Juggling work and life: Experiences of women in academic and research institutions in South Africa

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the experiences of women academics in their pursuit of knowledge production as South Africa progresses towards a knowledge economy. The data were drawn from 46 women with doctoral degrees and those currently undertaking their doctoral studies from academic institutions in the country. Data were collected through a questionnaire that encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research questions. The article further explores different theoretical paradigms which explain the paucity of women in academia. The findings indicate that women still face different pressures that hinder them from carrying out research activities at the same pace as their male counterparts. However, they do not need just sympathy, but rather, they need more financial and material support to ensure that they are able to balance their dual roles of being mothers in society as well as their roles as career women in academia. The results also revealed that institutional culture exacerbates the low productivity of women in research as it encourages close conformity to gender roles and practices. It is further argued that if academic and research institutions consider making women’s work schedules more flexible, this could make a huge difference in enhancing their rate of publishing. The research was undertaken on a relatively small scale sample and the results are by no means conclusive.

Keywords: academics; dual roles; gender inequality; knowledge, productivity; women

Due to the growing recognition of the pivotal role that higher education plays in promoting economic development, governments worldwide are increasing funding to support scientific academic research (Salmi, 2009). Developing countries such as China, South Korea, Brazil and Chile are moving forward the agenda to improve the quantity and quality of economic development through research (Altbach,
Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Within South Africa there is a drive to increase its knowledge-based output for economic growth and national development through incentivising universities to become renowned knowledge producers that contribute evidence-based solutions (Council of Higher Education, CHE, 2009). According to the Academy of Science for South Africa (ASSAF) (2010), this will position South African to compete in the global economy.

Notably, in South Africa only 33 per cent of academics in higher education hold a PhD (Higher Education South Africa, HESA, 2010). Furthermore, there are fewer women (24 per cent) who are professors and associate professors, which could be a reason for the general low record of publications by women (CHE, n.d). It is clear that South African higher education is still male-dominated and faces challenges regarding the promotion and retention of talented women academics, able to compete for top positions at the global level (HESA, 2011). This evidence of the low participation of women in research and publication points to women being mainly employed in higher institutions in a in lower and middle positions that have more administrative responsibilities (Ogbogu, 2011). Literature suggests that an institutional culture can suppresses women’s full potential to advance in academia (Ogbogu, 2011). As a result, women leave academia for better opportunities in the various sectors that they perceive as being more accommodating and supportive of their challenges (HESA, 2011). Clearly, the inequalities that still exist in academia are coupled with the lack of an enabling environment, cultural barriers, and unfavourable climates that impede productivity of women with regards to publications (Dever, Morrison, Dalton, & Tayton, 2006).

Ogbogu (2011) further pointed out that the lower levels of production of research and publications by women are exacerbated by the dual roles that women play within society. This perpetuates women’s underrepresentation in academia as they frequently face cultural barriers that dictate their roles and responsibilities as women (Ogbogu, 2011). Although literature suggests that both women and men have the potential to enjoy a successful career, women still struggle to balance life and thus men tend to dominate academia (Ogbogu, 2011). Consequently, women’s careers suffer as they fail to compete at the same level as men do with regards to knowledge production. In addition, institutional practices undermine the potential for women to advance in academia. Institutional practices further result in conflict involving the work expectations and family obligations dictated by society (Watkins, Herrin & McDonald, 1998). Indeed, the lack of women in academia suggests their marginalisation to varying degrees of disparities (Mabokela, 2003).

This article reflects factors that act as hindrances to the rate of producing publications by women. It further attempts to unpack the root of the lack of women in senior research positions.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite South Africa being a leading research hub in Africa, its doctoral production rate is very low at 26 doctoral graduates per million people as compared to 52 and 187 in Brazil and South Korea respectively (ASSAF, 2010). According to Mouton (2010), Africa’s outputs published in ISI indexes have been declining steadily over the previous decades due to the lack of resources. Another study conducted by ASSAF further reflects that South Africa has only 70 journals on the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI)-system (Veldman, 2013) and that there is a need to enhance their quality, visibility, and accessibility in the global arena (ASSAF, 2009). As a result, Africa’s proportion of publication output constitutes only 0.5 per cent of the ISI indexed journals (Ngobeni, 2010). Many scholars believe that the low publication output could be due to demanding teaching responsibilities owing to an increase in student enrolment (Dever et al., 2006), which has left academics not being interested or available to undertake meaningful research and publishing research (Migoshi, Muola, & Maithya, 2012).

