers' contentment with specific work and family-supportive resources. Based on the foregoing, the study wanted to identify the kinds of resources that organisations need to provide in order to support single working mothers to cope with work and family demands and stress.

The primary objectives of the research were

- to develop a valid and reliable measuring instrument to survey the problems and pressures single mothers in management and professional occupations in South Africa experience;

- to survey single working mothers' perceptions about the resources they perceive to be important in supporting them to deal with high job and family demands and to cope with stress; and

- to make recommendations regarding possible support systems and practices that organisations could implement to assist single working mothers in coping with work and family pressures and stress.

6.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

6.3.1 Methodology and procedure

To achieve the primary objectives of this research, theoretical information and empirical data relating to the specific issues of the research had to be collected. A sequential mixed method design was adopted to gather the data for the development of a questionnaire and to explore the relationship between supportive resources, work-family pressure and stress, and to compare single and married working mothers' perceptions regarding various resources.

Using the snowball sampling method, the researcher identified 17 women professionals and managers (ten single working mothers and seven partnered working mothers), who were interviewed about their experiences in managing their work-life balance. A semi-structured interview approach was used in which the interviewees were asked eight questions (see Appendix A) and their responses were tape-recorded and transcribed; and the content was analysed. Themes were extracted and later used to develop a set of 121 questions. Lawshe's (1975) technique was used to determine the extent of overlap between these items and the construct domain of the questionnaire. The content validity of the items was assessed by a panel of 27 female and three male experts from a cross-section of public and private organisations in South Africa. Only 96 items, which met Lawshe's criteria of content validity, were retained.

The resulting questionnaire and a covering letter (see Appendix D) were e-mailed to a non-probability purposive convenience sample of 300 women professionals and managers. A total of 205 usable questionnaires were returned and formed the basis of the quantitative part of the study.

Appropriate statistical techniques were used to analyse the data to answer the research questions and objectives of the study. The data were analysed in accordance with the basic associational design and a comparative design, as suggested by Morgan and Griego (1998:77-86). The associational design was used to determine the strength of the relationship between sample identity and the demographic characteristics of the participants, and to explore the relationship between working mothers' perceptions of work and family-supportive resources, work-family pressure and stress. The 'between independent groups design' was used, first, to establish whether the samples were homogeneous in terms of their demographic characteristics and, second, to compare the responses of different groupings in the sample on the measures/scales for work-family pressure, stress and the supporting resources mentioned in this study.

6.3.2 Participants

The sample included 104 single and 101 married working mothers. The 104 single working mothers included 76 unmarried mothers and 28 divorced mothers. This constituted 50.7% of the respondents. The married working mothers made up 49.3%. There was therefore an almost even division between the two sub-samples.

The ages of the sample ranged from 25 to 44 years, with a mean age of 34.43 years for the single working mothers and a mean age of 34.48 years for the married working mothers. The respondents had a 17-year range of work experience, with a mean of 5.35 years' work experience for the single mothers and a mean of 8.29 years' work experience for the married mothers.

The participants were relatively evenly divided between respondents from the managerial and professional ranks – the percentage of participants in the management and professional positions were respectively 48 (46.2%) and 54 (51.9%) for the single mothers and 54 (53.5%) and 45 (44.6%) for the married mothers.

The participants were well educated: of the respondents, three or 1.5% held a certificate and five (2.4%) had a diploma. The rest had been awarded a first degree (18.5%), an Honours degree (36.2%) or a Master's degree (38.5%). Six or 2.9% had doctorates. The number of degrees and the level at which the degrees were awarded were approximately similar for both the single and the married working mothers.

All the respondents had children, ranging from one to six children per family unit. The average was two children, with a standard deviation of one. The average mean age of the youngest child of the respondents in the sample was 6.73 years for the children of single mothers, and 7.01 years for the children of married mothers.

Associational and comparative statistical tests – the Chi-square (χ^2), Phi-coefficient (ϕ) and Cramer's V (V) – indicated that the characteristics of the single and married

working mothers in the sample matched each other to a large extent and that the groups were comparable. This, in essence, fulfilled a central aspect of the study, which was aimed at comparing the stress and coping styles of single and married working women.

6.3.3 Measuring instruments

One of the main aims of the study was the development of a questionnaire to explore the problems and pressures that single mothers in professional occupations and management positions in South Africa experience, and to identify the resources needed to mitigate these stressors. The research was able to develop acceptable and psychometrically sound instruments for measuring the constructs used in this study.

The leading instrument employed in the research was the Work-Family Pressure and Support Questionnaire (W-FPSQ). The W-FPSQ was used to collect information regarding the participants' demographic characteristics and to assess the level of work-family pressures they experienced, as well as the resources available to them to mitigate the pressure arising from work and family demands.

The W-FPSQ consists of three sections. Section A contains demographic data, and Section B contains one scale with items relating to work-family pressures. Higher scores indicate a greater degree of work-family pressure. Section C includes five scales that signify the resources that employees need to balance work and family responsibilities. Higher scores indicate a greater degree of employee contentment with the available resource(s). The items in both Sections B and C were scaled and scored according to a Likert-type scale, with anchors ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

To assess the level of stress working mothers experience and to gauge the coping behaviour they use to manage stressful situations, two sub-scales of the Pressure Management Indicator Questionnaire (PMI) were used. The items of the sub-scales were personalised to ensure that the respondents could identify themselves with the

related behaviour more easily if applicable. These two measurements were named the Overall Stress Index (OSI) and the Coping Behaviour Index (CBI).

