# THE ENIGMA OF WORKING MOTHERS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN NSUKKA L.G.A. OF ENUGU STATE: WORK-FAMILY ROLE CONFLICT

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**ABSTRACT**
*For the past two decades, employment rates of mothers have increased against most traditional practices that stipulate women as home-stay. The increase in mothers' rates of employment creates a basic income matrix of family support that ensures socio-economic wellbeing and triggers stress on working mothers at the same time. Most mothers are employed in institutions of higher learning; which Enugu State is not left out. It is against this background that this study examines the impact of work-family role conflict among working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A. of Enugu State. The study was guided by three research questions that were converted to objectives. The study tested two hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. The study adopted a descriptive statistical method. The population of the study was mothers who were employees of University of Nigeria and College of Education, Nsukka. The total number of mothers from the two higher institutions is 4,343. The sample size for the study was 313 working mothers. Questionnaire was used for the study. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis. The results showed coping strategies for working mothers, factors that help working mothers in their dual role functionalities. The result iterates psychological effects of role conflict on working mothers. Based on the findings of the study, it recommends there should be a balance between family and work, especially as it relates to working mothers. It recommends that for working mothers to be emotionally and psychologically strong, the support of their husbands is essential.*

## Introduction

In most societies, the basic role of mothers is outline of; preparing the family meal, taking care of the children, washing the husband's clothes, cleaning the house and other homework that are peculiar to females. This is most common in traditional African societies where the responsibility of taking care of the home is believed to be solely that of the woman. Therefore, women still find it difficult to disassociate themselves from the cultural or

traditional roles imposed on them lest they will be seen as being irresponsible (Elegbede, 2012). Thus, the roles and status of women in the society are well recognized against the new trend of feminization on the labour market (Casale, 2004), that has increased gender neutrality on employment which Nigeria is not exempted from.

Work-family role conflicts are dual functionality of two domains (work and family), which are not always compatible, therefore creating conflicts between work and family life (Frone, Ruseell & Cooper, 1992). Dual career mothers have to attend to two major life roles. That is, doing her prescribed jobs at the workplace and managing the home. This problem is most common in traditional African societies where the responsibility of taking care of the home is believed to be solely that of the woman, while at the same time performing official activities (Eremie & Kennedy, 2015). These roles demand that such a mother wakes up early to perform her domestic roles before going to work and also return home to perform her stipulated duties as culturally bound in the evening. The circling of these roles leads to different conflict situations at home and work place. Such conflicts may include verbal and physical assaults, threat to marriage, incompetence, queries, job dissatisfaction, boredom and low turnover rates, which leads to psychological distress, depression and dissatisfaction both in marriage and job. The consequences of these conflicts are seen in the role effectiveness of such mothers in both organization and domestic life roles. According to Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, (2000), for the employers (workplace) such role conflicts means dissatisfaction, lower standard of work performance, disregard of organizational goals and for the family (husband and children) resentment, depression, lack of trust, misunderstanding and disrespect among others.

The patriarchal nature of African societies makes things more difficult for women to balance work and family roles. For example, most Igbo societies in Nigeria have formidable patriarchal structure such that women are largely described as home-workers. Men are perceived as lords over their families, their wives must take permission from them before doing certain things. This is not the case with men as they are free to engage in any activities of their choice. On this, Asiyanbola (2005) posits that patriarchy has been defined as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Feminists have argued that in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist or socialist, a sex gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously (Makama, 2013).

On the other hand, Azodo and Eke (2007), posits that in traditional African societies, a woman's place is seen to be in the home space, where she is limited to domestic functions, bearing and rearing of children, while the man roams the wild looking for adventure in work and war. That man is seen as the leader and head of the society, while the woman cares for and nurtures the family and the home. These views have overtly and covertly impacted negatively on the women folk and indirectly on men, also on the socio-economic and political advancement of African society in general. According to Dogo (2014), opine that from the time a child is born in most traditional society (Igbo), he or she is cast in the role ascribed for the sexes by society. The children are therefore brought up in the awareness of societal gender roles and grow up to fulfill them. These roles confine the sexes to supposedly appropriate manners of behavior and areas of endeavor based on their biological identification of being either male or female.

Sequel to these arguments, Omadjohwoefe (2011) further exposed: "The male child is allowed to wander farther, get involved in rough and tumble play, while the girl is highly restricted and closely monitored." With such a strong patriarchal structure in Igbo society, women who are employed are confronted with the challenges of coping with work and family role conflict. It is against this background that this study examined work-family role conflict: the enigma of working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State Nigeria.

