Return-to-work experiences of female employees following maternity leave:
A Qualitative Study

by

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CONCEPT DECLARATION

I, Judite Lucas, hereby declare that **"Return-to-work experiences of female employees following maternity leave"** is my own work. All the resources used in this study are cited and referenced by means of a comprehensive referencing system.

I declare that the content of this thesis has never been used before for any qualification at any tertiary institution.

Judite Lucas	Date

ABSTRACT

Corporate culture does not allow for talented women to return to the workplace or continue to operate effectively in the workplace whilst managing their domestic responsibilities. This is directly influencing the retention and progression into senior positions of female talent (Baggallay, 2011).

While the above statement may be a narrow view considering shifts in many companies' policies aimed at supporting work-family balance, working mothers still have many concerns. Some of these concerns have been highlighted by the participants in this study, and confirm the need to better understand the challenges faced by female employees returning to work after maternity leave.

The primary purpose of this study is to identify common themes arising from South African female employees' experience of returning to work following maternity, and to ultimately gain an understanding of the interests of both mothers in the workplace and employers looking to retain and nurture top female talent.

The results of this study revealed that, despite viewing work positively, the participants found that returning to work after childbirth was difficult. A significant change in the attitudes of the participants towards their careers after childbirth was also found. This change is not necessarily negative and should not be interpreted as an indication of employees' loss of interest in their careers; it does, however, highlight the need for adequate management of the "workplace pregnancy" to ensure that female employees return to work.

Employers who are open to the evolution of best practice for maternity leave, the management of family responsibilities, and striking a balance between employee productivity and fulfilment will position themselves as an employer of choice, thereby attracting high-calibre talent.

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1.1   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Belkin (2003:1) mentions that many women never get near "the glass ceiling" because they are stopped long before then by the maternal wall.

In previous decades, the most topical of all female workplace issues was that of the glass ceiling and the unwritten rules established by a male-dominated environment, which largely prohibited or limited women's membership to the men-only executive lounge. With a shift towards workplace equality, the burning issue for our generation has less to do with the challenges faced by women and more to do with the challenges faced by mothers.

With workplace equality comes a shift in the social panorama as women are faced with questions such as: When is the least disruptive time to have children (if at all)?, How soon do I return to work and will it affect my child's development?, How do I maintain the balance between pursuing a successful career while meeting maternal/family obligations, and where do I fit in Pilates classes?

Even though research on career women, women in positions of leadership, women's multiple roles, and their coping strategies and mechanisms as well as role conflict has been more prominent over the past three years (Booysen, 1999, 2000; Brink & de la Rey, 2001; Dimati, 1997; Jano, 2000; Redelinghuys, Botes & De Wet, 1999), there are still major misconceptions regarding to mothers in the workplace.   The role of these misconceptions is evident in the amount of companies reducing their expectations to hire working mothers. In South Africa, companies have reduced this expectation by 20% since 2010, which is drastically higher than anywhere else in the world (Regus, 2011).

This study intends to shed light on the issues facing working mothers returning to the workplace after the birth of their first child, and aims to identify relevant trends by tracking the individual factors that influence a mother's choice to return to work, the ideal length of maternity leave, the level of support from their employer, and how cultural nuances within the South African context define the whole experience.

The cost of losing a competent, skilled employee is always high, and pregnancy is recognised as a time when a woman may re-evaluate her options (Regus, 2011). Previous research indicates that despite strengthened legislation and in some cases, enhanced organisational benefits, one in three women, for various reasons, find it difficult or very difficult to return to work after maternity leave (Morris, 2008). These reasons include: concerns about childcare, missing their child, their child missing them, financial issues, the inability to balance the work-family relationship, and the attitude of their supervisor and other employees upon their return.

Regarding the organisation's point of view, one of the most damaging stereotypes is the belief that the pregnant employee is no longer committed to her job and may not return to work after childbirth (Halpert, Wilson & Hickman, 1993). This belief is not limited to lower-level employees. Hughes (1991:B1) states that "the biggest fear among many employers is that a once assertive woman executive will ease up on the job, then take paid maternity leave and never return." This belief is held to the extent that managers and supervisors act thereon, leading to unfair discrimination.

In South Africa, women make up 51% of the population and 45% of the workforce (Baggallay, 2011). Nearly 80% of South African women between the ages of 20 and 50 are mothers (Baggallay, 2011).

Given these numbers, it is surprising that there is so little research regarding pregnant employees. There is an increasing need for organisations that employ and wish to retain highly qualified women to better understand and accommodate the way in which professional women integrate motherhood and career breaks into their working lives. These career breaks (maternity leave) will need to be accommodated in order to make maximum use of the training and development invested in female employees (Gerber, 2000:7).

Although women make up a large portion of our global and South African workforce, when we look at statistics of women in senior management, the numbers are not representative. Corporate culture does not allow talented women to return to the workplace or continue to

operate effectively whilst managing their domestic responsibilities, and this is directly influencing the retention and progression into senior positions of female talent (Baggallay, 2011).

Consequently, there is a need to better understand the challenges that female employees face upon returning to work after maternity leave.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Researchers (Barrow, 1998; Lyness et al., 1999; Mosisa et al., 2006; Morris, 2008) have investigated the challenges faced by pregnant employees and their experiences following maternity leave within developed countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Within emerging countries such as South Africa, little research has been conducted in this respect.

As companies break out of restrictions imposed by the economic downturn and strive for growth, the need for repopulation of affected positions with skilled staff is on the increase. Women who have become mothers can still bring experience and a variety of invaluable skills to the organisation, and companies that value these women and are willing to accommodate them will reap the rewards (Regus, 2011).

A proportion of companies still have some concerns about hiring working mothers, particularly that they may leave to have another baby, offer less commitment, and offer outdated skills (Regus, 2011).

Globally, companies are becoming accustomed to the notion that flexible working is less expensive, leaner, and more adaptable to growth, which will likely lead to an increase in flexible working practices, resulting in the attraction of more working mothers to the workforce (Regus, 2011).

Locally, however, despite the work of researchers in South Africa (Herbst, 2006; Gerber, 2000), there are still large gaps in the knowledge in this arena. Corporate South Africa could benefit from being more aware of their talent's changing needs and lifestyles in an

attempt to create environments that are flexible and adaptable enough to accommodate diversity and new ways of conducting business in order to have capacity for diversity (Baggallay, 2011). A family-friendly work environment is rapidly moving from a nice-to-have benefit to an essential employment offering.

1.3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

What is evident from the literature review is the difficulties working mothers face on their return to work following maternity leave. These difficulties stem from a variety of areas. Not only are these women concerned about the needs of their new infant, their own physical and mental wellness, their readiness to return to work, and increased financial responsibilities, they are also faced with the changed attitudes of their colleagues and managers on their return. Even in best-practice and forward-thinking companies there are still many misconceptions and stereotypes that make the return and reintegration of working mothers into the workforce after maternity leave difficult.

The purpose of the study is to identify common themes arising from the return-to-work experiences of South African female employees following maternity leave.

If working mothers are to be fully utilised in terms of their potential and value as a resource, recommendations are needed to alter the negative perceptions of managers and colleagues, and guidelines are necessary for the reintegration of mothers into the workforce.

Thus, the objectives of the study are:

- To determine the influence of childbirth on female employees' attitudes towards their careers;
- To identify reasons why female employees decide to return or not return to employment following childbirth;
- To determine the ideal length of maternity leave to ensure optimal readiness of the female employee;

- To identify the main concerns of female employees upon returning to work after maternity leave; and

- To gain insight into the experiences of female employees upon returning to work from maternity leave.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following specific research questions will be answered in this study:

- How does childbirth influence a female employee's attitude towards her career?

- What amount of maternity leave would be ideal before returning to employment from the female employee's perspective/experience?

- What are the reasons why female employees decide to return or not return to employment following childbirth?

- What are female employees' main concerns upon returning to work after maternity leave?

- How do female employees experience work upon returning from maternity leave?

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The researcher made use of non-probability, purposive sampling when selecting participants, thus participants relevant to the purpose of the study and who met the specified requirements were selected.

A combination of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and follow-up sessions was used to collect data. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as an interview guide during the interviews. The findings of the interviews guided the questions asked in the follow-up sessions.

The researcher used grounded theory as her research methodology, meaning that the data was analysed as it was collected. Coding aided the researcher in categorising and

assigning themes to specific data. The coding of data ensured that themes were properly categorised according to the defined research questions.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study provides an understanding of the interests of both mothers in the workplace and employers looking to retain and nurture top female talent. Employers who are open to the evolution of best practice for maternity leave, managing family responsibility, and striking a balance between employee productivity and employee fulfilment will position themselves as employers of choice, thereby attracting high-calibre talent.

Compelling evidence, supported by sound research, can change the status quo – the researcher believes that the results of this study and similar studies as a result of this one can shape future best practice, even basic conditions of employment, thereby improving the overall working experience of mothers in South Africa.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS
1.7.1 DELIMITATIONS

There are various delimitations in this study, which relate to the constructs, target population, and literature.

Firstly, the return-to-work experiences of female employees were limited to the perspectives of the female employees in question, and not those of their organisations, colleagues, and supervisors.

Secondly, only women who were actively employed during their pregnancy and maternity leave were included in this study. Furthermore, this study only included South African women employed in South Africa (as the study intended to draw conclusions about the circumstances within this specific emerging economy). The study was also limited to the experiences of women following the birth of their first child.

Lastly, as the information is of a sensitive nature, there was a concern about the validity and reliability of the information from the participants due to their fear of being judged for their honest opinions. Another issue was that the research was only conducted in English, and data were therefore limited to English-speaking participants. As English is only one of the eleven official languages in South Africa, the results are not representative of the South African population.

1.7.2   ASSUMPTIONS

An assumption is "a condition that is taken for granted, without which the research project would be pointless" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:5).   This study made a number of assumptions, which underlie the research.

These assumptions are:

- The appropriateness of the qualitative research approach as a measure to explore the return-to-work experiences of female employees following maternity leave;

- The ability and willingness of participants to participate in the study;

- The ability and willingness of participants to provide correct and truthful answers to the questions posed; and

- The reliability and validity of the research approach used in the study.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Table 1: Definition of key terms

KEY TERM	MEANING
Mother	A woman in relation to a child or children to whom she has given birth
Workplace pregnancy	The event of falling pregnant whilst employed through to return to work after maternity leave
Maternity leave	Job-protected leave from employment for women at the time of birth and for a period following childbirth (Kamerman, *n.d.*)
Paternity leave	Job-protected leave from employment for fathers, for many of the same purposes as maternity and parental leave (allowing for care of family) (Kamerman, *n.d.*)
Parental leave	Gender-neutral, job-protected leave from employment that usually follows maternity leave and permits either men or women to take advantage of the policy and share the leave or choose which of them will use it (Kamerman, n.d.)
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund, established by the government to provide short-term relief to workers when they become unemployed or unable to work because of illness, maternity, or adoption, and to provide relief to dependants of a deceased contributor (Anon, 1998)
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act, established by the government, which applies to all employers and workers, and regulates leave, working hours, employment contracts, deductions, pay slips, and termination (Department of Labour, 2007)
LRA	The Labour Relations Act aims to promote economic development, social justice, labour peace, and democracy in the workplace (Department of Labour, 2011)
Career-primary woman	Women who tend to put their careers first and remain single or childless or have their children raised by others in order to pursue a career (Schwartz in Gerber, 2000:8)
Career and family woman	Women who want to have serious careers whilst actively rearing their children (Schwartz in Gerber, 2000:8)

1.9 OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 of this thesis reviews the theoretical frameworks pertaining to this study. Chapter 3 reviews the literature regarding working mothers and the experiences of mothers within the employment sector. Due to the fact that there is very little literature on the return-to-work experiences of working mothers within a South African context, research in countries all over the world was explored.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and strategy in detail. This chapter provides details of the sampling technique used, the data collection procedures, and the grounded theory methodology as it was applied in this thesis. Reliability and validity of the data collection methods, as well as the ethical considerations maintained throughout the study, are also discussed.

Chapter 5 reports the research findings based on the methodology utilised, as well as the analysis of the research findings.

The last chapter, Chapter 6, provides conclusions resulting from the analysis done in Chapter 5. A summary of the recommendations and limitations of this study is also included.

2 CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to understand the complexity of women's roles as mothers and employees, the following theories will be discussed: systems theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Systems theory will give insight into the dual role that mothers play and their involvement in a number of systems. Maslow's hierarchy of needs clarifies the need to work outside of the home and the source of women's motivation to be productive in the workplace despite outside influences.

2.2 SYSTEMS THEORY

A woman's role and involvement in society is multifaceted, and therefore the roles that she plays cannot be viewed as disconnected from one another. In particular, the modern mother has joined the workforce and has a role to play there, but in most cases is still responsible for all other roles within the household as well (Rieckert, 2005:44). This duality indicates involvement in more than one system. As a result of dual roles and the expectation that women should comfortably perform these roles, woman are experiencing increased expectations, pressures, and role conflict.

2.2.1 WHAT IS A SYSTEM?

A system can be defined as a group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole (Bowen, 2007:190). Potgieter (1998:54) describes a system as a unit of people who are connected through the same form of relationship with one another in a particular context, space, and time.

A system can therefore be viewed as an interrelated group of individuals experiencing similar characteristics or circumstances and having an effect on one another. Individuals are able to function in more than one system (e.g., work, family, society, religion, etc.).

According to Bowen (2007:190), a family is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules to respect. Members of a system cannot be viewed and understood in isolation. The same definition applies to organisations, because they are made up of individuals with roles to play and rules to respect, and cannot be viewed separately.

2.2.2   ELEMENTS OF THE SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems theory supposes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The interactions between different subsystems within the main system make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The system has characteristics that no one individual element possesses, except when they are put together in an interactional context (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Systems theory is concerned with how different subsystems interact to make up the whole.

2.2.3   SYSTEM BOUNDARIES AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

A system boundary helps to determine what is considered to be part of the system and what is not (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The boundaries of a system will determine how open or closed a system is. This is known as boundary permeability.

The degree to which a system is open determines the amount of matter, energy, or information that is allowed into and out of the system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993:333).

Whitchurch and Constantine (1993:334) define the feedback loop as "a path along which information can be traced from one point in a system, through one or more other parts of the system or its environment and back to the point of origin."

In an attempt to control role conflict, the working mother will try and create closed systems in the form of a "work system" and a "family system." The nature of a system is such that an element of that system cannot be viewed in isolation, so despite the attempts the keep the two roles within the greater system of her life separate, the systems are automatically interlinked and cannot be viewed separately.

The researcher is of the opinion that by acknowledging the existence of the two systems and allowing them to exist concurrently, a balance can be found, allowing the individual (working mother) to successfully exist and function within both systems. The researcher believes that instead of using the term "work-life balance," "work-life integration" is a better representation, and therefore a more accurate term.

2.2.4   COHESION, FLEXIBILITY, AND COMMUNICATION

Olson (2000: 144) developed a model of the family, based on systems theory. The model describes families in terms of three main dimensions: family cohesion, flexibility, and communication. These dimensions were intended by Olson (2000) for use within a family system, but the researcher is of the opinion that these dimensions can be applied to the work system as well. These dimensions will be discussed as characteristics of the said systems.

COHESION

Olson (1993:105) defines family cohesion as the emotional bonding that family members have with one another. The level of cohesion between family members will determine the separateness or togetherness of the members in the system.

The researcher is of the opinion that the level of cohesion of a family will greatly impact the ability of that family to deal with challenging situations or circumstances. The birth of a new child can bring with it many challenges such as sleepless nights and added responsibilities. The level of cohesion of the family will determine how they deal with these new circumstances, which will have an impact on the individuals within the systems (such as the working mother).

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility has to do with the balance between the amount of change or stability within the family system. Family flexibility is the amount of change in its leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules (Olson, 1993:107). For example, during maternity

leave, the mother will be likely to continue with all household responsibilities, such as childcare, but once the mother resumes work, the father will need to assist in these roles. A change in the roles within the family system is needed, and the amount of flexibility within the system will determine how the period of "instability" is dealt with until the new roles are defined.

COMMUNICATION

Olson (1993:108) measures family communication by focusing on the family as a group with regards to their listening skills, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, continuity tracking, and respect or regard. The quality of communication within the family system determines where the family is in terms of cohesion and flexibility.

