

Track 7: GENDER AND WORK

The Great COVID-19 Gender Divide

ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has heightened the inequalities between men and women in the world of work, forcing many to work remotely. This has put excessive pressure on many families, especially women in general, regardless of their economic status. In this paper, we will present the 'Shecession' – in other words, the drain of female employees in the workplace - as an opportunity to change the working realities for women for the better.

INTRODUCTION

We are currently suffering from a 'Shecession' in the workplace. Economists have suggested that COVID-19 has resulted in a 'shecession' given that female labour supply (in August 2020) was 20% below the levels measured in February 2020. And whilst it might be tempting to presume this drop was COVID-19 related, by comparison the male labour supply was just 9% below the February 2020 figures, indicating less than half the negative impact seen on women. Rather than focusing on the loss of female employees in the workplace, the 'shecession' could arguably be seen as an opportunity to recognise the gender inequalities which remain in the 21st century and to change the working realities for women for the better.

Unequal Treatment Of Women And Men In The Workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to continue to impact the unemployment rate of women as the return-to-work is likely to prefer male counterparts owing to several reasons, such as:

- Experience,
- Technical qualifications, and
- Gender stereotypes.

COVID-19 has particularly afflicted working mothers with what sociologists term the 'motherhood penalty'¹ as many employers continue to deny these women pay increases, promotions and access to work. The [Institute For Fiscal Studies](#) indicates that:

- Mothers are 23% more likely than fathers to have lost their jobs (temporarily or permanently) during the current crisis. Of those in paid work prior to the lockdown, mothers are 47% more likely than fathers to lose their job or quit permanently, and they are 14% more likely to have been furloughed. In all,

¹ The motherhood penalty is a term coined by sociologists who argue that in the workplace, working mothers encounter biological and cultural-based disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to childless women. Specifically, women may suffer a per-child wage penalty, resulting in a pay gap between non-mothers and mothers that is larger than the gap between men and women. Mothers may also suffer worse job-site evaluations indicating that they are less committed to their jobs, less dependable, and less authoritative than non-mothers.

among those working in February 2020, **mothers are now nine percentage points less likely to still be in paid work than fathers.**

- Mothers who are still doing paid work have reduced their paid working hours substantially more than fathers. **Before the crisis, working mothers did paid work during 6.3 hours of a weekday on average. This has fallen by over one-fifth to 4.9 hours.** Working fathers' hours have also fallen, but by proportionally less, from 8.6 hours before the crisis to 7.2 hours currently.
- **Mothers are also far more likely to be interrupted during paid working hours than fathers.** Almost half (47%) of mothers' hours spent doing paid work are split between that and other activities such as childcare, compared with under one-third (30%) of fathers' paid working hours. Where focused work time is important for performance, gender differences in interruptions and the associated multitasking, risk further increasing the gender wage gap among parents.
- **In families where the father has lost his job while the mother kept hers, men and women still split housework and childcare responsibilities fairly equally.** In all other types of households, mothers spend substantially more time on domestic responsibilities.

According to the [United Nations](#), while everyone is facing unprecedented challenges, women are bearing the brunt of the economic and social fallout of COVID-19. Women who are poor and marginalised face an even higher risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence. Globally, 70% of health workers and

first responders are women however they are not on par with their male counterparts. At 28%, the gender pay gap in the health sector is higher than the overall gender pay gap (16%).

Many sectors have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the most affected industries in South Africa are the:

- Hospitality,
- Travel and Tourism, as well as the
- Personal Care (hairdressing, beauty) sectors.

Thankfully, the [Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International \(HSMIA\) Foundation](#) is supporting the hospitality industry by distributing a second round of COVID Relief Fund grants to hospitality professionals worldwide, bringing the total amount of grants to \$170 000 (which equates to nearly R2 million) distributed to nearly 400 recipients worldwide.

Unfortunately, the lack of an internationally recognised vaccine certification system could hinder travel recovery as many travellers are left confused about quarantine requirements and travel restrictions. With varying rules, some may opt for domestic trips, dealing a blow to destinations that are dependent on international visitation. This could hinder the recovery of this industry significantly.

In South Africa relief initiatives such as the COVID-19 Temporary Employee Relief Scheme, known as TERS, has offered a lifeline to these and other affected industries. Whilst more than R60 billion has been disbursed since April 2020, administrative frustrations and payment delays have created anxiety amongst intended beneficiaries who often have to wait months before receiving the benefit from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). For women in the personal care sector, many of whom are self-employed and therefore not contributors to the UIF, no such relief has been available.

