Work-Family Conflict and Job Satisfaction among Female Academics: A Study of Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia

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Abstract: *The growing interest of women in professional careers is one of the major developments of contemporary societies. However, the myths of motherhood instead of the realities of contemporary life in developing societies like Nigeria have placed limitations and frustration on the career path of women. This study investigated the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction of female academics particularly in Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia. Using descriptive survey, the population of the study comprised all female academics from the polytechnic. 30 respondents were purposively sampled for the study and the instrument of data collection was focus group discussion. Findings revealed that female academics are somewhat dissatisfied as regards opportunities for career growth in the polytechnic because of social policies and the demands of motherhood. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the issue of job satisfaction among female academics identified in this study were seen to be exacerbated by challenges and difficulties working mothers faced. The study, therefore, recommends that the institution should review their social policies and create favourable working environment that would help female academics deal with professional and family responsibilities which would enhance their job satisfaction.*
Keywords: *Work, family, conflict, job satisfaction, academics*

Introduction

Due to western education, civilization and modernization, the influx of women into the workforce over the past half century has seen more women embracing professional careers and performing managerial roles in the contemporary society. In the recent time, especially with the expansion of educational opportunities for them, women are getting more represented in the nation's labour force. For instance, more women have taken up professional occupations like medicine, accounting and academics (Dadirep, 1995). Female employees suffer in their career development when social policy is based on myths of motherhood instead of the realities of contemporary life in Africa. Moreover, job type characteristics come into play. Scientific and/or academic work has some features which affect childrearing lifestyle. As Ward and Wolf-Wendel state pointedly, "academic work is consuming by its nature" (2004, p.248). Indeed, life in the academia is not always easy for the women. Academic careers pose tripartite demands of research, teaching and community services. At many institutions, time is taken up mostly by the latter two, leaving research and writing for the evenings and weekends—time that many women need to keep up their homes and raise their families. One of the recent pressures female employees face within organizations includes the responsibilities of managing their own careers in order to enhance job satisfaction. This study investigated the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction of female academics particularly in Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia.

Problem

In comparison to men who averagely spend 40 hours at work for week, women spend between 50 and 80 hours averagely per week (Adebayo 2001 and Olujinmi 2004). Such other tasks which women engage in include child bearing, child caring, husband-caring, and other household works in relation to other demands (Ojo, 2015). These developments have brought enormous challenges to working women especially female academics. Many academic women feel that their career opportunities are limited after having children. Studies have revealed that female academics publish less, have slower career progress and generally have a more difficult time in academic careers than male academics (Phyllis, 1998; Ojo, 2015). Colleagues may assume that they have sold out and are no longer committed to their careers—which may influence tenure, promotion, and other opportunities for advancement (like appointment to chairs, deanships, and high-profile committee). Research supports a history of limited success for professional and especially academic women with families (Ezrati, 1983). In fact, conflicts involving expectation and family obligations appear to run rampant in institutions of higher education.

Research Question

The following questions were set to guide the study:
   i.   Does childcare serve as a potential barrier to career success of female academics in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?
   ii.   Do family responsibilities of working mothers affect their career development particularly women in the academics in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?
   iii.   Are female academics satisfied with their job in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?

Research Objectives
   i.   To analyse the influence of childcare as a potential barrier to career success of women
   ii. To investigate the influence of family responsibilities of working mothers on their career development particularly female academics in Nasarawa State Polytechnic.
   iii. To determine whether female academics are satisfied with their job in Nasarawa State Polytechnic.

Literature review & theoretical framework

There is great deal of literature showing the importance of women in the area of employment, particularly their involvement in the labour force. The work-family conflict situation in academics has been interrogated by scholars and analysts from a variety of analytical prisms. An exegesis of some of these contributions is germane in order to situate the subject matter on a sound analytical framework.

