

Balancing your scientific career and family life

By Buyi Sondezi-Mhlungu



Buyi with her daughters, Njabulo (aged 9 years) and Zenani (aged 13 years).

Physics has been populated by male candidates for a long time and female representative seem to fade out in the background due to a number of associated with the research environment. At the same time women can breakthrough the glass ceiling and advance successful in their careers, be good physicists and simultaneously raise a family when a certain level of motivation and support is put into it.

The general assumption of our society has been that it is impossible for women to strike a balance between the highest levels of scientific achievement and a stable family and/or motherhood. I believe that such proposition that motherhood and serious science cannot be achieved has hindered many potential scientists from emerging. Yes, it is undeniable that balancing the two is not easy but it can be done if managed properly. One of the important assets for every scientist to properly utilize is “time”. Learning to treasure and manage ones time helps in achieving desired goals and brings about a balance between the career and family life. As for today, many female physicists, around the globe do have children. Combining science with motherhood is not only possible, but is actually rather common. This requires a certain amount of sacrifice. In most instances a woman has to sacrifice “time to self” for the smooth running of other things. This means spending most of your time to your family, your career, your societal activities, and your research and very little on yourself. Even so, in some cases time to get everything done in set dates is normally not achievable unless otherwise you work till late at night or very early in the morning. This becomes a lifestyle of a scientist. It sounds difficult, but just get the hang of it, it becomes part of you and soon you won’t be able to live without your complete life – family, work and research – all combined!