Many of the most harshly affected sectors mainly employ women and, as previously stated, COVID-19 has had a disproportionately negative impact on female employees. Not only have hours and associated pay decreased, but the burden of childcare has increased given the lockdown regulations which saw schools, including Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and crèches close for extended periods.

Even as lockdown restrictions begin to ease, the devastating financial impact that the shutdown had on Early Childhood Development Centres and crèches will likely mean that many will never open again. This will create an ongoing childcare challenge for families who rely on safe, affordable caregiving facilities during working hours.

Lockdown restrictions have a ripple effect in terms of women employed in domestic households who were employees of individuals employed in formal sectors that have been severely affected by lockdown restrictions. In February 2021, it was reported – in the [Argus](#) – that the Western Cape is the only province that is providing relief to COVID-

19-stricken ECD centres. This begs the question of what will happen to the ECD centres in other provinces.

Schooling continues to be disrupted with fluctuating infection numbers causing temporary closures, or rotational cycles to be implemented. The burden of childcare during these 'off' times is further compounded as school work is expected to be completed at home, supervised by the parent (inevitably the mother) who continues to bear the brunt of childcare-associated responsibilities.

To illustrate the devastating effect of the closure of schools, according to data from the latest [National Income Dynamics Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey \(NID-CRAMS\)](#), the impact of disrupted education since the COVID-19 outbreak has been devastating, with learners between 75% and a full school year behind where they should be. Rotational attendance, sporadic school closures, and days off for specific grades have resulted in school children losing 54% of learning time. Some 400 000 to 500 000 learners have reportedly also dropped out of school altogether over the past 16 months.

The increased burden often falls on the shoulders of the women who head these households and who will be expected to try to 'catch up' the schooling for their children, or suffer the consequences of children falling behind and eventually exiting the education system with little, or no, prospects of employment.

Traditional Expectations Of Women

In a 'traditional family setting', most of the unpaid work – such as cleaning, cooking and childcare - at home is undertaken by the female in the relationship. However, as many employees are now working from home is there room for a more equitable division of these duties?

Global Business Solutions recently conducted some research among our clients to find out more about the impact the 'new normal' working environment has had on people's work and family lives.

Of those who responded to our survey, 78.67% are women and 21.33% are men. The respondents span nine different industries:

- Manufacturing: 13.33%
- Recruitment: 10.67%
- Financial services: 5.33%
- Education: 5.33%
- Automotive: 5.33%
- Hospitality: 5.33%
- Mining: 4%
- Tourism: 4%
- Construction: 4%

In terms of job titles, 17.33% are involved in Human Resources (HR), 14.67% are managers, 13.33% are HR managers, 10.67% are directors, 6.67% are executives,

5.33% are involved in finance, 5.33% are heads of departments and a further 5.33% are business owners. In each case, these individuals occupy roles with high levels of responsibilities and performance expectation. During the pandemic and the continued uncertain economic environment, these individuals in their capacities as business leaders have no doubt been swamped with additional stress, workload and longer hours to cope with the constant change and pressure. And yet, the results of the survey show that regardless of their status within the workplace, these women have continued to shoulder the responsibilities of their households too.

In countries, like South Africa, where the societal expectations of a woman's role in the household is to serve her family – particularly in the Black African culture - women are expected to cook, clean, take care of the children and the general well-being of the family. In our survey, only 17.56% of respondents felt that their partners had stepped up to the plate in terms of sharing household chores and childcare responsibilities.

Some respondents commented:

- *No - this task [cooking, cleaning and childcare]² fell on me, the wife and Mother.*
- *Not really.*
- *No – which is no different than before COVID-19.*
- *No - apparently only one of us was working from home!*

² Our own addition.

In the recently released [Quarterly Labour Force Survey \(QLFS\) for the second quarter of 2021](#) it was found that men are more likely than women to be in paid employment – regardless of race. Overall, the unemployment rate for women is sitting at 36.8% while the unemployment rate for men is sitting at 32.4%. The figure for women can further be broken down as follows:

- Black African women: 41.0%
- Coloured women: 29.9%
- Indian and Asian women: 22.4%
- White women: 8.2%

The QLFS for Q2 2021 also found that women are more likely to be engaged in unpaid work. Unpaid work - especially that associated with domestic duties, childcare, and care of the elderly or sick - remains largely the responsibility of women, regardless of whether male members of the family are employed or not.