Overall stress was measured with the OSI, using nine items derived from the 'physical health' sub-scale of the PMI. Two additional items were added to cover the effects of stress further. The stress measure consists of 11 items that assess stress-related physical symptoms and feelings of exhaustion. The items of the OSI refer to *physiological reactions*, such as prickly sensations or twinges in the body, muscle tremors, shortness of breath or dizziness; and to *exhaustion*, in other words, a lack of energy, difficulty in sleeping, headaches, and low energy levels.

The Coping Behaviour Index (CBI) consists of 17 items derived from the 'coping strategy' sub-scale of the PMI. The items refer to various ways to consciously or subconsciously deal with sources of pressure and stress. The CBI deals with perceptual, cognitive or behavioural responses that are used to avoid, control or manage situations that could be regarded as worrying or stressful. These responses include planning ahead, expanding interests and activities outside of work, seeking as much support as possible, concentrating on specific problems, effective use of time and setting priorities, interpreting the problem whilst maintaining a positive outlook on the problem and taking care to handle the stressful event in a mature manner.

The items in both the OSI and CBI indexes were scaled and scored in accordance with the scoring method laid down for the relevant sub-scales. The items of the OSI are rated on a six-point scale; and the respondents had to indicate how often they had experienced specific stress symptoms over the last three months. The items of the CBI are also rated on a six-point scale; and the respondents had to indicate the coping behaviour they used to deal with issues or events that had been a source of pressure to them during the last three months. Higher scores on the OSI are related to high levels of stress. By contrast, higher scores on the CBI signify more helpful coping behaviour.

6.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

6.4.1 Exploratory factor analysis

The W-FPSQ was constructed to survey single and married working mothers' experience of work-family pressure and the resources they require to cope with work-family pressure and stress. A total of 96 items were initially included in the W-FPSQ. After two applications of EFA, 54 of these items yielded a six-factor solution. The six factors displayed adequate factorial validity, unidimensionality and reliability. The magnitudes of the factor scores of the items in each of the six factors were all larger than 0.47, with factor scores ranging from 0.47 to 0.89. The mean inter-item correlations ranged from 0.68 to 0.81; and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients from 0.897 to 0.948. These results provided sufficient evidence of the psychometric adequacy of the W-FPSQ.

Similarly, the OSI and CBI demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and reinforced the overall confidence in the findings of the study. Factor analysis of the responses of the present sample on the OSI showed that five items identify physical stress symptoms (PSS) (Cronbach's alpha = 0.899) and six items measure feelings of exhaustion (ESS) (Cronbach's alpha = 0.842). The scores of the two scales were summed to form an OSI (Cronbach's alpha = 0.898).

The analysis of the factor structure of the CBI produced two poorly defined factors. Ten of the 17 items cross-loaded relatively high on both factors. The inter-correlation between the summated scores of the two factors was exceptionally high ($r = 0.840$). To avoid the problem of multicollinearity, it was decided to combine the scores of the two subscales to compute an overall coping behaviour index score for each respondent. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present sample on the CBI was 0.957.

6.4.2. Pressures facing women professionals and managers at work

Factor 1 of the W-FPSQ measures work and family role conflict. This scale consists of 15 items, with factor loadings from 0.875 to 0.486, and it accounts for approximately 17.25% of the total variance in the dataset. This factor was called work-family pressure, as it focuses primarily on pressures associated with conflict in balancing work and family demands. The elements of this factor include issues related to number of work hours, time pressures, workload, role overload and role conflict, and the inability to satisfy family and professional role expectations. This factor also includes items related to pressures associated with financial constraints, and feelings of social isolation, low self-esteem and emotional exhaustion. This factor measures the presence of time-, strain- and behaviour-based conflict and the pressures experienced by working mothers (Cronbach's alpha = 0.948).

6.4.3 Perceived support and resources needed to mitigate high job and family demands

The resources were defined by the content of the remaining five factors or scales of the W-FPSQ:

Personal development: This factor refers to the opportunities that working mothers have for personal development, growth and career advancement in their jobs. It measures both the intrinsic and extrinsic job resources that provide support to employees at the organisational, work and social levels (Cronbach's alpha = 0.927).

Management support: This factor includes items related to management behaviour that provides social and interpersonal support to employees in the form of both work and psychosocial assistance. The elements of this factor include managers' encouragement of working mothers to pursue their career goals, adequate and constructive feedback on performance, and a recognition of working mothers' need to achieve a balance between their personal and professional lives (Cronbach's alpha = 0.943).

Organisational flexibility: This factor describes a caring and family-oriented organisation which provides a flexible work environment. This includes flexible work schedules, allowing employees to work from home, involving and consulting with employees in decisions about workload and control over work time. This scale measures resources that provide support to employees at the work and family level (Cronbach's alpha = 0.897).

Time for family interaction: This factor is related to work-family interaction and refers to working mothers' experience of the availability of time for family interaction and building family relations. The items of this factor are associated with an employee's ability to 'switch off' at home, to balance work and family time, time to do things with the family and have enough time for themselves, and time on hand to match family members' schedules. It also includes the viewpoint that (satisfied) family demands have a favourable influence on their work. This scale is related to personal and social support (Cronbach's alpha = 0.926).

Childcare support: The variables of this factor include working mothers' satisfaction with arrangements made for their children while the mothers are working, the availability of a helper or baby sitter when mothers are absent or when their children are ill, and the ease with which working mothers can arrange for someone to look after their children (Cronbach's alpha = 0.912).

6.4.4 Demographic characteristics and outcome variables

Correlation analyses using Spearman's rank order correlation (ρ), showed the following significant relationships between the demographic characteristics and the dependent variables for the present sample:

Working mothers' age, years of work experience and the number of dependants they had were all significantly related. The age of the respondents, however, did not bear any significant relationship to their support, coping behaviour, pressure and stress scores.

