ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

BJ Erasmus*
E Sadler**

ABSTRACT

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

In the global economy competition is universal and more and more analysts acknowledge that only one resource, people, offers an enduring competitive edge. In terms of world competitive ratings over the years it is well known that it is precisely in respect of the people dimension that South Africa is falling short dramatically. South Africa’s ability to create an environment conducive to competitiveness, will to a large extent be determined by the nature and quality of the country’s labour force.

The Employment Equity Act makes women a specific subgroup of the so-called “designated” groups and an acceleration of the pace at which women are increasingly being absorbed and utilised in South Africa’s labour market is inevitable and indeed very necessary. The increase in the participation of women in the South African labour market makes it imperative that the opinions and experiences of South African working women should be taken cognisance of.

* Prof Erasmus is Professor in the Department of Business Management, University of South Africa
** Prof Sadler is Professor in the Department of Applied Accounting, University of South Africa

South African Journal of Labour Relations
The South African population has been estimated (Statistics South Africa 1998) at approximately 40.5 million in 1996, with 77 percent Africans, 11 percent White, 9 percent Coloured and 3 percent Indians. It was also estimated that 52 percent of the total population was female. Northern Province had the highest proportion of women and girls, at 55 percent of the total population, followed by the Eastern Cape at 54 percent. Gauteng was the only province with more men than women. The female population was 49 percent in Gauteng. Approximately 54 percent of women and 56 percent of men lived in urban areas. Education has not been equal for all South Africans in the past, therefore educational attainment among South Africans varies not only by race but also by gender. For all those aged 20 years and over, African females have the lowest educational attainments, followed by African males, whereas White females and males have the highest educational attainments. Among African males and females only 6 percent have obtained post-school qualifications.

According to the 1996 Census, 34 percent of the economically active population were found to be unemployed. Fifty-two percent of the African women could be rated as being unemployed and 5 percent of White women were unemployed. Among those who were employed in the formal economy, 26 percent of African males and 57 percent of females were working in elementary occupations such as cleaning, garbage collection and agricultural labour. Almost 14 percent of African women were in semi-professional occupations – for example, clerks and technicians. About 18 percent of African women and 11 percent of males were in managerial or professional positions. Among the Coloured population 41 percent of women were to be found in elementary occupations, 25 percent in sales and services and 19 percent of Coloured women and 14 percent of males were in management or professional jobs. A large proportion (37 percent) of Indian males were found in managerial or professional occupations and about 40 percent of Indian women were working in clerical occupations. The largest group of White women, namely 45 percent, were found mainly in clerical positions, but 48 percent were in managerial positions or in professional occupations (Statistics South Africa, 1998).

Women generally, and African and coloured women in particular, are remunerated less well than men. White women’s earnings averaged 60 percent of those of White men, while African women’s earnings averaged 89 percent of those of African men. The average African woman employee’s earnings were only 43 percent of those of the average White woman’s earnings and only just over a quarter (26%) of the average White male employee’s earnings.

3 WOMEN AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT: DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES

When one thinks of women in the work environment, one of the first questions often asked is whether women should be managed differently from men. According to Moorehead and Griffin (1995:529), most managers assume that women should be treated the same as men and that their reactions to issues are no different. The purpose of this discussion is not to find an answer to this question. Rather, the assertion made here is that few would challenge the statement that not all women would like to be treated in the same way as men, and vice versa. What is more important
is that we acknowledge that women cannot be ignored in the workplace because South Africa is experiencing a tremendous shortage of skills. In general women do possess special qualities and often tend to do things differently from men. Research has however shown that there are more similarities than differences between the abilities and attributes of men and women (Wolmarans 1997). Gerdes (in Prekel 1994:7) claims that there are some differences between men and women, and certain of these concern characteristics that tend to be more dominant in one sex than in the other. It is for example claimed that: females tend to be more people-centred, intuitive, holistic thinking, interested in aesthetics, mediating, family- and individual-oriented and emotionally expressive, while men had to be more object-centred, rational, analytical in their thinking, interested in technology, competitive/aggressive, peer-oriented and group-oriented and emotionally inexpressive. Apart from the aforementioned differences, Wolmarans (1997:26) indicates that there are also differences in the physiology of men is and women's brains, for example:

- The female brain functions in a more integrated manner than the male brain.
- Spatial, mathematical and structured thinking is better developed in men whereas the communicative and emotive areas of women are superior.
- Men are more comfortable with logical problem solving whereas women generally have greater consideration for people and feelings.

However, in a cumulative sample in the USA, Argyris (1997:372) found that women use the same (as men) unilaterally controlling, win-lose theories to design and implement their actions. Men and women also seem to use the same defensive reasoning processes when they are dealing with issues that could be, or are, embarrassing and threatening. It should, however, be clearly stated that, in the authors' opinion, the differences between the sexes should be respected, accommodated and indeed utilised. Management in organisations that also treat women as individuals (as is the case with men) and create equal opportunities for them are likely to attract and keep good and loyal women. Research has shown that higher-level women have lower turnover rates than men at comparable levels and that black women are generally more reliable and less inclined to absenteeism and other problems than their male counterparts (Prekel 1994:7). This, obviously depends on many factors, such as the occupation and the organisation women work for. All people make conscious decisions about their occupations and the organisations they wish to work for. Whether an individual chooses or rejects a particular organisation depends to an extent on how attractive the organisation is. Aspects organisations use to make them more attractive as prospective employers, are for example, by paying higher wages, making jobs more interesting, encouraging the formation of cohesive groups and being more flexible in designing work arrangements (Lawler 1994:142).

It is furthermore well known that the degree to which an organisation's work environment is well designed will also to some extent influence the satisfaction levels of employees in that organisation. Job satisfaction can be viewed as an attitude that individuals have about their jobs, a result of their perception of the job and the degree to which there is a good fit between the individual and the organisation. Job satisfaction stems from various aspects of the job, for example pay, promotion, supervisors, co-workers, policies, working conditions and benefits (Invanceich & Matteson 1996:129). As certain aspects enhance job satisfaction, certain issues also causes problems within the work environment. Dissatisfaction can lead to higher labour turnover. High
labour turnover and employee replacements costs can have a very negative effect on organisational success. Women also face certain problems in organisations and some of these problems include wages that are lower than those of men, the glass ceiling, balancing career and family choices, ensuring employment equity, sexual harassment, stress, lack of skills and working schedules (see Sherman, Bohlander & Snell 1998, Reece & Brandt 1996, Cooper & Lewis 1995; Delpot 1994; Gooch 1994; Duncaster 1993; Louw 1994; Higgins, Duxburg & Irving 1992). Although the problems and barriers experienced by women in the workplace are of a general nature, it is believed that they also apply to women in the various professions. The extent to which the above issues apply to the latter will obviously depend on the organisation and its specific culture. It is therefore very necessary for management to take cognisance of the factors that cause women to experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their employment relationships. This reasoning formed the rationale underlying the research reported in this article.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Target population and response

The target population of this study was as follows:

- female chartered accountants (CAs): 617 responded from a target population of 1 108 (57 percent response rate)

- females in the human resource profession (HRM): 512 responded from a target population of 1 800 (28 percent response rate)

- female nurses (registered and enrolled): 218 responded from a sample of 1 200 (18 percent response rate)

- a general group of females in a variety of occupations who belong to the Women's Bureau of South Africa which has 23 000 members: 512 responded from a sample of 1 200 (43 percent response rate)