Statistics from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are in line with this. It states that women have been hit harder than men by job losses around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and only men's employment is likely to recover this year to 2019 levels.

Women have been at greater risk of lay-offs or reduced working hours during periods of anti-infection economic and social restrictions, especially in sectors such as accommodation, food services and manufacturing. Many women have not only

experienced severe loss of income but also continue to bear the brunt of unpaid care work.

For women in low-paid jobs, including domestic employment, the lack of childcare and loss of income – which is often the only one coming into the home – has been shocking. During the hard lockdown periods, domestic employees were also restricted from working, creating the stress of “no work no pay” for many. Whilst TERS was available to those whose employers had been contributing to UIF, many will have fallen through the net as they work part-time and for multiple employers who would not have made the application for relief.

The knock-on financial pressures placed on households, where some or all of the income has been lost, is that many who previously employed a domestic will have opted to let these individuals go. In addition to contributing to unemployment, the additional burden of household chores inevitably becomes the responsibility of the women in the family. With rising unemployment (which is currently sitting at 34.4%), these women - who often have little education – will likely find it much more difficult to re-enter the workplace as they find themselves competing with more experienced, better-educated individuals.

South Africa is not the only country affected by the sudden increase in pressure within the household. A report by McKinsey & Company, entitled [Women in the Workplace 2020](#), states that almost 2 million women are considering taking a leave of absence

from the workplace or leaving the workplace altogether. This is in direct response to growing household and educational obligations and the increasing unaffordability of alternatives, such as childcare and domestic assistance.

To correct this imbalance, we need to start from the ground up. Perceptions need to be changed by example. More women need to start involving their children – especially boys – in household chores so that they acquire the skills and know-how and when they grow up they will see sharing these responsibilities as the norm. In addition, more husbands/partners should become involved in household chores. In addition to sharing the workload, their active involvement will provide the opportunity for their children to see that it is normal for fathers to be involved in the day-to-day running of the home.

It is heartening to see, from our survey, that some of the respondents from our survey are already implementing these sorts of changes in their own homes:

- *The whole family had to pitch in as our we gave our domestic worker paid time off.*
- *My partner had always shared the load of housework.*
- *We shared responsibilities equally between the two of us.*
- *Yes, [my partner pitched in]³ more than usual.*

Gender stereotyping is largely driven within communities and households, and arguably as much effort should go into normalising the sharing of household and

³ Our own addition.

childcare duties as there is in driving women's leadership in the workplace. Active participation by both sexes in all aspects of work and home life will help to create the space for individuals to take on the role that they prefer, or which makes most sense for the family, rather than what society expects.

Gender-Based Violence – The Nasty Side Of Lockdown

Unfortunately South Africa's decision to impose one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world meant that many individuals were forced into close confines for extended periods. This has contributed to reports of family gender-based violence increasing dramatically as families adjusted to their new normal. South Africa is known as one of the worst-affected countries when it comes to gender-based violence (GBV) and embarrassingly has a femicide level five times higher than the global average. The brutal killing of Uyinene Mrwetyana, a 19-year-old University of Cape Town student, in August 2020, once again highlighted the plight of many women and created the platform to spur South African citizens into action.

[The government's GBV and Femicide Command Centre, a call centre to support victims of GBV, recorded more than 120 000 victims in the first three weeks of the lockdown.](#) Just weeks later in Pretoria, a similar call centre was receiving up to 1 000 calls a day from women and children who were confined to abusive homes seeking urgent help.

The government's response, including highly controversial alcohol bans during lockdown, has been argued as necessary to curtail the escalation in GBV.

In a paper entitled [*Gender-based Violence and COVID-19 in South Africa: The Clash of Pandemics*](#) which was written by Dr Brigitte Clark, Senior Lecturer in Child Law and Jurisprudence at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, it is suggested the alcohol ban and instances of police brutality could have been responsible for the late emergence of gender-based violence reports:

“The reasons why South Africa did not appear initially to experience the rise in domestic violence cases reported elsewhere in the world may have been, firstly, that the ban on alcohol sales reduced the severity of domestic violence cases and the opportunity for rape (outside of the home). Sober partners may still be abusive and controlling but are perhaps less likely to resort to extreme physical violence.