2.2.5   ORGANISATIONS AS SYSTEMS

The researcher believes that the dimensions discussed are not only important in terms of the family systems, but are equally applicable to an organisational system. The dimensions are: level of cohesion, flexibility, and communication within the organisation, and they directly impact the experience of reintegration of the female employee into the workforce following maternity leave (Morris, 2008).

The researcher believes that the presence of these three dimensions within the organisational system will largely influence female employees' decision to return to the organisation following childbirth, or to possibly change employers, or to not return at all. The three dimensions are related to this situation as follows: An organisation with a high level of cohesion will most likely remain in contact with the female employee while she is on maternity leave, checking to see how she is doing (mentally and physically). This will show the employee that she is cared about and that her role within the system is valued.

The level of flexibility within the organisation will determine the degree to which the organisation is able to accommodate the new working mother. It is the researchers belief that an organisation that is willing to accommodate the new working mother's additional roles and responsibilities in her private life will gain more productively from the employee

and gain further commitment from that employee towards the organisation.

Communication is central to the organisational system and will determine the success of the system.

2.2.6   CONCLUSION

According to Crouter and Mchale (in Luster & Okagaki, 1993:183), a mother functions in a meta-system, meaning that she functions within different systems and is required to move from one to the other.

Systems theory is less concerned with the cause and effect of the various systems than with how different sub-systems interact to make up the whole system. Working mothers cannot be viewed in one dimension, but rather need to be considered as a whole (taking into account the different roles within the different systems that make that whole).

2.3   MASLOW'S HIERARCHY

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is based on the theory that humans are motivated by needs. These needs are pursued, starting with the lower level (basic) needs and progressing to the higher level needs.

The first four groups of needs are the lower needs, and these are driven by deficiency or lack. When these needs are not adequately gratified, the deficiency creates energy, motivation, emotions, etc., leading to coping behaviours. Once they are gratified, the drive ebbs and the individual moves onto the next level of needs (Hall & Goodenough, n.d.).

The higher needs are the gratification needs and relate to self-actualisation (Hall & Goodenough, n.d.). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is depicted in Figure 1 below. The different levels of needs will be briefly discussed.
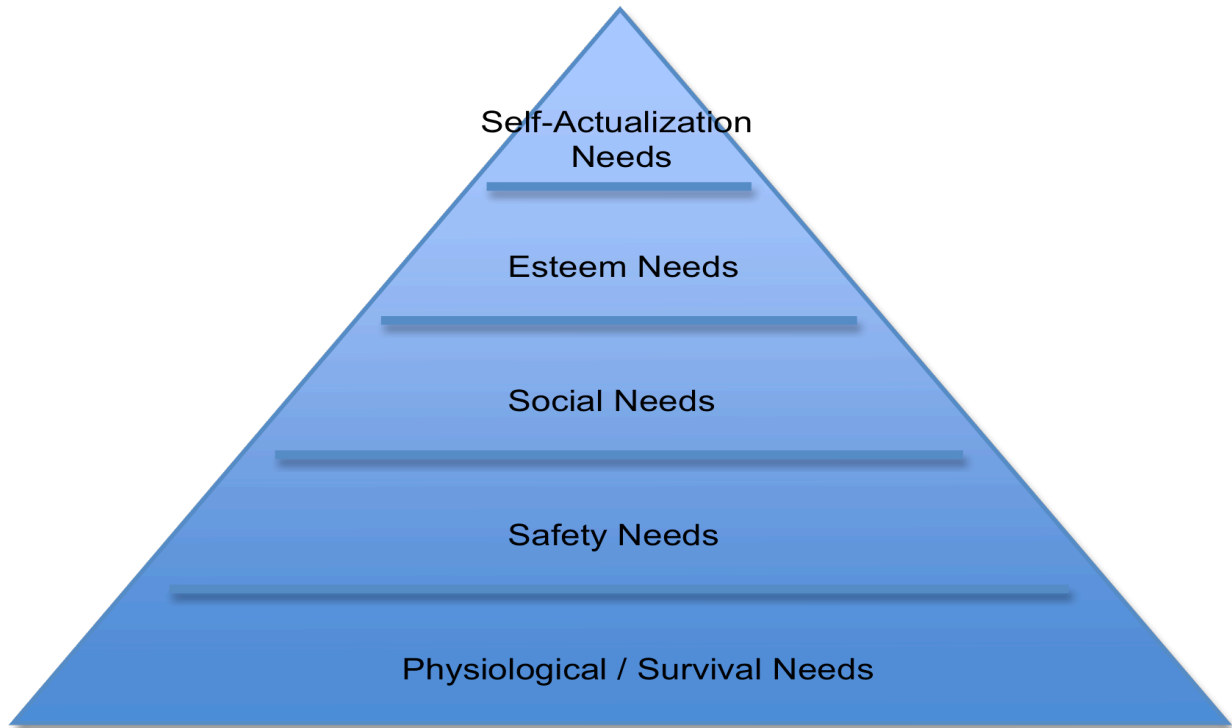
FIGURE 1: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

PHYSIOLOGICAL/ SURVIVAL NEEDS

Physiological needs are the most basic of all needs. These include food, water, shelter, and sleep, which are all necessary for physical survival. Physiological needs need to be met in order to be able to pursue the next level of needs, which are safety needs.

SAFETY NEEDS

These needs are related to an individual's safety and security. Safety needs are not limited to physical safety, but include an individual's need to be free of emotional harm.

SOCIAL NEEDS

Social needs are related to meaningful interaction with others, giving and receiving love, belonging, and acceptance (Anon, n.d.).

ESTEEM NEEDS

The fourth need is that of esteem, and is driven by external and internal motivators.

Internally motivated esteem needs include self-esteem, accomplishment, and self-respect, whereas external motivators are, for example, reputation and recognition (Anon, n.d.).

SELF-ACTUALISATION NEEDS

Self-actualisation has to do with individual excellence, exploration, contribution, and legacy. Maslow's theory culminates in the quest to reach one's full potential, which is self-actualisation. This need is never fully satisfied. As one grows, new opportunities continue to emerge and, according to Maslow, only a small percentage of the population ever really reaches self-actualisation (Anon, n.d.).

As long as human beings are motivated to satisfy these needs, they are moving towards growth and, ultimately, self-actualisation. After a need is satisfied, it ceases to act as a motivator, and the next need starts to motivate the person. It is therefore important for managers/employers to understand the role of needs in individual employee motivation.

Maslow's hierarchy can be used to inform employee motivation. An employer can provide ample breaks for lunch and recuperation, and pay salaries that allow employees to buy essential goods, thereby satisfying their physiological needs. The employer can provide a working environment that is safe, relative job security, and freedom from threats, thereby satisfying safety needs. Another example would be for employers to offer challenging and meaningful work assignments that enable innovation, creativity, and progress according to long-term goals, thereby allowing employees to self-actualise.

By being aware of Maslow's hierarchy and an employee's needs, an employer can continue to satisfy that employee's needs, thereby ensuring commitment and motivation. At various points in an employee's life and career, he/she will be motivated by completely different needs. It is imperative that managers recognise this in order to motivate their employees.

2.3.1 MOTHERS AND MASLOW

The researcher is of the opinion that the role of motherhood satisfies various needs in the hierarchy, as does the role of a working employee.

Motherhood is the essence of female role fulfilment, perhaps even more so than being a wife or partner (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Ireland, 1993; Safer, 1996; in Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers, Conn, 2005).

According to the researcher, motherhood fits in the categories of social and esteem needs. In terms of social needs, being a mother satisfies the need for belonging, love, and intimate relationships (as the relationship and love shared with a child is the most intimate of relationships). In terms of esteem needs, being a mother satisfies the need to provide the basic physiological and safety needs for another human being (one's own flesh and blood), and enabling a child to proceed up the hierarchy of needs is the most important accomplishment.

The role of a professional in the workplace, however, also fits into these categories (social and esteem needs). The workplace satisfies the social needs for acceptance, belonging, and community, as well as the esteem needs of recognition, status, and importance. The social and esteem needs form part of an individual's psychological needs.

The researcher is of the opinion that a significant contributing reason behind the decision to stay at home full-time or return to work following the birth of a child has to do with a mother's psychological needs. With both roles satisfying psychological needs, the decision will be made according to which role most satisfies the mother's needs or with which role she most identifies.

Due to both roles satisfying the same needs, it is understandable that working mothers experience much role conflict. A few scenarios should be considered: women who identify with the role of mother, women who identify with the role of worker, and women who consider the two roles as equal. Schwartz (in Gerber, 2000) also makes a distinction between career-primary women and career-and-family women.

The researcher believes that when a woman identifies with the role of mother more than that of worker but is forced to work due to ,e.g., financial reasons, the women might feel that her work is taking her away from her child and that she is unable to be the mother she would like to be. This could lead to feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction with her current working situation.

Society's opinion might also influence the way that a mother feels regarding this situation, as a good mother is often considered to be one who nurtures her family and considers providing care as more fulfilling than work (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Orenstein, 2000; Riggs, 1997).

In the case where a woman identifies more with the role of worker but is forced to stay out of the workforce due to personal reasons (e.g., lack of proper childcare), she might become unhappy and come to resent or ignore the child. According to Schwartz (in Gerber, 2000:8), these women are known as career-primary women, and they tend to put their careers first and remain single or childless, or ideally have their children raised by others.

In order for an organisation to get the most out of career-primary woman, these women need to be recognised early and accepted, and artificial barriers need to be cleared from their path to the top (Schwartz, in Faulds *et al.,* 2008:22).

When the roles of mother and worker are equal but one of the roles becomes too demanding and doesn't accommodate the other, the woman might be put in a position where she needs to choose one as a preference. In the case where work becomes too demanding and does not accommodate family life, the woman might be forced to change employers, leave the work environment completely, or become self-employed. According to Schwartz (in Gerber, 2000), the majority of women are career-and-family women who want to have serious careers whilst actively rearing their children.

These women are smart, talented, and committed to their careers, but are satisfied to stay at middle-management level, at least during early child-rearing days.

In order for organisations to retain and nurture their female talent, they need to identify what type of female employee they are dealing with, as well as that woman's employment preference. There are two rewards for a company's responsiveness to a working mother's needs: higher retention of their best people and greatly improved performance and satisfaction (Schwartz in Faulds *et al,* 2008:22).

3   CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Career and employment issues have become progressively more important because we are experiencing a changing workforce and workplace. Women are increasingly making up a larger portion of the labour force, and social and legal changes are providing pressure for better representation of women and minorities in top management (Gerber, 2000).

According to studies in the United Kingdom, women make up nearly half of the workforce in the United Kingdom, and more than 80% will become mothers during their working life (Morris, 2008:3). With the average age of motherhood in the United Kingdom being 30, most working women over this age will also be working mothers (Morris, 2008).

In South Africa, women make up 51% of the population and 45% of the workforce (Roberts, 2011).

Due to the increasing participation of women and mothers in the workforce, more individuals are pursuing careers while simultaneously being committed to a family relationship (Morris, 2008:3). The failure to plan for the natural evolution of working women into working mothers is short-sighted of employers.

This literature review is comprised of six sections. The first section looks at women and pregnancy in the workplace. The second section discusses work-family conflict. The third section cites literature on leaving and re-entering the workforce. Section four looks at literature within a South African context. The fifth section considers maternity leave, policies, and legislation in South Africa and internationally, and the final section looks at the retention of mothers in the workforce.

3.2 WOMEN, PREGNANCY, AND THE WORKPLACE

According to Thomas (in Gerber, 2000), women now constitute a sufficiently large part of UK organisations to make these organisations vulnerable to the female employees' departure.

It is believed that the haemorrhage of female talent from organisations' talent pipelines is linked to the onset of parenthood. Despite this being the twenty-first century, professional women are still faced with the dilemma of being forced to choose between returning to work after childbirth or leaving their jobs to care for their children (Schembari, 2009). According to Devanna (in Gerber, 2000:8), women are asked to pay a price for success that is not demanded of men – even if they limit the probability of marriage and children, they continue to be denied the same clear career paths and role models enjoyed by men.

The cost of losing a competent, skilled employee is always high, and with pregnancy being recognised as a time when women may re-evaluate their options (Regus, 2011), unfair discrimination often results from managers' uncertainty over whether or when a women will return to work and issues relating to an interim substitute (e.g., workload increase for other staff, training new staff, and planning substitution). These are perceived to be the most troubling issues when dealing with pregnancy in the workplace (Regus, 2011). According to Schwartz (in Faulds, Govender, Hoffman, Ragoobeer & Sole, 2008:20), when even a few valued female employees fail to return to work from maternity leave on schedule, employers begin to fear that there is nothing they can do to infuse women with new energy and enthusiasm to persuade them to stay.

Organisational development is hindered because of maternity leave and career momentum is lost as women temporarily move out of the mainstream employment and away from managerial focus (Gerber, 2000). The effects of maternity leave on a female employee's career are potentially devastating with, at best, maternity leave representing temporary career stagnation. The effects of pregnancy on an employee's career do not end with maternity leave, as women with children have to alter their lofty career ideals and adjust their careers because of family responsibilities (reducing their career involvement)

(Gerber, 2000). Organisations view these career adjustments as a dramatic change in the woman's commitment to the organisation, which most women feel is not true.

Data show that participation in the labour market and number of hours worked are linked to parenthood. This effect is negative for women, whilst it is positive for men. In almost all European countries, women aged 20 to 49 years with children have lower employment rates than those without children (Haataja in Faulds *et al.,* 2008:19).

Management expects the traditional "career-over-family" focus in female managers, and women who choose not to have children send an important message to management about the importance and priority of their careers (Gerber, 2000). Employers tend to view women with children as mothers first, assuming that family situations will automatically preclude mothers from attending after-hours meetings and perform extra work (Gerber, 2000). To make such assumptions is uninformed, as women who are career-orientated, regardless of familial responsibilities, tend to invest time and money in their careers and structure and arrange family commitments to prevent work interference.

Due to ignorance on the part of managers/employers, women are often faced with unfair discrimination, as some managers assume they will be unable to work at the same level as before childbirth. It is unfair towards female employees to be put in a position where they need to re-prove themselves within a position they had already occupied successfully.

According to Stoner and Hartman (1990), 80% of a sample of 633 female managers felt that their careers were adversely affected by home and family responsibilities. Organisations that want to gain the most out of their female employees can no longer continue disregarding the importance of families in their employees' lives. In order to receive the most out of their female employees, career plans need to be viewed in the context of their life course and timelines.

Identifying and understanding the contributing factors in a mother's decision to return to work and her subsequent experiences will enable employers to accurately and reasonably plan for capacity plans, individual employee career plans, training, etc.., as well as make the return easier for their employees.

3.3 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Family and work are the two most important domains in most individuals' lives, yet family issues are often not regarded as legitimate concerns. The lack of work-life balance is often cited as a factor explaining the persistence of gender gaps in the labour market (Faulds *et al*., 2008:19).

When conflicts between the family and work domains occur, there are potentially adverse effects on individuals, families, and organisations (Andrews & Withey, 1976). This is known as work-family conflict, and is increasingly being experienced by women (Fu & Shaffer, 2001), as women appear to be more affected by the tensions arising from trying to combine participation in the labour market with private responsibilities.

Women may put in second shifts (working at home), engage in micro-managing, opt out of the workforce, slow down their career progress, integrate or compartmentalise work and family time and emotions, find work to be a safe haven from relational turbulence, or resort to "mommy madness," in attempts to be the perfect mother when confronted by work and family conflicts (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers & Conn, 2005:263).

Work-family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which compliance with one of the role pressures makes it more difficult to comply with the other (Fu & Shaffer, 2001). That is, participation in the work role is made more difficult due to participation in the family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985:77).

According to Pistrang (n.d.), the following variables influencing the experience of life-balance, and thereby leading to work-family conflict, can be identified:

- Multiple roles performed by women;
- Role strain experienced because of multiple roles (role conflict and overload);
- Organisational culture and work dynamics (organisational values supporting work-life-balance have positive work and personal well-being consequences);
- Lack of personal resources and social support; and

- Career orientation and career stage.

Considering the influencing variables, a woman's career needs to be viewed in the context of her life course and time lines.

Work-family literature has typically portrayed role conflicts for white, middle-class, married, professional, managerial women (Buzzanell *et al.,* 2005:263). Professional women may have joint allegiance to traditionally incompatible ideologies (motherhood and career), they may experience greater tensions and require more complex emotion and identity management than women who prioritise one aspect over another (Buzzanell *et al*., 2005).

The ability to develop a realistic schedule and adhere to it is cited as one of the most important factors in effectively balancing work and family (Faulds *et al.*, 2008:21).