4.2 Questionnaire development and administration

The questionnaires used in these studies were party based on a questionnaire developed by the American Department of Labour entitled “Working Women Count” (Working Women Count 1994) and an Australian survey amongst chartered accountants (Kelsall & Leung 1995). They consisted of six main sections addressing issues such as job satisfaction, problems experienced at work, changes that might provide a better workplace, barriers that might influence career prospects and expectations from the job. Different scales were used for different sections and these will be provided when the results are reported. The questionnaires were posted to the different groups, namely CAs, HRM practitioners, nurses and the general group after it was adapted to suit there specific needs. The section on “job satisfaction” was included in all four groups’ questionnaires; the sections on “problems at work” and “changes in the workplace” were included in the questionnaires of three groups, namely HRM practitioners, nurses and the general group; the sections on “barriers in the workplace” and “career expectations” were included in the questionnaires of three groups, namely HRM practitioners, nurses and CAs.
4.3 Statistical analysis

The responses of the four groups were integrated and analysed for each section of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and frequencies) were used in this study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program was used to analyse the data. The overall reliability of the questionnaires, as measured by the Alpha Cronbach Coefficient, was 88 percent. The approach taken in this study was to establish common areas of agreement and to determine priority areas within each section of the questionnaire. Statistical differences among the four groups were found but the reporting thereof falls outside the scope of this article.

5 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

5.1 Nurses

A substantial percentage (41 percent) of respondents were employed by the government and 42 percent were employed in large (with 5 000 and more employees) and medium-sized organisations (more than 100 but fewer than 5 000). Most of the respondents were employed full-time (87 percent), while only 7 percent were employed part-time. A large percentage (43 percent) of the sample represented the 30 to 39 year age group and 41 percent were between the ages of 40 and 65 years. Almost three quarters of the respondents (71 percent) had children under the age of 18, living at home.

Regarding the marital status of the sample, the distribution was almost equal, with 49 percent being married and 51 percent being single, divorced, separated or widowed. The majority (58 percent) of the respondents were black women, while Asian and Coloured groups were represented by only 12 percent. White women constituted 30 percent of the sample. The gross monthly income of 61 percent of the respondents ranged between R2 000 and R4 999, with 28 percent earning less than R1 999 per month. The majority of respondents (56 percent) possessed a matriculation certificate, with 25 percent having reached only standard 8 level. Only 14 percent had university degrees.

5.2 General group

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

5.3 Chartered accountants

The total membership of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants as at 31 December 1997 was 16 313, of whom 1 262 (8 percent) were female. Although this still represents a very
small percentage of the total membership, the number of women in chartered accountancy has
grown by 250 percent since 1987, when there were only 351 (3 percent) female members.

Over 50 percent of the women CAs who responded worked in business and another 30 percent
were employed in public practice. Seventy four percent of the respondents indicated that they
worked full-time and only six percent were working part-time. Nearly 43 percent of women CAs
had children. Of those women CAs who had children, most were employed in business (42
percent) and in small accounting practices (18 percent).

The majority of women CAs in South Africa were relatively young. Over 86 percent of the
respondents were aged 39 or below, with over 28 percent aged 29 or below. More than 70
percent of the respondents earned over R140 000 a year, with those employed in large accounting
practices and in business reporting the highest salary packages – well over 60 percent earned in
excess of R180 000 per annum.

5.4 Human resource profession

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

The majority (89 percent) of the respondents indicated that they work full-time, while four percent
were part-time workers. A large group (41 percent) was employed in the personnel
officer/administrator category, 37 percent as human resource managers/directors, 12 percent as
human resource consultants and 10 percent in other categories, for example as secretaries, social
workers, researchers, lecturers and administrative workers.

A large proportion of respondents (47 percent) were between 30 and 39 years of age, and 27
percent of the respondents were under 30 years of age. Nearly 20 percent were between 40 and
49 years of age and close to six percent were over 50 years of age. The majority of respondents
(57 percent) were married and 80 percent of the respondents were White, 12 percent black, 4
percent Indian and 3 percent Coloured.

