

# WORK-FAMILY ROLE CONFLICT AMONG ACADEMIC WOMEN IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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## Abstract

*Work-family conflict is a form of inter role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains become an obstacle to employees' job performance. This study examined academic women's experiences of work-family role conflict and determined the implications on their job performance. It also identified the factors that trigger academic women's work-family role conflict in Nigerian Public Universities. The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were generated from the administration of questionnaires on 250 randomly selected female academic staff from 3 purposively selected Public Universities in Southern Nigeria. Results revealed that several factors such as long hours of work, overcrowded job schedules, inadequate working facilities, family and domestic responsibilities, teacher-student ratio and cohesive Heads of Departments accounted for greater work-family conflict. It was also found that women's experiences of work-family conflict impacted negatively on their level of job performance and well-being. The study concluded that universities need to pay attention to the interface of work and family by initiating family friendly policies that take into consideration the multifaceted roles of women.*

**Keywords:** Academic women, work-family role conflict, job performance, Public Universities, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The work-family interface is a unified relationship that people experience between their work and other life roles. Work-family conflict arises when pressures from work becomes incompatible with those from family domains (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Conflict arises when employees extend their efforts in satisfying their work demands at the expense of their family demands or vice-versa (Carlson et al 1995). It is therefore a form of friction in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects. This implies that conflict occurs when participation in a competing family activity or when stress has negative effect on behaviour within the family domain (Friedman et al, 1996).

Although work-family conflict is challenging for women and men in all career paths, not much work has been done to emphasize its effects on the job performance of females in the academic profession in Nigeria. With responsibilities for multiple roles in a patriarchal society such as Nigeria, female academics are more likely than men to experience work-family conflict involving incompatible demands.

There are several characteristic aspects of employment in academia that impact on work and family roles. For instance, academics facing review for promotion are expected to demonstrate high levels of competence in cutting-edge research and publishing the outcomes in high impact factor journals (Finkel and Olswang, 1996). A lot of time is spent in this aspect coupled with the multitude of job responsibilities that must be managed on a daily basis which ranges from being a teacher, adviser, editor, consultant to being a committee member etc. Such multiple responsibilities that do not overlap create a sense of dissonance (Holton and Sonnet, 1996).

This study therefore assumes that female academics more than men experience a high level of work-family conflict because of the socio-cultural expectations regarding women's role in the family as well as the lack of support and understanding of family issues at the institutional levels. Despite the huge and substantial body of literature on the intersection of work and family, little attention has been paid to understanding work-family conflict experiences of academic women in Nigerian Public Universities.

This study therefore makes an attempt to examine academic women's experiences of work-family conflict, in Nigerian Public Universities. It also identified the causes as well as the implications of these conflicts on the job

performance and well-being of female academic staff. Because universities have failed to respond flexibly to women as care givers, this study therefore hopes to create awareness of the need for universities to initiate new set of criteria and practices that are gender-friendly and that acknowledge the multiple roles of women.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been carried out to address the issue of work-family conflict in the work place. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) examined the antecedents of conflict between work and family, while Greenhaus and Powell (2006) studied the effects of family responsibilities on the work commitment and job performance of women. Outcomes of research have constantly demonstrated that work-family conflict is prevalent and a common experience of women in the workforce. Ogbogu and Erero (2009) affirm that it is a major source of stress which negatively impact on employees' job performance, well-being and relationships.

With responsibilities for multiple roles Yank and Hawkins (2004) posited that female employees are more likely than men to experience inter role conflict involving incompatible demands. Bryon (2005) explained that conflict occurring between one's work and family responsibilities is bi-directional, indicating that one could experience work to family conflict, while at the same time experience family to work conflict. Both conflicts have been found to decrease performance and satisfaction in the particular domain in which interference is experienced. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three types of work-family conflicts. These are: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. According to them, time-based conflict occurs when time spent on activities within one role cannot be devoted to activities within another role. This implies that time obligations from role make it physically impossible to fulfill expectations from another role. Strain-based conflict is when roles are incompatible such that the strain created by one makes it difficult to comply with the demands of another. Strain-based conflict occurs when the strain from a given role affects one's performance in another role. In this way strain from one role which can include stress, tension, anxiety and fatigue makes it more challenging to fulfill obligations from another competing role. The final type of conflict defined by Greenhaus and Beutell(1985), is behaviour-based conflict in which specific patterns of in-role behaviour may be incompatible with expectations regarding behaviour in another role.

The time divide between family and work roles for female academic staff contributes to the incongruity between the two domains. In Ohio University for instance, Jacobs (2004) posited that faculty members work an average of 50 hours per week. According to him women are expected to work hardest during the tenure-track years precisely when their biological clocks are ticking the loudest (Wilson, 2003). This is when they are expected to set out their own research agenda, which is done at the beginning of an academic career. This according to Wilson (2003) is hindered by heavy teaching loads, administrative job assignments, project supervision, teaching large undergraduate classes, assuming greater student advisory and counseling functions etc. In view of these, Enders (2000) opined that it is difficult for academic women to coordinate work at the university with family responsibilities.

Duxbury et al (1994) went further to specify the family based factors that trigger conflict. These include: marital conflict, number of hours spent by females on household duties, childcare and extended family care and support. Pleck et al (1980) added that the number of children possessed by female academics is the foremost family related variable that creates greater work-family conflict. According to them, a lot of time is spent in this aspect and universities have paid little attention to understanding work-family conflict experiences of academic women. Work-family conflict impacts negatively on academic women's job performance and well-being (Karatepe and Sokmen, 2006). This assertion confirms the proposition of role theory propounded by Kahn et al (1964). Role theory suggests that the demands for multiple roles accentuate inter-role conflict which in turn leads to symptoms of strain and negative outcomes such as reduced performance. It provides an understanding for the tension involving work and family and its impact on the fulfillment of tasks in other domains. Based on this theory, this study proposes that work-family conflict has a direct effect on the job performance and well-being of academic women in Nigerian Public Universities.

### METHODOLOGY

This study which adopted the survey research design was carried out in three purposively selected Nigerian Public Universities. The study obtained its data from both primary and secondary sources. In order to locate women who were involved in work and family roles, only married academic women with children were used for this study. Consequently the random sampling technique was used in picking 250 of such female academic staffs from three Universities located in Southern Nigeria. This was done because the central interest of the study was to examine academic women's experiences of conflict that arise due to work and family responsibilities. The respondents' demographic data, the intersection of the conflict between work and family domains, their causes as well as the

implications on the job performance and well being of female academic staff were measured by a four-point likert scale questionnaire, which ranged from strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree to disagree. Being a survey and a descriptive research, the statistical technique used for analyzing the retrieved data was the simple percentage.

#### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal the intersection of work-family-conflict experiences of academic women, the causes, as well as the implications on their job performance and well being in selected Public Universities in Nigeria. The themes are presented on the tables and discussed below:-

**Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Demographic Data**

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29	60	24
30-39	100	40
40-49	50	20
50 and above	40	16
Total	250	100
<b>Highest Educational Qualification(s)</b>		
Bachelors Degree	45	18
Masters Degree	123	50
Doctorate Degree	82	32
Total	250	100
<b>Number of Children</b>		
1-3	182	72
4 and above	68	28
Total	250	100
<b>Ages of Children (years)</b>		
0-9	123	49.2
10-18	72	28.2
19 and above	55	22
Total	250	100

Table 1 above shows the summary of the demographic data of the female academic staff used for the study. Data in the table reveal that majority (40%) of the female respondents are between 30 – 39 years of age, 24% are between 20 – 29 years, those between 40-49 years are 20%, while very few of them (16%) are 50 years and above. This result shows that majority of the respondents are young and probably still at their child rearing stage. It confirms the fact that the study focused more on women with children who are involved in work and family roles.

The educational qualifications of the respondents reveal that majority (50%) of the respondents possess Masters Degrees as their highest educational qualification, 32% have Doctorates, while 18% possess Bachelors Degrees. The child rearing practice of majority of the respondents and the young ages of their children may be attributed to their inability to acquire Doctorate Degrees which is a major prerequisite for advancing in academia. Previous studies have shown that having young children is related to role strain and time shortage for completion of postgraduate programmes (Aluko, 2009).

The table further indicates that 72% of the respondents have between 1 – 3 children, while 28% have up to 4 and even more. Information on the ages of children reveals that 49.2% of the respondents have very young children who are between 0 – 9 years of age. Those whose children are between 10 – 18 years are 28.2% while those with older children of 19 years and above are 22%. This result confirms the fact that majority of the respondents are women with young children who are still at their child-bearing stage.

**Table 2: The determinants of work-family-conflict among academic women in Nigerian Public Universities, (Numbers in brackets represent percentages).**

Variables	SA	A	SD	D
Long hours of office work.	102 (40.8)	75 (30)	38 (15.2)	35 (14)
Overcrowded academic job schedules.	105 (42)	82 (32.8)	40 (16)	23 (9.2)
Inadequate working facilities.	95 (38)	73 (39.2)	45 (18)	37 (14.8)
Cohesive Heads of Departments.	97 (38.8)	83 (33.20)	27 (10.8)	43 (17.2)
Increased students' enrollment without Corresponding increase in academic staff.	87 (34.8)	72 (28.8)	43 (17.2)	48 (19.2)

Family and domestic responsibilities.	108 (43.2)	82 (32.8)	35 (14)	25 (10)
Heavy teaching load.	78 (31.2)	58 (23.2)	63 (25.2)	51 (20.4)
Assuming greater student advisory Counseling functions.	95 (38)	76 (30.4)	43 (17.2)	36 (14.4)
Lack of policies that respond flexibly to Women as care givers.	52 (20.8)	50 (20)	80 (32)	68 (27.2)
Attending meetings and administrative Assignments.	54 (21.6)	51 (20.4)	83 (33.2)	62 (24.8)
Heavy load of theses supervision.	46 (18.4)	49 (19.6)	92 (36.8)	63 (25.2)

Table 2 above shows academic women's views of the determinants of work-family-conflict in Nigerian Public Universities. Figures on the table reveal that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the following variables are mainly responsible for their experiences of work-family-conflict:- family and domestic responsibilities (43.2%), overcrowded academic job schedule (42%), long hours of office work (40.8%), cohesive Heads of Departments (38.8%), inadequate working facilities (38%), greater student advisory and counseling functions (38%), increased student enrolment without corresponding increase in academic staff (34.8%) and heavy teaching load (31.2%). The result shows that work-family-conflict is determined by a number of both job-related and family-related factors and that time spent in activities within one domain makes it difficult to participate effectively in another domain. These views are consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) observation regarding the fact that stress within the family domain is capable of producing conflict in work roles. It also negatively affects their motivation to respond to demands of other domains. This result also confirms Aluko's (2009) assertion that strain in performing one role impacts on women's ability to perform another role and that work and family roles induce stress spill over from one domain to the other.

Furthermore, the table reveals that heavy load of theses supervision (36.8%), attending meetings and engaging in administrative assignments (33.2%) and lack of policies that respond flexibly to women as care givers (32%) did not trigger work-family conflict. This is because a higher percentage of them strongly disagreed with these variables. It is interesting to note that majority of the respondents indicated that heavy load of theses supervision and spending hours at meetings with administrative assignments were not sources of work-family-conflict. This may be due to the fact that theses supervision is a meaningful and interesting job schedule which results in publication outcomes, a major prerequisite for elevation in academia. Women with older children may be able to spend long hours at meetings because they are less saddled with child-rearing practices. Furthermore, lack of family friendly policies does not seem to be a source of conflict probably due to the ideology of patriarchy in the Nigerian society that believes that women alone must engage in the multiple roles of caring for the family. This finding is also attributed to the sex-role ideology that emphasizes women's greater involvement in family and domestic responsibilities.

**Table 3: The Effect of work-family-conflict on the job performance and well being of academic women,(Numbers in brackets represent percentages).**

Variables	SA	A	SD	D
Work-family-conflict negatively impacts on women's research activities.	110 (44)	80 (32)	28 (15.2)	2 (8.8)
It leads to a reduction in paper writing and publication.	105 (42)	87 (34.8)	40 (16)	18 (7.2)
Impact on women's ability to meet up with deadlines.	90 (36)	83 (33.2)	42 (18)	35 (14)
Reduces women's participation in conferences and academic workshops.	85 (34)	73 (29.2)	62 (24.8)	30 (12)
Lowers productivity level both at home and at work.	75 (30)	70 (28)	65 (26)	40 (16)
Reduces the overall quality of life of women.	40 (16)	65 (26)	95 (38)	50 (20)
Results in psychological strain.	103 (41.2)	80 (32)	42 (16.8)	25 (10)
Increases emotional exhaustion.	45 (18)	55 (22)	87 (34.8)	63 (25.2)
Results in poor health outcomes.	102 (40.8)	85 (34)	30 (12)	33 (13.2)

Academic women's opinions about the effect of work-family-conflict on their job performance and well-being are shown in Table 3 above. Majority of the respondents strongly agree that work-family-conflict impacts on their work and well being. They specified that it impacts on their research activities (44%) as well as the rate at which they write papers and publish the research outcomes (42%), which are critical for advancing through the academic career ladder. Furthermore, 36% of the respondents strongly agree that work-family-conflict impacts on their ability to meet up with deadlines, 34% indicated that it reduces their rate of participation in conferences and workshops, while 30% posited that it lowers their productivity level both at home and at work. Data on the table further reveals that work-family-conflict results in poor health outcomes (40.8%) and psychological strain (41.2%) among female academic staff. These results accentuate the fact that the multitude of responsibilities associated with academic job trigger strain-based conflict, such that tension, anxiety and fatigue experienced within one role affects one's performance in another role. Consequently women experience strain-based conflict as they strive hard to fulfill different role expectations impact on their work and family life.

It is interesting to note that figures on the table shows that majority (34.8%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that work-family-conflict increased emotional exhaustion. This may be attributed to the fact that although women are involved in multiple roles, advancement in technology makes accomplishment of tasks easier for woman. Generally, the findings of this study and empirical data reveal that academic women in Nigerian universities experience work-family-conflicts. Due to the challenges of the academic profession as well as family-related variables, the problem of work-family-conflict was found to be pervasive.

### CONCLUSION

This study investigated academic women's experiences of work-family-conflict in Nigerian public universities. It identified the causes of work-family-conflict as well as the implications on the job performance and well-being of female academic staff.

The study found that academic women's experiences of work-family-conflict was huge and pervasive. This was accentuated by women's multiple role linked to job and family related factors. Evidences revealed that negative experiences within the work environment impaired academic women's job performance, reduced their level of productivity and also resulted in negative health outcomes. Consequently, it is evident that extensive role conflict which emanates from both family and work domains is associated with high levels of work-family-conflict. A plausible explanation is that academic job responsibilities that must be managed on daily basis ranging from doing research, teaching, being a committee member, consulting, to being an editor requires large investments of time, concentration and emotion, that there is little time and energy remaining for other domains. Consequently, strain-based conflict was found to be associated with female academics because of the job characteristics of academic positions that involve a high degree of ambiguity, tension as well as worry associated with a multitude of responsibilities. As a means of coping with feelings of job – related anxiety, female academics work longer hours resulting in greater family based conflict as expectations of family members are neglected. This results in family-work interference as well as role overload.

Rather than overlook the evident struggles to balance work and family, common among many female parent academics and which create greater work-family interference, universities in Nigeria should take steps to support academic women in achieving success in academia and at home. There is the need to develop institutional policies that push for changes in structures and practices that are not gender friendly, while promoting family-friendly policies at the institutional level. Understanding issues and challenges facing female academics contending with work-family-conflict is crucial to supporting the success of women in academia and reducing their experiences of work-family-conflict.

#### Author's background information.

**Christiana, O. Ogbogu** lectures Public Administration in Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Her doctorate degree dissertation evaluated the labour input of females in Nigerian Public Universities. Her research work focuses on higher educational administration as well as gender analysis in cross cutting issues in Public Administration and Human Resource Management. She has won academic awards and published in reputable national and international journals. She has also presented papers in local and international conferences within Nigeria, Ghana, India, Spain, Canada and the United States.

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