“The United Kingdom domestic abuse non-government organisation ‘Refuge’ reported a 700% increase in calls from victims and a 25% increase in calls from men wanting to change their behaviour. This suggests that the alcohol sales ban and enforced lockdown may be responsible for the decrease in reported cases and the reduction in cases of serious injury in South Africa during the alcohol ban.

“However, it could also be that the increase in police brutality and the strict lockdown kept women at home. They may have been unable to venture out because either they lacked a valid excuse, or because they were afraid of being confronted by police or were fearful of getting COVID-19, bringing the virus home and infecting their children. This may have meant that women were not able to report their cases because they

could not get to a police station and unable to go to court to get orders under the Domestic Violence Act.”

Many argue that the continued levels of abuse, particularly against women, is a direct result of deep-rooted cultural beliefs. These stereotypical perceptions that women are inferior contribute not only to GBV, but to the continued challenges women experience in breaking glass ceilings within workplaces and gaining support within the domestic context.

Can Remote Working And Flexible Hours Become The "New Normal"?

The fact that many employees are now working remotely or have a hybrid working arrangement – in other words, they split their working week between the office and home - has put excessive pressure on many families, especially women in general, regardless of their economic status.

In our survey, we found that 41.89% of respondents have a hybrid working environment, with 31.08% working remotely and 27.03% back at the office full time. In addition, we found that 42.25% of our respondents are now busier than they were pre-COVID while 30.99% report working longer hours. Although majority of respondents stated that they prefer a remote or hybrid working environment, others reported missing the interaction with colleagues at the office:

- *A hybrid solution will allow more flexibility during these times. it is however necessary to meet in person and not virtually on a daily basis.*

- *Not too happy, I don't like working from home.*

A [CNBC survey](#) of top executives in human resources, finance and technology indicates that just under half of companies will use a hybrid work model in the second half of 2021; roughly one-third say their company will be “in person-first”.

Boston Scientific in Singapore is just one of these companies.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Boston Scientific developed a new set of global guidelines to enable them to remain flexible and responsive to ever-changing business, technology, and workplace trends. With their Singapore office acting as a pilot for the new guidelines, they refurbished and reconfigured their existing space for new modes of work.

As part of Boston Scientific’s revised strategy, the new office needed to cater to three groups of employees: on-site, hybrid, and remote, with each group characterised by its own unique workplace requirements. IT staff, for example, were categorised as on-site staff who required their own desks in the office, while sales staff, being remote employees, only came into the office once a week, and were thus not allocated dedicated workstations. With these specifications in mind, and the company had to introduce new work settings and typologies to encompass the diversity in working styles across the Singapore team.

While feelings remain mixed regarding hybrid working and virtual working environments, these alternative working arrangements could help to ease some of the economic fall-

out caused by COVID-19 by lowering transport costs and commute times. In addition, childcare costs could be decreased as children can be 'supervised' whilst a parent is working from home. The more flexible working hours that remote working arrangements offer could also allow parents to be more involved in their children's care and be present at important sporting and school events.

Demand from employees for continued remote or hybrid working arrangements has increased substantially post-pandemic as most employees have experienced this alternative to some extent during the past 18 months. According to the [EY 2021 Work Reimagined Employee survey](#), 54% of employees globally would consider leaving their jobs post-pandemic if they are not afforded some form of flexibility in terms of when and where they work.

Work-Life Balance Is All About Work-Life Integration

We need to integrate – and not balance – work-life. Each cannot be forced to remain only within their pre-determined, designated hours. With the potential to collaborate globally, many individuals may have to work beyond our traditional 9 to 5 to fit in with their colleagues' various time zone constraints. And it should be a given that life events, such as doctor's appointments or children's activities, do not comply with office hours.

COVID-19 has fast-tracked most of the world's working population into the Fourth Industrial Revolution challenging the notions of 'pay for hours' first introduced in the



Industrial Revolution. Work should be defined by contribution or output, and further acknowledgement given to the individual variation in the time it could take to achieve the requisite deliverables.

As opposed to contriving means to monitor hours for those working off-site, most employers now have the opportunity to shift from a time-based culture to one which focuses instead on delivery and performance.

Shift To Results Only Work Environment (ROWE)

The ROWE concept was developed by Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, founders of the consulting firm CultureRx. They published the approach in their 2008 book, *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix it*.