A large percentage (46 percent) of the respondents earned between R5 000 and R9 999 per
month, 18 percent between R10 000 and R14 999 per month and nine percent more than R15 000
per month. A small percentage (9 percent) earned between R2 000 and R4 999 per month and
three percent earned less than R2 000 per month. Over 72 percent of the respondents earned more
than R5 000 per month and about 27 percent earned more than R10 000 per month.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Job Satisfaction

In this section, all four groups indicated on a five-point scale, where one equals “strongly
disagree” and five equals “strongly agree”, how various aspects contributed to their job
satisfaction. The aspect which contributed most to job satisfaction was the fact that the respondents like what they do (x̅=4.13). This was followed by: they enjoyed the company of co-workers (x̅=4.02), they were learning new things (x̅=3.99) and they had job security (x̅=3.73) and job training opportunities (x̅=3.43). The aspects that contributed least to job satisfaction were pay (x̅=3.0), flexible working hours (x̅=3.11), working as part of a team (x̅=3.16) and benefits received (x̅=3.18). When the different groups are compared with each other (see graphs 1-9 in Annexure A), the following come to the fore:

- “I like what I do, enjoy the company of co-workers and learn new things.” The four groups generally felt the same about the contribution these aspects made to their job satisfaction (Graphs 1, 2 and 3). “I like what I do”, as indicated earlier, was the biggest contributor to job satisfaction, followed by enjoyment of the company of co-workers and the opportunity to learn new things. In a similar study in the United States of America (Working Women Count 1994), the majority of the respondents also indicated that the company of their co-workers was the aspect they liked most about their jobs.

- Job security. The CAs felt that this aspect contributed more to their job satisfaction than the other three groups did (Graph 4). This may be attributed to the fact that there is a shortage of chartered accountants in South Africa, and there is also a higher demand for female chartered accountants, being a minority group. On the whole this aspect was the fourth highest contributor to job satisfaction for the four groups.

- Job training opportunities. The general group felt that job training opportunities contributed more to job satisfaction than the other three groups did (Graph 5). Job training opportunities were the fifth highest contributor to job satisfaction.

- “I get paid well.” There seemed to be agreement among HRM, CAs and the general group about the role pay played in contributing to job satisfaction (Graph 6). Nurses indicated very clearly that they differ significantly from the rest of the three groups in that pay did not contribute to their job satisfaction. Nurses traditionally belong to an employment group who has been complaining about low pay for years.

As indicated earlier, pay contributed least to job satisfaction compared with the other aspects on the list of job satisfaction items for the four groups as a whole. A similar survey in the United States of America showed similar results, with 49 percent of the respondents indicating that pay was a serious problem in their jobs, and also rating it as the second biggest work-related problem (Working Women Count 1994). Although the respondents felt that pay contributed least to their job satisfaction, in another part of the study (refer to par 6.6) they rated remuneration as their lowest career expectation. Aspects such as promotion and professional support were more important to them.

- Flexible working hours. Nurses and the general group seemed to be in agreement compared to the HRM and CA groups, who felt that this aspect provided more job satisfaction (Graph 7). Flexible working hours were, however, the third lowest contributor to job satisfaction for the four groups as a whole. This indicates that employers in South Africa have not provide enough opportunity for female employees to adjust their working hours to suit their fairly obligations. A balanced professional and private life was rated as
a very important career expectation in another section of the study (Refer to Table 3). Obviously there is still too little understanding about the disproportionate struggle women wage in keeping a career going while fulfilling their role in the family.

*Working as part of a team.* The HRM, general and CA groups generally felt the same about the contribution this aspect made to their job satisfaction (Graph 8). Nurses felt that working as part of a team contributed highly to their job satisfaction and thus played a more important role in their job satisfaction than in the case of the other groups (almost 60 percent of these respondents were from the black population group). For the four groups as a whole, this aspect was the third lowest contributor to job satisfaction.