Although women have made great strides, institutional culture still suppresses the full potential of women to advance in academia alongside men. The persistent higher education culture of resistance and discrimination practices impedes the ability of women to participate in and contributes to the knowledge economy at an optimal level (Mazibuko, 2006; Ogbogu, 2011). Due to strong patriarchal behaviours, women continuously attempt to perform as men do while negotiating traditional gender roles in order to accommodate their careers (Dever et al., 2006). Potgieter and Barnard (2010) argue that the work efforts of women are often unrecognised because women are undervalued and labelled as being unproductive. As such, women appear to lag behind their male colleagues and are often perceived as being less productive, especially with regards to research and publication (Asmar, 1999). Certainly, this lowers women’s morale, as it places greater stress and strain on their academic and private life, and ultimately, this leads to lower levels of research and publication.

Many scholars have used different theories to understand the paucity of women in academia. Singh (2002) affirms that psychosocial, structural, and cultural values act as hindrances to the advancement of a woman’s career. According to Singh (2002), women’s psychosocial behaviour of taking on more teaching load and administrative work rather than pursuing research activities, that add value to the career progressions, limit their career. Singh further argues that institutions’ structural aspects also play a role to deter women from climbing the ladder. This was affirmed by White (2001) who argued that organisational culture disadvantage women to attain top positions and have power. According to White (2001) women can advance depends upon the establishment of good relationships with keyplayers so that research output can be recognised and rewarded. Therefore, networking is seen as a major enabler for
women to promote their research careers. Singh (2002) further asserted that cultural factors that construe the gender-based role, responsibilities and expectations are responsible for limiting women’s opportunities in academia and demoting women to secondary roles.

The reflected inequities hamper women aspiration to achieve their career heights as they prevent women from climbing the ladder into higher positions. These factors affect even women to opt out of positions despite their competence. Currently, universities have a huge gap to produce a mass of scientists that can create opportunities for the next generation of academics due to the aging of the current generation in academia (CHE, 2009). However, the objectives stated in the South African national development plan to increase doctoral graduates by 5 000 in 2030 as compared to less than 1 500 in 2010 cannot be achieved unless the inequities outlined above are addressed in order to fully incorporate women’s participation in the mainstream (Mohamedbhai, 2012; National Planning Commission, 2011).

**METHOD**

The study focused on women academics in research institutions and universities who deal with the demands of research, publishing and sourcing funding, teaching and community work. The objectives of the study were to examine experiences of women academics in meeting their mandate to contribute to the production of research in a knowledge economy. Given that women have different roles to play, those of being full time employees and meeting family obligations, it is important to gain insight into their experiences in endeavouring a balance between the two factors while contributing to knowledge creation.

The study was conducted among women with a minimum qualification of a Master’s Degree. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used in the study. A standard questionnaire that included open-ended and closed-ended questions was developed to focus on work, family life, and other related issues. The open-ended responses were qualitatively analysed in order to elaborate further on certain answers the participants provided quantitatively. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select respondents from universities and research councils. Questionnaires were distributed to 100 women, however, only 46 questionnaires were completed by the set deadline of the study. Although, the response rate was lower than anticipated, approximately 83 per cent (38) of the respondents who took part in the survey were South Africans; while a small proportion (8, 17 per cent) were from other countries while the remainder respondents nationality are unknown. Of which the majority (65 per cent) were African people while White and Coloured women constituted only a small fraction of 13 per cent, with the remainder 9 per cent being Indian respondents. The statistical package, SPSS, was used to analyse the quantitative data and descriptive analysis was used to analyse questionnaire items.
Ethical issues and confidentiality were ensured during the whole study, respondents’ identifiers were not provided on the questionnaires. Respondents’ participation was entirely voluntarily and consent forms were signed upon return of questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The results of the study will focus on key issues identified as challenges to women’s career advancement as illustrated below.

Women’s motivations and challenges faced in pursuit of research careers

One of the ‘ice breaker’ questions focused on the motives of the respondents in pursuing a career in research. The majority of respondents felt that research was a career choice due to different reasons. Figure 1 below illustrates that about 59 per cent of respondents felt that they are motivated to do research as a way to achieve career advancement, while 56.5 per cent indicated that it is because of their personal interest in research. A reasonably high proportion of respondents (43.5 per cent) were motivated not by self interest but by the desire to meet requirements of their degree compared to 32.6 per cent who indicated that they are undertaking research due to their commitment to learning.