In a ROWE, you measure team members by their performance, results, and/or output, not by their presence in the office or the hours that they work. You give them complete autonomy over their projects, and you allow them the freedom to choose when and how they work to meet the pre-defined and agreed goals.

Working in ROWE is not the same as having 'flexible hours'. The time team members spend on a task is irrelevant; only the results matter. (This is like the relationship many managers have with freelancers who are paid solely for the work that they deliver.)

One of the main benefits of working in a ROWE is the freedom and flexibility that it provides. People can complete work in their own time, as long as they meet the agreed deadlines. This means that they can take breaks and attend appointments without

having to take time off and can be particularly useful for working parents, or those who would prefer to avoid a stressful commute.

This approach works particularly well with team members who need to deliver an easily measurable, standardised piece of work to a deadline and an agreed quality. It allows people to focus on one project or task at a time, and it gives them freedom to complete their work as they see fit.

The focus is on results and goals. This means that team members are clear about what they need to achieve, and how this contributes to the organisation's overall objectives.

Consideration For 'Asynchronous Working'

Flexibility and remote working create challenges for teamwork and the execution of tasks which involve multiple parties. Most organisations operate in a synchronous fashion, meaning that everyone is expected to be available between certain hours. True flexibility would enable individuals to operate within their own timeframes, taking advantage of their personal preferences or circumstances, a night owl who prefers to start later or someone that would like to work early and log out midday to focus on childcare, for example, but respecting the rights of others in the process.

Sadly, the experiences under COVID-19 working conditions are that everyone seems to be working longer. Expectations that calls should be taken, or emails responded to, no matter the day or time, translates into longer days and a lack of boundaries between work, and 'off' time. In some countries, such as France, boundaries have been

implemented formally through amendments to labour law such as the digital disconnect amendment. This requires employers of 50 or more to formally engage with employees and establish policies and codes of good practice which enable employees to legitimately disregard work-related communication in their off-time.

In some companies, this has gone one step further with IT departments tasked with switching-off the email servers between certain hours. This means that even if you're a night owl and send an email through at 1am, this will not be delivered until 8am the following morning in order to protect the rights of the recipient to not feel pressured to respond immediately.

The adoption of asynchronous working typically requires a review of the 'rules' within an organisation, the utilisation of appropriate technology platforms, which provide the chance for individuals to contribute and gather information at times suitable to them, without unnecessarily infringing on a colleague's right to do the same, at a different time. With the growth of distributed workforces, not only those who operate remotely, but the incorporation of pockets of employees across the globe, there is a need to adopt asynchronous work models to manage time zone differences.

Empowering Women To Set Boundaries

Societal pressure on women continues with expectations off the charts. The meme "*We expect women to work as if don't have children and raise children as if they don't work*" exemplifies the pressure that many working mothers feel.



Increased empathy within the workplace would do wonders to alleviate some of the pressure working mothers feel when faced with the demand for a meeting after hours, or delivery of a project over the weekend. The ability to say “no” becomes critical.

Just as the elimination of feelings of guilt associated with, for example buying cupcakes for school birthday rings, instead of baking homemade, is essential to empowering women and reducing some of the pressure they are under.

Sadly women in the workplace still find it difficult to be assertive and to clearly communicate their dissatisfaction with demands which they perceive to be unreasonable. Assertiveness, a trait which is seen as positive and indicative of leadership potential, is sadly perceived differently as a result of gender bias. For men, assertiveness is likely to get them what they want and boost perceptions of their leadership abilities. For women however, gender stereotyping creates the impression that assertive women are “bossy” and in turn impacts their likeability amongst colleagues. These traditional gender biases need to be tackled by broader cultural changes if we want to see more women in the boardroom.

The Responsibility Of Government And Organisation

France is well-known around the world for prioritising the employee over the company. It gives its employees 30 days off a year and 16 weeks of full-paid family leave when a child is born.

Many companies are taking employee wellness quite seriously and are instituting employee wellness programmes. In our survey, 51.81% of respondents indicated that their companies have a wellness programme which focuses on their mental well-being.

Many corporates are giving their employees paid time off, in addition to their normal leave allotment, so that they can relax and avoid burnout. MTN has given its employees an additional five days of paid leave to foster work-life balance and in recognition of the longer working hours since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the sacrifices that were forced on employees by COVID-19 are mostly like to affect the gains made by South African equality laws in terms of gender diversity in the workplace.

