

Shouldering the burden:

gender attitudes towards balancing work and family

The South African workplace has changed in recent decades as increasingly more women enter the labour market. The greater economic empowerment of women in the post-apartheid period may have changed public attitudes towards women’s place in the economy, yet, a considerable number of women still shoulder a heavy burden when trying to balance work and family. *Steven Gordon, Jarè Struwig and Benjamin Roberts* share findings from the latest South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) in this regard.

Data for the study comes from the 10th round of SASAS, which was conducted in late 2012. The survey included a dedicated questionnaire on family structure, family-related roles and values, as well as policy preferences. Questions included attitudes towards women and work, as well as the domestic division of labour. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 2 547 respondents aged 16 years and older living in private households, with financial support from the Department of Science and Technology.

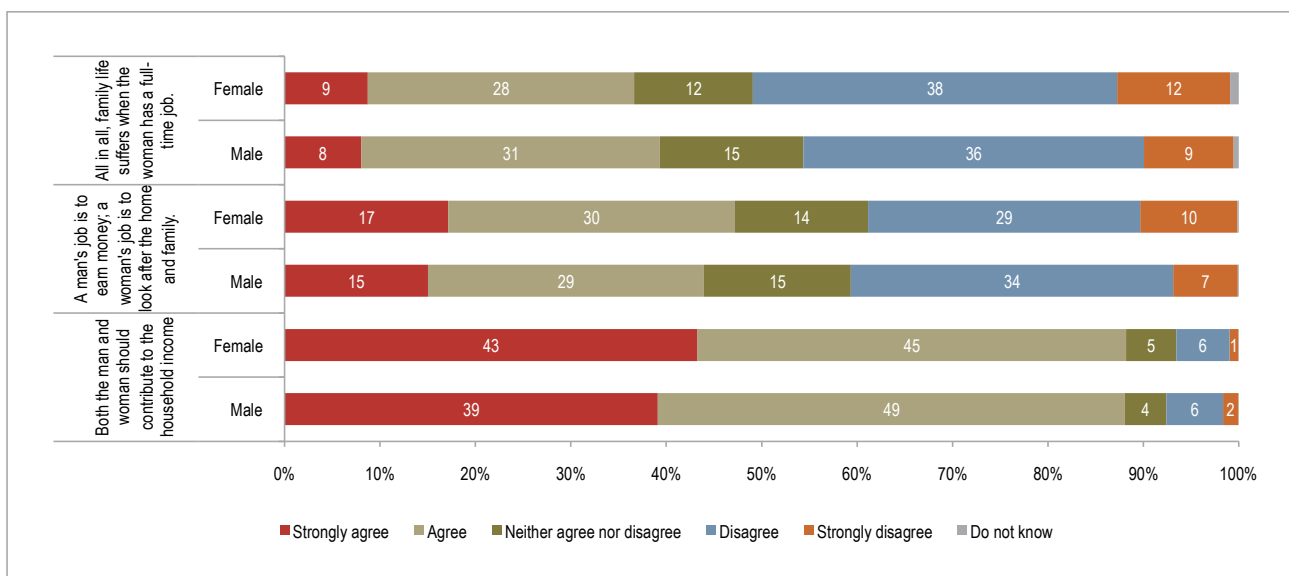
Changing gender roles

Since the end of apartheid, the South African labour market has undergone a degree of feminisation, suggesting that the conventional model of men as breadwinners and women

charged with raising children and doing household work may have begun to erode in the face of the feminisation of the workforce. The SASAS findings offer support for this argument:

- There was near universal agreement (88%) that both men and women should contribute to the household income, with no gender differences evident in this opinion.
- Less than half the adult population (46%) believed that a man’s primary role in the household was to earn money while a woman’s chief role was to look after the home and family, and both men and women were likely to hold this belief.
- A minority of South Africans – 39% of men and 37% of women – agreed that family life suffered when the woman had a full-time job.

Figure 1: Attitudes towards women in the workplace.



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

A majority of women thought that when children were young, it was best for their mothers to stay at home, either full-time or part-time.