Figure 1. Motives for pursuing a career in research
In terms of the level of demand of writing an article, the majority of respondents indicated that they often find writing articles too demanding (58.7 per cent), while another proportion (41 per cent) indicated that it is less demanding. When respondents were probed in open-ended questions to find out the factors which impact on their production of knowledge, a larger proportion of respondents indicated that the impediments to writing a scholarly article were high workload (73.9 per cent), followed by 47.8 per cent who mentioned that family responsibilities posed challenges for them. It is hardly surprising that majority of respondents felt that excessive time is spent on teaching, whilst inadequate time is allocated to research activities.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked what they see as reasons for their research productivity being affected. Most respondents, as indicated in Figure 2 below, indicated that high workload and balancing family responsibilities are their main reasons that impact largely on knowledge production.

![Figure 2. Impediments to writing scholarly articles](image)

Respondents recognised a greater vulnerability of women in patriarchal society. One respondent expressed this sentiment on the issue as follows:

_A multiple set of reasons affect the research productivity of women. These can include cultural issues relating to how the role of a woman is perceived in the household and in society, the workplace constraints which define the identity of women as being inferior to men when it comes to undertaking innovative and creative research projects, and finally, the view that women have to juggle their various identities and expectations of being both domestic caretakers and professional career individuals._
Another respondent echoed similar sentiments: *juggling between being a mother, wife, and a researcher will not balance, one of the things has to suffer and therefore it impacts adversely on research output.*

Institutional culture also emerged as a challenge to women’s research productivity. Universities in the country are widely viewed as being male-dominated and hence excluding women, especially black women who are relatively “new entrants” in academia. One respondent spoke strongly of male dominance:

*I think in most cases it is usually because of the fact that most of the heads in the academic world are mostly men as compared to women. There are few women academics and therefore it becomes difficult to find your way out in the world that is being dominated by men. You tend to be forgotten in terms of the value that you can add.*

*The problem with male dominance is that it often leads to a gender imbalance which sees women undertaking significant roles in administration as opposed to their male counterparts.*

In addition, respondents indicated that about 50 per cent of their working hours were allocated to carry out research-related activities. About 28 per cent of respondents reported that 75 to 100 per cent of their time is dedicated to undertaking research, whilst 19.6 per cent spent up to 25 per cent of their time conducting research. The results show a reasonable time is spent on research activities.

**Perceptions of gender imbalances in academia**

In comparison with their male counterparts in the knowledge production fraternity, female researchers revealed some of the inequalities which leave them marginalised. When respondents were asked whether they have to work harder than men, 61 per cent indicated that they often work harder than their male counterparts. When these women were probed further to understand why they felt that there are gender challenges in research production, they shared these sentiments:

*I think there is this perception that men can do it better than women. For instance, if you are given the same task with you’re your male counterpart, your work will be scrutinised more than that of a male who is in the same position with you. This obviously shows that the perception that men can do it better than women still exists. It is difficult to prove it that you can do better probably because if your work is scrutinised more, human errors will always be there.*

*In my particular context, I am aware that men who are employed simultaneously with me were automatically remunerated at a higher scale than I was. Therefore, in order to earn a comparable salary, I have had to work harder to earn productivity output and research incentives and in order to qualify for a promotion.*

Another respondent further stated that: *women have to prove their worth and justify why resources should be used on them. Men generally are better integrated into managerial and research systems.*
Apart from respondents feeling that men are better positioned to perform their research activities with greater ease, they also explained the difficulties of balancing work and family life as women.

**Balance between family and work**

Although most respondents indicated that their households have relatively few family members to care for, concerns were raised in open-ended questions that reflected that women are still struggling to balance these two important factors in their life. The majority of respondents (48 per cent) have a family of three or four family members within their households, followed by 26 per cent of those who indicated that their households have five or six family members, while 24 per cent have at least two family members. The smallest proportion of respondents (2 per cent) had more than six family members. Marital status and family size were used to understand how family, especially spouses and children, impact the careers of the respondents.

It was interesting to learn about the extent to which respondents’ families offered an environment conducive to executing their tasks as researchers. The majority (67 per cent) felt that their family members were supportive of their careers at all times, while 32.6 per cent reported that their family occasionally supported them. None of the respondents felt that their family never provided enough support for them to pursue their careers. Respondents were probed to find out what kind of support they needed the most in order to undertake research, 60.9 per cent felt that they needed someone at home to relieve them of their family duties, 58.7 per cent indicated that they needed time off from family duties, and 46 per cent indicated that social and professional networks often gave them support. In terms of how respondents balance work and family in order to ease the burden of performing dual roles, Figure 3 indicates that most of the respondents (60.9 per cent) usually attempted to separate family and work responsibilities, while 35 per cent took time off of office-bound work for research activities.

