

Preface

Among the most striking labour market trends of recent times has been the growing proportion of women in the labour force and the narrowing of the gap between male and female labour force participation rates. Despite this, the expectations of women as the primary caregivers of minor children, older persons, and the firm in their households and families remain the same. This often leads to competing demands between labour market and family roles and, in turn, to considerable stress, conflict and loss in the quality of life of working women with care responsibilities—all with significant social cost. Although this trend is global, much of the research and policy dialogue in this area have been taking place in Western countries, resulting in the paucity of cross-cultural and comparative work on the subject, and limiting the extent to which generalisations can be made based in conclusions by Western studies.

This book is one of the first systematic efforts to bridge this research gap by focusing on sub-Saharan Africa—one of the least studied regions in terms of the relationship between workers' family responsibilities and paid work, or work–family interface. The book is divided into four parts each dealing with a different aspect of the subject: (i) Work–Family interface as a policy issue in Sub-Saharan Africa; (ii) factors underlying Work–Family conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa; (iii) impact of Work–Family conflict on families; and (iv) current and plausible coping strategies. All chapters end with policy recommendations to enhance the reconciliation of the demands of paid work and family responsibilities. Together therefore, the chapters: (i) offer critical theoretical perspectives and empirical insights into the opportunities and constraints that workers with family responsibilities have in sub-Saharan Africa and (ii) provide a roadmap for future research and policymaking in the area of work–family interface in the sub-region.

The book will be of primary interest to graduate students, academics and researchers in social policy, family studies, sociology, social work and other social sciences. To the extent that each chapter concludes with recommendations for interventions, the book will also be of value to socio-economic policymakers in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book is timely and relevant against the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Resolution 2011/29 of 2011 on the "Preparations

for an observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family” which will be in 2014. Among other things, the resolution encourages Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work–family balance and share good practices in those areas.

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Challenges and Responses

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