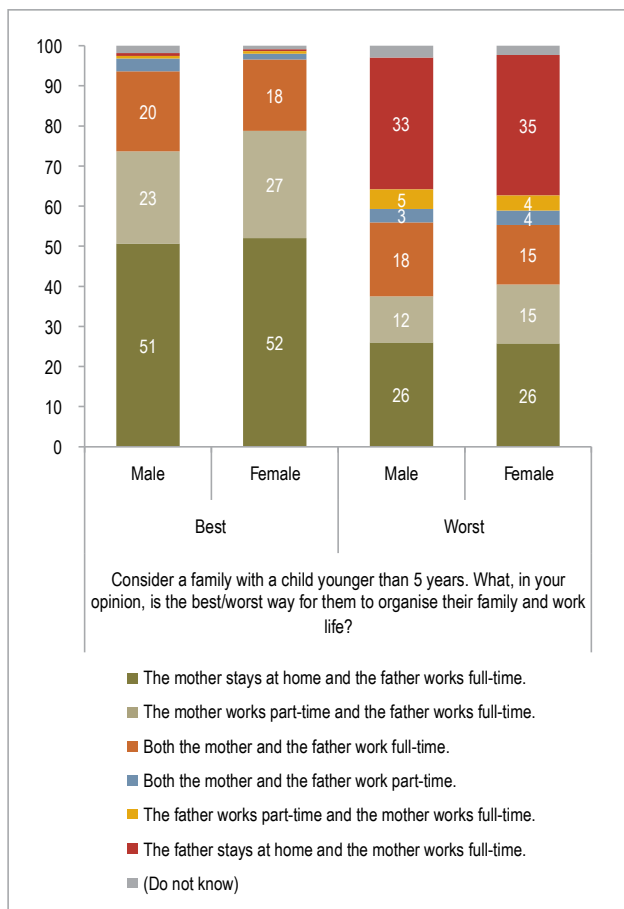
Caring for the young and restless

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- A majority of South African women (52%) and men (51%) believed that the ideal situation for a family with young children was for the mother to stay at home and for the father to work full-time.
- Both adult women and men reported that the least desirable situation for a family with young children was for the father to remain at home and the mother to enter the workplace on a full-time basis (mentioned by 35% of women and 33% of men).
- A significant share of men and women alike (both 58%) opposed the view that having children restricted the employment and career chances of one or both parents.



Figure 2: Best and worst scenarios for family and work balance



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

When employed women and men with a partner or spouse were asked who did the household chores, it was apparent that women were more likely than men to shoulder the burden.

Dividing up the chores

As women enter the workplace, the question of how household chores and tasks are divided among the family becomes pivotal. When employed women and men with a partner or spouse were asked who did the household chores, it was apparent that women were more likely than men to shoulder the burden:

- Eight out of every 10 employed South African women with a partner reported that they either always or usually prepared the household meals, compared to less than one in 10 employed men. In addition, around two-thirds (65%) of employed women in partnerships reported that they were primarily responsible for doing the laundry and household cleaning.
- More than half (55%) of all employed women always or usually cared for sick family members compared with 11% of employed men. Interestingly, almost a third (31%) of employed women shared this task with their partners. A similar pattern was observed in relation to shopping for groceries.

- Men were primarily responsible for small domestic repairs, with 84% of employed men with a spouse or partner always or usually performing this role compared with 19% of employed women.

