Women, work, study and health: 
the experience of nurses 
engaged in paid 
work and further education

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements 
for the degree of 
Master of Philosophy in Nursing 

Massey University

Sara Ann Horrell Blackie

January 2001
Abstract

Most women undertake many roles in their lives; homemaker, partner, mother and paid worker. Nurses who may not have achieved to their potential during their earlier education, or who recognise the value of further education may be studying at a tertiary level. They may be working to increase their qualifications in addition to their other existing roles. While there have been positive effect noted from working outside the home and from being involved in study, there are some women who suffer feelings of guilt and stress from trying to combine these roles. Gendered expectations from themselves, their partner and the community have been found to influence women’s lives and experiences.

This thesis examines the lives of eight women nurses who are engaged in study as well as part or full time paid work. A feminist analysis is made of the pressures and expectations that they experience from themselves, their families, their colleagues and their communities.

Currently, changes in the role of the advanced nursing practitioner are being discussed and New Zealand is experiencing the international trend towards difficulties with recruitment and retention of nurses. Recommendations are made which may assist to create a culture where nurses who advance their education, mainly at their own expense, can be utilised and valued to the advantage of New Zealand as a whole.
# Contents

Abstract............................................................................................................. ii  
Contents............................................................................................................ iii  
Acknowledgments........................................................................................... v  

## Chapter 1 - Introduction ............................................................................. 5  
1.1 Introduction.............................................................................................. 5  
1.2 Aims of the study...................................................................................... 7  
1.3 Definition of terms................................................................................. 8  
  1.3.1 Unpaid work and housework............................................................. 8  
  1.3.2 Paid work.......................................................................................... 8  
  1.3.3 Health............................................................................................... 9  
1.4 The context of the study......................................................................... 9  
  1.4.1. Nursing as a career choice for women............................................ 9  
  1.4.2. Educational level of entry to training and education in New Zealand 10  
1.5 The escalation of qualifications.............................................................. 11  
1.6 Post basic nursing education in New Zealand........................................ 12  
1.7 Summary............................................................................................... 13  

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review ................................................................ 15  
2.1 Introduction.............................................................................................. 15  
2.2 Women and unpaid work – gendered expectations.............................. 15  
2.3 Multiple roles of women and the effects on health............................... 21  
2.4 Issues of personal control at home and at work.................................... 26  
2.5 The return of the registered nurse to tertiary study.............................. 28  
2.6 Summary............................................................................................... 33  

## Chapter 3 - Method and Methodology .................................................... 35  
3.1 Introduction.............................................................................................. 35  
3.2 Methodology........................................................................................... 35  
3.3 Feminist theory....................................................................................... 36  
3.4 Feminist research................................................................................... 37  
  3.4.1 Principles of feminist research......................................................... 38  
  3.4.2 Application of a feminist perspective to this study......................... 39  
3.5 Gender.................................................................................................... 40  
  3.5.1 Definition of gender......................................................................... 40  
  3.5.2 The essentialist and constructionist views of gender....................... 41  
  3.5.3 The relationship of gender to this study.......................................... 41  
3.6 Method.................................................................................................... 42  
  3.6.1 Introduction to the method............................................................... 42  
  3.6.2 Research design............................................................................... 42  
3.7 Participant selection............................................................................... 43  
3.8 Profiles of the participants.................................................................... 43  
3.9 Ethical issues........................................................................................... 45  
  3.9.1 Ethical approval................................................................................ 45  
  3.9.2 Informed consent............................................................................. 45  
  3.9.3 Confidentiality................................................................................ 46
Acknowledgments

This research could not have been completed without the participation of the women I interviewed. I owe them a debt of gratitude for the time they took from their already busy lives to tell their stories and to comment on my interpretation of these stories.

While completing this research I have been supported by family and friends. I thank my husband Alan and my son Mike for their ongoing support and encouragement. I also thank my critical friends Marion, Nita and Mary who each provided a listening and thought provoking sounding board when it was needed. My thanks go to Jude and Bob who provided practical support and computing expertise.

To my supervisor, Professor Jenny Carryer, thank you for believing at this was an issue of serious social significance and for encouraging and challenging me along the way.

For financial assistance I wish to thank the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, Massey University and the New Zealand Nurses’ Organisation.