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BEYOND THE CAREER BREAK

Women Returners' Perceptions of the Skills they bring from the Home and Barriers to their Return to and Advancement in Paid Work: An Exploratory Analysis

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Studies in Human Resource Management at Massey University

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS........................................................................................................... I

TABLE OF CONTENTS............................................................................................................... II

LIST OF TABLES....................................................................................................................... IV

LIST OF FIGURES..................................................................................................................... V

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ VI

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................ 4

2.1 TAKING A CAREER BREAK ......................................................................................... 4
  2.1.1 Changes in Women’s Career Breaks........................................................................ 5
  2.1.2 Why Women’s Career Breaks are Changing............................................................ 8
  2.1.3 Parental Leave ........................................................................................................ 10

2.2 THE SKILLS AND STATUS OF WOMEN RETURNERS ........................................... 16
  2.2.1 A taxonomy of competences ................................................................................ 19
  2.2.2 Assessing Competence.......................................................................................... 22

2.3 BARRIERS TO WOMEN RETURNING TO THE LABOUR FORCE .......................... 25
  2.3.1 Public and Private Worlds ...................................................................................... 26
  2.3.2 Sex-typed family roles .......................................................................................... 27
  2.3.3 Employer discrimination ........................................................................................ 27
  2.3.4 Unavailability of resources .................................................................................. 28
  2.3.5 Characteristics of the labour market ...................................................................... 28
  2.3.6 Other Barriers ....................................................................................................... 29

2.4 BEYOND THE CAREER BREAK ................................................................................. 30

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN RETURNERS .................................................... 31
  2.5.1 Demographic Trends .............................................................................................. 32
  2.5.2 Skill Shortages ....................................................................................................... 33
  2.5.3 Society’s Best Interest ............................................................................................ 33

## CHAPTER 3: THE PRESENT STUDY .............................................................................. 36

3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES ......................................................................................... 36

3.2 RATIONALE FOR METHODOLOGY .................................................................... 36
  3.2.1 Questions of Paradigm ......................................................................................... 36
  3.2.2 Questions of Method ............................................................................................. 37

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 40

4.1 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................. 40

4.2 COLLECTION OF DATA ............................................................................................ 41

4.3 ANALYSIS OF DATA .................................................................................................. 42

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS .................................................................................................. 44

5.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ............................................................................................... 44
  5.1.1 The Participants and their Children ....................................................................... 44
  5.1.2 The Participants’ Careers ..................................................................................... 44
  5.1.3 The Participants Return to Work .......................................................................... 45
5.2 THE EFFECT OF CAREER BREAKS .............................................. 48
  5.2.1 Level of Return .......................................................... 48
  5.2.2 Promotion Opportunities .............................................. 48
  5.2.3 Status ........................................................................ 50
  5.2.4 Overall Effects .......................................................... 51
  5.2.5 The Importance of a Career ........................................... 53
5.3 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SKILLS OF WOMEN RETURNERS .... 60
  5.3.1 The Skills of Women Returners .................................... 60
  5.3.2 Recognition of Women Returners' Skills ......................... 65
5.4 BARRIERS .......................................................................... 70
  5.4.1 Special Needs ............................................................. 70
  5.4.2 Accommodation by Manager ......................................... 72
  5.4.3 Work-Family Conflict ................................................. 75
  5.4.4 Suggestions .................................................................. 77

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION ............................................................. 84
  6.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ....................................................... 84
  6.2 THE EFFECT OF CAREER BREAKS ..................................... 89
  6.3 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SKILLS OF WOMEN RETURNERS 91
       6.3.1 The Skills of Women Returners ................................. 92
       6.3.2 Recognition of Women Returners' Skills .................... 95
  6.4 BARRIERS .......................................................................... 97
  6.5 LIMITATIONS AND GENERALISABILITY .............................. 101
       6.5.1 Limitations of Sample .............................................. 102
       6.5.2 Limitations of Methodology .................................... 103
       6.5.3 Limitations of Design .............................................. 104

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS ............................................................ 105

REFERENCES ........................................................................... 109

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE .................................................. 117

APPENDIX II: INFORMATION SHEET ............................................ 119

APPENDIX III: CONSENT FORM .................................................... 121
LIST OF TABLES

2-1  PAID PARENTAL LEAVE AVAILABLE IN NEW ZEALAND AND OVERSEAS........ 14

2-2  CAREER OPTIONS EMERGING FROM THE FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF UNPAID WORK IN THE HOME................................................................. 21

5-1  SKILLS AND QUALITIES OF WOMEN RETURNERS........................................... 61

5-2  SPECIAL NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS................................................................. 70

5-3  SUGGESTIONS GIVEN BY PARTICIPANTS....................................................... 77
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY PARENT, BY AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS ENTERING LABOUR FORCE AFTER BIRTH OF LAST CHILD</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>SELECTION METHODS USED REGULARLY OR NOT AT ALL BY EMPLOYERS IN NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-1</td>
<td>CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN RETURNING TO WORK AFTER COMMENCEMENT OF CAREER BREAK</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>COMPARISON OF LENGTH OF CAREER BREAKS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS AND POPULATION STUDIES CENTRE STUDY</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis reports the results of a study about the perceptions of women who have returned to work after taking a career break due to family responsibilities (women returners). Most of the women who participated in the study believed that their career breaks and ongoing family commitments had adversely affected their careers. The participants also believed that, because of the skills they had acquired through their roles as caregivers and home managers, they were better employees. However, not all of the women valued those skills themselves, and many believed that their employers did not recognise them either. The study also found that women returners have various needs that, if not met, become barriers to their ability to be involved in paid work. The two most commonly reported needs were reduced hours and flexi-time. Good quality and affordable childcare, understanding from managers and colleagues, and a change in societal attitudes that equate time spent at work with ability and commitment were also important needs of women returners. Conclusions that arose suggest that employers should change policies and train managers and those involved in the recruitment and selection process to meet the needs of women returners. This will increase the organisation's ability to develop creative solutions that will support the needs of both the organisation and its employees. Furthermore, the government needs to consider the implementation of paid parental leave and allowing all childcare expenses to be claimed against earnings. Through implementing these suggestions, mothers will have more choice about when they return to work, allowing them to better meet their own needs as well as those of their families.