Teamwork and greater participation among employees in organisations could be among the elements that will make South Africa a more competitive nation. The philosophy of *ubuntu* "A person is only a person because of other people" (Boon 1996:32) may to some extent contribute more to employees’ job satisfaction. Black women managers seem to be in a better position to cultivate the philosophy of participation in organisations than White managers, both male and female, because they have an inherent need for ubuntu and because the majority of workers in most large organisations belong to the black race group or will do so in future. It is believed that these strengths should be developed and applied in the context of other organisational realities like financial constraints.

*I have good benefits.* Here again, as with pay, nurses indicated that they differ from the CAs, HRMs and general group in that the benefits they received did not contribute to their job satisfaction (Graph 9). It is clear, however, that the general group and the CAs felt that benefits contributed more to job satisfaction than the HRM group did. Benefits on a whole were still not a high contributor to job satisfaction.

The fact that all four groups like what they do, like the company of co-workers and that they feel they learn new things indicate that factors inherent in the job itself contribute most to job satisfaction. The factors which contribute least to job satisfaction were the benefits they received, pay and flexible working hours. Regardless of the above, a general inference that can be drawn from the results is that the majority of respondents agreed that they are satisfied with their jobs. This has an important bearing on their contribution to organisational success. A satisfied employee will tend to be absent less often, will stay with the organisation longer, will make a positive contribution, and her organisational commitment will increase. It should, however, be noted that high levels of job satisfaction do not necessarily lead to higher levels of performance (Moorhead & Griffin 1995:64).

### 6.2 Problems at work

Respondents were asked to indicate the seriousness of various problems experienced in the workplace by using a scale where one equals “not at all serious” and five “one of the most serious”. Three groups responded to this question, namely human resource practitioners, the general group and nurses. On average the respondents felt that the most serious problems they experienced were that they needed more benefits (\(=2.66\)), were under too much stress (\(=2.36\)), they were not paid enough (\(=2.17\)) and that they worked too many hours \((=1.91)\). Aspects which did not apply or were not serious at all were sexual harassment \((=0.30)\), the fact that they had lost a job or promotion owing to the fact that they were women \((=1.14)\) and they travelled.
too much ($= 1.15). The comparisons of the different groups (Graphs 10-15) (Annexure B) reveal the following:

- "I need better benefits." Here again there was no agreement among the three groups. Nurses again felt that this aspect was a big problem, followed by HRM and the general group (Graph 10). To some extent this aspect is closely related to the pay problem (Graph 12). On the whole this aspect seemed to be the biggest problem the three groups experienced.

- "I am under too much stress." Nurses experience more stress than HRM and the general group (Graph 11). On average this aspect was the second biggest problem experienced by the group as a whole. The many demands a woman's career place on her can have a negative impact on her performance. Stressed workers may perform poorly, quit their jobs or suffer low morale.

- "I am not paid what my job is worth." The three groups differed in their responses. Nurses felt that this was a big problem followed by HRM and the general group (Graph 12). The general group was of the opinion that it was not applicable to them and this might be the case because they generally belong to well-paid occupational groups such as lawyers, businesswomen and managers. Nurses on the other hand represent an occupational group which has been complaining about low pay for many years. On average this was the third biggest problem experienced by the three groups. In the "Working Women Count" survey in the United States of America, women overwhelming cited "improving pay scales" as their top career concern (Bill 1997:10).

- "I work too many hours." No agreement existed among the three groups (Graph 13). Nurses felt it was a big problem, followed by the general group and HRM. On the whole this was the fourth biggest problem for the three groups.

- "I am sexually harassed." The three groups were generally in agreement that this aspect was not a problem (Graph 14). Although this was the case, sexual harassment at the workplace seems to be more prominent than ever before. For example, the Labour Relations Act and the recently Code of Good Practice produced by the National Economic and Development Labour Council (Nedlac) place emphasis on the role management has to play in this regard.