Working mothers' years of experience in their present organisation or profession appeared to have a significant relationship with most of the variables under study, and notably with age, the number of dependants, personal development,

organisational flexibility and time for interaction, but was negatively related to perceptions of work-family pressures and stress dimensions.

Level of qualification showed no noteworthy correlation with work-family pressure or the stress measurements.

The total hours that a married mother spends at work in a week did not correlate significantly with any of the demographic characteristics, or the support, coping, pressure and stress scores.

The number of dependants correlated positively with the overall coping behaviour score and negatively with the work-family pressure scores.

The number of days' sick leave taken by the working mothers over a period of three months correlated negatively with the age of the youngest child and related positively with the experience of exhaustion symptoms, although the effect sizes were small.

In summary, it seems that working mothers' years of experience in their present organisation or profession are the most important demographic variable in understanding possible variability in the sample's support, pressure and stress scores. Years of experience accounted for 14.1% of the variability in work-family pressure and 10.1% of the variability in the overall stress scores. However, the inclusion of working mothers' years of experience as a covariate did not have any significant effect on the results of the between-subjects effect of marital status or the opportunity to negotiate work hours.

6.4.5 The relationship between the supportive resources and specific behavioural dimensions

The correlation between the different resources, coping behaviour, work-family pressure and stress experienced by the present sample indicated the following important relationships:

Personal development correlated significantly positively with coping behaviour, but negatively with work-family pressure, physiological symptoms, exhaustion symptoms and overall stress. Personal development accounted for 29.6% of the

variability in work-family pressure and 40.4% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

Perceptions of management support correlated positively with the scores on the coping behaviour scale and negatively with the scores for work-family pressure, physiological symptoms, exhaustion symptoms, and overall stress. Management support explained 14% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

Organisational flexibility scores correlated positively with the scores on the coping behaviour scale and negatively with the scores for work-family pressure, physiological symptoms, exhaustion symptoms, and overall stress. Four of the correlations' effect size was medium to large. Creating and providing a flexible work environment seemed to explain 24.5% of the variability in work-family pressure and 25.7% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

The scores on the time for family interaction scale correlated significantly with the scores on the coping behaviour scale, with a medium effect size. The availability of time for family interaction related significantly negatively with work-family pressure, physiological symptoms, exhaustion symptoms, and overall stress. Most of these correlations denoted large size effects. Time for family interaction accounted for 38.9% of the variability in work-family pressure and 49.1% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

Childcare support correlated positively with the scores on the coping behaviour scale and negatively with the scores for work-family pressure, physiological symptoms, exhaustion symptoms and overall stress. The effect sizes of three correlations were large. Childcare arrangement accounted for 29.6% of the variability in work-family pressure and 35.0% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

Significant negative correlations were found between the overall coping behaviour score and the scores on the pressure/stress scales. However, the effect size of all the rho correlation coefficients was relatively small.

The five support variables appeared to collectively explain approximately 41.2% of the variability in work-family pressure, 29.7% of the variability of the physiological symptoms and 54.7% of the variability in the occurrence of the exhaustion

symptoms. Approximately 50.2% of the variability in the overall stress scores was due to the effects of the combined support scales.

6.4.6 The effect of marital status and the ability to negotiate non-standard working hours

The results of the non-parametric MANOVA indicate that marital status and negotiating non-standard working hours had a considerable effect on the sample's perception of the support, coping behaviour, pressure and stress measures. There were significant differences in the vectors of the mean rank scores of mothers who were single as opposed to married, and the vectors of the mean rank scores of mothers that responded 'Yes' rather than 'No' to the question as to whether they can negotiate non-standard working hours. Experience of negative events and ongoing negative pressures did not have an effect on the variance in the eight outcome variables.

With regard to the relationship between marital status and the dependent variables, the results show significant statistical differences between single working mothers' and married working mothers' responses on all the behavioural scales. Compared to the scores of the 101 married working mothers, the 104 single working mothers' scores were significantly lower on the five support scales and significantly higher on the pressure and stress scales. In comparison to the scores of the married working mothers, the single working mothers' scores on the coping behaviour scale were also significantly lower, suggesting their limited ability to manage adverse situations.

The possibility to negotiate non-standard working hours has a notable effect on the sample's perceptions in respect of the support, coping behaviour, pressure and stress measures. Significant differences in the mean rank scores were noted between the scores of those mothers who were able to negotiate non-standard working hours with their organisations and those who were not able to do so. The 'Yes' group's scores (78) were significantly higher than the 'No' group's scores (127) on the five support scales and on the coping behaviour scale, and significantly lower on the pressure and stress scales. Relatively large and practically significant

differences were obtained between the 'Yes' and 'No' subsets' perceptions of the two support scales of personal development and organisational flexibility.

6.4.7 Ability to predict the marital status of the respondents

Logistic regression analysis was done to develop a model to predict the marital status of the respondents in the present sample. The predictor measurements that contributed significantly to the model were management support, organisational flexibility, and time for family interaction, work-family pressure and stress. Single working mothers' perceptions were characterised by poor management support, limited opportunities to interact with family members and limited work flexibility and the existence of high levels of work-family pressure and stress. The results of the logistic regression showed highly acceptable statistical features which allow the possibility of generalising these findings to the broader population of single and married mothers working in professional and management positions.