Some respondents captured their predicament as being women as part of a broader problem in post-apartheid South Africa:

*I really don’t think it should be a gender issue. Both male and female South Africans (in particular) do not have a sufficiently strong academic background and skills to persevere and succeed in post-grad study and research thereafter. Schools do not equip students with research skills and even undergraduate research work tends to be below par. I am involved in master’s and doctoral supervision and 50 per cent of my students in my opinion do not have the academic skills for this level of study. That said, other women probably face a lot of demands on their time and energy in terms of work and family responsibilities.*

Some respondents expressed that they play dual roles; one respondent expressed her predicament with these sentiments.
Figure 3. Balance between work and family

The fact that a woman is always multi-tasked makes it difficult to succeed in this field because you have got very limited time as you need to play different roles simultaneously while you have less support in terms of grants and even support of work. So in other words what I am trying to say is that as women we get the same share of work with men and to us it becomes harder to deal with all tasks in front of us whereas men can do it better because they are only involved in work and academic activities and less family responsibilities.

Respondents also felt that there were lessons to be learnt from other countries in order to escalate the production of knowledge.

I'm making an educated guess that women, particularly in western countries, have more time to devote to studies since it is culturally more acceptable for women to be highly educated. Non-white women in South Africa are still very much seen in traditional roles as wives and mothers. So perhaps it is a cultural mindset that needs to change?

Another respondent also argued that other countries have made more resources available for women so that they don’t have to work while studying, such that the remuneration they will be getting will equal those of their peers.

Institutional incentives towards boosting research productivity

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their institution offered them any incentives to conduct research and publish it. A relatively high proportion of
respondents (26 per cent) indicated that they received no incentive to conduct research. In addition, the results also reflect a relatively low number of respondents (13 per cent) who mentioned that they received funding while 19 per cent utilised sabbatical leave. In comparative terms, the proportions of respondents who felt that taking a day off work to carry out research (6.5 per cent) and those who felt that they needed flexitime (8.7 per cent) were also marginally small. It is unfortunate that a significant proportion of respondents (26 per cent) did not respond to the same question.

In order to understand the type of interventions that could improve their situation, respondents were asked to suggest the kind of support they needed to improve their research productivity. The majority of respondents indicated that the provision of research grants (69.6 per cent) is the most important item that could change the current status of productivity. This is followed by 58.7 per cent who mentioned that workshops and related activities could improve their work, while 52 per cent indicated mentorship as a way to enable them to produce more research and 50 per cent mentioned that a balance of their workload could also improve productivity.

Figure 4 below illustrates the extent to which respondents make use of certain incentives provided by their employers in order to enhance their research productivity.

![Figure 4. Support provided by employer for research purposes](image-url)
Among the respondents, 33 per cent indicated that they have never taken a day off to undertake research, whilst 28 per cent often took time from the office to carry out research. A relatively larger number (48 per cent) of respondents indicated that their employers support them with conference funding and publishing their outputs. This is followed by 39 per cent of respondents who reported that their employers provide support in the form of writing skills workshops, while 35 per cent mention that they receive mentorship. However, a relatively high percentage of respondents (20 per cent) who did not respond to the question on support provided through mentorship is cause for concern, as it might indicate that mentorship does not exist within their institutions.

The results nevertheless indicate that there is some form of support provided by employers for their staff to undertake research. Irrespective of the 11 per cent of respondents who did not indicate whether their employer provides financial assistance for research, the majority of respondents (56.5 per cent) indicated that they do receive some financial assistance, while 32.6 per cent said that they do not receive any assistance. In terms of the degree to which the respondents receive funding for research, about 30 per cent of the respondents reported that they receive grants often, while 26 per cent reported that they sometimes receive such grants and 28 per cent reported that they have never received that kind of support from their employers. Linked to this question was the issue of whether their employers provided support when women published their outputs, of which 48 per cent declared that they often received support, while 26 per cent have never received support.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which they experienced challenges at work. They were largely concerned about the non-flexibility of their workloads (50 per cent) and lack of mentorship (33 per cent) that they experienced most of the time, while 43 per cent indicated that they sometimes experienced lack of support, lack of acknowledgement, and job dissatisfaction. However, about 35 per cent of the respondents indicated that they have never experienced lack of mentorship.