In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) recognises women as a designated group. As such, companies need to achieve equitable representation at all occupational levels. The effects of retrenchments due to companies downsizing will have a negative impact on companies' Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BB-BEE) level status. Recent unemployment statistics revealed that women have been more affected and Black women in general have been most adversely affected. A reasonable BB-BEE status is a licence to trade as such companies need to promote an equitable representation of black females.

The EEA amendments are proposing sectoral targets that will see women becoming more equitably represented in the workplace. The 21st CEE Report by the Commission

for Employment Equity (CEE) shows the real impact of gender inequalities in the workplace. Female representation at top, senior and middle management only increased by 0.5% for top management, 0.4% and 1% for senior and middle management respectively.

According to the QLFS: Q2 of 2020, of the total working population of those in managerial positions, 66.9% were men compared to 33.1% of women. Overall, close to a third (30.1%) of all people who had jobs in the 2nd quarter of 2021 were employed in Elementary and Domestic work occupations.

Women dominated the Domestic Worker, Clerical and Technical occupations while the rest of the occupations were dominated by men. Only 5.5% of Domestic worker jobs were occupied by men while only 11.9% of Craft and related trade jobs were occupied by women.

As many organisations contemplate downsizing their workforces due to operational requirements, women are most likely to be affected as some opted for voluntary retrenchment to devote their time to childcare and household responsibilities.

New experiences and opportunities are gained daily as people realise the impact of COVID-19 and the need to change mindsets. Employers are realising that their employees can be productive when working remotely, which is something that quite a lot of South African employers couldn't wrap their heads around pre-COVID-19.



What used to be male-dominated or female-dominated jobs will become less of an issue as digitisation becomes increasingly preferred.

The [World Bank's Gender Innovation Labs](#) (GILs) have developed policy recommendations adapted to regional and country-level recovery efforts. In Pakistan, SAR GIL recommends social safety nets and support services targeted at women who were previously employed in sectors that suffered the largest declines in employment. AFR GIL recommends measures to help buffer female-owned businesses against the effects of COVID-19, such as enabling women's access to lines of credit.

Evidence and recommendations from early policy briefs have already influenced the design of several World Bank projects. For example, data on the impact of the crisis on female-owned businesses in Ethiopia influenced the design of the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP II), which will provide a rescue package to women entrepreneurs and support new revenue-based credit products.

We expect that more recent evidence produced by LAC, EAP, SAR AND Middle East and North Africa (MNA) GILs will continue to inform the design of World Bank operations to address the pandemic's impacts on women's employment.

It is hoped that the South African government will follow suit, identifying opportunities to target relief efforts at women and women-owned businesses as these remain critical contributors to their respective households and to the economy overall.



Most employers have all the right policies in place that seek to eradicate gender bias or unfair discrimination, and yet at its heart the stereotyping which restricts women and their upward mobility in the workplace, is entrenched within the cultural biases and psyche of the people.

More effort should be made to create awareness of these biases, which remain subconscious for many, and to seek to promote equity in the roles, responsibilities, terms of employment and pay, as well as daily engagements between all employees, regardless of gender or parental status.

An increased focus on developing EQ amongst individuals will help to create the space for individuals to be more aware of self and others, recognising the potential prejudices they might have, and offering the opportunity to overcome these.

It is clear that COVID-19 has contributed to continued women discrimination and inequalities in the workplace and at home. Whilst research studies show that there has been a small shift/ improvement in gender roles and allocation of household responsibilities by and large women continue to bear the brunt of inequalities as they take on significant household activities. Research shows that the traditional stereotypes and unfair expectations of women have not disappeared.

Women continue to be the first affected in retrenchment processes or forfeit work when it comes down to deciding who will look after the children. There needs to be more inclusive measures implemented by organisations where women can be afforded equal



opportunities. Labour laws such as Employment Equity and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment need to be stricter to companies in terms promoting gender equality. It should not be easy for a company to retrench women. Better policies and measures need to be enacted to accommodate working mothers who must juggle work and school activities. These policies must be fair, inclusive and accommodating for women so that they can continue to build their careers in the same way as their male counterparts.

The positive aspects brought by COVID-19 are that people can work anywhere in the world as long as there is stable Internet connectivity. This has allowed some families to spend time together.