- "I have lost a job or promotion because of my gender." Nurses were of the opinion that this was a bigger problem than the HRM group and the general group felt it to be (Graph 15). On the whole it did not seem to be a problem. The fact that the respondents from the nursing profession regarded this as a big problem was surprising, as most employees in the nursing profession are female.

The biggest problems expressed were benefits, stress and pay. When one considers the three groups who responded, it is clear that nurses had the biggest problem in this area. Although they perform an essential service in the community, the majority of them are paid by the State and it is well known that they are not paid as well as nurses in the private sector.
Stress seems to be a general problem and managers in organisations should introduce programmes to alleviate stress related problems. If not dealt with adequately it may lead to lower productivity and low morale among employees.

6.3 Suggested changes to the workplace

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

**TABLE 1:** CHANGES TO WORKPLACE: HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS (HRM), NURSES AND GENERAL GROUP IN ORDER OF PRIORITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>HRM (\bar{x})</th>
<th>General (\bar{x})</th>
<th>Nurses (\bar{x})</th>
<th>Total Average (\bar{x})</th>
<th>Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the job training opportunities</td>
<td>3,34</td>
<td>7,82</td>
<td>8,90</td>
<td>6,69</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job sharing</td>
<td>3,12</td>
<td>7,60</td>
<td>9,26</td>
<td>6,61</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More responsibility</td>
<td>3,80</td>
<td>7,78</td>
<td>7,85</td>
<td>6,48</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity</td>
<td>2,55</td>
<td>7,68</td>
<td>7,63</td>
<td>5,95</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved pay scales</td>
<td>2,59</td>
<td>6,69</td>
<td>8,55</td>
<td>5,94</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loans</td>
<td>2,89</td>
<td>6,77</td>
<td>8,03</td>
<td>5,90</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing men about gender</td>
<td>3,31</td>
<td>6,15</td>
<td>7,75</td>
<td>5,74</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More flexible working hours</td>
<td>2,93</td>
<td>6,15</td>
<td>7,05</td>
<td>5,38</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave – newborns etc</td>
<td>2,94</td>
<td>5,62</td>
<td>7,46</td>
<td>5,34</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retraining</td>
<td>3,08</td>
<td>4,36</td>
<td>5,86</td>
<td>4,43</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info on child/dependent care</td>
<td>2,20</td>
<td>3,67</td>
<td>6,63</td>
<td>4,17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\bar{x}\) = arithmetic mean

1. On-the-job training opportunities to learn new skills (\(\bar{x} = 6,69\))
2. Job-sharing opportunities (\(\bar{x} = 6,61\))
3. Giving employees more responsibility to do their jobs (\(\bar{x} = 6,48\))
4. Ensuring equal opportunity in the workplace (\(\bar{x} = 5,95\))
5. Improving pay scales (\(\bar{x} = 5,94\))
6. Student loans to enable employees to acquire new job skills (\(\bar{x} = 5,90\))
7. Informing men about gender discrimination (\(\bar{x} = 5,74\))
8. More flexible working hours (\(\bar{x} = 5,38\))
9. Paid leave to care for newborns or seriously ill relatives (\(\bar{x} = 5.34\))
10. Retraining opportunities (\(\bar{x} = 4.43\))
11. Information about support for child or dependent care (\(\bar{x} = 4.17\))

The item highest on the list of priorities is that they would like on-the-job training opportunities to learn new skills (\(\bar{x} = 6.69\)) in the workplace. Formal on-the-job training does not normally form part of many organisations’ training endeavour, but there is a clear indication here that it should be introduced. The rapidly changing environment and the fact that the job requires incumbents to adapt to new circumstances and challenges will not allow them to be taken off the job to be trained for any length of time nor can the off-the-job training always provide the necessary skills. More attention should therefore be given to more formal on-the-job training initiatives and this could be done in conjunction with institutions for higher education. Job sharing opportunities are also considered to be high on the priority list. The group with the highest need for job sharing opportunities was nurses. They felt very strongly (\(\bar{x} = 9.26\)) about job sharing. This could possibly allow more people to work and earn an income. There is, however, no clarity on whether they would be prepared to sacrifice income to make this change possible.

Another important change in the workplace was that the respondents from the three groups felt that employees should be given more responsibility to do their jobs. This could be a reflection of a feeling on the part of the respondents that they are capable of carrying more responsible jobs in the organisation and are due for promotion or that they are not given the responsibility to do their jobs properly. Regardless of the reason, women employees are clearly stating that they are willing and able to take on more responsibility at work and this opportunity should be utilised by employers to the benefit of the organisation. They would also like equal opportunities in the workplace to be guaranteed. This could suggest that a male culture is still prevalent in the workplace and these respondents still feel that women are discriminated against. It should, however, be noted that equal opportunities do not only refer to promotion only but also include equal training opportunities, equal pay, equal promotion and appointment opportunities. One respondent commented that “women in senior positions must not treat female subordinates unfairly”. The latter would suggest that female managers should also ensure that they treat subordinates fairly and that the responsibility for ensuring equality lies with all managers/supervisors in the organisation, irrespective of their gender.

6.4 Barriers in the workplace

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

1. Lack of recognition and respect for work completed (\(\bar{x} = 7.06\))
2. Restriction on types of work given, thus limiting experience (\(\bar{x} = 5.37\))
Lack of female mentor support ($\bar{x} = 5.16$)
Lack of flexibility in working hours ($\bar{x} = 5.12$)
Low salaries which cannot support child-care payments ($\bar{x} = 4.50$)
Little allowance made for family commitments ($\bar{x} = 4.37$)
Male culture within the organisation ($\bar{x} = 4.25$)
Required to long work hours ($\bar{x} = 4.20$)
Gender bias by supervisors ($\bar{x} = 3.51$)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>CA ($\bar{x}$)*</th>
<th>HRM ($\bar{x}$)*</th>
<th>Nurses ($\bar{x}$)*</th>
<th>Total average ($\bar{x}$)*</th>
<th>Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of recognition</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations on experience</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of female mentor support</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of flexibility</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low salary-child-care payments</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family commitments</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male culture</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long working hours</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender bias by supervisors</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $\bar{x}$ = arithmetic mean

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

Chartered accountants viewed the lack of recognition and the lack of flexibility as the most important job barrier. Those in human resource management were of the opinion that a male culture and the lack of recognition were the most important barriers and nurses viewed the lack of recognition and the restriction on types of work, which limit their experience, as their most important barriers. Lack of recognition seems to be a dominant career barrier for all three groups and it is no surprise that it is the most important barrier for all three groups. In general, people feel good when their achievements are recognised and conversely become upset when they are not recognised. Recognition for work “well done” can be a powerful motivator if used correctly. Management must take notice of this need that women experience and if recognition is given.
where deserved it can lead to better work output and greater job satisfaction. This barrier experienced by women may also be explained by the male dominance in the work environment women find themselves in. Men may be reluctant to acknowledge the fact that women do perform well and might be hesitant to openly give them recognition because they might be too busy or be too preoccupied with their own concerns and in the process overlook the accomplishments of others. Recognition is a very important reward preference and often ranked higher than monetary rewards and job security (Reece & Brandt 1996:280).

Other barriers were inbuilt limitations in their jobs, which limited their experience, the third barrier was a lack of female mentor support. A possible explanation for the latter may be ascribed to the fact that women may aspire to move upwards in the corporate world but so few women are managers who could provide mentor support. The few that are available may not be in a position to render the support due to a high workload.

In a survey among female chartered accountants in Australia, the three most frequently cited career barriers were a male culture within organisations, lack of female mentor support and requirements for working long hours (Kelsall & Leung 1995:10). Male culture was a problem for those in the human resource profession and was not as dominant for chartered accountants in South Africa. Lack of female mentor support seems to be a problem in Australia (chartered accountants) and for these groups in South Africa. According to Burke and Mckeem (1995:33), the absence of female mentors, sponsors or role models might be translated into less career satisfaction coupled with lowered career aspirations. This, however, highlights the responsibility of women managers in organisations to act as role models for younger women in the organisations who need to climb the corporate ladder.

6.5 Career expectations

Three groups of respondents, namely nurses, chartered accountants and human resource practitioners, also had to indicate what their main career expectations were. The majority (79 percent) of respondents indicated that they wanted promotion, followed by professional support (76 percent), a balanced professional and private life (71 percent), job satisfaction (57 percent), power and status (52 percent) and better pay (29 percent) (see Table 3). Similarly, in a survey among female chartered accountants in Australia, job satisfaction (96 percent), balanced professional and private life (89 percent) and remuneration (70 percent) were the three most preferred career expectations (Kelsall & Leung 1995:7). In an earlier section, the various components of job satisfaction were discussed and it is clear from this survey that the respondents felt very positive about their jobs and were experiencing a great deal of job satisfaction. However, they did not receive the promotion and professional support they deserved. A balanced professional and private life seemed to be a very high expectation. This can, however, only be achieved if organisations change their work rules to accommodate more women in the workplace and acknowledge their significant contribution. An apt example here is Pick ‘n Pay which grants women six months’ maternity leave and grants men paternity leave as well, and Rennies Travel which has a women executive director (Mittner 1997: 68). The introduction of the new Basic Conditions of Employment Act may also to some extent help to fulfil women’s expectations. Rand Merchant Bank is also considering the possibility of establishing a creche (Naude 1998:15). At the same bank, the IT section is run by women who work half-day. It seems, however, that South African companies, generally, fall short in helping female employees meet their family-related
obligations. Nevertheless, one should realise that it is not always easy for companies to make these facilities available at the workplace.

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

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

**7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this article the results of a survey among four groups of women were reported, namely chartered accountants, human resource practitioners, nurses and a general group of female employees. Their feelings on job satisfaction issues, problems at work, suggested changes to the workplace, barriers in the workplace and career expectations were discussed. Areas of difference and areas where they agreed were highlighted. While it is accepted that on certain issues these groups will differ significantly, an endeavour was also made to indicate in which areas they do agree and those areas may be considered to apply generally to women in these professions.

General recommendations are provided below.

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

- Methods that managers of organisations could employ to improve the job satisfaction levels of women are to improve their pay and benefits, but more importantly, to introduce a far more flexible system of working hours to accommodate female employees to ensure better balance between their work and private lives. Factors that could be considered are half-day jobs, flexitime and job sharing.
Companies can do a great deal to facilitate the careers of married women by providing important support systems. This apparently happens far too often.

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

More job training opportunities (formal and informal) in conjunction with Higher Education Institutions could be offered to women employees by employers.

Employers should consciously endeavour to give women employees more responsibilities to enable them to prove that they are capable, which they are, to be successful.

Women managers should be encouraged to make themselves available to act as female mentors to younger female managers in organisations but also to those in the community at large.

Employers should take cognisance of the fact that team work contributes highly to job satisfaction and should therefore introduce more team work related structures to achieve organisational objectives.

REFERENCES


South African Journal of Labour Relations


GRAPH 1: I LIKE WHAT I DO

GRAPH 2: I ENJOY THE COMPANY OF MY CO-WORKERS

GRAPH 3: I LEARN NEW THINGS
GRAPH 7: MY HOURS ARE FLEXIBLE

GRAPH 8: I WORKING AS PART OF A TEAM

GRAPH 9: I HAVE GOOD BENEFITS
GRAPH 13: I WORK TOO MANY HOURS

GRAPH 14: I AM SEXUALLY HARASSED

GRAPH 15: I HAVE LOST A JOB OR PROMOTION BECAUSE OF MY SEX

South African Journal of Labour Relations