Women in academia in Nigeria and characteristics of academic work

The tertiary institutions in most African countries reflect an imbalance with regard to the percentage of female staff especially in the scientific, technology and leadership positions. This is reflected in the small number of female staff in the faculties of sciences and science-based disciplines and by the fact that most women are found at the lower

professional ranks unable to progress to seniority at the same pace as their male colleagues (AAU, 1995). Reasons for slow mobility of women include their multiple social responsibilities which demand women's time, thus hindering their performance in the sciences and other research required for their mobility on the job as well as lack of female mentors (AAU, 1995). There are many wonderful things about an academic career. It provides more freedom and autonomy than most high-level endeavours, it allows one to work on things one really care about, and the system of tenure provides a level of job security unheard of in most other occupations. At the same time, there are some characteristics that make it particularly demanding. An academic must fulfil multiple roles of teaching, research, community service and that increases the level of demand. Indeed, it is a profession with a great deal of overload (Ojo, 2015).

There is also another aspect of the career that increases the psychological demands it makes on faculty. A professor is supposed to be in her field, one who has the answers to all questions. There is pressure, therefore, always to appear knowledgeable, never to have to ask for help. Mentors are recommended for junior faculty, but are not assumed necessary once one has reached senior status (Greenhaus., Parasuraman & Collins, 2001). So, this, too, increases the psychological pressures of this profession. All of this makes the ideal, the perfect academic as someone who gives total priority to work and has no outside interests and responsibilities. The latter is something that poses a challenge to women faculty, which partly explain why most of them are not married and have no children or married with few children. And in some ways that may be the greatest inequity of all: the profession is set up in such a way that men academics routinely have families, while women, given current rules, find it much more difficult (Hewlett, 2002a, 2002b). However, we do not claim that scientific work is more difficult to reconcile with a family than any other specific occupation, but we draw attention to its special characteristics by reviewing past research. First, the structure of scientific work differs from that of most other occupation. Working hours are generally high and it is not unusual that they exceed contracted ones. Particularly in times of high demand work spills into free time blurring the boundaries between the two (Burchinger, 2004; Beaufays, 2006; Burchinger, 2006). This has to do with the nature of academic work; "There are always article to read, papers to grade, syllabi to update, (Wendel 2004, p.245). On the other hand, the work schedule is generally flexible as is the work place which facilitates combining work and family duties (Macha, 2005; Buchinger, 2006).

In academics, being geographically mobile is necessary to undertake research stays, to take part in conferences, workshops as well as guest lecturers and to obtain extended education. Job mobility is high in the academic field and may entail the opportunity or need to move to another place such mobility is frequently not easy to reconcile with a family (Ackers & Gill 2008). Having children, however, imposes strings on time, energy and geographical mobility, at least for the primary caregiver who typically is the woman. Therefore, women with children are stereotyped in a negative way as being less serious about their career (Armenti, 2004). But, scholars argue that even before they have children female researchers are confronted with a deficit of trust, because they are potential

mothers (Lind, 2007). These traits give a stylised picture of academic work. We certainly do not argue that they characterise all academic positions or that they impose constraints on the reconciliation between work and family in all cases. In fact, Comer & Stites-Doe (2006) identified mediating factors which influence whether balancing is successful or not.

Family Characteristics and Women's Academic Career

Relatively few studies provide evidence on the effects of family characteristics on women's academic careers. Two studies, Long (2001) and Olson (1999), included direct controls for family characteristics in their analyses of tenures and promotions. Family responsibilities hinder women's careers in that women appear to be disadvantaged at points in their careers when they are likely to have children. However, anecdotal evidence from women researchers indicates a perception that gaps will count against them when they apply for funding. This fear of a "bias against caregiving" in academia has been well documented (Drago, 2005; Williams, 2004). Family characteristics can reasonably be expected to influence chances for tenure and promotion, but the direction of their effects is unclear. For example, being married might enhance a doctorate recipient's career if the spouse provides support and motivation. Having children might also provide motivation. Alternatively, the burden of supporting a family might divert time and energy from job responsibilities, thus reducing chances for tenure and promotion. Research results also claims that having children alters women's priorities, decreases their expectations regarding their work and renders them to develop more efficient work styles (Ward & Wolf –Wendel, 2004, 2006; Lind, 2008). While studies argue on the one hand that handling childcare and work triggers stress (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005), they show on the other hand that stress in the work domain may be buffered by the family domain and vice versa (Macha, 2005; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2006).