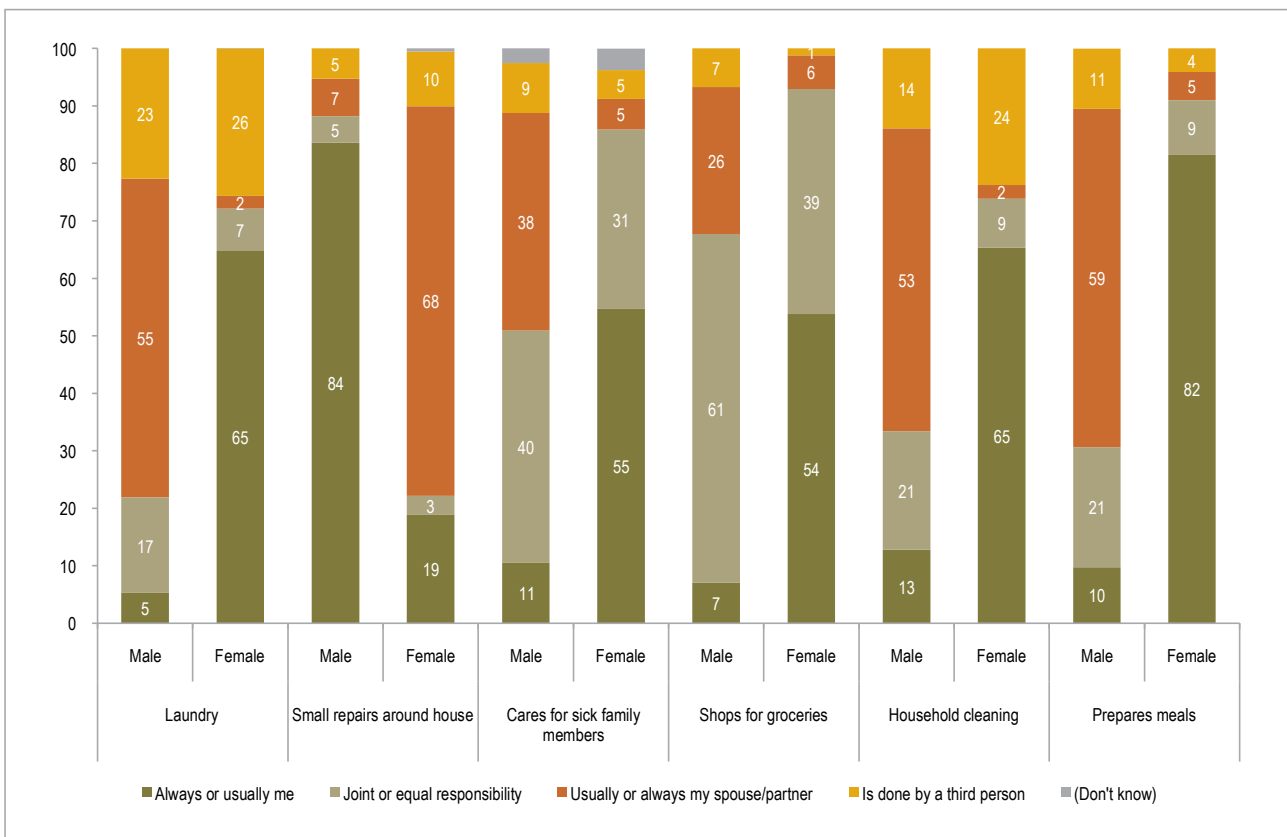
Women in South Africa may suffer from a 'double burden' of participating in the labour market as well as in household work

These results suggest that women in South Africa may suffer from a 'double burden' of participating in the labour market

as well as in household work. When respondents were asked how many hours a week they personally spent on household work (not including child care and leisure time activities), stark gender differences were evident:

- Employed South African women with a partner spent on average six more hours a week on household work than their male counterparts. A similar result was observed when respondents were asked how many hours a week they spent looking after family members (e.g. children, elderly, ill or disabled family members).
- Most working women acknowledged that they were doing a disproportionate share of household work. More than half (57%) stated that they were doing much more than their fair share of the household work, and 20% thought they were doing a bit more than their fair share (compared to 18% and 14% of employed men respectively).

Figure 3: Division of household labour among working South Africans in relationships



Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2012

Conclusion

This article provides a preliminary examination of attitudes towards women in the workplace in a context of increasing feminisation of the labour market. Although relatively broad acceptance of women entering the workplace was found, traditional attitudes towards housework persisted. As a result it appears women are burdened with both household as well as workplace responsibilities. Such a double burden may place significant stress on South African households and could serve as a source of family tension and conflict. In promoting family cohesion in the

country, policy makers need to be cognisant of this reality in designing interventions that suitably facilitate work-family balance.

Financial support for collecting the SASAS 2012 family data was provided by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The views expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not represent those of DST. ■

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