Organisations seem to have a growing interest in work- and family issues. Four reasons have been identified for this interest: changing workforce demographics, changing employee perceptions (as women and men in dual-career or single-parent families become more able to identify corporate policies that allow them to act responsibly towards their families and satisfy their professional ambitions), organisational inflexibility has an adverse affect on productivity, and children appear to present with worsening literacy, obesity, and general intelligence scores, coupled with increased suicide rates (Rodgers & Rodger in Gerber, 2000).

3.4   LEAVING AND RE-ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

Realistically, working women who choose to have children will have to take some time off from work, either by taking family leave, sick leave, or vacation leave, or by exiting the labour market entirely (Barrow, 1998:2). There is, however, a misconception that women find it easy to leave their jobs to look after their children (US Census Bureau Research, 2009). Previous studies (Morris, 2008; Halpert et al., 1993; US Census Bureau Research, 2009) have found that women are very conflicted about leaving their jobs and find it difficult to do so.

As a result of gender equality and growth opportunities, more women are investing time and money in their education and professional development. For professional women, their jobs form a large part of their ongoing professional development and identity (US Census Bureau Research, 2009), and leaving employment is thus not a decision that is easily made.

Research on the labour patterns of working women is conflicting, with research such as that of the Pew Research Centre (2007:1) finding that full-time work outside of the home has lost its appeal to mothers, and research by PSI (1997) finding that women are not only more likely to go back to work after having a baby, but that they are taking less time away from work before and after childbirth.

3.4.1 PREFERENCE FOR EMPLOYMENT

Employers can encourage women's participation surrounding birth in two ways: by making it relatively easy to combine work with motherhood or by making it difficult to stay away from work for extended periods (Desai & Waite, 1991).

Some women prefer to work exclusively in the home over the long run, whereas others prefer to combine work and family. This underlying preference for work over other activities is often called work commitment or subjective orientation towards work (Desai & Waite, 1991).

Work commitment indicates the importance of market work in an individual's life (Desai & Waite, 1991:552). Work commitment reflects both personal preferences and the importance of intrinsic features of work, such as how important and interesting it is, and extrinsic features like relationships with co-workers (Desai & Waite, 1991). In a study conducted by Desai and Waite (1991), 62% of the 1 158 women interviewed indicated a preference to work in the long run, and 38% preferred homemaking.

Work commitment may predict women's employment, but it may also condition the effects of occupational characteristics on employment. Compared to women with lesser work

commitment, women with strong work commitment may be less responsive to characteristics of occupations that make it easy (or hard) to combine work with childrearing.

According to a study by Working Mother (2010), the way women view their employment situation also has an enormous implication for their attitudes about work and life in general.

Women that identify themselves as having a career, as opposed to just having a job, are more satisfied and feel more positive in every area of their lives. Career-orientated working mothers are more satisfied with their decision to work, the opportunity to develop their skills, the level of respect they perceive at work, and the support they get from their managers in meeting family and home demands (Working Mother, 2010).

This positive attitude extends to family matters as well, with career-orientated women feeling more respected at home and reporting more support from their spouses with childcare and household duties. Career-orientated mothers also tend to feel more positive about their childcare arrangements, they feel healthier, and they feel that their lives are in balance and that their work fulfils a higher purpose than just making money (Working Mother, 2010).

3.4.2   IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

According to Urban Institute (in Working Mother, 2010), every 10% improvement in commitment increases an employee's level of discretionary effort by 6% and performance by 2%.

Successful companies nurture the positive attitudes of working mothers, thereby improving their work commitment. According to Working Mother (2010), building a sense that a women's work is more than just a job is critical. A woman's employment needs to offer the following (Working Mother, 2010):

- Career prospects;

- Opportunities to develop skills;

- Support from managers in meeting home and family demands;

- Respect for her contributions; and

- The sense that her work fulfils a higher purpose.

Screening for attitude and work commitment is therefore an important factor in the recruitment process, but having the right elements in place to make a job feel like a career can also go a long way in harnessing attitude and commitment.

3.5 CAREER PATTERNS OF WORKING MOTHERS

3.5.1 'OPTING OUT'

According to the Pew Research Centre (2007), full-time work outside of the home has lost some of its appeal to mothers. This trend holds for both mothers who have such jobs and those who don't. Nearly half (48%) of all at-home moms now say that not working outside of the home is the ideal situation for them, up from the 39% who felt that way in 1997 (Pew Research Centre, 2007).

In most cases, the decision to leave full-time employment or change employers following the birth of a child is due to the current employer is not making available or not making obvious a way to conceivably combine work with the rest of the employee's life (US Census Bureau Research, 2009). 'The opt-out revolution' is a term coined to describe the alarming talent drain of highly trained women, largely working mothers, who choose not to aspire to the corporate executive suite (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005:106).

The main reason for the choice to leave is the seeming incompatibility of the two roles. Work-family issues are depicted as dilemmas in which women have to choose sides (Williams, 2000). If they choose both work and family, they are labelled as superwomen or second shifters. Work and family women report exhaustion and guilt over time and energy conflicts between competing (public-private) realms (Buzzanell *et al.*, 2005). It is not just

the working mothers who feel conflicted and labelled; stay-at-home mothers feel even more so, sensing that society demonises them for choosing not to work.

The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (in U.S Census Bureau Research, 2009) found that the trend of mothers stepping out of the labour force is broader than previously believed, and applies to women of all income levels, races/ethnicities, and levels of education.

U.S. Census Bureau research (2009) hypothesises that two groups of women may opt out: women whose earnings are so low they may not be able to afford child care and women whose family earnings allow them to forego personal earnings. The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (in U.S Census Bureau Research, 2009) reported similar findings: women with husbands in the highest 20% of earners had a 8.6% decrease in their labour force participation rates, and women with husbands in the second lowest 20% also had a significant decrease of 7.9%. They concluded that while some wealthier mothers of infants may choose not to work, the high cost and low availability of childcare might prevent some poorer mothers from working, even if they want to.

U.S Census Bureau Research (2009), Barrow (1998), Waldfogel (1997) and Felmlee (1995) reported similar findings as above, identifying two groups of women who may opt out. Women facing childcare costs that they cannot afford (these moms are on average younger, poorer, and less educated than other mothers) and women with a greater, other family income (these moms tend to have higher educational levels and are more likely to change jobs or leave the labour force following childbirth). Married mothers are also more likely than unmarried mothers to consider being unemployed or part-time employment ideal (Pew Research Centre, 2007).

3.5.2   RETURNING

According to US Census Bureau Research (2009), despite many media stories to the contrary, most working mothers do return to the workforce within a year of having a child, although research conducted by Henderson (2006) found that more than one fifth of

working mothers in the United States do not return to the workforce within one year of their first child's birth.

A study by Liz Morris in the UK found that 55% of mothers surveyed said their ideal family had both partners with equal jobs and equal shares of house- and childcare duties, and 61% said they would work even if they did not need to financially, compared to 24% claiming that they would not work if they were not financially compelled to do so.

In the United Kingdom, more than 85% of women will return to work after pregnancy, but despite this high motivation to work and the established business case for gender diversity, few women will progress into upper management or the boardroom upon their return (Morris, 2008).

Garrett *et al.* (1990) and O'Connell (1990) found that woman who work during their pregnancies are more likely to return to work after childbirth. Garrett *et al.* (1990) and Leibowitz *et al.* (1995) found that a female employee's income prior to pregnancy plays an important role in the retention of the employee following childbirth. In other words, should the mother's income make up a considerable portion of the family's income, she will most likely return to work.

Studies conducted by Garrett *et al.* (1990), O'Connell (1990), and Leibowitz *et al.* (1995) indicated that black women could be expected to return to work after childbirth, more so than white women.

Factors that aid in decision of mothers to return to work include job flexibility, the availability of part-time work, the option of taking unpaid leave, permission to work from home, childcare at the workplace, the amount of leave she has available, the ability to avoid overtime hours, and having support from supervisors and co-workers (Hofferth, 1996; Glass & Riley, 1998).

During the time period 2000-2002, 79.4% of women who worked during their pregnancies returned to the workforce within a year of their first child's birth (Henderson, 2006). During this same period, 17% of women who worked during pregnancy and returned to work

within a year of childbirth did so at a different employer. These mothers' reasons for changing employers included higher pay and/or reduced working hours (Henderson, 2006).

A total of 73% of executive women in the Catalyst's Women in US Corporate Leadership study (US Census Bureau Research, 2009) declared that they were comfortable with the trade-offs they had made between career and personal goals. On average, mothers working full-time gave themselves slightly lower ratings as parents than did at-home mothers or mothers who were employed part-time. The parenting ratings were also affected by education, as mothers with higher levels of education tended to judge themselves more harshly than mothers with less education.

Research by the Policy Studies Institute (in the UK) found that two thirds of mothers now return to work after having a baby, an increase of 50% since 1988, when less than half (45%) returned to work.

Amongst the reasons for returning to work, the most common were: financial necessity, desire for intellectual stimulation, a desire for social contact with other adults, to maintain professional qualifications, and to keep long-term career prospects open (Morris, 2008).

CONCERNS ABOUT RETURNING

When asked to indicate concerns about returning to work after maternity leave, the top concerns of working mothers were: childcare (60%), worrying that their child would miss them, worrying about whether their child's development might be affected by the mother returning to work, and concerns about the continuation of breastfeeding (Morris, 2008).

With regards to work, the following concerns surfaced: managing multiple roles and responsibilities and having enough time to do everything, the attitude of the boss and colleagues upon their return, and job availability (Morris, 2008).

RETURN TO WORK EXPERIENCE

According to Morris (2008), 39% of mothers rated their return to work as difficult, and the majority of mothers said it was difficult to adjust to work again. The reasons for this included: missing their children, difficulty concentrating, and an increased workload (in terms of balancing familial and work responsibilities). These women reported feeling emotional initially, but eventually adjusting.

According to Morris (2008), factors affecting a woman's experience of returning to work can be clustered into two groups: organisational factors and individual factors.

Organisational factors related to returning to work:

- Relationship with boss/line manager;
- Organisational culture (purpose-driven organisation and target-driven team);
- Workplace process support; and
- Workplace social support.

Individual factors related to returning to work:

- Work preference;
- The number of reasons for returning to work;
- Health at the end of maternity leave; and
- The woman's confidence in her ability to perform effectively upon her return.

CHANGES TO WORK UPON RETURN

A large majority of respondents in a study conducted by Morris (2008) in the United Kingdom said they wanted to work flexibly on their return to work (88%). However, some women did not request flexible working hours or felt they had to work full-time: 79% requested flexible working hours, 10% of respondents shelved their plans for flexible working due to the recession, and 4% said they felt that a request would be turned down.

Of those who requested flexible working, 16% experienced no change in their work patterns and 7% changed employers (two thirds of these were first-time mothers).

Among working mothers with minor children (aged 17 and under) in the United States of America, just one in five (21%) say full-time work is the ideal situation for them, and six in ten (up from 48% in 1997) of today's working mothers say part-time work would be their ideal (Pew Research Centre, 2007). Part-time work is also the preferred option of about half (49%) of mothers who work full-time and a third (33%) of mothers who don't work outside of the home (Pew Research Centre, 2007).

The way in which change requests are managed affects how individuals feel about their relationship with their employer (Morris, 2008).

3.5.3 CONCLUSION

A study by Boushey (2005) analysed whether women with a child at home would be less likely to be in the labour force than they were at earlier points in the last two decades, simply because there was a child in her household. Findings include: women's labour force participation rates have not fallen due to the presence of children at home, but rather due to the early 2000s recession. Labour participation rates for highly educated women in their thirties are, for the most part, unchanged.

Although most employers have made arrangements to help parents combine work and family responsibilities, many workplaces still have some way to go before they are truly "family-friendly" (PSI, 1997). Women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects in their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005:106).

For women to flourish and grow within the working community, more change needs take place and unique working conditions tailored to employees' lives. In defining a new career model for working mothers, the following needs to be included: career interruptions,

employment gaps, opt-outs, and the new values of the current generation (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005:108).

The shrinking interest of professional women in traditional employment and linear career progression is not just an indication that the workplace is failing women, but also that women are rejecting the workplace (Belkin, 2003).

3.6   SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Research and literature within the South African context seems to be more limited than abroad. This is not surprising as the emergence of women in the developing socio-economic environment happened later and more slowly than in developed countries such as the United States and Britain.

South Africa has openly embraced a policy of gender equity and equality. This policy is eloquently stated in an ANC Discussion Document: "South Africa will never be free as long as women are not free." The ANC further states that the women of South Africa have historically experienced triple oppression on the basis of race, class, and gender (Biraimah, K., August 1999:3).

Ferreira (2000) believes that South African firms, given the unique circumstances and competitive position on the African continent, have plenty of opportunities to become real path-breakers in accommodating working mothers. South Africa is already one of the leaders in Africa in terms of maternity leave and benefits, and should take the opportunity to pave a new way of working that is unique to its people and their needs.

3.6.1   LABOUR FORCE MOVEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN

Only one South African study specifically concerned with career breaks and patterns of re-entry into the workplace of professional women was discovered in the literature, and that is the work of Gerber (2000). However, the work of Wessels (1982) and Lemmer (1990) also

provide relevant findings within this space. A discussion regarding the labour force movement of South African women follows below.

According to the findings of Wessels (1982) and Gerber (2000), most women interrupt their employment when their first child is born, with the intention of returning to the workplace, but this is least likely to come about whilst their children are under the age of three.

Wessels (1982), in her research findings concerning South African graduate women's job expectations and job rewards, revealed that, of her sample of 9 065 participants, 21.4% were waiting to re-enter the workforce.

The following factors will influence the return to work of South African women following a career break as a result of having a child: age (young women who become mothers in early adulthood are more likely to return to work), smaller families, age and number of offspring, timing and spacing of births, marital status, positive support of husband, and education (Gerber, 2000; Lemmer, 1990).

Women who have invested time in their studies either before or after motherhood show tenacity in pursuing their careers, which women with less education do not. The presence of children may, however, cause them to postpone the serious pursuit of a career until their mid-thirties or later, but upon re-entry they pursue their careers with great determination and the desire to achieve excellence at work.

Wessels (1982) identified that married women do not always have free choice between working and not working although, according to Lemmer (1990), marriage is no longer considered a significant reason to end employment, and motherhood, rather than marriage, is the most powerful inhibitor of the labour market participation of women. That being said, the positive support of a husband is often a decisive determinant of a woman's decision to re-enter the labour market, and is the single best predictor of the extent of the wife's actual occupational involvement. Gerber (2000) also found that women who married economically secure husbands experience greater stress about returning to work because

their peers and families found it unacceptable as it was not necessary for them to be employed.

A current or previous divorce dramatically increases the probability of a woman seeking employment in order to support herself and her dependent children. The findings of Gerber (2000) support Lemmer (1990) in this regard, in that divorced women have an increased awareness of the tenuousness of a husband's support and are likely to seek employment.

REASONS FOR WORKING

A study by Rieckert and Taute (2009) identified reasons why South African women pursue paid work outside of the home. These reasons include: finances, socialisation, recognition, and technological development.

Rieckert and Taute (2009) as well as Gerber (2000) found that financial reasons for working are not only due to financial pressures but also to maintain a high standard of living and provide for children's needs. Young women have also developed "a taste for employment." Taking paid work outside of the home makes the working mother financially, emotionally, and socially independent.

Despite the inclination to pursue work, Wessels (1982) found that 44% of married female graduates who were employed full-time were not seeking promotion because of domestic reasons including family planning, added work load, and husbands' employment mobility. Regardless of the number of children still in the home, married women with high career orientations tended to reject promotion because of family obligations, especially if the children are pre-schoolers.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF WORKING MOTHERS

Research by Rieckert and Taute (2009) found that working mothers struggle with the many roles they play within their homes and professionally. These findings are in line with the

findings of many international studies (Belkin, 2003; Gerber, 2000; Stoner & Hartman, 1990).

One of the most pressing issues that a working mother needs to deal with is that of sick children (Rieckert & Taute, 2009). Especially when children are very young, a mother is needed to comfort and care for an ill child, something for which employers rarely cater. According to Smanjak (2007) in Rieckert and Taute (2009), personal illness accounts for only 35% of unscheduled absences, while 65% of absences are due to other reasons, including family issues such as child illnesses. Statistics like this cannot be ignored and need to be considered by employers.