6.5 DISCUSSION

6.5.1 Introduction

Since 1994, South Africa has done away with the apartheid system, which denied the majority of the population of their fundamental human rights, and has also adopted legislation that legally removes other forms of oppression and discrimination under which various groups of the populace laboured. This was achieved, among other things, through the Constitution, which guarantees the fundamental human rights to life and property, and accords men and women equal rights before the law. More than twenty pieces of legislation were promulgated between 1994 and 2000 that directly and indirectly address women's issues in the areas of family, legal rights, employment, health, property, education and training.

Specifically, through legislative initiatives such as the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) and the Employment Equity Act, Act No 55 of 1998, discrimination against women has been abolished. As one of the designated groups for affirmative

action, women are to be given preference in selection and promotion. Parliamentary structures and specialised bodies such as the Commission for Gender Equality have been created to mobilise and advance the cause of women in the economy, resulting in the rapid entry of women into the labour force. Statistics indicate that, while the number of men in the broad labour force increased by 35% from 1995 to 2005, by comparison, the number of women has increased by 59%. In 2005, women accounted for almost six in every ten new members of the labour force in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, Department of Labour, 2006).

Research has revealed that inevitably work-family conflicts arise when an increasing number of traditional women have to fulfil multiple roles by managing work and family demands, some of which are incompatible (Janssen, Peeters, De Jonge, Houkes & Tummers, 2004). The seriousness of such conflicts and their largely deleterious impact have understandably been a matter of concern, not only to researchers, but also to a multitude of other stakeholders, such as the employees themselves, their managers and organisations, trade unions, social workers, the community, government and researchers. This study was born from such concerns and the findings described above are discussed in the light of previous studies and contemporary events. The discussion highlights the significance of the entry of women into the labour force, with a special focus on single mothers as a neglected group in research. World-wide, their needs have been overlooked in much of the literature on women professionals, according to Gill and Davidson (2001).

Understanding the relationship between work-family conflict and employee well-being is important in order to discover how working mothers can be supported to cope with work and family demands. While there has been an increased focus on the work-family conflict of working mothers, less is known about single working mothers and their experience of work-family pressure and stress and the resources they need to cope with pressures and stress. Research has shown that single working mothers have greater exposure to ongoing financial strain, the stresses of care-giving and other sources of stress than other working mothers do.

6.5.2 Relationship between resources and work-family pressure and stress

The present study focuses on work and family-supportive resources and makes a contribution to the work-family interaction literature. The results indicate that working mothers form inferences about the work-family support that organisations provide and that these perceptions can be measured. The present study indicates a significant relationship between working mothers' contentment with several supportive resources and their experience of work-family pressure and stress. The working mothers who perceived that they received more work and family-supportive resources (personal development, management support, organisational flexibility, time for family interaction, and childcare support) experienced less work-family pressure and notably less stress. These supportive resources contributed significantly to the variance associated with work-family pressure and stress. The five support variables appeared to collectively explain approximately 41% of the variability in work-family pressure, and about 50% of the variability in the overall stress scores.

The dynamics of these findings can best be understood by considering Bakker and Geurts's (2004:362) and Van Aarde and Mostert's (2008:8) explanations of the 'spill-over' of positive load effects from work to family life and from family life to work. In the context of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model designed by Demerouti *et al.* (2001) and the Effort-Recovery (E-R) model developed by Meijman and Mulder (1998), it seems that sufficient and relevant work resources may enable female workers to deal with high work demands and simultaneously increase their enthusiasm to put energy into their work. This positive effect created at work may spill over to the home domain (positive work-family interaction). Having the necessary resources at work may create the energy and opportunity for women to recover adequately after a day at work. This reduced need for recovery at home leaves employees with more energy to engage in pleasant activities at home and to fulfil their family roles and obligations (family interaction). Sufficient family resources may also enable women to deal with high family demands and at the same time increase their enthusiasm to put energy into their work (Bakker *et al.*, 2005; Bakker *et al.*, 2007). The current study suggests that access to the resources and benefits

required for personal development, management support, organisational flexibility, time for family interaction and childcare support could lead to a reduction in negative work-to-family interaction and an increase in positive family-to-work interaction.

6.5.3 Comparing single and married mothers

In this sample, marital status also contributes significantly to the variance associated with work-family pressure and stress. While both single and married women are affected by the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities, the results suggest that the single working mothers in the present sample experienced higher levels of distress in their daily lives, and perceived their organisation as less work-family-supportive than their married counterparts did. Single working mothers scored significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) on the work-family pressure scale and the stress scale, and significantly lower ($p < 0.01$) on the five supportive resource scales than the comparative group of married working mothers. Single working mothers appeared to be significantly unhappy with their opportunities for personal development, the support that their managers provide and the role of their organisation in creating and providing a flexible work environment. They were exceedingly dissatisfied with the lack of availability of time for family interaction and childcare support. Interestingly, when one examines the two different sets of resources, resources associated with work-support (personal development, management support, flexible work) on the one hand, and resources related to family-support (flexible work hours, time for family interaction and childcare) on the other, it seems that single working mothers put a very high premium on family-supportive resources to cope with work-family pressure and stress.

The results of the present study are consistent with the views of previous researchers (Gordon *et al.*, 2002; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006) in that these results suggest that organisations should create a family-friendly environment and policies to support single working mothers in balancing work and family demands. Family-friendly organisations are institutions that have formal policies that allow single working mothers flexible working hours, control over their work time, the option to work from home, and childcare facilities (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006:95).

Opportunities for single working mothers to interact more frequently with their families, to participate in family activities and to devote time to themselves are important to assist women in experiencing life-balance and to promote their well-being (McLellan & Uys, 2009; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). Such family-friendly benefits can support single working mothers to fulfil both work and family demands without incurring penalties in either domain (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). In this context, Goff, Mount and Jamison (1990) also found that parents with children under the age of five experienced a lower degree of work-family conflict and that there was less absenteeism if these parents work for organisations that provide day-care facilities.

In the current study, in comparison with the married working mothers, the single working mothers' scores on the coping behaviour scale were also significantly ($p < 0.01$) lower, suggesting a decreased ability to manage adverse situations. This finding is consistent with previous predictions and findings, such as those of Gill and Davidson (2001), who lamented that previous research has 'paid little attention' to single mothers, and who concluded in their own study that single working mothers are a distinct group.

6.5.4 Possibility to negotiate non-standard working hours

The possibility to negotiate non-standard working hours was positively related ($p < 0.05$ to $p < 0.001$) to the sample's perception of the support, coping behaviour, pressure and stress measures. The 'Yes' group's (78) scores were significantly higher than those of the 'No' group (127) on the five support scales and on the coping behaviour scale, and significantly lower on the work-family pressure and stress scales. Relatively large and practically significant differences were obtained between the 'Yes' and 'No' subsets' perceptions regarding two of the support scales, namely personal development and organisational flexibility. The respondents in the 'Yes' subset were significantly more positive about the opportunities available to working mothers to attain personal growth, career advancement and autonomy in their jobs (a high medium effect size, $r = 0.442$). The 'Yes' group also had strong positive views about their organisations' capacity to create and provide a flexible

work environment and they were pleased with their organisations' support for working mothers at both the work and social levels (a large effect size, $r = 0.584$).

The 'Yes' group seemed to perceive personal growth and career advancement in their jobs as an important resource to help working women to develop a number of skills relevant to managing the work-family interface. Personal growth and autonomy enable people to cope with their workload, handle a higher overall level of demands and enlist the support of others in structuring and meeting demands (Ruderman *et al.*, 2002). In a similar vein, Gill (2007) proposes that training and career development initiatives enable employees to continue to develop new skills, self-confidence and self-efficacy to solve problems and to manage a variety of situations, both at home and at work. Providing employees with the opportunity for career development and personal growth also leads to increased motivation, excellent performance, higher work engagement and lower cynicism, according to Schaufeli and Salanova (2007).

Furthermore, the 'Yes' subset was also of the opinion that their employers were willing to provide them with a flexible work environment, which includes flexible work schedules, control over workload and work time. This result suggests that mothers who could negotiate non-standard working hours were more likely to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by flexible working conditions. Considerable evidence exists that the adoption of benefits that enhance workplace flexibility and control over work time are important antecedents of satisfaction with work-family balance. Practices such as flexitime, voluntary shifts, part-time work and job sharing have become important commodities in assisting parents in meeting their multiple role demands (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Williams & Alliger, 1994). Such resources make it possible for working mothers to work closer to home or at home, and offer mothers the possibility to interrupt or reduce work to attend to family needs and emergencies (Eaton, 2003; Wood, De Menezes & Lasaosa, 2003). Having greater control over working hours increases people's ability to fulfil both work and family demands without incurring penalties in either domain (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). The study by Gill and Davidson (2001) shows that work flexibility is particularly valued by single parents. Having control over their time can create

opportunities for single working mothers to interact more frequently with their families, to participate in family activities and to devote time to themselves or leisure activities. These activities are important for experiencing a life-balance and well-being (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

6.5.5 Predicting the marital status of the respondents

Logistic regression analysis provided a reliable model to predict the marital status of the respondents in the present sample. The measurements that contributed significantly in predicting marital status were management support, organisational flexibility, and time for family interaction, as well as work-family pressure and stress. This model attests that organisations should foster a workplace culture that values and supports work-family balance. Creating a family-supportive environment with family-friendly policies and benefits can help single working mothers to cope with work and family demands. However, the needs of the married and single working mothers play a pivotal role in organisations' deciding on the right mix of policies and programmes to support these mothers in balancing work and family demands and coping with stress.

The model indicates that targeted interventions that increase management support and promote emotionally close family relationships may be more beneficial in reducing single working mothers' work-family conflict and stress than programmes that enhance personal development, flexible work hours and even childcare support. These findings suggest that to buffer single working mothers' experience of work-family pressure and stress, specific work-family supportive resources should be considered to accommodate their specific needs.

In this regard, Gill and Davidson (2001:395) have found that single working mothers perceived flexible working hours and the opportunity to reduce working hours as a less appropriate strategy, because of their greater financial needs, 'as well as the adverse effects of such working arrangements on (their) future career opportunities'. According to Grzywacz and Marks (2000), the needs of employees and the work-family outcomes envisaged by management must first be established before specific

interventions are implemented. 'Work-family initiatives are more likely to be effective when employees believe the organization is truly supportive of their needs to balance work and family obligations' (Allen, 2001:432). It should be noted that the perceptions about and use of work-family supportive resources are therefore strongly related to an individual employee's personal circumstances, needs and goals and the availability of resources and family-friendly benefits (Allen, 2001; Diener & Fujita, 1995). Hochschild (1997) has found that married employed women with children are more satisfied with their jobs than single employed women or married employed women without children, and that full-time workers experience better health than their reduced-hours counterparts. Bakker *et al.* (2005:178-179) warns that an increase in some resources may not always coincide with a decrease in the symptoms of burnout – they cite Warr's (1987) argument that work resources such as autonomy, social support, and feedback may have a non-linear effect on well-being.

This study has convincingly established that marital status significantly affects the level of work-family pressure and stress experienced by working mothers, and that the single and partnered mothers in the sample differed significantly in their contentment with the different work and family-supportive resources provided by their organisations. The findings strongly suggest that resources, benefits and interventions aimed at mitigating either single or married mothers' work-family pressure and stress will be more applicable and successful if they are tailor-made to address the needs of the two groups. However, before these findings can be generalised to the broader population of working mothers, several limitations to the present research should be considered.

6.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.6.1 The utility of the Work-Family Pressure and Support Questionnaire

There are some limitations to the current research, with a range of implications for future research.

Firstly, while the findings obtained in this study indicate that the psychometric properties of the W-FPSQ are statistically robust, further studies are required to examine its factor structure, the reliability and validity of the scales fully. Because the analyses conducted in this research were exploratory, additional research is needed to confirm the factor structure of the W-FPSQ using confirmatory factor analysis.

Secondly, the sample sizes used in the study were considerably smaller than those normally used in scale development research (Comrey & Lee, 1992:67). The present findings need to be replicated with other larger samples of participants to confirm the results of the present study and to support the generalisation of the findings to populations of South African working mothers. However, it should be noted that, according to deliberations by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007:613) on sample size, the number of 205 respondents is adequate for an EFA and for most multivariate statistical analyses. Therefore, the W-FPSQ has a great deal of utility in spite of the small sample size.

Thirdly, several of the participants endorsed response options at the higher or lower end of the Likert scale used for the W-FPSQ; consequently, the scores on the six scales were all non-normally distributed. Although assumptions on distribution do not apply in factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007:613), this situation called for the employment of non-parametric statistical techniques to analyse the current data set.

Fourthly, further research needs to be conducted among a broader cultural spectrum of participants, which should include working mothers from diverse ethnic groups and at various organisational levels. Such research should allow for other means of data collection that do not require computer or Internet access.

Nevertheless, the W-FPSQ shows promise for evaluating the perceived negative aspects of work-to-family spill-over and the supportive resources available to working mothers. This research has contributed to knowledge regarding work-family interaction and provides a tool that researchers and practitioners can use to describe and evaluate working mothers' experiences of balancing work and family responsibilities and to examine the extent to which organisations are perceived as work- and family-supportive. Depending on the research question to be answered, the six scales of the W-FPSQ can be used as dependent variables or as independent variables. Furthermore, the W-FPSQ can be used to generate information that management needs to develop and implement work- and family-supportive policies that will help working mothers to balance work and family demands. These scales offer the potential

- pro-actively to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in organisations to provide effective supportive resources to working mothers;
- to identify the presence or a lack of specific resources that are important to support women in balancing work and family life;
- to get feedback from dual-career couples on the efficiency of support systems and relevancy of resources provided by management; and
- to provide a starting point for communication between management and working mothers to put into practice work- and family-supportive resources that will benefit both parties.

6.6.2. Generalising the findings of the study

There are several limitations that restrict the generalisation of the findings and the mode of causal inference.

Firstly, the method of non-probability sampling applied in this study was a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. In this regard, it should be noted that, for inferential theory building, generalisations based on a non-probability sample are acceptable; however, for researchers to infer generalisations about the population at large, probability samples are required (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:227).

Secondly, data collected at a single point in time (a cross-sectional survey), as in this study, is limited, because no relationships can be interpreted causally, and no final causal inferences can be drawn with regard to the variance between single and married mothers' satisfaction with the different supportive resources.

Thirdly, as in most other studies, this study relied on self-reporting measures regarding the work-family pressure and level of stress the respondents experienced and their perceptions of the resources offered by their organisations. Respondents' response styles, emotional state, and even previous experiences could have led to response bias in the reporting.

Finally, the finding that the assumption of normality was not met for the six scales of the W-FPSQ may have implications for any generalisation of the results of this research beyond the sample (Field, 2005:641).

Despite its limitations, the study has made a promising contribution towards a better understanding of the work and family supportive resources. It will ultimately help to create applicable family-friendly policies and benefits, as well as the effective management of these resources.

These results also have implications for future research. It would be helpful to determine the extent to which the family-supportive variables account for variance in the work engagement, motivation, performance and job attitudes of single and married mothers. Researchers should also examine how married and single working mothers perceive the fairness of different work- and family-supportive resources. Management can use the principles of distributive justice and procedural justice to assist them in evaluating their employees' reactions to different policies and interventions related to work-family support. The assessment of the fairness of work- and family-support could become an integral part of quality-of-work life surveys performed in organisations (Allen, 2001:432).

Additional research is needed to assess the influence of the work and family environment on employee reactions to family-friendly benefits. Since organisations

differ in respect of their ‘family-friendly support services’ or cultures, according to Evbuoma (2008), further studies should also consider the impact of organisational characteristics on the perceptions of single and married mothers. A comparison of how single and married mothers fare in private and public sector organisations would also be illuminating, especially since the public sector has provided a welcome home for many women.

Moreover, future studies should attempt to compare single working mothers with single working fathers, the latter having been marginalised in studies of work-family conflicts. Just as the single mothers face pressures and stress peculiar to their gender and marital status, it is not inconceivable that single fathers, too, face specific problems when compared to partnered fathers and mothers.

Finally, given the overwhelming evidence of the negative impact which work-family conflict has on families, especially on the health and mental well-being of single working mothers, the effects of such conflict on child development deserves to be urgently investigated, especially in an African setting, where the once communal spirit of *ubuntu* (caring for others) has been eroded by forces of urbanisation and modernisation.

6.6.3 Contribution of the present research

The findings of the present study contribute to the body of Organisational Behaviour and work-family conflict literature and to Human Resource Management research. Perhaps the two most noteworthy findings of this study relate to the effect of marital status and the possibility to negotiate flexible working hours on the respondents’ perceptions regarding the supportive resources that organisations provide, their coping behaviour and their experience of work-family pressure and stress. It must be remembered that one of the motives for undertaking this study was to identify the peculiarities, if any, pertinent to working single mothers as opposed to working mothers with partners.

Ascertaining that resources such as personal growth, management support, organisational flexibility, family interaction and childcare support can mitigate work-family pressure and stress is a notable contribution. Various previous studies confirm the importance of these five resources in supporting both married and single working mothers to cope with work-family pressure and stress. The results of the study, however, emphasise the necessity for the managements of organisations to give more consideration to family-friendly practices and benefits if they are sincere in their desire to support single working mothers to cope effectively with work and family demands. Providing resources such as flexible work schedules, flexible work hours, childcare assistance and time for family interaction is very important in assisting single working mothers to balance their work and family responsibilities.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature study (mainly concentrated in Chapters 2 and 3), and the empirical findings of the current study (presented mainly in Chapters 4 and 5), a number of recommendations are noteworthy. These are set out in the sections below.

6.7.1 Improving job resources

The study has clearly shown that single working mothers are a 'distinct group facing unique problems and pressures, and deserve to be recognized as such' (Gill & Davidson, 2001:397). Furthermore, the pressures they face, as captured in this study, represent levers that can be used by employers to address the plight of single mothers. Doing so requires a multi-pronged approach which seeks to address job design concerns, especially time constraints and workload, role conflict and lengthy working hours and time for family interaction in such a way that single working mothers can still adequately fulfil their cherished role as mothers – employers need to provide opportunities for personal and career development through training and development, coaching and counselling. Mentoring programmes are also urgently needed to ensure that women shatter the 'glass ceiling'. Supervisors can play an important role in all of these strategies – they should themselves be role models in

balancing work and family life, especially in terms of providing a consultative and flexible work environment which matches the demands of home (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer & Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker *et al.*, 2005:170).

However, in terms of priority, Gyllensten and Palmer (2005:102) argue that 'primary workplace interventions aiming to prevent or reduce stressors are the most proactive approaches to stress management and they are generally found to be effective in reducing stress'. HSE (2001) recommends that sources of work-related stress should be combated at an organisational level first, before interventions focusing on the individual (for example, coaching, counselling and training) are introduced. Cahill, Landsbergis and Schnall (1995) provide a step-by-step process of healthy organisational changes aimed at increasing

- employees' autonomy or control;
- skill levels;
- social support (both supervisory support and co-worker support);
- physical working conditions;
- healthy use of technology;
- a reasonable level of job demands;
- job security and career development;
- healthy work schedules; and
- the personal coping mechanisms of employees.

Similar strategies are proposed by authors such as Frone (2003) and Mostert (2009), who emphasize that the corporate world should be aware of the relationship between demands from work and interference between work and home and the link with ill-health. Organisations should monitor work and home demands. Organisational resources which can be used to mitigate work and home demands include practices such as flexibility in weekly working hours, daily starting and finishing times, time for family interaction, out-of-hours childcare, flexible carer's leave and paid maternity and paternity leave.

6.7.2 Establishing family-friendly organisational cultures

According to Evbuoma (2008), many organisations in developed nations such as America, but also in Nigeria and other developing countries, are beginning to institute 'family friendly' personnel policies in order to reduce stress associated with dual careers, through the provision of on-site childcare facilities, elderly care and employee assistance programmes. Such policies are aimed at work performance and family adjustment, in order to generate commitment to work. Evbuoma (2008) gives some examples of such family-friendly programmes, such as child and elder day-care services, school facilities for staff children in organisations, crèches, breast-feeding centres, health and recreation centres and flexible working, which have in turn improved morale and elicited dramatic commitment from employees. This is also confirmed in Hirsh, Hayday, Yeates & Callender (1992) study where about 72% of the management and professional women that they surveyed reported that childcare arrangements had a significant effect on their jobs and career choices. Work-life balance programmes do exist in some multi-national companies in South Africa, although studies of their operations and impact are very limited (Mangeni & Slabbert, 2005). Mangeni and Slabbert (2005) suggest that the widespread use of such programmes needs to be adopted and adapted to suit South African conditions. Creating a family-supportive environment with family-friendly policies and benefits will moderate the effect of potential negative work to family spill-over and is becoming increasingly important for mothers with children and other dependants at home.

6.7.3 Empowering women to negotiate non-standard working hours

Based on the finding in this study that women's ability to negotiate non-standard working hours did make a difference in the pressures faced by women at work, it is strongly suggested that women in general and single working mothers in particular seek avenues for enhancing their bargaining power in organisations. The results of this study show that only 38% of the respondents were able to re-negotiate their working hours. The majority (62%) were not able to do so. In their study, Gill and Davidson (2001) also found only two of 12 interviewees were able to successfully

negotiate non-standard working hours with their employing organisations. Such was the value that women attached to flexible working hours that some women in their sample changed employers in order to achieve it. Job sharing was not considered a valued alternative, because of the implications of reduced earning which could only worsen the financial constraints faced by single parents. Considering the importance of flexible working hours, Gill and Davidson (2001) are of the opinion that women should be 'more proactive' in seeking reduced time working, even if no formal facility currently exists within their organisations for them to do so. However, their chances of success would be greatly enhanced if trade unions lend their voices and weight to this cause by making work-life balance programmes a bargaining issue. The UK example in which workers were granted rights to apply for flexible hours should be looked into in South Africa.