Even before experiencing any incompatibility between family and job responsibilities themselves, childless female academics anticipate it (Kemkes–Grothenaler, 2003; Van Anders, 2004; Lind, 2008). Therefore, they are very careful in fitting their childbearing plans into their career aspirations (Van Anders, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward 2004) and show a high willingness to postpone motherhood (Kemkes-Grottehthaler, 2003). While from a life-course perspective an academic is probably most pressured during the years of establishing oneself within the scientific community and working towards tenure, the biological clock is ticking in parallel. Many subtle restrictions exist that prevent women from acquiring promotions, tenure, and other forms of advancement. The vocations of successful mother and professional are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Holt, 1981). However, the major segment of the workforce-women, composing 52% are struggling to balance these two most important forces in their lives. Women in academics with spouses and children face location constraints that unmarried women without children do not. These constraints might cause individuals to compromise job choices, and, eventually, reduce their chances for tenure and promotions (Ojo, 2015).

Job Satisfaction

Management of organizations are always more concerned about important outcome variables are crucial bottom-line variables of job performance/productivity, work quality, employees absenteeism and turn over etc. However, from the workers perspective, the most important outcome variable is likely to be job satisfaction (Riggio, 2000). Riggio (2000) posits that, Job satisfaction consists of the feelings and attitudes one has about one's job. He observed that, all aspects of a particular job, good and bad, positive and negative are likely to contribute to the development of feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Two approaches for conceptualizing job satisfaction: global approach, considers overall job satisfaction. This simply asks if the employee is satisfied overall using a yes-no response or a single rating scale. The second - is the facet approach, which considers job satisfaction to be composed of feelings and attitudes about a number of different elements, facts of job. Riggio, (2000) also observed that proponents of the global approach argue that it is overall satisfaction with a job that is important and that such complete satisfaction is more than the sum of satisfaction. While the second approach which is the facets approach focused on separate job facets and maintained that this view provides better, more detailed assessments of job satisfaction. This is because it helps to indicate specific areas of dissatisfaction that can be targeted for improvement (Locke, 1978; Smith, Kendel & Hulin, 1969 in Riggio, 2000)

Job satisfaction, also termed employee satisfaction deals with the measure of workers' contentment with their job, whether or not they like the job or individual aspects or facets of jobs, such as nature of work or supervision (Spector, 1997). It is important to note that most instruments are designed from the facet approach measure satisfaction with such things as pay, working conditions, and relationships with supervisors and coworkers. Other variables like pre-employment expectations, individual personality characteristics and the fit between the organization or job and the employee may also affect worker satisfaction (Ostroff, 1993 in Riggio, 2000). Satisfaction with career choice and the employee career progression can also contribute to job satisafction (Scarpello & Vandenberg, 1992). Other research has suggested that elements of job satisfaction may be deeply rooted in the individual workers – there may be genetic predispositions to be satisfied or not satisfied with one's job (Riggio, 2000).

Theoretical Framework: Boundary Theories

Boundary theory is useful for understanding how individuals move between their work and family roles. Roles are specific forms of behaviour associated with given positions, and they develop from task requirements (Katz & Kahn, 1978). There are at least three core characteristics of boundaries including they are flexible, permeable, and directional (Hecht & Allen, 2004). Specifically, the flexibility characteristic of boundary suggests that physical time and location markers can change (e.g working hours). The permeability characteristic of boundary theory describes the extent to which a person that is physically present in one domain, is psychologically concerned with another domain in their lives (e.g a mother at work that is concerned about a sick child that is at home with a babysitter).

Finally, the directionality characteristic of boundary theory describes the extent to which an individual defines the strengths of their boundaries, that is, there is variance in the extent to which an individual allows work to cross over to home (Hecht et al, 2004). The relevance of boundary theory to this research is to understand how individuals engage in daily role transitions, and the psychological movement between roles, from role exit to role entry (e.g. leave work and coming home to parenting role) (Sutton & Noe, 2004). Role behaviour is the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the actions of others, and the best criterion for understanding role behaviours is to study the expectations of a specific role (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Boundaries are physical and temporal limits that help individuals conceptualize two entities, work and family, as separate from one another. Role boundaries specifically describe how individuals make the distinction between various roles in which they are engaged (i.e. employee, parent). Finally, role identity describes a social construction where individuals use various cues (i.e. goals, values, beliefs) to identify their occupancy in a particular role.

