



# ***“Kusinda kwehlela”*: The collision of work faced by low-income employed mothers: in urban and rural KwaZulu-Natal.**

---

Dr Nonzuzo Mbokazi  
University of Cape Town  
[nonzuzo.mbokazi@uct.ac.za](mailto:nonzuzo.mbokazi@uct.ac.za)

Ms Nokhetho Mhlanga  
Human Sciences Research Council  
[NOMhlanga@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:NOMhlanga@hsrc.ac.za)

*African feminism 5<sup>th</sup> Conference 2023*

# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND



- The different experiences of working women during apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa
- The implications of women entering the labour force post-apartheid
  - The feminization of labour
    - Low paid
    - Precarious
    - Low skilled
  - The home structure and reproductive work vs productive work
  - Childcare work the responsibility of women even when employed
- **The study aimed to understand the lived realities of low-income working mothers And the implications on the childcare strategies they employ.**

# THE STUDY SITES

- KwaZulu-Natal
  - Two Township sites:
    - Umlazi
    - Sundumbili
  - Two Rural sites:
    - Macambini
    - KwaNdaya
- The purpose of selecting these sites was to capture the experiences of low-income employed mothers in an urban townships, peri-urban township and rural areas.
- To grasp whether space affects the choices made when it comes to childcare, given the significantly different geographical positioning of these areas and historical context.



# METHODOLOGY

---

- **Qualitative** methods used to:
  - Explore the choices of low-income employed mothers in relation to childcare.
  - Describe the involvement of kin in childcare.
  - Explore the experience in rural and urban areas of KZN (in relation to childcare)
- **Sampling and Study Participants**
  - N=20 mothers equally distributed across the study sites
  - The sampling criteria and definition of low-income and employed, followed the child support grant criteria (the year this study commenced < 36 000 and < 72 000 p/a)
- **Data collected** using semi-structured interviews over a two-year period
  - The topics covered included: understanding biographical backgrounds and circumstances, childcare options utilised ,the role played by paternal/maternal kin in childcare, work experiences, economic and social constraints and the balancing of work and domestic/care responsibilities

# LITERATURE

---

## The economy of paid work, unpaid work and cognitive work

- The sexual division of paid and unpaid labour
- Productive (market) and Reproductive (household) work and the **“Second Shift”** women work at home
- How the ‘double burden’ becomes a ‘triple burden’ when the cognitive work done by women is incorporated.
- **The nature of Cognitive labour**



A Portrait of South Africa's Women Workers by Lesley Lawson

# LITERATURE

---

## Women and Social Reproduction

- Includes the production of the means of subsistence (clothing, shelter, and food) which is necessary for production
- **AND** the production of human beings and the propagation of the species
- Feminisation of labour
- The lack of adequate care policy
- The location of social reproduction in its 'natural' place and the 'privatisation' of social reproduction relies on the unpaid work of household members, the commercialisation of reproductive needs, or both .



A Portrait of South Africa's Women Workers by Lesley Lawson

# LITERATURE

---

## Women and Social reproduction

- Even where the working mothers are absent, the care of the children of employed mothers often become relegated to the remaining female household members
- **Essentially, the black working-class households are sites of a crisis of social reproduction in contemporary South Africa, and the black working-class women are the shock absorbers of the crisis.**
- The South African case of low-income mothers, childcare policy and social reproduction is interesting because it reflects on the experiences of disadvantaged women in townships and rural areas of post-apartheid South Africa, whose burden and responsibilities persist within their family and at work.

# FINDINGS

---

Trying to describe and understand the choices of low-income employed mothers pertaining to childcare the study found:

## **Paid, unpaid and cognitive work: the collision faced by women**

- The concept of care in the household involves a range of tasks involving financial provision, and physical and emotional labour.
- Mothers did the **balancing act** of paid work, unpaid work and cognitive work to ensure that their children were receiving decent care and were living decent lives.
- Paid work refers to **the low-income employment** the mothers were participants of (as cleaners, domestic workers, cashiers and hairdressers).
- There is then the **cognitive work** the mothers perform.
- These forms of work are particularly more difficult for mothers in the low-income setting because they are performing this work with **scarce resources and support**.



# FINDINGS

---

- Women spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men and spend an important part of their day on meeting the expectations of their domestic and reproductive roles.
- The fatiguing collision between paid, unpaid and cognitive work.

*“When looking at my day and the household work and work I am employed to do, my working day starts when she wakes up and ends when she retires to bed in the evening.” - Gabisile*

# FINDINGS

---

## **More work: chasing money and involvement**

- Strained relationship with the father
  - The fathers have exempted themselves from their responsibilities of fatherhood.
  - The mothers have an added labour of chasing fathers for involvement and participation
- Mothers are left with the sole responsibility of providing care for the children, financially and otherwise such as organising childcare arrangements .
- These cases depict that, indeed, cognitive labour is gendered as women in this study perform most, if not all, the cognitive labour regarding childcare.

# CONCLUSION

- The study contributes to literature by using the lived experiences of working mothers to show the inadequacies of the state, market and kin in providing an adequate support and guard for the care of the children of low-income working mothers.
- The demonstrates that low-income working mothers are stretched and 'choices' they make regarding childcare are not necessarily 'choices', but strategies they arrange to ensure that their children are in some form of care when they are at work.
- The study points to the need for high quality childcare arrangements; in this way mothers may feel more supported in their roles.