Situations like the one discussed above, where a child is ill and a mother is unable to provide personal care due to work commitments, can produce a number of emotions. The emotion most commonly experienced by working mothers is guilt. Cooper and Lewis (1998) indicate that mothers feel guilty about leaving their children, especially in a time of crisis, illness, or during school holidays. Mothers feel guilty towards their children for not attending to them and guilty towards the company for spending company time to deal with a home crisis (Rieckert & Taute, 2009).

Rieckert and Taute (2009) found that the role conflicts experienced by mothers might create dissatisfaction and frustration. The availability of a support structure, however, could minimize these feelings and the effects of work-family conflict on the productivity of the working mother (Rieckert & Taute, 2009).

TRENDS IN HIRING WOMEN AND WORKING MOTHERS

A global workplace study conducted by Regus (2010) brought to light concerning trends in the hiring of women and working mothers in South Africa, with 45% of South African firms regarding opportunities for women as bleak.

South African companies have reduced their expectations to hire more working mothers more drastically than anywhere else (20%). The net appreciation of returning mothers is also well below average (17%) in South Africa. Companies in South Africa (46%) record

amongst the highest levels of concern with regards to employing mothers, highlighting a correlation between low senior level female employment and difficulties envisaging strategies to retain and motivate returning mothers (Regus, 2010).

In South Africa, women constitute 45% of the workforce, yet only 19% of executive managers and 17% of directors are women. This, coupled with the findings that 44% of South African companies plan to add staff but only 31% of these organisations intend to hire more working mothers, is of great concern (Regus, 2010). The reason for the lack of advancement of South African women into senior positions is that corporate culture doesn't allow for talented women to return to the workplace or continue to operate effectively in the workplace whilst managing their domestic responsibilities.

Fears of South African employers include working mothers showing less commitment and flexibility than other employees, concern that mothers will leave shortly after training to have another child, and that returning employees' skills will be outdated (Regus, 2010).

Although the vast majority of firms agree that shutting out working mothers means losing valuable staff, there are organisations that continue to perpetuate such discriminatory and illegal hiring practices, especially in the light of financial unrest due to unfounded, outdated fears (Anon, 2011).

3.7   MATERNITY LEAVE: POLICY AND LEGISLATION
3.7.1   SOUTH AFRICA

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The rights of pregnant and working mothers in South Africa are protected by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Labour Relations Act.

Companies are obliged to comply with at least the minimum provisions of the acts, but are permitted to improve on the minimum in company policy and procedures.

According to Section 25 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of South Africa, an employee is entitled to at least four consecutive months' maternity leave, which may commence at any time from four weeks before the expected date of birth (maternity leave may be taken earlier if medical conditions do not allow the employee to work). The BCEA also stipulates that no employee may return to work for six weeks after the birth of a child, unless authorised by a medical practitioner.

Employers are not obliged to provide paid maternity leave, and employees may claim from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). To claim from the UIF, the employee must apply at a Labour Centre at least 8 weeks before the birth of the child. A total of 17 weeks can be claimed. Payments must be collected from a Labour Centre (Grogan, 2005:8), and no tax is payable on the benefits.

The UIF will pay between 38% and 58% of an employee's basic, gross salary, to a salary cap of R12 478. The lower the salary, the higher the percentage paid out and vice versa. In cases where the company is paying a portion of the employee's salary during maternity leave, the employee can still claim, but the amount paid out by the UIF plus the salary amount paid by the employer may not be greater than the employee's original monthly salary. It may, however, be equal (Anon, 2010).

The only obligation resting on the employee is that she must notify the employer in writing of the date on which she intends to start maternity leave within four weeks of that date or when reasonably practicable (Grogan, 2005: 74).

Section 26 of the Basic Condition of Employment Act protects pregnant or nursing mothers who choose to return to work. Employers may not employ them in work that is hazardous to the health of the mother or child, and if the mother is required to do night work, the employer must offer her suitable alternative employment if there is a threat to her health and if reasonably practicable (Grogan, 2005: 74).

The Labour Relations Act protects pregnant employees by defining the refusal to allow an employee to resume work after taking maternity leave as a dismissal (Grogan, 2005: 145), and declares the dismissal of an employee on the grounds of pregnancy or intended

pregnancy or any reason related to her pregnancy as automatically unfair (Grogan, 2005: 145).

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act also provides for family responsibility leave. That is three days' paid leave during each 12-month cycle to discharge family responsibilities in certain circumstances, i.e. birth/illness of a child, or the death of spouse, parent, adoptive parent, grandparent, child, or sibling (Grogan, 2005: 75). Reasonable proof of these events may be demanded by employers, and any unused family responsibility leave lapses at the end of the leave cycle (Grogan, 2005: 75).

PRACTICE

Although the law does not oblige employers to provide paid maternity leave, employers who value their working mothers and wish to position themselves as employers of choice will either continue to pay employees on a monthly basis or according to a sliding scale for the duration on the maternity leave (e.g. month 1 = full salary, month 2 = 80% of salary, etc.).

The burden of claiming from the Unemployment Insurance Fund is often impractical and time-consuming. Mothers can stand at the Labour Centre for hours and still not receive any payout, having to return on another occassion. Female employees who are in a position to afford such services will make use of agencies to collect their money on their behalf.

In reality, the three days' leave for family responsibility is not sufficient. Being placed in day-care at the age of four months when the mother returns to work places an infant's immune system under strain. Mothers are required to tend to sick children, and often use their annual leave to do so. This results in female employees not taking enough time off work to rest and recover, and employers are therefore not enjoying that employee's full potential.

3.7.2 INTERNATIONAL

In most countries around the world, paid parental leave (i.e. maternity leave, paternal leave and adoptive leave) is available for those who have worked for their current employer for a certain period of time (Anon, 2011).

Only four countries have no national law mandating paid time off for new parents. These countries are: Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, and the United States of America (sub-national laws vary, e.g., California does mandate paid family leave) (Fass, 2009).

The legal requirements for parental leave benefits do not always reflect actual practice. In certain countries with low requirements, individual employers choose to provide benefits beyond those required by law (particularly in the case of the USA).

3.7.3 BENEFITS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

EUROPE

Central European countries are the most progressive in the world regarding parental leave.

Below is a summary of the parental leave in a number of European countries:

Czech Republic: It is standard practice for mothers to stay home for 3 years with every child. Mothers can decide to take 2, 3, or 4 years' maternity leave. Fathers are permitted to take the leave instead of mothers, but this is not common. For the whole period, mothers are supported by the state (Anon, 2011).

Slovakia: The standard duration of parental leave is 3 years, and for a handicapped child it is up to 6 years. The state pays support of 256 Euros per month for the child's first 2

years. After this period, it is 164.22 Euros per month (Anon, 2011).

Sweden: All working parents are entitled to 16 months' paid leave per child, with the cost being shared between the employer and the state. To encourage greater paternal involvement in child rearing, a minimum of 2 months out of the 16 months is required to be used by the "minority" parent, in practice usually the father (Anon, 2011).

United Kingdom: Female employees are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave (of which 39 weeks are paid leave). The first six weeks are paid at 90% of full pay, and the remainder at a fixed fee. Most employers offer more generous contributions. Annual leave continues to accrue throughout the maternity leave period. Fathers can request paternity leave of 2 weeks' paid leave at a fixed rate (Directgov, 2011). Both parents can also request unpaid parental leave, which can be up to 4 weeks annually, with a limit of 13 weeks (Directgov, 2011).

AFRICA (Anon, 2011)

Angola: Paid maternity leave is granted at 100% of salary for 3 months (Anon, 2011).

Cameroon: Paid maternity leave is granted at 100% of salary for 14 weeks, with 10 days' paid leave for fathers (for family events concerning the worker's home) (Anon, 2011).

Ethiopia: Paid maternity leave of 90 days is granted at 100% of salary, and five days' unpaid leave in the event of serious situations in the home (Anon, 2011).

Tunisia: Mothers are entitled to 30 days' maternity leave at 67% of their salary. Fathers are entitled to 1 day's paid paternal leave in the private sector and 2 days in the public sector (Anon, 2011).

3.7.4   COMPANY POLICY

Companies who acknowledge that female professionals are great contributors to the future of business provide benefits that include extended maternity leave, paternity leave, and paid personal or sick leave to stay at home with sick children. Innovative and flexible childcare benefits are the most supportive of company benefits, and include the provision of vouchers toward childcare, subsidies to attend local childcare centres, information and referral services for child services, and on-site childcare. Flexitime and job sharing have also enjoyed some support from organisations, and work-at-home options have also increased significantly (Gerber, 2000).

INTERNATIONAL

Working Mother Media conducts a yearly survey, "the Working Mother 100 Best Companies Survey," which is the most important benchmark for work-life practices in corporate America (Working Mother, 2011).

Below are examples of company policies of companies on the Working Mother 100 Best Company list.

Table 2: International Company Policy

Abbott
Percentage women employed: 49%
Female managers, senior managers, and executives: 42%
Women among top earners: 37%
Women on board of directors: 15%
Formal compensation policies reward managers who help women advance
Benefits • 89% of employees enjoy flexible schedules • 64% of employees telecommute • On-site childcare centre (offering full-time care and therapy for special needs) at head office • Branches offer up to $35/day for backup care
Employee comments

"Having flexible work options has allowed me to spend valuable time with my family and develop a productive, growing career" - Diane Weishaar

Deloitte

Percentage women employed: 44%

Female managers, senior managers, and executives: 36%

Women among top earners: 26%

Women on board of directors: 29%

Formal compensation policies reward managers who help women advance

Benefits

- Sabbatical program: four unpaid weeks' leave to do anything, three to six months partially paid leave to do volunteer work or pursue career-enhancing opportunities
- Health insurance
- $10 000 annual tuition aid for job-related courses
- 14 weeks' paid maternity leave
- 8 weeks' paid leave for adoptive caregivers
- Back-up childcare: in-home caregivers for $6/hour or use in-network centres for $20/day

First National Bank

Percentage women employed: 58%

Female managers, senior managers, and executives: 43%

Women among top earners: 13%

Benefits

- Child development centre at headquarters (weekdays from 6:30am - 6:00pm)
- 20 days' subsidised backup care annually for parents
- 16 job-guaranteed weeks off, with seven of these at partial pay (maternity leave)
- $3 500 adoption benefit

According to studies, working mothers rate flexible work arrangements as the most desired benefit when seeking an employer (Working Mother, 2011).

Companies like the ones above are giving their employees the power to create their own workday, -week, and -year, and to design their careers. These companies are reaping rewards such as enhanced loyalty and dedication, increased productivity, and lower absenteeism.

According to Working Mother (2010), the reason flexibility is so important to working mothers is that they want to do their best at home and in the office. Flexible work arrangements enable mothers to do both.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, companies (especially the bigger ones) have started to improve their maternity and family policies.

Below is an example of such a company:

Table 3: South African company policy

Nedbank
Female employees: 62,8%   Female managers: 60,5%   Female executives: 16,7%   (Percentages as at 2009)   **Benefits**   • Childcare facilities at 3 head office buildings   • Flexible work practices   • Paid maternity leave at 100% of employee's salary for four months

3.7.5   RETENTION

The key to the successful return to work after maternity leave is mutual recognition that there is a significant overlap in interests between professionals and their employers, and making the time to sit down and develop a work plan that delivers certainty to both parties (Sarder & Keogh, 2005).

Sarder and Keogh (2005) identified several useful factors for the retention of women. These are: a positive attitude, a focus on opportunities rather than difficulties, employee and employer working together and communicating well, and the development of a joint

plan coupled with a regular review thereof. Suggestions from employees included: active encouragement of female employees to maintain contact with their manager during maternity leave, training opportunities during maternity leave, working together with local child-care providers to ensure places are available that fit in with the intended roster or shift lengths of the employee, working together with the employee to draft a plan focusing on providing career development as well as satisfying the business's needs, and setting up web communications from the employee's home (Sarder & Keogh, 2005).

3.8 CONCLUSION

From the literature review above it is clear that for organisations to position themselves as employers of choice, the implementation of new and innovative workplace practices is necessary, as young people (not just female employees) are aspiring to more work-life balance.

4 CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research design is a detailed plan for how a research project will be conducted. Babbie and Mouton (2006:74) explain research design as follows: "Before you can observe and analyze you need a plan of how the research will be conducted."

This chapter describes the research design, research paradigm, inquiry strategy, and the research methods used in the study.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM / PHILOSOPHY

Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) define a research paradigm as: "… a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator …" Mills et al (2006:2) indicate that it is important for a researcher to choose a research paradigm that is congruent with his/her beliefs about the nature of reality. This is particularly relevant in qualitative research.

The researcher subscribes to Wheatley's (1999) notion that the reality one experiences does not exist "out there," but that it is co-created through acts of observation and awareness. Something exists only when it is experienced and is given a meaning. According to Hatch (2006), people create and experience realities in different ways because individuals and groups have their own assumptions, beliefs, and perceptions.

The researcher followed an interpretivist paradigm (shown in Table 4). The methodology for this study is, however, constructivist grounded theory.

Table 4: Research paradigm

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Method-ology	Methods of data collection & analysis	Reporting Style
Interpretivist	The real world can be discovered by means of a systematic, interactive, methodologic al approach	Knowledge arises from the understanding of symbols and meaning (symbolic interactionism)	Grounded theory	Data are gathered by means of participant observation, human documents, and interviewing, and are analysed systematically	The researcher provides insights into behaviour expressed and meanings and interpretations that subjects give to their life worlds

(Archer, 2008)

The concern within this paradigm is the understanding of human behaviour from the perspectives of the people involved. That is, understanding the experience of a phenomenon and not the description of phenomenon (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2007:7).

The next section describes qualitative research and the constructivist grounded theory methodology used in this study to gather and analyse the qualitative data.

4.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

4.3.1   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is defined as the interpretive study of a specified problem where the researcher is central to the sense that is made (Knight, 2008). Qualitative research is interested in the meaning and description of certain phenomena, and the researcher attempts to put him/herself in the shoes of the people being observed (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:270).

The aim of qualitative research is to establish the socially constructed nature of reality, to emphasise the relationship between the researcher and the object of study, as well as to emphasise the value-laden nature of the inquiry (Welman, Krugar & Mitchell, 2005:188).

Qualitative research attempts to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:270). Table 5 lists the characteristics of qualitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:273).

Table 5: Qualitative study characteristics

Qualitative studies	
Approach to the setting	Natural settings
	Whole context
Aims of research	Thick descriptions
	Interpretive understanding
Research strategy	Inductive
	Contextualising
Notion of objectivity	Intersubjectivity: gaining trust and rapport in order to get as close as possible to subjects; trustworthiness and credibility

(Babbie & Mouton, 2006:273)

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the researcher preferred the quality and richness of the information that can be retrieved within a qualitative paradigm. As the current study deals with an emotionally charged topic, the qualitative approach provided a better platform for the participants to fully explain and express themselves, their thoughts, feelings, and situations. *Secondly*, the inherently complex nature of ethics was described with less restraint during the interviews, whilst questionnaires might have limited the responses that participants could give.

Given the limitations of qualitative research designs, special care was taken to limit the negative impact thereof.

A specific limitation relates to the complex data analysis procedures that have to be followed and the possible influence of the researcher's subjectivity in the process. For this reason, every effort was made to rigidly follow standardised data analysis methods. The small sample size was another limitation, but was dealt with by ensuring that sufficient data were collected by collecting it to the point of data saturation.

4.3.2   CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY

The strategy/methodology that was used to conduct the research can be described as Constructivist Grounded Theory.

According to Strauss and Corbin, as noted by Babbie and Mouton (2006:498), "a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. It is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon." Grounded theory is an approach that allows one to study a relatively unknown social phenomenon around which no specified theory may exist (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:499).

Constructivist Grounded Theory starts with wanting to gain knowledge about a certain research topic with either limited knowledge or preconceived ideas about the topic. The topic is then studied (literature study) to gain more knowledge about it and a theory or theories can be developed based in the data gathered (through interviews/focus groups).

This approach is specifically appropriate to this study because to argue that the researcher should have commenced with a clean slate (as suggested by Traditional Grounded Theory) is neither practical, nor possible. The process of data collection was inevitably influenced by the researcher in that she had already gained insight into the topic through her own experience of returning to work, as well as from literature.

Hancock (1998) points out that one of the most important features of using grounded theory is the fact that the data are usually collected and analysed at the same time. This is commonly known as constant comparative analysis, where the data are recorded and scanned for its content immediately after being collected.