Method

The study is particularly about working mothers in academics (Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia). The population of the study comprise of all female academic staff (52) in Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. The study employed qualitative approach to analyze causal explanation. The characteristics that were considered important here are those that can have some influence on research results. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling technique was adopted, where 30 female academic staff was selected. The research setting is grouped by clusters; i.e faculty/school within the institution; Administrative and Business Studies, Engineering Technology, Environmental Studies, General and Preliminary Studies, Information Technology, Sciences and Technology. The sample was selected on the basis that they are relevant and available for this study. Focus Group Discussion was employed to generate qualitative data. The aim of focus group discussion in this study was to draw conclusion about the participants' views, ideas or experiences. In consonance with previous research, guidelines were observed, such that ten (10) participants was the maximum number allowed in each focus group. The criteria for inclusion in the group were: (a) in the academics full time and not less than 8 years in service (b) working mother with children. This method is appropriate in this study because of the homogenuity of the study group. Data collected were analysed using qualitative method, essential quotations and expressions by the respondents were reported verbatim to enrich the analysis.

Data Analysis

Focus Group Discussion: The discussion was analyzed in line with the research objectives.

- **Does childcare serve as a potential barrier to career success of female academics in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?**

According to the focus group discussion, a participant says "to be sincere, working mothers face so many challenges, which deter their career progression. For example, women are challenged by career interruptions of times taken off from work to stay at home

with children". Working mothers have less time to allocate towards the development and socialization of organizational networks as a result of career interruptions (taking time off from work soon after the children are born), spending less time at work (especially networking functions that takes place after work, conferences, publications etc). According to them, "family practices hinders their career advancement and success" The participants believe that their tasks in academics are not conveniently managed with raising children as academic career is characterised by endless publication and further studies. Childbearing puts limitation on career advancement because timing of childbirth will always delay progression. Again, looking at this in the context of culture, for a woman to give birth and combine this role with her academic career is not easy if not properly managed. If the number of children is minimal, you may have less difficulties, says 2 or 3. Academic career is more stable, assuming is like other civil service where there is high level of redundancy, it might not be a problem but in academics where it demands much time and commitment, it can be difficult and constitute a barrier. Some opportunities are more available for those that don't have children. With children you cannot travel far away from home for conferences and even for further studies.

In Nigeria, and particularly Nasarawa State Polytechnic Lafia, women in academics don't have enough provisions from employees on childcare. All the participants feel that their career opportunities are limited after having children. Colleagues always assume that they have sold out and are no longer committed to their careers, which influence tenure, promotion and other opportunities for advancement (like appointment to chairs, deanships, heads of department, and high-profile committees). "I remembered my colleague who planned to give birth during the dissertation phase of graduate school. Upon informing her supervisors of her pregnancy, replied 'I'm so sorry,' and was unable to find time to meet or read her dissertation drafts until well after she gave birth". This is an exaggeration of the problem, of course, but the problem nonetheless exists.

- **Do family responsibilities of working mothers affect their career development particularly women in the academics in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?**
From the Focus group discussion, participants said that women have to do extra work to be at par with your male colleagues. Many of us have not been able to complete our PhDs because of family commitments, and some of us are getting frustrated for not being able to gain promotion and considering converting to the non-academics. Furthermore, they added that, life would have been much easier, if the institution gives consideration to career women and put in place crèches and other facilities that can further enhance our career.

Although Academics enjoy flexible work schedule, one outcome of this flexibility is that work is mostly accomplished at home in the evening or weekends. All the working mothers reported that they give more time to family responsibilities resulting in more time investment and perceptions of greater family demands for women. From the focus group discussion, all the participants agreed to the fact that there are so many challenges. According to them, combining catering for children, cleaning of the house, cooking, etc, with research is not easy. The time available to write for publication, attend conferences is

limited. Academic work is very challenging, you must keep 'publishing or perish'. One of the participants has this to say "multi-task, academics, presenting papers, publishing, teaching and research, take care of the responsibilities at home, oooh…… All my works are done in the night when children and spouse are sleeping and I have to wake up early to prepare them, God help us!"