## Statement of problem

In Nigeria, the female labour participation in jobs rose significantly in the past few years largely as a result of improvement in girl child education/enrolment. This implies that, according to Ajiboye, (2008), that the family structure is moving from traditional single-income families to double-income families. The

new operand shift caused by the double-income paradigm in family life instigates role conflicts that result in limited time spouses spend together. Scholars have examined different aspects of work-family roles conflict,(Ajala, 2007, 2009, Aminah, 2008; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1997 Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006; Netemeyer, Maxham & Pullig 2005; Karatepe & Sokmen 2006) etc. Most of these researches have concentrated on the job performance, satisfaction and organizational wellbeing without much consideration on coping strategies as they constitute part of the organizational wellbeing. It is against this background that this study decided to focus on mothers given the evidence that working mother's hours on work drop significantly more than those of men when family issues, especially having children, are involved (TUC, 2008). Its' an attempt to fill this gap that this study investigates work-family role conflict: the enigma of working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka Local Government Area in Enugu North senatorial zone, Enugu state.

## Research questions

1. How do mothers in paid employment cope with work-family roles in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A?

2. What are the factors that help working mothers cope with their work-family roles in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.?

3. What are the effects of work-family roles on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.?

## Objective of the Study

In Nigeria, the female labour participation in paid employment rose significantly in the past few years largely as a result of educational improvement (Ajiboye, 2008), suggesting that family structure is moving from traditional single-income families to double-income families. The new family-work context results in role-conflicts caused by limited time among husband and wife. Scholars (Van Daalen, Willemsen & Sanders, 2006) have examined different aspects of work-family role conflicts among families; it seems that nothing has been done on work-family role conflict among working mothers in institutions of higher learning, especially in the Enugu North Senatorial zone. Therefore, the study is an attempt to fill this gap by investigating work-family role conflict among working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu North senatorial zone, Enugu State.

## The Specific Objectives were:

i. Examine how mothers in paid employment cope with their work-family roles in Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

ii. Ascertain factors that help mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka cope with their work-family roles.

iii. Find out the effect of dual functions on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A, Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

## Research Hypotheses

**Ho1:** There is a significant relationship between age and work-family role conflict among working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

**Ho2:** There is a significant relationship between staff category (academic and non-academic) and work-family role conflict among working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

## Conceptual clarification

An understanding of the concept of work-family conflict is of practical importance for this study. This will buttress the impact of work-family role conflict thereby working towards solving inherent problems to achieve a balance between work demands and family obligations (Burke, Fiksenbaum, El-Kot, Koyuncu & Jing, 2011). Work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict that occurs as a result of incompatibility between work and family role demands. This incompatibility in role demands often leads to unhealthy functioning in both work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Debatably, work and family roles are probably the most

important roles in an individual's life (Morris & Madsen, 2007) and each part has high expectations that could bring forth conflict if it is not effectively managed (Elloy & Smith, 2004). The greater the role demands of an individual's employment, the higher the level of conflict that they are likely to experience in the family domain and vice-versa (Cinamon, 2006). However, conflict does not only come from the work domain to the family domain, the reverse can also occur depending on an individual's involvement in both spheres.

Among working mothers, this role conflict occurs when work demands interfere with family needs and family-work conflict occurs when family demands interfere with work requirements. Accordingly, feelings, attitudes, behaviours, and emotions in work and family domains usually transcend the physical boundaries of home and work domains; and these domains affect one another through a permeable boundary in a positive or negative way (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). This implies that spillover tends to occur between family roles and work performance. Usually this would arise when feelings, attitudes, and behaviours in one are affected by role participation in another. For example, happiness at work leads to happiness at home and vice-versa.

This puzzle of dual role functionality characterized the daily routine of working mothers in paid employment. It is on these institutional roles on women that this study examined the enigma of working mothers in institutions of higher learning using Nsukka LGA. as scope of the study.

## Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design which is often preferred when the aim of a study is to describe, explain or explore a phenomenon. The population of the study was about 4,343 working mothers from the University of Nigeria and College of Education, both in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The sample size for the study was 313 working mothers from the above mentioned institutions. This number provides statistical valid data for meeting the study objectives. The study was guided by three research questions that were converted to objectives. Instrument titled Work-Family Role Conflict Questionnaire (WFRCQ) was used for this study. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher after a review of existing literature. The questionnaire was made up of two parts; parts A and B. Part "A" seeks the demographic information of the respondents while part "B" is arranged in clusters. Cluster "A" seeks the extent of women involvement in paid employment in institutions of higher learning. Cluster "B" seeks information on how women in paid employment cope with dual functional roles in family and workplace. Cluster "C" seeks information on the factors that help women cope in their workplace and familial obligations. Cluster "D" seeks information on the effect of dual functions on working women in institutions of higher learning. Cluster "E" sought for information on the remedial measures required to enhance working mothers' dual functionality roles.

## Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was trial tested on 20 working mothers from Bishop Shanahan Hospital which is outside the study area. The Cronbach Alpha values were .89 for cluster A, .78 for cluster B, .81 for cluster C, .78 for cluster D and .77 for cluster E respectively. The overall reliability of the instrument was .81. The results indicated that the various sections are reliable.

## Design and Statistics

In the analysis of data for this study, inferential statistics were used. The study tested two hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. The results were presented based on the research questions. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the questions. The benchmark for accepting or rejecting a statement was 2.5. The t-test was used to test the hypotheses raised. Result was presented in tables.

## Theoretical framework

Gender construction and Norm theories were adopted for this study. According to Janssen, (2018), the term gender role was first used by John Money and his colleagues in 1954, during the course of his study of intersex individuals to describe the manner in which these individuals expressed their status as a male or female in a situation where no clear biological assignment existed. The gender construction theory posits that by doing disproportionately less or more

domestic work, men and women are respectively reacting to normative conceptions regarding their genders. Women "do gender" by engaging in domestic activities; conversely, women also "do gender" by not regarding their paid employment as breadwinning. Men "do gender" by withholding themselves from housework and treating their paid employment as breadwinning. The gender construction theory illustrates the power of gender norms in shaping behavior, but does not describe the internal psychological processes that lead individuals to feel obliged to conform to those norms (Prottas & Thompson, 2006).

Norm theory was propounded by Kahneman & Miller, (1986). This theory deals with the issue of gender role expectations based on cultural praxis. Although this theory may not overtly focus on work and family issues, understanding the functionality of societal norms is much relevant to role expectations on working mothers' performance at home and work. Norms regarding motherhood are especially powerful because there is so much pressure surrounding the various roles mothers participate in as quoted in Kirchmeyer, (2002). Mothers may be criticized by others because of their career aspirations or for their impatience with childcare. Disapproval may leave mothers feeling pressured by their peers or families to articulate acceptable feelings and goals. Gradually, the suppression of their feelings may become more internally motivated and may ultimately be experienced as reality. Women who are adamant that decisions to compromise their work lives are established on choice may, in fact, feel that way because they have internalized the norms (Prottas & Thompson, 2006). Their failure to blame their husbands for the unequal distribution of domestic work may be a consequence of having suppressed resentment by shifting their attention from a comparison between their spouses and themselves or a comparison between their spouses and other men.

Analyzing the above theories in relation to cultural expectations among working mothers, it suggests that the stipulated rules and roles of a given community pre-determines work-family roles among male and female in a society. From the tenets of these theories, one will deduce that society assigns roles to spouses in familial obligations and these roles assigned became the basic fabrics and fundamentals that stipulate acceptable norms and behavioral attitudes that shape work-family roles in the society.

## Result Presentations

The results were presented based on the research questions as shown below:

**Research question 1**: How do working mothers in paid employment cope in their workplace in Nsukka L.G.A.?

**Table 1: How working mothers in paid employment cope in their workplace in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

| S/N | Items | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **i.** | Keeping track of stressors and developing ways of managing them | 2.7 | 0.81 | Accepted |
| **ii.** | Develop healthy attitudes on work aspects that cause stress. | 2.8 | 0.77 | Accepted |
| **iii.** | I make good use of working and non-working hours | 3.1 | 0.66 | Accepted |
| **iv.** | Learning how to relax when appropriate | 2.6 | 0.78 | Accepted |
| **v.** | Discussing official issues that cause work stress with supervisors | 2.9 | 0.78 | Accepted |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **vi.** | Involvement in physical activities | 2.5 | 0.89 | Accepted |
| **vii.** | Getting more sleep | 2.8 | 0.9 | Accepted |
| **vii.** | Using Relaxation as a strategy | 3.2 | 0.6 | Accepted |

The above table showed the coping strategies working mothers use to cope with role conflicts. It was found that all the items that the researcher presented were accepted as the coping strategies that working mothers use. The mean scores for the items range from 2.5 to 3.2. This means that all the items were within the acceptable benchmark for rejecting and accepting items. That is to say that working mothers use a total of eight strategies to cope with work-family role conflict.

**Research question 2:** What are the factors that help working mothers cope in their work places in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.?

**Table 2: The factors that help working mothers cope in their work place in institutions of higher learning in Enugu North**

| S/N | ITEMS | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **i.** | Encouragement from spouse | 2.9 | 0.56 | Accepted |
| **ii.** | Counselling | 2.7 | 0.91 | Accepted |
| **iii.** | The thought of being paid | 2.6 | 0.85 | Accepted |
| **iv.** | The thought getting promoted | 2.9 | 0.76 | Accepted |
| **v.** | Verbal praises from boss | 2.6 | 0.67 | Accepted |
| **vi.** | The thought of the growing unemployment in Nigeria | 3.1 | 0.67 | Accepted |

The above table showed the factor that helps working mothers cope in their work place in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A. The result revealed that the mean scores of the items presented range from 2.6 to 3.1. The mean score is above the benchmark set for accepting or rejecting items. Therefore, all the items were accepted as the factors that help women cope in their work place in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

**Research question 3:** What are the effects of dual functions on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A, Enugu North Senatorial Zone?

**Table 3: The effect of work-family role on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

| S/N | Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **i.** | Increase in stress level | 3.3 | 0.47 | Accepted |
| **ii.** | Job dissatisfaction | 3.4 | 0.48 | Accepted |
| **iii.** | Lack of family happiness | 3.6 | 0.61 | Accepted |
| **iv.** | Lack of concentration at work | 2.9 | 0.42 | Accepted |
| **v.** | In ability to meet up with some official and family responsibilities | 3.7 | 0.68 | Accepted |
| **vi.** | Increased aggression | 2.6 | 0.44 | Accepted |

The table above showed the effect of dual functions on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A., Enugu North senatorial zone. The result showed that all the items had mean scores that range from 2.6 to 3.3. Therefore, all the items were accepted as the effect of dual functions on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

## Test of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between age and work-family role conflict among working mothers in higher institutions of learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

**Table 4: t-test analysis of younger and older working mothers on work-family role conflict in higher institutions of learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

| Grouping | N | Mean | SD | T | Df | Sig.(2tailed) | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Younger (20-35) | 189 | 3.3 | 0.87 | | | | |
| Older (36 above) | 124 | 2.4 | 0.66 | 1.162 | 651 | 0.002 | Sig |

Using the eyeball test, looking at the means reveals a significant difference in the sample means. Levene's test indicates by the p-value whether we should assume equal or unequal variances. If the p value is <0.05 the evidence suggests that the variances are unequal. Here p =0.002. Hence the equal variances assumed is <0.005, we accept the alternate hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant statistical difference on the mean rating of younger and older working mothers on work-family role conflict.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between staff category (academic and non-academic) and work-family role conflict among working mothers in higher institutions of learning in Nsukka L.G.A.

**Table 5: t-test analysis of academic and non-academic working mothers on work-family role conflict in higher institutions of learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

| Grouping | N | Mean | SD | T | Df | Sig.(2tailed) | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic | 160 | 3.5 | 0.48 | | | | |
| Non-academic | 153 | 3.4 | 0.42 | 8.162 | 653 | 0.61 | NS |

Using the eyeball test, looking at the means reveals an insignificant difference in the sample means. Levene's test indicates by the p-value whether we should assume equal or unequal variances. If the p value is <0.05 the evidence suggests that the variances are unequal. Here p =0.61. Hence the equal variances assumed is >0.005, we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant statistical difference on the mean rating of academic and non-academic working mothers on family-work role conflict.

## Discussion of Findings

The discussion of this study was done according to sub-headings guarded by the research objectives and questions:

**i. How do women in paid employment cope in their workplace in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.?**

The result of the study found that working mothers in the institution of higher learning cope by keeping track of stressors and developing ways of managing them; develop healthy attitudes at work: making good use of working and non-working hours; learning how to relax when appropriate; discussing official issues that cause work stress with supervisors: involvement in physical activities; getting more sleep and using relaxation as a strategy. What this means is that working mothers are fully aware of the challenges faced from their dual functionality roles of work-family conflicts. Therefore, they make efforts to ameliorate such effects on them by making use of the above mentioned coping strategies in exonerating the negative impact of work-family roles on them. This result finding is in consonant with previous studies by these scholars (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 1988; Gutek, 1992; Frone, Ruseell & Cooper, 1992), which suggests that women takes preventative measure to address the challenges that come with work-family role conflict. The result of the hypothesis testing showed insignificant difference in the sample mean and this suggests that both academic and non-academic staff is significantly affected by work-family role conflict. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted and concludes that there is no significant statistical difference on the mean rating of academic and non-academic working mothers on family-work role conflict.

**ii. The factors that help women cope in their workplace in institutions of higsher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

The finding of the study outlined factors that help working mothers cope in the institution of higher learning as: the encouragement they get from spouse and counseling, the thought of being paid, the thought of getting promoted, verbal praises from boss and the thought of the growing unemployment in Nigeria. The result of this study implies that motivation plays an essential role in helping working mothers to continue to push when confronted with work-family role conflict. It also suggests that the degree to which individuals are satisfied at work may be influenced by the existence of factors and conditions that have a motivating effect (Furnham, 2002). Therefore, the findings implies that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors are useful elements for working mothers when faced with the pressures and demands of work-family role conflicts. This finding also is in support of the studies conducted by (Wright, 2003; Mattis, 1994; & Phillips and Imkoff, 1997), which states that a supportive environment helps women's organizational development. That is, the implementation of organizational support policy and developing better understanding of the conditions under which women work are fundamental in managing work-family stress and family-work role conflict.

**iii. The effect of work-family role on working mothers in institutions of higher learning in Nsukka L.G.A.**

The findings of the study found that working mothers are faced with the following challenges as effects of work-family role conflicts; increased stress level, job dissatisfaction, lack of family happiness, lack of concentration at work, inability to meet up with some official and family responsibilities and increased aggression. The result of this study implies that job satisfaction plays an essential role in helping working mothers to continue to push when confronted with family-role conflict. It also suggests that the degree to which individuals are satisfied at work may also influence their overall wellbeing because career satisfaction always leads to life satisfaction. The finding of the study supports previous study conducted by Turliuc and Buliga, (2014), which revealed that married working women experienced more work-family conflict than unmarried women. The hypothesis test result showed that there is a significant work-family role conflict among younger working mothers than the older ones. This could be because the older ones may have grown up children who will be assisting with some domestic chores unlike their younger counterparts whose children may still be too tender to engage in domestic activities. The result of the hypothesis testing also suggests that both academic and non-academic staff are significantly affected by work-family role conflict. The result of this study confirms the spillover and compensatory models. The spillover theory supports the perception that life and work satisfaction are interconnected, and that satisfaction in one aspect of an individual's life may spillover to satisfaction in another domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This means, therefore, that dissatisfaction with work could spill over to familial obligations and vice-versa.

## Conclusion

In general, this article adds to the overall role of conflict literature by exploring the causes and consequences of work-family conflict among Nigerian working mothers in the institution of higher learning, using the two tertiary institutions in Nsukka L.G.A. as the study population and the study adopted gender construction and norm theories as models of analyses. Outlining the findings, this article offers insights that would be useful for academics, government, policymakers and other stakeholders in Nigeria with possible strategies to curtail the negative effects of work-family role conflict on working mothers in the organized labor market. There is a need for a friendly environment as a preventative measure or family friendly policies in the workplace and this will curtail some of the stress working mothers' encounters at work.

More so, the article reveals great importance of work-family life by suggesting a balance between family and work, especially as it relates to working mothers. It reiterates regular counseling services for working mothers, this will enable them to manage conflicts that arise from work and family role experiences.

Finally, the article showed practical implications on the relationship between working mothers and their spouses. And this suggests that for working mothers to be emotionally and psychologically strong to address the challenges that come with work-family role conflict, the support of their husbands, colleagues and their organization is essential.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

i. Organizational counselling services in all organized work places; this will help workers to cope in most adverse situations.

ii. Organizations should create an atmosphere of friendliness to working mothers; this will exonerate most of the stress they went through in the course of discharging their dual functionality.

iii. Supportive environment at work and family will ensure satisfaction which will ameliorate stress and serve as a psychological defense mechanism for working mothers in their workplace.

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