Pandit (1996) describes the process of Grounded Theory Research in terms of five phases, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Pandit's process of conducting Grounded Theory Research

PHASE		ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
Research Design Phase			
Step 1	Review of technical literature	Definition of research question Definition of priori constructs	Focuses efforts. Constrains irrelevant variation and sharpens external validity.
Step 2	Selecting Cases	Theoretical, not random sampling	Focuses efforts on theoretically useful cases (e.g., those that test and/or extend theory)
Data Collection Phase			
Step 3	Develop rigorous data collection protocol	Create case study database Employ multiple data collection methods	Increases reliability and construct validity. Strengthens grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence. Enhances internal validity. Synergistic view of evidence
Step 4	Entering the field	Overlap data collection and analysis Use flexible and opportunistic data collection methods	Expedites analysis and reveals helpful adjustments to data collection. Allows investigators to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features.
Data Ordering Phase			
Step 5	Data Ordering	Array events chronologically	Facilitates easier data analysis. Allows examination of process.
Data Analysis Phase			
Step 6	Analysing data relating to the first case	Use open coding Use axial coding Use selective coding	Develops concepts, categories, and properties. Develops connections between a category and its sub-categories. Integrates categories to build a theoretical framework. All forms of coding enhance internal validity.
Step 7	Theoretical sampling	Literal and theoretical replication across cases (go to step 2 until theoretical saturation is reached)	Confirms, extends, and sharpens theoretical frameworks.
Step 8	Reaching closure	Attain theoretical saturation when possible	Ends process when marginal improvement becomes small.
Literature Comparison Phase			
Step 9	Compare emergent theory with existing literature	Compare conflicting frameworks Compare with similar frameworks	Improves construct definitions, and therefore internal validity.

			Improves external validity by establishing the domain to which the study's findings can be generalised.

(Pandit, 1996: 3)

The research process as it pertains to this study is discussed below.

Phase 1: Research Design / Literature Review

In the first phase of the research process, an in-depth study was conducted of the available literature on working mothers, pregnant employees, maternity legislation and policy, etc. The literature review revealed a broad body of knowledge, which was narrowed down to identify specific themes, and from which a first draft interview structure was compiled.

Phase 2: Data Collection / Sampling

Suitable participants were identified and approached. Semi–structured, face-to-face, interactive interviews were conducted with seven participants. In order to improve the trustworthiness of the data, recordings and reflexive interview notes were kept during the interviews. The final results were e-mailed to the participants to verify that the information was representative of what was said in the interviews.

Phase 3: Data Ordering / Data Analysis

In the third phase, data analysis took place. On collection, data were chronologically arranged. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to analyse the data. The coding method used is explained in Section 3.6. Coding took place after each interview to see if there were any new emerging categories. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously.

Phase 4: Data Collection / Data ordering / Data Analysis

Analysis of the data identified areas on which the researcher wanted to elaborate. Follow-up sessions were then conducted with the participants. Once again, reflexive notes were kept to improve the trustworthiness of the study. The final results were e-mailed to the participants to verify that the information was representative of what was said.

Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to analyse the data. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously.

Phase 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

In the last phase, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made, based on the results obtained from the data analysis.

4.4   SAMPLING

Sampling is the process of selecting observations. For the purpose of this study, non-probability sampling was used. The probability that any element will be included in a non-probability sample cannot be specified (Welman, Krugar & Mitchell, 2005:67).

Social research is often conducted in situations where you cannot select the kinds of probability samples used in large-scale social surveys (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:166), and thus non-probability and, more specifically, purposive sampling was the most appropriate for this particular study.

Participants who met the criteria and were willing to participate were purposefully selected to take part in the study.

4.4.1   TARGET POPULATION

The target population for the proposed study was employed South African women with a first-born child aged two years or less. This study was conducted within a South African context.

To be included in the research, the participants needed to be working for an employer (that is, not self-employed) at the time of being pregnant with their first child, going on maternity leave and returning from maternity leave.

4.4.2   SAMPLE METHOD AND SIZE

Bias is defined by R.A. Wienclaw (2009) as, "the tendency for a given experimental design or implementation to unintentionally skew the results of the research." With regards to bias when choosing a sample, such errors can cause the sample to not accurately represent the population, and thus cause the results of the study to be inaccurate and futile. Particularly in the case of choosing individuals to participate, the researcher's personal bias may play a role.

Despite the researcher remaining as objective and impartial as possible, the participants in the study, although purposefully selected according to certain criteria, were still of a convenience nature, and the sample is thus not representative of the South African population as a whole.

The researcher was committed to obtaining a clear and in-depth description of what was being researched. The size of the sample was thus determined by the data obtained and not by the number of interviews conducted. A total number of seven participants were chosen to participate.

4.5   DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data were collected via a combination of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews. The interviews were recorded to facilitate better data capturing as well as

interpretation of the data (the data was transcribed immediately after every session). These recordings will be stored for the prescribed period of time.

Other methods of data capturing, such as research notes, were also used.

4.5.1 LITERATURE STUDY

In order to gain knowledge and insight into the research topic, research was initially conducted in the form of a literature study. The information gathered was used to guide the direction of the interviews.

4.5.2 INTERVIEWS

Berg (2007) defines an interview as a conversation with the specific purpose of gathering information. Personal interviews provide insight into the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences that underlie the phenomenon (Ormrod *et al.*, 2005), and facilitate the obtaining of rich descriptive data, which aids understanding of the participant's construction of knowledge and social reality (Maree, 2007).

The interviews focused on a descriptive and explorative account of the participants' perceptions and experiences, as guided by various themes in the literature study.

The interviews were semi-structured with a set of pre-determined questions that defined the line of inquiry (Maree, 2007). Questions were designed to elicit information that highlighted a holistic understanding of the participants' experience of returning to work following maternity leave.

The interviews included a range of open-ended questions (to obtain a description of the situation), closed questions (to obtain specific information), and probing questions (to explore a particular focus of direction or significance to the research area).

The researcher believed interviews to be the appropriate method for the study, because interviews guarantee a 100% response rate and, due to the small participant group, all the responses were vital to the success of the research. The interviews also offered flexibility and allowed the researcher to gain richer data from the participants. Interviews tend to be time consuming and there is a risk of possible interviewer bias, but these factors were countered through effective time management and strict adherence to standardised procedures.

The interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix A. Although these questions were posed to each participant, variations of the questions developed as a result of the participants' answers.

4.5.3   FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group is a method designed for interviewing small groups by facilitating a group discussion of specific topics (Berg, 2007).

The researcher intended conducting a focus group session, but due to health and time constraints, this was not possible and thus individual follow-up interviews were held with all the participants. The follow-up interviews were conducted telephonically, and notes were taken. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to further explore emerging concepts.

The combination of the interviews and follow-up interviews had the added benefit of allowing for continuous enrichment of the data collected within the sample.

4.6   DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

As mentioned in Section 3.3.2, the researcher used grounded theory. Hancock (2002) points out that one of the most important features of using grounded theory is the fact that the data is usually collected and analysed at the same time.

The researcher immediately started analysing the interviews after each interview had taken place, noting new ideas and facts that had emerged throughout the process of data collection. As the researcher moved through the process of data collection, new perspectives and ideas emerged and relationships between certain ideas and theories were formed which, in turn, led to new concepts and understandings (Hancock, 2002).

Concept formation is an integral part of data analysis and begins during data collection. Qualitative researchers form new concepts or refine concepts that are grounded in data. Conceptualisation is therefore one way in which a qualitative researcher can organise and makes sense of data (Neuman, 1997).

Neuman (1997) further explains that relationships among concepts are examined, and the concepts are later linked to each other in terms of themes, either as oppositional sets or as sets of similar categories, which the researcher interweaves into theoretical statements.

4.6.1 Coding

Coding involves organising the data into conceptual categories and creating themes or concepts that are often used during data analyses (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The data from the interviews were categorised and themes were allocated per category.

The coding of data assisted the researcher in categorising themes according to the defined research questions.

4.6.2 Open Coding

Open coding involves the creation of certain categories pertaining to certain segments of text (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:499). The open coding was achieved by evaluating the data as it was obtained. Themes were identified and codes assigned in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories.

The researcher made use of semi-structured, face-to-face, interactive interviews where a questionnaire was used as a guide. The researcher looked for specific themes in the data and allocated codes to these themes.

4.6.3 Axial Coding

Axial coding consists of "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Strauss & Corbin in Babbie & Mouton, 2006:500).

Axial coding was employed to connect the open codes into broader themes/categories. The themes/categories were determined inductively by data immersion and by grounding these in the data through specific excerpts.

4.6.4 Selective Coding

Selective coding is "the process of selecting a core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filing in categories that need further refinement and development" (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:500). The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which everything else is draped" (Borgatti, 1996: 7).

4.7 QUALITY AND RIGOUR

4.7.1 QUALITY

Lincoln and Guba suggest that the quality of data within the qualitative realm can be described in terms of "trustworthiness." They describe trustworthiness as a simple question of how an inquirer can convince his or her audience that the findings of an enquiry are worthy of attention (1985:290).

Four dimensions of trustworthiness are described by Lincoln and Guba (1994):

Credibility

Credibility refers to the comparability of the realities that were obtained from the

respondents and the realities that actually exist in the minds of those respondents. Methods to enhance credibility in this study included: full disclosure and honesty by the researcher, prolonged engagement – which meant staying in the research field until the point of data saturation had been reached, and using member-checking to determine accuracy of findings by providing participants with final descriptions and themes for confirmation of accuracy (Creswell, 2009: 191).

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. The researcher attempted to collect adequately detailed descriptions of data. The researcher has also previously indicated that purposive sampling was used which, according to Lincoln and Guba (1994), also increases trustworthiness.

Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), there can be no validity without reliability (and therefore no credibility without dependability). With regards to the concept of reliability within qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (in Golafshani, 2003) use the term "dependability," which closely corresponds to the notion of "reliability" in quantitative research. The researcher gained the trust of the participants by being open and honest, and assuring them that all information obtained during the interviews would remain anonymous.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher. In order to improve confirmability, the researcher kept all research notes and raw data.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003) state that qualitative research is valid insofar as it is useful and worthwhile in assisting the researcher, participants, and others to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

For this reason, discrepant findings were also presented, as real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always correlate with other information. By presenting this information, the account becomes more realistic and, consequently, more valid.

4.7.2 RIGOUR

In order to ensure rigour, the researcher attempted to adopt a strategy that is systematic and self-conscious in terms of research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication.

Furthermore, the researcher attempted to create an account of method and data that can be analysed by another researcher, who should come to essentially the same conclusion. The researcher also attempted to provide a coherent and plausible explanation for the phenomenon being studied (Mays & Pope, 1995). Lastly, the researcher also applied peer debriefing as part of methodological rigour by sharing the research methods, analysis, interpretations, and findings with academics in the field of qualitative analysis who could provide critical feedback and discussion.

4.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics is the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of a research project, or who are affected by it (Saunders et al., 2007:610).

Researchers are expected to behave ethically, not only when presenting the results, but also while conducting the study (Ruane, 2006:17). The following ethical guidelines were followed during the study (Ruane, 2006:17-29):

- *Research should not cause harm to subjects*
  The researcher ensured that none of the subjects was exposed to any harm, whether physical, psychological, or emotional.

- *Researchers should obtain the informed consent of subjects*
  All subjects were informed of their right to decide whether or not they would like to participate in the research study. Each subject received a consent form prior to participating, explaining their right to withdraw from the process at any stage, as well

as their rights with regard to their research participation. The signed consent forms can be found in Annexure B.

- *Researchers should respect subjects' privacy*

  Privacy refers to our ability to control when and under what conditions others will have access to information about us. To avoid an invasion of privacy and to put the subjects' mind at ease with regard to their privacy, the researcher paid special attention to the following issues: sensitivity of the information, location of the research, and disclosure of the study's findings.

- *Researchers should avoid conflicts of interest*

  This research study was conducted as partial fulfilment of the researcher's Master's degree. In order to maintain a high ethical ground, the researcher made this clear to the subjects participating in the study.

- *Ethical reporting should be truthful*

  The results of this study were processed through scientific procedures in an objective and non-biased way. The results were recorded fairly and accurately.

- *Institutional review boards*

  The researcher presented a proposal to conduct this study to a panel of experts from the University of Pretoria who reviewed the research and ensured all necessary steps were followed during the research.

5   CHAPTER 5:   DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents and analyses the research results. The process of data analysis was approached with the intention of "bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:150), and strategies appropriate to a grounded theory approach where utilised to analyse the data, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Section 4.2 provides detailed information about the interviewees that made up the sample. Section 4.3 reports the questions used during the interviews. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 describe the coding process used to analyse the data, as well as the results of the coding.

5.1 SAMPLE

The data were collected using semi-structured, face-to-face, interactive interviews. Seven participants were chosen for the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to enhance the quality and accuracy of the data collected.

Table 7 provides information about the individuals interviewed.

Table 7: Participant information

Race	Age	Marital status	Child Age	Highest Qualification	Occupation
White	27	Married	24 mnths	BCom (Hons)	Wealth Manager
White	35	Married	20 mnths	Grade 12	Call Centre Agent
White	31	Married	6 mnths	BCom	Senior Credit Controller
Black	26	Married	12 mnths	BCom (Hons)	Human Resources Partner
White	27	Married	10 mnths	Certificate	Senior Account Executive
Black	27	Single	11 mnths	Diploma	
White	26	Married	24 mnths	BCom (Hons)	School Teacher

5.2 QUESTIONS

The interview questions were designed to feed into the broader research questions and objectives, allowing the researcher to fully explore relevant components. Table 8 lists the research questions, questions that were asked to explore the research questions, and questions that were asked to further explore the answers received.

Table 8: Research and Interview Questions

Research Question	Questions Asked	Further Questioning
How does childbirth influence a female employee's attitude towards her career?	How would you rate your attitude towards your job before childbirth? How would you rate your attitude towards your job after childbirth?	What are the reasons for the change in your attitude towards your job?
What amount of time following childbirth would be ideal to return to employment, from the female employee's perspective/experience?	What month following childbirth did you return to work? What is your company's maternity leave policy? How would you rate your mental and physical health at the end of maternity leave? Did you find maternity leave sufficient? Given the choice, how many months after childbirth would you return to work? Specify reasons for you response.	Were you ready to return to work (physically and mentally)? Do you think that you and your baby would have benefited from longer maternity leave? Why do you think you would have benefited from longer maternity leave?
What are the reasons female employees decide to return or not to return to employment following childbirth?	Did you change positions/jobs/organisations after the birth of your child? Given the choice, would you still want to work, now that you have a baby? Do you intend on remaining with your current organisation? How would you describe your ideal family situation before childbirth? a. Only partner has a job (mother runs the household) b. Mother has a less demanding job and larger share of household and childcare duties c. Equal jobs and share household and childcare responsibilities d. Partner has no work or less demanding work, with larger share of household and childcare responsibilities	What is the reason you changed positions/jobs/organisations after the birth of your child? Are you still satisfied with your current career choice? What are the reasons you are no longer satisfied with your career choice? Has your opinion of the ideal family situation changed following the birth of your child?

| | What is currently your ideal family situation?

What are the reasons you decided to return or not return to employment following childbirth? | |
|---|---|---|
| What are female employees' main concerns upon returning to work after maternity leave? | What were your main concerns upon returning to work?

Did you experience any work-/job-related stress/concerns while you were on maternity leave? | What were your main personal concerns upon returning to work?

What were your main concerns upon returning to work with regards to your work environment, job, etc.? |
| How do female employees experience work upon returning from maternity leave? | How did you experience work upon returning from maternity leave?

How would you rate your experience of returning to work terms of difficulty?

What efforts were made by management to reintegrate you into the workplace after maternity leave? | What challenges did you face in adjusting to work?

Were you treated differently upon your return?

Did you receive any contact/communication from your employer during maternity leave?

What could have been done differently at work to improve your return to work?

Do you have any special arrangements at work following childbirth to accommodate your new family situation? |

5.3   DATA ANALYSIS

As noted in the methodology chapter, all interviews were recorded. The data were then transcribed, which formed the basic, raw data on which analysis was done.

Going through each transcribed interview and identifying key words, commonalities, and phrases pertaining to each question started the coding process. These were placed onto a chart, and data were subsequently added from each interview to the same chart. After all the interviews were conducted, coloured highlighters were used on the chart to indentify areas of commonality, which lead to the identification of concepts and categories. These areas were given category names and divided into broader themes.

A summarised version of this process is given in Table 9.