"My major challenge is the sacrifice I have to make, I would have completed my PhD long ago, but it is not possible because of family commitments, I cannot attend conferences far away from home, all these have to be put on hold because of family responsibilities." It is more difficult for a woman that doesn't live with the husband, as you have to carry the whole responsibilities. It takes the grace of God to balance work and home responsibilities and these are factors that hinder women career development. "In a way, those that their husbands are not there whether by death or separation, has a hectic task. Dropping children at school and all those petty works that are not recognized actually weigh women down in the pursuit of their career".

Another said "I always experience conflict trying to manage competing demands from home and work". There is no doubt that combining work and family responsibility is a difficult task that the 'double day' of paid and unpaid work done by most women is particularly demanding. According to the participants, they are faced with sets of incompatible expectations and demands; Working mothers experience role conflicts. Even though, women are more likely than men to adjust their jobs around their family responsibilities. In academics, you cannot be promoted without meeting certain criteria. 'Personally, family responsibilities, has limited my career growth.' 'Create time for research, attend conferences and for the housework, it is stressful.' 'When I was alone, I was doing better than now, immediately after marriage, there was a slow movement. However, according to one participant, it is possible to be a successful career woman in spite of family responsibilities. In the reality of today, a woman must not do everything, house-help and maids can be a support. The issue is that she has to make extra effort. Multitasking and priotizing can help as combining the two roles is not a very easy task. The main constraints in academics, is the timing that always conflicts. According to one of the participants, it was argued that it is not every woman who stays at home that is a mother. The quality of the relationship and the quality of motherhood and parenting overrides the more physical phenomenon of a mother just staying at home with children. The issue is how to effectively manage the two roles.

- **Are female academics satisfied with their job in Nasarawa State Polytechnic?**
The majority of the respondents indicated that they are very dissatisfied, some respondents were somehow satisfied, while few were neutral, with conditions of current employment vis-à-vis family responsibilities. Consequently, majority of the respondents were somehow satisfied in spite of various challenges posed by other roles of a mother and family responsibilities. According to one participant, "I feel that my voice is not heard within my workplace". Another said, "I feel that my talents and abilities are not being used to its potential within my current position". It can be deduced from the analyses that work-

family conflict has negative implications on job satisfaction.

"So much burden is on the woman according to culture, if the home is good it is the handwork of the woman even though she may not receive the credit, in my culture, the role of women is well-defined. The women are solely responsible for everything in the home".

According to the participants of the focus group discussion, in Africa, we have a culture that is not like, that of the Europeans and other western countries, in that as soon as you are getting married, you are expected to get pregnant, and after the first child, you may not be able to decide on whether to wait or delay childbirth so as to develop your career because you will attract attention and suspicion from your in-law and even your own family will not be in support. It is rather difficult because having children confers honour and respect and is a way of 'insuring' your marriage. The pressure to publish characteristized the nature of academic work, again publishing demands time which is actually conflicting with family responsibilities of a working mother.

Conclusion

The data presents a picture of a relatively discontent working force, with the majority of respondents in this sample reporting some levels of dissatisfaction with their employment conditions and family responsibilities. The institution appears to be negatively regarded by their female employees in terms of providing equitable and relatively flexible working environments, although there is some reasonable level of improvement. The issue of job satisfaction among female academics identified in this study were seen to be exacerbated by challenges and difficulties working mothers faced. Tertiary institutions can benefit from utilizing the untapped female academic talents if appropriate measures can be taken to enhance work-family balance to promote job satisfaction.

Recommendation

1. The institutions should review their childcare provision and, if possible, invest in additional childcare facilities. This will ease the burden of childcare on the working mothers.

2. It is suggested that institutional attention should be given to providing, publicizing, and encouraging the use of policies that help female faculty deal with professional and family responsibilities which will in turn enhance both the quality of the environment, making it more attractive to academic women, and help individual scholars fulfil professional and family duties.

3. More female (working mothers) academics in the Nasarawa State Polytechnic should be encouraged to apply for PhDs, and academic positions and be more actively supported in these processes and more career guidance should be given at the early career stage by effective mentoring systems and career development seminars.

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