Respondents were asked what needed to be done to increase their publication outputs. Some respondents expressed the need for differentiation in the treatment of women researchers:

\[ I \text{ think there should be more initiatives that are aimed at promoting women scholars so we can find more women being involved in research as well. These initiatives will help women to climb to the very same as men and therefore their visibility and value would be recognised.} \]

Another respondent strongly felt that this differentiation should be enforced regarding the expected outputs by gender:

\[ I \text{ think there should be more initiatives that are aimed at promoting women scholars so we can find more women being involved in research as well. These initiatives will help women to climb to the very same as men and therefore their visibility and value would be recognised.} \]

To enable a better conducive working environment that recognises the various identities and pressures that women face because of their gender and status in society. Perhaps
the outputs for research productivity should be different for women and their male counterparts by taking these constraints into consideration.

Regarding the challenges of seeking funding for research purposes, one respondent expressed this sentiment:

There is nothing [more] disappointing than applying for funds and not get them and worst not even obtaining feedback in terms of what made the application unsuccessful. This situation at times makes most people to give up because it [is] practically impossible to carry out research without funding.

The issue of working from home was also raised by another respondent who suggested that as research and writing can be concluded anywhere, flexible working time could benefit [one]. Similarly, a reduction in administrative responsibilities was pointed out as being beneficial to researchers.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The paucity of women in the academic domain has attracted many scholars to carry out studies in order to understand its linkages to feminist theories. Clearly, the paucity of women in research productivity is attributed to a number of disabling factors that women face in their careers and family life. Asmar (1999) noted similar findings that women experience some level of difficulty and barriers to their progress in carving out a career. The finding of this study has indeed confirmed that factors that impede on the ability of women to publish and climb the academic ladder stems from the psychosocial, structural, and cultural perspectives as well as organisational culture.

Although the respondents indicated that the demands of research writing were negatively impacted high workload, male-dominated institutional culture, and family responsibilities as major barriers, the majority of respondents still felt that research is a viable career choice for women. After all, Asmar (1999) indicated that both women and men found producing research publications to be an ongoing struggle. Silvia (2007, cited in Migoshi, Muola, & Maithya, 2012) also found that academics consider research writing hard work that requires adequate preparation.

Respondents further argued that gender disparities force them to work harder than men to earn research publication and incentives in order to qualify for a promotion. This finding was affirmed by Panofsky (n.d) who noted that institutions are shaped by men for their own privilege, while little support is offered to women to attain promotion. HESA (2011) echoed a comparable assertion that salaries are not competitive; hence the need to attract and retain women academics. This somewhat echoed the structural perspective argument that women are potentially equal to men but institutional culture reinforces barriers to women’s progress. Failure to take cognisance of this in order to address the disparities will result in employees suffering from burnout and increased non performance.
Respondents echoed organisational culture assertion by revealing that woman’s contributions are undervalued, unrecognised and overly scrutinised because they are not part of male networks. This somewhat confirms the person-centred approach that reflects what is designated as women’s work does not add research value as women seem to undertake additional teaching tasks that are not meaningful for scientific research career, and thus creating a negative perception that women lack aspirations. Sentiments such as these were found by Mabokela (2003) who reflected that women are supposed to prove their worth and often did not receive credit for their contributions and White (2001) views that women’s work is subjected to intense scrutiny that transcends their performance. Similarly to Higgins’ (2007) statements that women in academia are still inadequately acknowledged and valued in terms of their contributions, one respondent also lamented marginalisation to varying degrees of disparities in terms of promotion and remuneration. This implies that women need to form a relationship with key senior player in organisation in order to be afforded opportunity to undertake meaningful research activities and publish their research.

Furthermore, it was revealed that male dominance led to women academics not interested in undertaking meaningful research. White (2001) affirms the cultural approach that argued that cultural barriers are formed within a society where institutions devalue women as competitive partners. According to Acker (1994) academia is for traditional elitists of a patriarchal culture, structure and values instead of a theoretical academic life spheres where women should find opportunities for success. Another study agreed with the findings on the institutional culture of male dominance and closed fraternity excluding women academics in their networks (Ebrima, 2000). However, Asmar (1999) rejected this finding that there is a gendered agenda with the institution of higher education as he argues that there is little empirical data to prove the findings. According to Higgins (2007) the culture of resistance and discrimination practices impede on women’s ability to participate and contribute to knowledge economy at their optimum level.