Table 9: Coding Process

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Love job Very good Enjoy work Not as good as before Distracted/unfocused Hate job Relationship with baby Family 1st priority No change	• Attitude before • Attitude after • Reasons for change	JOB ATTITUDE
Ideal family situation Work commitment Change positions after birth Remaining with current employer: - "Company too far; too much time away from the baby" - "Temporary to accommodate family"	• Views about work and family • Employer commitment • career satisfaction	WORK ORIENTATION
Month of return Company policy Maternity leave sufficient Ideal maternity leave Benefit of longer maternity leave Healthy (mental and physical) Mentally well, physically not well Physically well, mentally not well Readiness to return	• Time planning • Health/personal • Readiness to work	ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH ASPECTS
Financial Enjoyment Personal concerns: Good support structure; bond with baby; health; baby's adjustment Professional concerns: Performance; insecurity Guilt Concern Don't want to go back	• Reasons for return • Concerns • Stress	PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
Experience upon return Difficulty	• Experience • Challenges	RETURN EXPERIENCE

| None
Breast milk
Concentration | • Treatment | |
| Management efforts
Suggestions

Time
Sick children | • Reintegration
• Contact
• Special arrangements | ORGANISATIONAL
ASPECTS |

5.4   RESULTS

The process of coding described above led to the identification of six major selective coding themes, namely: job attitude, work orientation, environmental and health aspects, personal experience, return experience, and organisational aspects.   Each of these themes is discussed below.

5.4.1   JOB ATTITUDE

Within this theme, two sub-themes were identified, namely attitude before childbirth and attitude after childbirth.

Attitude before childbirth

This sub-theme relates to the attitudes of the female employees towards their jobs before childbirth.   All 7 participants indicated a positive attitude towards their jobs before childbirth.

The open codes were: love job, very good, and enjoy work.   Examples of the participants' description of their experiences in this regard are as follows:

"I loved my job, and I was very dedicated."

"Good.   I really enjoyed my work."

"I loved my job so much.   I had a positive attitude and was always motivated to wake up and go to work."

"I loved it, never had a problem with my shifts, and was really doing well for myself."

"Very positive. I would spend hours right through the night preparing for the next day. It was the most important thing in my life, at times."

Combining the above produced the first axial code that represented the attitudes of the female employees before childbirth as positive.

Attitude after childbirth

This sub-theme relates to the attitudes of the female employees towards their jobs after the birth of their first child. A significant change was identified within this theme, with four of the participants indicating a change in their attitudes towards their jobs.

The open codes were: not as good, distracted and unfocused, and hated job. Examples of the participants' responses include:

"I am still positive, but not as much as before."
"I hated it! I hated the shifts and just couldn't understand how I fell in love with this industry. I resented my job."
"I was distracted, depressed, and unfocused."
"I still love my job, but for different reasons: it feeds my baby. The attitude I have now is that my family is much more important than my job."

The second axial code, discussed above, identified a change in the attitudes of the female employees towards their jobs following the birth of their first child.

Further investigation lead to the identification of a third sub-theme (reason for change), which is concerned with the reasons for the change in attitude. The open codes related to this theme were: relationship with baby, family first priority, and no change. Below are examples of the participants' responses within each open code:

• Relationship with baby

"My job is still good, but my mind is with my son. I miss him."

"My mind and heart are with my baby at nursery school."

"I've had withdrawal symptoms from being away from my baby for such long hours."

- Family first

"I view things differently since I've had a child. My priorities have changed, and my child and my family have become number one priority."

"Other things have started taking preference over my work. My family comes first. I'm not able to work through the night anymore."

- No change

"No change, because my job is flexible enough to accommodate my baby."

"No change; I enjoy the people I work with and love my job."

The above three sub-themes were combined to produce the first major theme: describing the overall job attitudes of the female employees. The second sub-theme relates to the commitment of the participants to their careers.

5.4.2   WORK ORIENTATION

This theme relates to the participants' overall orientation to work. Three sub-themes were identified within this theme, namely views about work and family, employer commitment, and career satisfaction.

Views about work and family

This sub-theme is comprised of two components: ideal family situation and work commitment.

- Ideal family situation

This theme relates to the participants' ideal family situation before and after childbirth. The participants' ideal family situations before and after childbirth are depicted in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: IDEAL FAMILY SITUATION
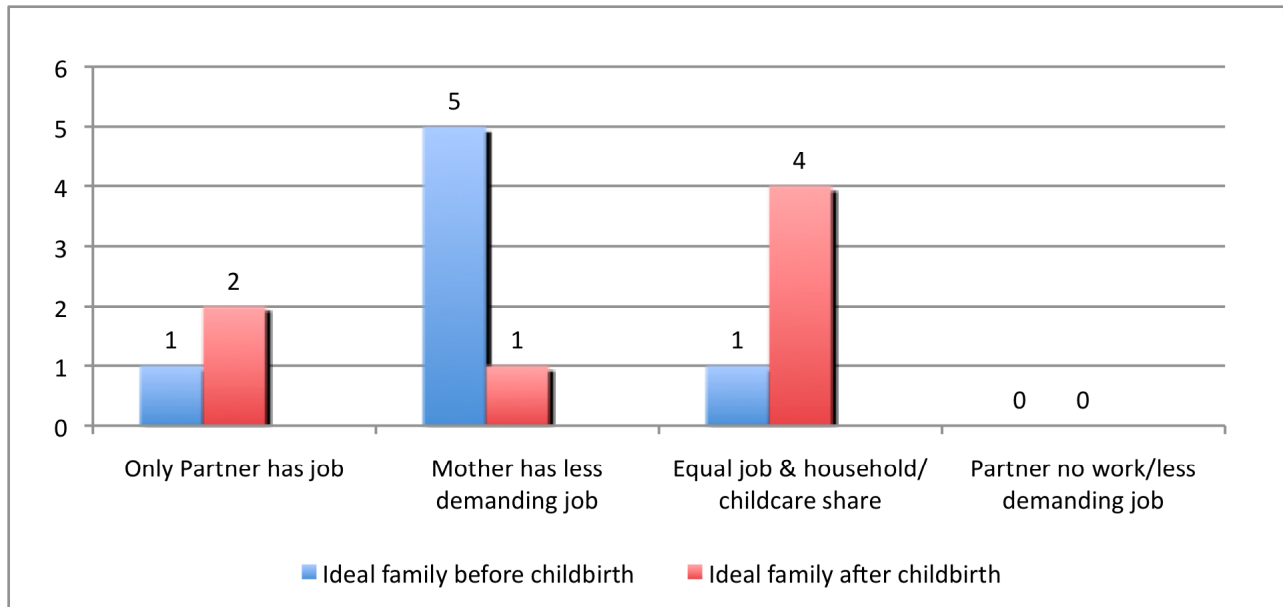
The majority indicated that before the birth, their ideal family situation would have been the mother having a less demanding job and a larger share of household and childcare duties. After childbirth, the trend changed to equal jobs and share of household and childcare duties.

Reasons for this change include: job flexibility, family/child being the first priority, and shared responsibility (work load and both incomes). Examples of participants' responses include:

"I think it's important for both parents to have demanding and rewarding jobs. My job offers a lot of flexibility and I like the fact that I can be with my baby when I need to be."

"Yes, my opinion has changed, because I would love to be with my baby at home, but both of us need to earn an income in this economic climate."

"I would still like to work, but my child is my first priority now."

"I have realised how important family is and, with shared responsibilities, we can build a happy family."

- Work commitment

The participants showed a slight orientation towards not working since becoming mothers, with four participants saying they would not work if they did not need to for financial reasons. Below are a few participant responses:

"No, I feel like I'm not there for my baby and I'm missing out on so much."
"No, I would rather spend time with my child."
"No, no, not at all."

Three participants indicated they would like to continue working. Below are examples of the participants' responses:

"Yes, I'm not a housewife."
"Yes, I'm lucky that my job is completely flexible and I can be home if my children need me."
"Yes, I enjoy what I do. I would have just extended my maternity leave by a few months."

Employer commitment

This theme looked at the commitment/loyalty of the participants towards their current employer. The following open codes were combined to create the sub-theme of employer commitment: Change positions after birth and remaining with current employer.

- Change positions after birth

Four participants did not change positions. Two participants changed positions due to promotions within the same company, and one participant changed employers due to employer's refusal to accommodate her family situation.

- Remaining with current employer

Four participants indicated that they had no intention of changing their employer. Three participants indicated that they intended to change employers, of which two were related to their baby or familial situations:

Examples of participant responses follow below:
"Company is too far; I'm spending too much time away from my baby."
"This is just a temporary move to accommodate my family, but I don't plan on staying here longer than a year."

Career satisfaction

This theme considers the satisfaction of the participants with their career choice.

Five participants indicated they were still very satisfied with their career choices. Two participants indicated they were no longer satisfied with their career choices, but only one of these two participants' change in career satisfaction was related to the birth of her child:

"I left the hospitality industry because of the shifts, and chose to do something way out of that so I could work stable hours and be with my child, but I would love to go back one day"

5.4.3   ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH ASPECTS

This theme investigated the environmental and health aspects of the participants relating to their time planning with regards to returning to work and their health and readiness to return to work after giving birth.

Time planning

The open codes identified to create this axial code include: month of return, company policy, and ideal maternity leave.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of those returning to work according to the month in which they returned, as well as the length of the maternity leave afforded by the company's leave policy.

FIGURE 3: MATERNITY LEAVE
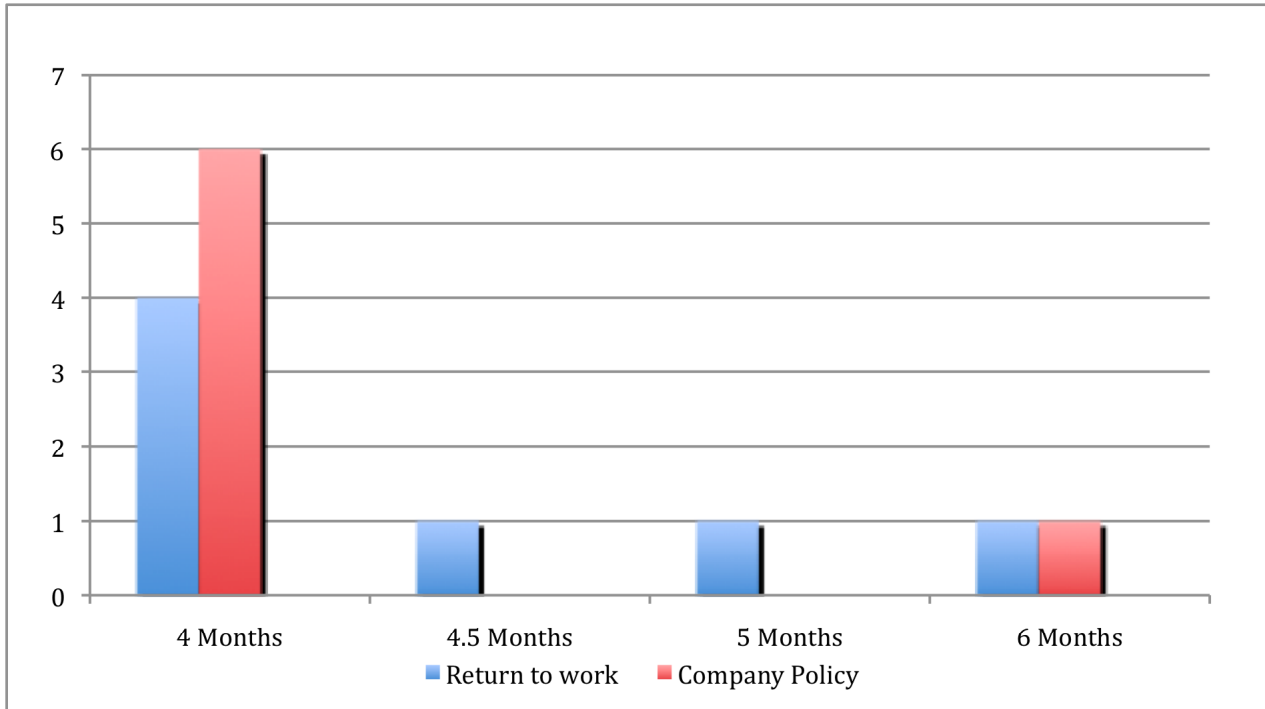
- Company policy

Most of the companies complied with the minimum maternity leave prescribed by legislation, with the exception of one company, which offered six months' maternity leave. With regards to salary during maternity leave, four participants were not paid and needed to claim from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. One of the participants who was unpaid received contributions from her company for pension and medical aid while she was on maternity leave, but upon her return she had six months to repay these amounts to the company. One participant received 75% of her salary for the duration of her four months' maternity leave, and had the option of taking a further one month of unpaid maternity leave. One participant received 33% of her salary whilst on maternity leave and claimed the rest from the UIF, and the last participant received her full pay during her four months' maternity leave (she also had the option to apply for a further six months' unpaid maternity leave).

- Month of return

Four participants returned after four months, when their prescribed maternity leave was exhausted. One participant returned after six months, in accordance with the company's policy. Two participants extended their leave using holiday leave that they had accrued, returning at four and a half months and five months respectively.

- Maternity leave sufficient

When asked whether their maternity leave was sufficient, 5 participants stated that it was not, and only 3 participants stated that it was sufficient..

- Ideal maternity leave

71% of participants indicated that the maternity leave afforded by the company was not sufficient. Table 10 shows the ideal length of maternity leave according to the participants.

Table 10: Ideal Maternity Leave

Length of Ideal maternity leave	No. Participants
6 months	5
6 - 8 months	1
7 - 8 months	1

All the participants indicated that the ideal length of maternity leave would be at least 6 months. Reasons for this length of time can be categorised as follows: the baby is bigger, able is more aware and able to bond better with baby, baby start to eat solids, and able to breastfeed for longer. Participant responses included:

"This is long enough for Baby to become aware and baby is also not so small anymore."
"By 6 months, Baby has grown a lot and can start eating solids."
"Real bonding only starts after 4 months. My son became more aware and that would have been the ideal bonding time. I would have liked to carry on breastfeeding."
"After 6 months, when baby is on solids and can be weaned from the breast, and you know she is older and well."

"I think 6 months is good because babies can start eating solids and would have benefited from longer breastfeeding. They are a bit stronger. The bond has been formed, and I would have probably felt better leaving him, but he'd still be young enough to easily adapt."

- Benefit of longer maternity leave

Two participants said they would not have benefited from longer maternity leave, whereas four participants said that they and the baby would have benefited from longer maternity leave. One participant was indifferent about longer maternity leave.

Amongst the reasons for benefiting from a longer maternity leave, the following themes emerged: breastfeeding and mother's care for baby.

"My baby was premature, and she would have benefited from the extra care for a longer time."

"When I returned to work, there was a significant drop in the amount of breast milk I could provide because I was having to feed a lot less and baby was supplemented with formula. So, yes, I feel, had I been able to be home a bit longer, he may have benefitted from the goodness of breast milk rather than formula."

Health

This theme explored the health of the female employees upon their return from maternity leave. The overall response was positive, with 71% of the respondents being in good health, both mentally and physically. 14,5% indicated that they were physically unwell, but mentally well. 14,5% indicated that they were mentally not ready, but that they were physically well.

Readiness

This theme looked at the readiness of the participants to return to work following maternity leave.

More than half of the participants indicated that they were not ready to return to work because they wanted to be with their babies. Three participants said they were ready to return to work, two of which cited good support as their reason for being ready to return to work.

"Physically I was ready, but mentally not, as I was still enjoying my little girl and did not want to leave her behind."

"I didn't want to go back ... mentally I was not right, I was dreading going back."

"I was not ready; could never have been ready."

"Yes I was ready. Of course I missed my child, but I had a good support structure and knew my child was in good hands in terms of child care."

5.4.4   PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The discussion of reasons for returning to work after the birth, as well as concerns and stress regarding work, led to the fourth selective coding theme: personal experience. Three sub-themes were identified, namely reasons for return, concerns, and stress.

Reasons for return

Two code sub-themes were identified within the reasons for returning to work: financial and enjoyment of job. Examples of participant responses are:

"I like earning an income and also get satisfaction out of working. I enjoy what I do."

"I need to contribute to household expenses. Also, I have excellent medical with my company, which I needed due to the complications with my pregnancy."

"I needed to return for financial reasons."

"I like my job and I needed the money."

"I'm a single parent, and I need the money to survive and in order to provide for her needs."