At the informal level, the role of the supervisor is important in job re-negotiation, mentorship and employee assistance programmes. A supervisor who shows a holistic concern for the employees and consults with them in work assignments would go a long way toward assisting subordinates to cope with the volume of the workload and time constraints – one of women's nightmares, as Gill and Davidson (2001) discovered.

6.7.4 Changing stereotypical attitudes towards women

The issue of empowering women as discussed above cannot be addressed without also considering the holistic empowerment of men, and restricting traditional family scenarios. According to April *et al.* (2007), one of the greatest restraints cited by women who want to advance their careers is their situation at home, where they are mothers first and foremost, before being managers or professionals. This is also borne out in this study, where women have several school-going children and often several other dependants, including aged parents, cousins and other relatives, to take care of. Their care and welfare is the sole responsibility of the *matrona domo*. If women's position changes in the workplace, April *et al.* (2007) argue that men's roles and attitudes to home responsibilities are likely to change too, and that a big part of women's journey to success lies in transforming the lives of men as well.

But more fundamental is the need for an attitudinal change on the part of men and society as a whole. Greene (1985:33) believes that people's firm belief in the stereotypes attached to gender roles and the unwillingness of men to accept women as their equals have prevented women from participating equally with men in leadership positions. Schein (2007) has shown that men's stereotypical attitudes to women have, unfortunately, remained unchanged for many decades, in spite of legislative enactments. Therefore, societal beliefs and stereotypes about gender need to be changed, through a process of education, socialisation and training.

6.7.5 Providing educational programmes for women

Many studies, such as those of Felstehausen, Couch, and Wragg (1993), Schuchardt and Guadagno (1991) and Robbins and McFadden (2003) have found that women in general, and especially single mothers, have low qualifications which prevent them from entering and competing with men for positions of responsibility and power. In addition, women and especially single working mothers experience stress and strain both at work and at home, which has an adverse effect on their mental health and well-being. Mostert (2009:6), in her discussion of the relationship between work and home demands and ill health of employed women, refers to a longitudinal study by Demerouti *et al.* (2007) in this regard. Their findings suggest that organisations should not only provide work-related training to employees, but should also try to provide parental training and role reorientation for couples as an additional resource to support working mothers who combine work and family responsibilities.

Most of the authors above are unanimous in emphasizing the importance of exposing women in general, and single mothers in particular, to educational programmes which should include parenting and employment skills, stress management, time and financial management, health and nutritional information, negotiation skills and ways to cope with change. Other areas of skills development include networking and socialisation skills and considering the importance of social support in combating stress. It is important to develop these skills as early as

possible among youths, before they enter into the world of work. Policy-makers and educators need to become aware of the magnitude of the problem.

6.7.6 Mitigating or eliminating sexual harassment and violence

In view of the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence against women in the South African society, both preventative and intervention strategies are required to deal with these issues. According to Ramsaroop and Parumasur (2007), sexual harassment in the workplace can be curbed by early identification and effective management. They identify cues for early identification of an environment of sexual harassment which includes, among other things, inappropriate dress, unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour, inappropriate jokes and sexual innuendo. These authors also call for constant monitoring of the workplace in order to identify and remove offensive materials and curb offensive behaviour, as well as training, coaching and empowering employees to fight sexual harassment. They conclude by emphasizing the need for developing and implementing sexual harassment policies which will indicate an organisation's non-tolerance of sexually related misconduct.

6.7.7 Monitoring legislative support

Although many pieces of legislation have been enacted over the years that directly or indirectly support women's liberation and empowerment, the implementation of these laws needs to be rigorously monitored to ensure that their goals are being met, and defaulter organisations should be appropriately dealt with. The growing importance of women in Parliament and government positions bodes well for the enactment and enforcement of family-friendly legislation.

6.8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study is important in adding to the knowledge and understanding of women in general and single mothers in particular. The fact that marital status emerged

as a defining characteristic in this study should inspire more studies across different contexts in South Africa. In conclusion, this study looks at the future of women managers and professionals based on the findings of this study and contemporary developments. While the gates of the world of work have been opened to women through legislative and other imperatives, the opportunity for women to rise to important positions still remains elusive for many women. This study has illustrated the plight of women in general and that of single mothers in particular. It is hoped that the recommendations made will be implemented by the relevant stakeholders.

The future of single mothers is still rather bleak. The *Sunday Times* of 12 July 2009: 3) reported that 40% of South Africa's 18 million children are being raised by single mothers. The report further indicated that seven million children are growing up with single mothers, outnumbering the 6.2 million – around 34% of the country's children – who live with both parents. The findings in this study show that single working mothers appear to be more *discontented* than their married counterparts with opportunities for personal and career development, social and interpersonal support, flexible work arrangements, the availability of time for family interaction and childcare arrangements made for their children while working. The effects of these issues on their performance, physical and mental well-being are noticeable.

Moreover, the impact of these matters on the development of their children is unknown and, therefore, urgently require in-depth study. The *Sunday Times* report quotes a recent UK study into the effects of family breakdown, where 24% of children are raised by single parents. The study found that the most common negative effects of single parenting are behavioural problems, under-achievement at school, mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, and an inability to form lasting relationships. This is a major challenge in a country already in the grip of crime and other social problems, such as HIV/AIDS. In the light of these problems, studies of women in general and single women in particular deserve urgent attention. If this challenge is taken up by all the relevant stakeholders, the objectives of the current study will have been met.

In view of the vast reservoir of potential contributions that women in general and the many single mothers in our country in particular can make to our economy and our society, it is perhaps apposite to conclude with the following *caveat*: 'Single parenthood should be conceived as a risk factor for exposure to stress, rather than as an indicator of personal vulnerability' (Avison, 1997:662).