Similarly to the assertions by Marshall (2009) pointing out the fact that life-balance continues to be an elusive goal for most professional women, respondents reported that they struggled to balance their dual roles irrespective of the size of their family household and the support they receive from their family members. However, Asmar (1999) argued that both men and women experience considerable difficulty and many barriers to their progress in carving out a career after the completion of their doctoral studies. Certain studies have reported that women academics faced conflict between the demands of the home and the need to concentrate on work, specifically research and writing (Wilson, 2001). Although, women did not want to blame their family as a factor that inhibits their progress in research, women find that family commitments do have research-inhibiting effects (Asmar, 1999). Therefore, it is proposed that organisational structures should foster a workplace culture that supports the interface between work, family, and personal life. Furthermore this
attention to life-balance would benefit the organisational effectiveness and enhance 
employee well-being (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2011).

The view that societal roles prohibit women from participating and contributing 
to academic research at a similar rate as men was an opinion expressed by all 
respondents. This view was affirmed by findings that societal roles often influence 
the way in which men interact with women. Furthermore, respondents resonated 
with the view that society labels women as citizens to secondary men and women not 
being able to compete on the same level as men; this also affirms the organisational 
culture of male dominance. According to Mabokela (2003), male managerial styles, 
discourses, and language shut women out. This is an informal culture referred to as 
the “old boys club” which undermines women’s career aspirations. This informal 
club is said to perpetuate perceptions of women being less productive than men 
and fuelling men’s attitudes of undervaluing and not recognising women’s efforts to 
knowledge.

Some respondents agreed with Mabokela (2003) by expressing that the 
constant conflict between societal norms and values and professional expectations 
compromised the process of acculturation that would be necessary for both women 
and men as colleagues. The finding also concurred with the structural approach 
that argues gender-based roles are taken into the workplace to discriminate against 
women, irrespective of their potential. Mabokela (2003) also argued that institutional 
culture creates expectations, rules and regulations that the minority will need to 
conform with and thus comply.

Work flexibility was identified as beneficial to research productivity. Some 
respondents expressed that since research can be carried out anywhere, flexibility of 
workload would benefit women who still faced various challenges. They believed 
that flexibility of schedule was of utmost important as women balance both realms. 
According to Panofsky (n.d), flexibility might make academic careers attractive to 
women by allowing them time to balance work and family responsibilities. Some 
studies found that women completely neglect their own personal needs as they 
spread their priorities over children, careers as well as partners and thereby leaving 
little time for themselves. With this in mind, increasing flexibility will ensure 
employees have control over the location, and amount of work thus enabling people 
to be able to combine employment with care-giving or other important non- work 
roles. However, women will still face greater barriers while striving to increase their 
production rate due to existence of patriarchal societal norms in academia.

**LIMITATIONS**

The sample size of the current study was small; therefore generalisation cannot be 
made to all women in academia. Future studies could aid in collecting more in-depth 
data utilising additional qualitative methods such as key informants and/or face-to-
face interviews.
CONCLUSION

Despite this small-scale study, the realities of these women academics must be recognised and respected. Notwithstanding the aforementioned arguments on the barriers that impede women’s productivity, the respondents appear to be pursuing both realms of their lives without seeking sympathy or fearing reprisal from their counterparts. Although, fewer women have made great strides in pursuing careers in academia, the academic domain remains dominated by males and the institutional culture has failed to recognise contributions made by women.

These findings reveal that the psychosocial, structural, cultural, and organisational factors have a negative impact on the ability of women to advance their research careers and published contributions. This is coupled with the little support offered to women in order to nurture their career development in academia through funding, networks, and mentorship, thus making it difficult for women to compete on the same level as their male counterparts while having to bear multiple responsibilities on a daily basis. For these reasons, the respondents argued that the cornerstone of flexibility should mark their professional lives in order to balance these two forces and create a healthy work-life balance that benefits all in the long term as this would promote job satisfaction and commitment. The failure to realise the consequences of these challenges to women will result in the country suffering from the lack of essential capabilities required in all institutions responsible for macro and micro economic development. Certainly, women do not lack determination, but being the minority in a male-dominated environment, restricts women from proving that they can compete on the same level as men.

NOTE

1 Black people here refers to African black people.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Azwifaneli Managa holds a Master’s degree in Research Psychology from the University of Venda. She currently works at the South African Police Service (SAPS). Her area of research focus on criminal justice, serial crimes, criminal psychology/behaviour, gender-based violence, and women in academia.

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