"I really do enjoy my work; it is what I have always wanted to do. And I was also not in the financial position to afford the luxury of being a stay-at-home mom. In my ideal world, I

would be a stay-at-home mom until my children were old enough to start school, then I would return to work."

Concerns

Participants were asked to indicate all their concerns about returning to work. Two categories of concerns emerged: personal and professional.

- Personal concerns

Two participants indicated that they had no concerns. Both of these indicated a good support structure as the reason why they were not concerned.

From the responses of the five participants who had personal concerns, a number of open code themes were identified: bond with baby, health, and the baby's adjustment to school/caregiver. Participants described their experiences relating to these themes as follows:

Bond with baby:
"My Baby won't see me as the primary caregiver."
"Losing the bond with my Baby."

Health:
"Worried about baby getting sick"
"Baby had to take a lot of medication – I was worried it wouldn't be given properly."

Baby's adjustment to school/caregiver:
"Will baby be happy at crèche?"
"Would he adjust to school? He was so small."
"Leaving my baby with the helper, who is a stranger to her."

- Professional concerns

Three participants indicated that they had no concerns. One of these participants experienced no professional concerns due to her mind being occupied by her baby (and her being on the verge of quitting within the first week).

Four participants had professional concerns. Two open code themes in this regard were identified namely: performance and insecurity. Participants' responses in this regard were as follows:

Performance:
"I was a bit worried that I might not be able to give of my best anymore or meet deadlines due to my motherly obligations."
"I knew my performance would drop, because my mind was always on the wellbeing of my child."
"Would I be able to meet the challenges of the job?"

Insecurity:
"Would the company still see my value and need me? Was the company closing down?"

- Stress

The participants were asked whether they experienced any work-related stress whilst on maternity leave. Four participants denied this and three acknowledged it.

The reasons for experiencing stress whilst on maternity leave were indicated as: feeling guilty for not working, being concerned about whether they were being missed, and not wanting to go back. Participants described their experience in this regard as follows:

"...felt guilty for not working; I kept feeling there is something I should be doing."
"Did they even miss me?"
"I didn't want to go back; I was worried about shift work because I didn't want to   confuse my baby."

5.4.5 RETURN EXPERIENCE

This selective coding theme relates to three axial codes: experience, challenges, and treatment.

Experience

This theme relates to how the female employees experienced their work upon returning from maternity leave, and how they rated their return experience in terms of how difficult they found it.

- Experience of work upon return

Four participants experienced their work in a positive light and three participants had a negative experience. Participant responses in this regard include:

Positive
"...enjoyed being back in the rat race."
"Easy, just tiring at first, but I got used to it."

Negative
"Difficult at first, because I was constantly thinking about my child."
"I cried the whole first week and almost quit."
"I hated it; it took me away from my baby and I just wanted to leave."

- Difficulty

Despite experiencing their work in a positive light upon return, the majority rated the overall return to work as difficult. Four participants found the experience difficult, but for three of these the difficulty didn't last long and after the first month their experiences improved. Three participants did not find the experience difficult. Participants described their experiences in this regard as follows:

Difficult

"...difficult in the beginning."

"...difficult balancing home and work."

"...difficult, because I wanted to be with my baby."

"...difficult, but I lost interest and left."

Easy

"...easy, I just missed my son a bit in the beginning."

"...easy; no hassles."

"...not difficult."

Challenges

This theme conveys the challenges in adjusting to work after maternity leave.

Three participants said they experienced no challenges in adjusting to their work. One participant said she had lost interest and did not care, and thus did not experience any challenges. Three participants did experience challenges in adjusting to work.

The open codes relating to these challenges were: expressing milk, concentration, and time. Participant responses included:

"I had to break every two hours to express milk."

"I had to learn to focus on work and not worry about the baby."

"Time was my biggest challenge; trying to balance things and get everything done."

Treatment

This theme relates to whether the participants were treated differently upon their return to work.

Four participants said they were not treated differently, and three said they were treated differently. Among these three participants' responses, one was negative, while the other

two were treated differently but in a positive way. Participant responses in this regard include:

"Yes, I was treated differently, and comments were made that I had too much on my plate."

"I was treated differently but in a good way. My child was considered, and I wasn't given duties that needed me to stay late."

"I was treated differently, but I wanted to be. There were two other pregnancies, but mine was complicated and they kept asking why I wasn't like the others. I didn't want that."

5.4.6   ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

This selective coding theme relates to three axial code themes namely: reintegration, contact, and special arrangements.

Reintegration

This theme relates to the efforts of management to reintegrate the employee into the workplace after maternity leave (management efforts), as well as the employees' opinions on what could have been done better to create a more positive experience of reintegration (improvement).

- Management efforts

The overall experience of this aspect was negative, as five participants indicated that there were no efforts by management to reintegrate them into the workplace. Two participants had a more positive experience in this regard. Participant responses included the following:

Negative
"None, I just carried on as I left off."
"Nothing, that is why I decided to leave. I asked if I could just work the morning shift for at least two months and they refused, so that's why I resigned."

Positive

"My work let me bring my baby to work for one month. They made a small special office for me."

"It wasn't really necessary, but a few things had changed and the head of department briefed me on these changes as soon as I got back."

- Improvement

Four participants said there was nothing that could have been done by management to improve their return to work. Despite significantly negative responses from five participants, only three of these participants had suggestions on what could have been done better by management to improve their return to work. The suggestions were:

Suggestions

"Accommodate me. Consider my request to work morning shift seriously."

"Allowing flexi-time and/or working from home some days would have helped."

"Acknowledgement of my situation by my manager. Also, a crèche at work (because we have space), and then I could have breastfed for longer. We could all contribute towards a helper."

Contact

Four participants indicated that they had received no contact from their employer whilst on maternity leave. One participant indicated that there was no contact, but that she did receive flowers while in hospital. Three participants indicated they did receive contact from their employers while on maternity leave.

With regards to the three participants who did receive contact from their employers, this contact related to the employer establishing whether the birth went well and that the return date would still be as agreed. This pertains to two participants. One participant indicated that the employer's contact only related to a job opportunity within the organisation.

Special arrangements

Three participants indicated that they have no special working arrangements to accommodate their families. Four participants indicated that they do have special working arrangements.

With regards to special arrangements, two aspects were identified, namely time and sick children. Participants described these two aspects as follows:

- Time

"Mothers leave at 16:30."

"I have flexible work arrangements. I sometimes work longer hours and can take a day or half a day depending on how many hours I have worked."

"My work hours have changed to accommodate my nanny, and I was allowed to bring my baby to work for a month when I returned from maternity leave. My baby was 'prem' and needed an extra month with me. My boss said I couldn't take another month off, but allowed me to bring her to work."

- Sick children

"If my child is sick, they let me bring him to work and then take him to the doctor."

"My child comes first. When she is sick, she comes to work with me."

The theme discussed immediately above related to the organisational aspects of the participants return to work experiences.

The implications of all the above findings will be discussed next.

5.5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.5.1 JOB ATTITUDE

According to the results, there was a significant change in the attitudes of the participants towards their jobs after giving birth to their first child. Before childbirth, the participants were all positive and optimistic about their jobs.

Their attitudes changed after childbirth, but were not necessarily negative towards their jobs (with a few exceptions). The researcher is of the opinion that these changes were due to role conflict experienced by the participants who were new to the many roles of working mothers. Many of the participants reported being distracted and unfocused. The researcher believes that this is due to the inability of the new mother to step out of the "mother" role and into the "worker" role.

The participants ascribed their changes in attitude to the new relationship with their babies and the realisation that family is their first priority. Two participants experienced no change in attitude towards their jobs after childbirth. One participant said she experienced no change because her job offered enough flexibility to accommodate her family, whereas the other participant experienced no change in her attitude due to her love for her job.

Schwartz's (in Gerber, 2000) distinction between career-primary women and career-and-family women was discussed in the literature review. The participants who experienced no change are likely to be career-primary women, whereas the participants who did experience change are most likely career-and-family women or family women who are forced to work due to financial reasons.
Rieckert and Taute (2009) found that the role conflicts experienced by mothers could create dissatisfaction and frustration.

The participants who experienced no change in their attitudes towards their jobs or were still positive about their jobs after childbirth despite being distracted had an overall positive outlook on their work-life situation. This supports the findings of Working Mother (2010) that the way women view their employment situation has an enormous implication for their attitudes about work and life.

5.5.2   WORK ORIENTATION

Views about work and family

A significant tendency found was that before childbirth the trend was towards the mother having a less demanding job, and after childbirth the trend changed to both partners having equal jobs and sharing household and childcare responsibilities, or with the mother having no job at all. These results are similar to the findings of Morris (2008), in which 55% of working mothers indicated that their ideal family situation was an equal job and share of childcare, and 38% indicated a preference for the mother having a less demanding job and a larger share of childcare.

The change in the participants' ideal family situation was due to a number of reasons: the flexibility offered by certain employers, thereby making the fulfilment of all the roles of a working mother possible; the realisation of the importance of family and making it a first priority, and mostly due to shared responsibility in the household. The change towards both partners having equal jobs was mostly due to the need for shared responsibility. It seems that the economic climate has influenced these opinions, as a child brings new costs and, with the current economic crisis, both salaries are needed to make ends meet or to maintain a certain standard of living (Gerber, 2000; Rieckert & Taute, 2009).

It seems likely that the women have also developed a taste for employment and the elements that accompany working, namely financial, social, and emotional independence (Gerber, 2000; Rieckert & Taute, 2009). This situation relates to the women satisfying their underlying needs as working mothers and allowing them to progress through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in terms of their working career.

Employer commitment and career satisfaction

According to Desai and Waite (1991:552), work commitment indicates the importance of work in an individual's life and may predict a woman's employment. Work commitment may also influence certain occupational characteristics, that is, compared to women with less work commitment, women with strong work commitment may be less responsive to characteristics of occupations that make it easy (or hard) to combine work with childrearing

(Desai & Waite, 1991:552).

The participants in this study showed that they were committed to their employers, with only one participant changing employers upon returning from maternity leave. The same participant also planned on leaving her current employer in the future. A further two participants intended to change employers in the future. Two participants changed positions (with the same employer) upon their return to work.

According to Gerber (2000), the effects of maternity leave on a female employee's career are potentially devastating with, at best, maternity leave representing temporary career stagnation. This was not confirmed in the case of the two participants who changed positions upon their return from maternity leave, as the changes in position were due to promotion. One participant was in the process of being promoted before going on maternity leave, and the other was informed whilst on maternity leave about the opportunity for promotion and asked whether she was interested.

Mothers who change employers soon after returning to work after maternity leave often do so for higher pay and/or reduced working hours (Henderson, 2006). The latter is true of the participant that changed employers upon her return from maternity leave. The participant was employed in the hospitality industry. This industry requires long working hours and shift work, which requires working at irregular times. The participant's baby was born prematurely, and upon her return she asked her employer if she could work day shifts only for the first month. The employer refused, and the participant resigned.

Perhaps the employer in this case felt that the request was a sign of a change in attitude and organisational commitment by the participant. According to Gerber (2000), organisations view career adjustments as a dramatic change in organisational commitment, which most women feel is not true.

The participant's resignation was due to her employer's refusal to accommodate her new role as a working mother. The participant left the hospitality industry (expressing that she was unsatisfied with her career choice as it did not accommodate this new phase of her life) and took a job as a receptionist, which allowed her more flexibility to accommodate

her child. She maintained that this was a temporary situation until she could find another job that she was more passionate about, but that would also accommodate her role as a mother. She intended on leaving her current employer within the next year. Belkin (2003) found that, although not all mothers leave their employment, they tend to scale down or redefine their roles in the crucial career-building years (25 to 44), thus affecting their future career prospects.

The majority of the participants (five out of seven) expressed satisfaction with their current career choices. With regards to the two participants that intended changing employers in the future, one of these participants wanted to change employers for career purposes (including increased income), and the other wanted to change employers due to changes at work (which affected the time spent away from her baby). The former participant was no longer satisfied with her career choice as she felt that she should have chosen a higher paying career.

The latter participant was committed to her employer and grateful for their accommodation of her new role as a working mother; however, the employer changed premises soon after her return and was then too far from her home. As a result of the move to the new premises, she was spending more time travelling and less time with her child, which was the reason why she intended to change employers. Again, this supports the findings of Henderson (2006) that among mothers returning to work, those who move to a different employer often do so for higher pay and/or reduced hours.

5.5.3   ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH ASPECTS

Time Planning
Six of the seven participants were given the prescribed minimum maternity benefit in terms of length of maternity leave (i.e. four months), and one participant was given six months' maternity leave.

In a study in the United Kingdom, Morris (2008) found that 57% of participants received more than their statutory maternity pay, but the amount of pay in addition to the statutory

maternity benefit was not found to influence the length of maternity leave. Similarly, in the current study, the amount of pay was not found to affect the length of maternity leave. However, with regards to pay, only 42% of the participants in this study received compensation during the maternity leave period. Four participants had unpaid leave, and the onus was on them to claim from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

With regards to the companies that offered compensation, only one participant received her full monthly salary for the duration of her four months' maternity leave (she also had the option to apply for a further six months' unpaid maternity leave). The other two participants received a portion of their monthly salaries. One participant received 75% of her salary and had the option of taking a further one month of unpaid maternity leave, and the other participant received 33% of her salary and claimed the rest from the UIF.

Four participants returned to work after their maternity leave had ended at four months, and two participants extended their maternity leave, making use of accrued vacation leave and returning to work at 4.5 months and 5 months respectively. The participant who was offered 6 months' maternity leave returned to work at the end of the six-month period.

These findings correspond with the findings of Morris (2008), where it was indicated that the majority of participants' return to work corresponded with paid leave, while the other participants extended their maternity leave by using accrued holiday leave, which explains the later return of some participants.

Morris (2008) found that the amount of maternity leave taken by participants varies significantly between those organisations employing 50-500 people and those employing 5000 or more people, with the latter offering on average four weeks more than the former.

None of the participants in the current study chose to return to work before their maternity leave had been exhausted. In fact, five participants indicated that four months' maternity leave was not sufficient, and that they would have benefited from a longer period. (Two mothers, specifically, would have benefited from longer maternity leave due to complications experienced during their pregnancies and their babies being born prematurely).

All the participants considered the ideal length of maternity leave to be at least six months. Reasons for this choice included: the size of the baby, the baby's readiness for solid foods, the baby having achieved more milestones at this stage (including sitting), being able to bond better with the baby due to increased awareness, and concerns over not being able to continue breastfeeding upon their return to work. Two mothers said they tried to continue breastfeeding upon their return to work, but needed to supplement the baby's feeding with formula due to the drop in milk supply caused by the baby not stimulating milk production during the day.

Health and readiness to work

The majority of participants indicated that they were not ready to return to work at the end of their maternity leave. This readiness was not necessarily related to the participants' health, as 71% of the respondents were mentally and physically well. Only two participants indicated that they were somewhat unwell, with one participant saying that she was mentally unwell, and one participant saying she was physically unwell.

A study by Morris (2008) similarly found that only 10% of participants indicated that they felt ill, exhausted, tired, and uncomfortable at the end of maternity leave.

The primary reason cited for not being ready to return to work was the need/desire of the participants to be with their babies for longer.

Three participants indicated that they were ready to return to work, two of which attributed their readiness to good support at home, and one participant was simply eager to return to work. She was likely a career-primary woman as defined by Schwartz (in Gerber, 2000:8).

5.5.4   PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Reasons for return

57% of participants returned to work purely due to financial reasons, 28% of participants returned due to their love/enjoyment of their jobs as well as for financial reasons, and 14% returned due to personal satisfaction and a love of working.

Morris (2008) had similar research findings, with the most common reasons for returning to work being financial necessity (68%), the desire for intellectual stimulation (48%), and a desire for social contact with other adults (35%).

A study by Rieckert and Taute (2009) identified reasons for South African women pursuing paid work outside of the home.   These reasons include: financial, socialisation, recognition, and technological development.   All the motivations for taking paid work outside of the home make the working mother financially, emotionally, and socially independent.

Rieckert and Taute (2009), as well as Gerber (2000), found that financial reasons for working are not only due to financial pressures, but also to maintain a high standard of living and providing for children's needs.   Young women have also developed a taste for employment.

Personal and professional concerns

Two participants indicated no personal concerns regarding their return to work.   These participants also felt ready to return to work, as mentioned previously.   Both these participants indicated that they had good support structures in terms of childcare at home.

Childcare seems to be the greatest concern for working mothers, with 57% of participants citing childcare as a concern upon their return to work. Other concerns include losing the bond with their babies and their babies' health.   These findings support those of Morris

(2008), where she identified the most common concern with returning to work as being related to childcare.

Two participants had no professional concerns at all, and one participant said she had no professional concerns due to her mind being with her baby to the extent that she almost resigned within the first week of returning to work. This participant was, however, committed to her employer and did not intend leaving in the near future.

In the study conducted by Morris (2008) 21% of women worried about managing multiple responsibilities and having enough time to do everything upon their return. Another 33% were concerned about the attitude of their boss and their colleagues, and 10% were concerned about job availability. The findings in the current study support these findings. Three participants were concerned about their ability to perform and meet their obligations in light of becoming mothers, and two participants were concerned that their employers did not "miss" them, and that they would not have a job upon their return. These concerns were experienced as stressful while the participants were still on maternity leave.

5.5.5   RETURN EXPERIENCE

Experience and Challenges

57% of the participants in the current study experienced their work as positive upon their return, whereas 43% experienced their work negatively. Despite experiencing their work in a positive light, the majority rated the overall experience of returning to work as difficult, which supports the research findings of Morris (2008) in which 39% of participants rated their return to work as "difficult" or "very difficult."

Morris (2008) found that 20% of participants had no problem settling back into work, and 34% of participants had difficulty adjusting due to missing their child. Similarly, 43% of participants in the current study experienced no challenges in adjusting to work. However, 43% did experience challenges, and these challenges were likely the reason for experiencing the return to work as "difficult."

In the current study, challenges experienced by the participants related to concerns regarding breastfeeding and managing multiple roles. With regards to breastfeeding, only one of the employers provided a facility specifically for breastfeeding/expressing of milk, but this was just for one month (the participant was allowed to bring her baby to work for one month and was given a special office to feed the baby and do her work). The participants who continued to breastfeed upon their return to work, expressed milk in the ladies' room.

Treatment

57% of participants felt that they were not treated differently upon their return to work. One participant felt that she was treated differently and that she needed to prove that she was able to handle both roles. As mentioned in the literature study, it is unfair for female employees to be put in a position where they need to, or feel that they need to, re-prove themselves in a position they had already occupied successfully. According to Stoner and Hartman (1990), 80% of a sample of 633 female managers felt that their careers were adversely affected by home and family responsibilities.

Two participants in the current study felt that they were treated differently but in a positive way, and the participants welcomed this because, although their commitment to their jobs had not changed, they had changed and needed to approach their work differently. According to Gerber (2000), the effects of pregnancy on an employee's career do not end with maternity leave, as women with children have to alter their lofty career ideals and adjust their careers because of family responsibilities. As long as employers acknowledge that their employees need to change, the participants can continue to perform, but in a different way. Each individual, pregnancy, and situation is unique and needs to be treated as such by employers.

5.5.6 ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

Reintegration and contact

The results show a significant lack of effort by management to reintegrate the returning employee into the workplace. Morris (2008) describes the process of returning to work as being equivalent to a workplace transition, needing proper integration in a way that is similar to on-boarding a new employee, inducting a new team member, or rehabilitating an employee from long-term sick leave. Only about 11% of organisations have a formal support or coach/counsellor service available to women upon their return to work following maternity leave (Morris, 2008).

Apart from a lack of effort by management to reintegrate the employee into the workplace, as indicated by this study, the majority of participants received little or no contact from their employers whilst on maternity leave. This might have also added to the difficulty experienced by participants upon their return to work.

Uncertainty over whether or when women will return to work is perceived to be one of the most difficult issues when dealing with pregnancy in the workplace (Regus, 2011). Yet, effort on the part of employers and some communication during maternity leave could alleviate this problem.

Suggestions by the participants for a better reintegration include: considering requests for work flexibility (at least for a few months after returning to the work), acknowledgement by managers that the female employee has experienced a change, and day-care facilities at work (participants indicated that they were willing to pay for this service). A day-care facility at work will allow for continued breastfeeding.

Special arrangements

Four participants had special working arrangements. These special arrangements were related to time off and sick leave.

With regards to time off, arrangements included: mothers leaving work at 16:30, flexible work arrangements (if longer hours were worked, participant could take time off work at a later stage), and work hours were changed to accommodate the participant's nanny.

Two participants had special arrangements for when they babies were ill. Their employer allowed them to bring the baby to work and time off to take the baby to the doctor. This arrangement, specifically, resulted in increased employer commitment, and these two participants did not consider leaving their employer.

The way in which change requests are managed affects how individuals feel about their relationship with their employer (Morris, 2008). This is evident from two different scenarios. Two participants gave birth to premature babies and, upon their return to work, both these participants requested special arrangements. One participant requested a further month of maternity leave due to her baby's health issues. The employer declined, but allowed the participant to bring her baby to work for one month. She was provided with a special office and was able to care for and feed her baby whilst at work. This participant remained with her employer.

The other participant requested working morning shifts only for the first month so that she could care for her baby in the afternoons. The employer declined and had no alternative suggestions. The participant resigned immediately.

Sarder and Keogh (2005) postulate several useful factors for the retention of female employees: a positive attitude, a focus on opportunities and not difficulties, employee and employer co-operating and communicating well, and the development of a joint career plan that is reviewed regularly. The results of this study support the above findings, as it was indicated that communication would have improved the return experience for the participants. A proper plan for managing the return to work of female employees after giving birth will alleviate many stressors for employees and consequently for employers.

5.5.7   CONCLUSION

Garrett *et al.* (1990) and O'Connell (1990) found that woman who worked during their pregnancies were more likely to return to work after childbirth.   The current study's research findings confirm this, as all of the participants worked during their pregnancies and all of them returned to work afterwards.

Most of the participants in the current study (with the exception of one) needed to work to contribute to household expenses and their lifestyle.   Garrett *et al.* (1990) and Leibowitz *et al.* (1995) found that a female employee's income prior to pregnancy plays an important role in the retention of the employee following childbirth.   The researcher's findings support this.

The current study found that mothers are not given enough support in returning to the workplace after maternity leave.   The findings of this study, however, indicate an overall more positive view of female employees and the accommodation of mothers in the workplace than was expected by the researcher.

6   CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this study was to identify common themes arising from the experience of returning to work of female employees following maternity leave.

The data of the study were obtained through personal and telephonic interviews with working first-time mothers. The following six main themes were identified during the coding process: job attitude, work orientation, environmental and health aspects, personal experience, return experience, and organisational aspects.

6.2   CONCLUSIONS

In order to achieve the primary objective of this study, the following research questions were formulated in Chapter 1. The researcher has summarised the results obtained according to these questions.

- How does childbirth influence a female employee's attitude towards her career?

The results indicated a significant change in the attitudes of the participants towards their careers after childbirth. For the most part, this change seems to have an effect on how employees view their careers (specifically for career-and-family women). There were participants who experienced no significant change in attitude, and these are likely to be career-primary women.

The change in attitude is not necessarily negative and should not be interpreted as an indication of loss of interest by the employee in her career. It does, however, seem to influence how an employee approaches her work. More effective ways of working are necessary in order for the employee to maximise her time at work and reduce the likelihood of taking work home.

The management of the female employee's change in attitude is crucial, as proper management and coaching could be the difference between maintaining an otherwise dedicated, hard-working employee or losing the employee either to another employer or from the workforce all together.

- What amount of time following childbirth would be ideal before returning to employment, from the female employee's perspective/experience?

The results indicated that the ideal amount of time off for the birth of a child from the participants' perspectives is six months. The reasons for this have been extensively discussed in the research findings.

- What are the reasons why female employees decide to return or not return to employment following childbirth?

The results of this study indicated three reasons for returning to work after childbirth. The first is financial only. The second reason is enjoyment as well as financial, and the third reason is enjoyment and satisfaction.

The financial argument for work is undeniable due to tough economic times and increased expenses, but the argument for work for personal satisfaction is also compelling. Women have developed a taste for employment and the motivations that accompany it, namely socialisation, recognition, as well as financial independence.

The reasons for not returning to employment are: wanting to be with baby, missing the baby, feeling guilty for not being with the baby, concern for the baby's health/development/wellbeing, and not wanting to miss important milestones and moments in the baby's life.

None of the participants in this study left their employment after childbirth. The researcher is of the opinion that none of them (with the exception of one) really had the freedom of

choice. None of the participants occupied a position higher than middle management, nor were their husbands/partners earning substantial salaries, and thus none of the participants could afford to leave employment to be with their babies.

At the same time, none of the employees was in the position that their earnings were so low that they could not afford proper childcare, forcing them to stay home to care for their babies and thereby increasing their financial pressures.

- What are female employees' main concerns upon returning to work after maternity leave?

Childcare and a good support system in terms of taking care and being there for their babies seemed to be the main concerns of the participants. The other concerns of working mothers are: their babies' health and a fear of losing the bond with their babies. These are personal concerns, but the female employees also experienced certain professional concerns.

The main professional concern experienced by female employees after returning to the workplace was the ability to perform and meet obligations. Other concerns included: anxiety about whether they were missed by their employers, and job security or availability of work upon their return.

- How do female employees experience work upon returning from maternity leave?

Just over half of the participants in this study viewed their work in a positive light upon returning from maternity leave, but this did not make the experience of returning to work any easier, and the majority of participants found their overall experience of returning to work difficult.

The difficulty of returning to work could be due to challenges experienced upon their return. These challenges include: concerns regarding breastfeeding and managing multiple roles.

In general, the participants did not feel that they were treated differently upon their return to work, but this was not necessarily viewed positively. Most employers did not communicate at all with the participants whilst they were on maternity leave, nor did they acknowledge the change in the participant's life. Acknowledgement and sensitivity to the changes in the participants' lives would have enhanced the overall experience of returning to work.

6.3   LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher's experience through this study led to the identification of a few limitations of the study.

The sample size used for this study was quite small and, although the participants were from various industries and companies, the researcher is of the opinion that a study conducted on a larger, more diverse group in terms of background, culture, race, socio-economic status, age, and marital status will provide a better indication of the situation in South Africa. Such a study will identify additional variables considered by working mothers as affecting their careers.

Another limitation is concerned with time, as the interviews were of a once-off nature with a few follow-up questions. The researcher is of the opinion that a study conducted over a longer period of time would possibly have yielded more conclusive results.

These limitations have influenced the researcher's suggestions for future research. There are five suggestions for future research. The first suggestion is to conduct a survey that is available to all South African mothers (thus not limited to first-time mothers or mothers who are presently employed). A survey that is open to all South African mothers will provide a better indication of how mothers view employment, how they are treated at work, how they

are treated for wanting/needing to work, as well as a better indication of all the thoughts and feelings that accompany the experience.

The second suggestion is to conduct a study on the experiences of working mothers over a longer period of time. Mothers generally rate their experience of returning to work as difficult, but how long do these experiences last and what are the longer-term effects thereof?

The third suggestion for future research is to identify measures of women's determination to follow a career. The determination of a woman to follow a career determines her resilience in overcoming factors that might otherwise cause her to step out of the workplace or slow down her career progression. These measures would be useful in recruitment and selection procedures of top female executives. The value to organisations would be immense if they are able to separate career women from those who merely want employment in order to provide some additional income for their families.

Suggestion four is concerned with breastfeeding. The researcher has noticed a stigma around breastfeeding for professional women. Prolonged breastfeeding is supported and encouraged (and catered for) by employers, especially in Europe. This does not seem to be the case in South Africa. The number of bottle-fed babies is increasing. The provision of lactation facilities at work could change this.

The fifth suggestion relates to working fathers. To suggest that women work differently to men and that they leave employment more easily and find other aspects of life more fulfilling is easy, but not enough research has been conducted on working fathers to make such comparisons. The researcher therefore suggests that more research also be conducted on the experience of returning to work and work related decisions of fathers.

6.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

As the number of women in the workforce near and in some cases outnumber men, employers need to respond to women's desire for equitable opportunities to reach the

upper ranks, if they so desire. Sheer demographics make this a simple reality, and business results prove the value thereof (Working Mother, 2010:19).

The new working reality requires breaking away from traditional modes of how work gets done and how careers progress. Employers embracing this will win the loyalty of talented working mothers and all employees who desire vibrant working and personal lives (Working Mother, 2010:19).

The first step in effectively managing working mothers and other employees is recognising that individuals and their situations are unique, with different talents, priorities, and motivations. So too is each pregnancy unique, and this needs to be catered for.

6.4.1 POLICIES, PROGRAMMES, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT

In order for working mothers and pregnancy in the workplace to be effectively managed, the structures and systems in the company need to enhance the working mother's ability to perform. The focus needs to be on getting working mothers from the level of "survival" to one of "excellence." These concepts need to be defined for each individual within the context of the company's strategic focus (Rieckert, 2005).

Proper guides, workplace plans, and programmes for employers and employees alike need to be created to ensure a successful return to work and reintegration after maternity leave. Training and the effects of training (i.e. information) will reduce unfair discrimination and increase the success of programmes. This view is supported by companies like IBM and Johnson and Johnson, who are leading the field in innovative work and family policies (Working Mother, 2010:5).

Re-entry programmes for returning women do not appear to exist in South Africa. These programmes make re-entry easier for women and are less rigid in their demands and more aware of the need for employees to balance work and family demands.

Return-to-work training programmes such as the *Returning to Work Guide for Parents and Employers* (Morris, 2009) need to be utilised in South African organisations.

Such guides/programmes need to include checklists for employers and employees relating to the steps to follow from the moment the employee informs the employer of the pregnancy. The guide needs to cover aspects such as planning a smooth transition; identifying key dates such as the due date, antenatal appointments, maternity leave, and returning to work, and how these will be accommodated; all information on company maternity policy and flexible working policies; the handover plan, and a back-to-work plan.

The guide needs to be thorough, but flexible enough to cater for unforeseen circumstances and events such as still births, difficult pregnancies, and premature babies.

The time from workplace pregnancy through to the return to paid work constitutes a period in which individual and collective sense-making occurs, not only because of profound physiological, emotional, and relational changes (workplace, familial, and friendship), but also because having and raising children may not meet the mother's expectations (e.g., "baby shock") (Buzzanell *et al.,* 2005). Employer communication is essential during this period.

From the initial meeting with the employee to plan the workplace pregnancy through to the return to work, it is suggested that a role model or coach be assigned to the employee. This person can act as a point of contact during the employee's maternity leave and can provide support upon her return to work. The first month after returning to work is likely to be the hardest in terms of finding a balance between the roles of worker and mother. The coach or role model can assist and provide comfort during this journey.

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

6.4.2   FACILITIES AND CHILDCARE

The provision of facilities such as lactation rooms and day-care will also assist working mothers to better balance their multiple roles.

Lactation rooms will enable mothers to continue breastfeeding long after their return to work. Innovative and flexible childcare benefits, such as the provision of vouchers towards childcare, subsidies for enrolment of children at local childcare centres, information and referral services, and on-site childcare will assist the employee in focusing and being committed whilst at work, instead of being concerned about the wellbeing of her child.

Other recommendations by Gerber (2000) include less expensive forms of support, such as the provision of a childcare room for use during school holidays, relaxation of telephone policies, and establishing routine work breaks for parents to telephone home and check on children after school.

6.4.3   FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS

Organisations need to provide the best environment for working mothers so that they can perform optimally for the organisation. A change in the way of thinking by top management is necessary, because the difficulties that mothers face in balancing productivity at work and family life originate in contradictions within policies and not within motherhood itself (Buzzanell *et al.*, 2005).

Family-friendly policies such as flexible work arrangements and work-schedule changes can assist in minimising the negative impact of work-family dynamics and could significantly improve the wellbeing of the working mother.

A risk of offering mothers flexible work arrangements is that colleagues may see working mothers as having special privileges, thus adding to negative judgements towards working mothers, with colleagues perceiving that they are left to "pick up the slack."

A better option is to make workplace flexibility available to all employees. Younger workers also expect flexibility more than previous generations, because it comes naturally with technological improvements adding to multi-tasking ease.

As long as performance is high, employees can be trusted to use good judgement in managing their time. Flexible work practices in terms of time and location have many benefits including being less expensive, leaner, and more adaptable to growth. According to Working Mother (2010), 81% of mothers whose work allows for flexibility feel that it positively affects their productivity. Flexibility also has a positive impact on employee morale, commitment to the organisation, and overall job satisfaction.

With solutions readily on the market, there is no excuse for companies that understand the value that returning mothers can bring to the organisation to not reach out to them with family-friendly, flexible work strategies (Regus, 2011).

APPENDIX A: LIST OF REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS