

# WORK LIFE BALANCE AND WOMEN IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose:* This paper examines the importance of Work Life Balance (WLB) as it relates to working class women in Nigeria. It addresses the need to incorporate work life balance into work environment as a means of competitive advantage which in the long run would contribute to the economic growth of Nigeria.

*Design/methodology/approach:* This study focused on a phenomenological approach using an exploratory method. A sample of 60 employees working in different service industries (banking, power sector, education and healthcare) were used. Data was collected with the use of interviews and was analysed through coding and transcribing.

*Findings:* The findings revealed that women bear the bulk of domestic responsibilities, however work life balance for women in Nigeria is still wishful thinking, even though more women continue to join the workforce as more than half of the nation's population consist of women. *Value:* The study further strengthens the recommendations of creating work life balance especially for women in the work place and seeing it not just as a case for social responsibility but for competitive advantage.

*Classification:* Research Paper

**Keywords:** Work Life Balance, Competitive Advantage, Nigeria, Work Life Conflict

## INTRODUCTION

According to World Bank (2018), Nigeria has a population of over 190 million. Seventy percent (70%) of that population is occupied by women. As a result, more women are in the work force and usually combine this with domestic duties. Initially, men were the bread winners of homes while the women stayed at home to tend to the kids and attend to other domestic affairs but this changed during the World War II when women were introduced to paid labour as a means of keeping up with production. Overtime, more women became educated and started taking up jobs as a means to support their homes (Lero & Bardoel, 2009). Over the years, women's participation in the labor force has increased greatly mainly due to financial reasons. It is nearly impossible for families with children and relatives to survive on the income of the man alone. The standard of living in Nigeria is one of the poorest in the world with a GDP of 9.5% as at 2018 (CIA World Factbook, 2018). As such, most families experience situations where both parents have to work to make ends meet.

As more women join the work force, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to manage work and home; with these increase comes work life conflict.

In Nigeria, the structure system is mostly controlled by tradition and cultural norms. Since the pre-colonial period, the typical Nigerian woman has been engaged in diverse traditional economic activities, which is usually based on a division of labour that is rooted in a patriarchal tradition and based on the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority. Traditionally, women are still perceived as the primary care giver of the home where she is expected to cook, clean, take care of the kids, cater for her husband as well as her in laws. She is expected perform these roles to perfection and still earn a living for her family.

More so, due to globalization and the growing need for organizations to stand out; policies such as 24/7 open hours or longer working hours have accelerated conflicts between work and homes. Families spend more time on work related activities giving all their energies and less time on non-work related activities. Commuting between work and home becomes alarmingly difficult. This ultimately affects the working woman as she tries her best to juggle work and family roles. Some end up quitting the job while others delay having children. For others, it affects their mental health as well as their relationships with their spouses and children. This gives rise to work life conflict.

(Greenhaus & Beutell, 2005) define work life conflict as a variety of inter-role conflict that results to pressures on the work role which makes work role more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role. Therefore, conflict between work and family becomes bi-directional or interdependent domains or roles with permeable boundaries. Work life Conflict usually occurs when employees try to satisfy their work demands at the expense of their homes. Conflict could arise from instances such as missing a child's recital as a result of working overtime to meet a deadline or skipping important family functions due to work pressure (Adebola, 2005; Akintoya, 2010).

The difficulties faced by women in a bid to integrate work and family, which is part of the everyday reality of a dual income Nigerian family, gave rise to this study as imbalance between work and family would affect the organisations as well as homes as it can lead to high turn overs in organisations. Women have become an integral part of the labour force that cannot be dispensed with (Barnett et al., 1992). This is partly due to the fact that women's ratio to men is at an alarming stance of 3:1(National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Work Life Balance

Work Life Balance is still a novel area in developing countries such as Nigeria. Whereas the roots of Work Life Balance can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century where western workers and unions demanded for shorter working hours; which was approved after it could be seen that these hours in no way affected productivity and instead had the opposite effect. (Bosworth & Hogarth, 2009). After that, companies began to adopt family friendly policies which motivated workers and improved productivity (Parakati, 2010). Work Life Balance is the resultant effect of the Work Life Conflict experienced by western employees in developed countries. Work Life Balance has greatly advanced in these countries however this cannot be said for developing economies like Nigeria where very little is known about Work Life Balance practices.

(Kalliath & Brough, 2008) define work-life balance as the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities. (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007) opine that Work Life Balance is the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his/her role partners in the work and family domains. (Dhas, 2015) postulates that Work Life Balance is about creating and maintaining a supportive and healthy work environment which enables employees to have balance between their work and their personal responsibilities which in turn strengthens employees loyalty and productivity. (Eby et al., 2005) point out that Work Life Balance has implication on employee's attitudes, behaviors, wellbeing as well as organizational effectiveness. Barrera (2007:2) points out that in Work Life Balance, "Employers work constructively with their employees to put in place arrangements, which take into account the needs of the business as well as the non-work aspects of employees' lives".

According to (De Cieri et al., 2009), Work Life Balance initiatives can broadly be divided into four categories which include:

**Flexible Working Arrangement:** This includes working from home, compressed hours or flexible hours.

**Leave Arrangement:** leave arrangement includes study leave, exam leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave and parental leave.

**Dependent Care Assistance:** This involves arrangement made for employees who have kids, they range from crèche and child care arrangement.

**General Services:** has to do with all employee assisted programs.

### **Nigeria's Economic and Legal Frame Work**

According to Nigeria's labor Act (2004), daily hours of work are to be fixed by mutual agreement or by collective bargaining. Provision is made for rest intervals of no less than one hour in total if the day's work is longer than 6 hours (section 13:3), and for one day's rest per week (section 13:7). After twelve months of continuous service, a worker is entitled to an annual leave of at least six working days that may not be deferred by more than twelve months (section 18). Employees also have up to 12 days of paid sick leave per year in which an employee is allowed absence from work on the condition that a registered practitioner certifies the illness. Women are entitled to sixteen weeks' maternity leave with full pay if they were employed up to one year prior the pregnancy and half pay if employment is less than one year. Standard working time in the public sector is 8hrs. 8am -4pm for senior staff and 7am- 3pm for most junior staff. Employees are allowed an hour of break each work day.

Most organizations in the private sector also operate with the 8hrs work time (9am-5pm).

### **Banking Sector**

Banks operate much later than standard times. Nigerian banks are notoriously known for their long hour culture and that applies both to its male and female staff. Most times bankers get to work by 8am and do not leave the office till 9pm (Epie, 2009).

(Ephie, 2006) also postulates that these long hours has resulted in many couples separating and child neglect. Nigeria is a family oriented society and hence the failure of a family system is seen as a failure on the individual's part; this could lead to depression.

## **Power Sector**

The power sector was initially owned by the government and employees worked within the approved 8hours working time, however over the years, the power sector became privatized and experienced a change in management style as well as working hours. Employees began to take on more work load and worked late shifts and as a result began experiencing work life conflict (Okoro & Chikuni, 2007).

## **Education Sector**

The educational sector is split into four categories comprising of Early Childhood Care, Primary Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education. The standard working hours for this sector is 8hours, however these days, most schools are involved in extracurricular or extra school activities that happen every other week day which also requires the teacher to be present. There is also summer school which increases work load. This usually extends the teachers working time to 10 hours each working day. They have an annual leave of up to 30 days and are entitled to maternity leave of between 12-16weeks.

## **HealthCare Sector**

Nigerian health care practitioners are usually under a lot of pressure especially as most times the standard working time is ignored and doctors can be called in at any point in time. Typical hospitals are short staffed and one can find female doctors with kids being on call 4 times a week added to their official working hours. Often times, they pile on too much work and are too exhausted to attend to any other thing by the time they get back home (Kirti & Pujar, 2017). This usually brings about work life conflict.

## **Gender and Work Life Balance**

(Lundberg, 1996) suggests that women experience more work family conflict than men. (Duxburry et al., 1994) opine that women are more likely than men to report high level of work over load because outside the work environment they devote extra hours to activities such as childcare, elder care and home care. This is mainly due to their dual roles/responsibilities also described as double shift (Thomas, 2013). Furthermore women also experience less spousal support for their careers than their male counterparts.

Long working hours not only hampers the ability of women to harmonize work and family but also pose a threat to their mental and physical health. Managing Work Life Balance is particularly important for Nigerian women who are still assumed to have the role of homemaker. Therefore it is important to consider how changes in work structure can affect women's Work Life Balance (Hill & Martinengo, 2006). Currently, asides from the Full time, Part time and Contract mode of employment, Nigerian organisations do not have any flexible working arrangements put in place that women can take advantage of which makes the problem worse for them. (Slaughter, 2012) suggests that women will not be able to have family- career balance until there is a cultural shift against masculine structures which dominate the economy.

## **THEORITCAL FRAMEWORK**

The Spillover theory by Guest, the Work Family Border theory by Clark and the Role Theory will serve as the theoretical basis for this study. (Guest, 2002) opines that the conditions where spillover between the work and family microsystem occur can either be positive or negative. This means that if work family interactions are rigidly structured in time and space then the spillover in terms of energy and behavior is negative. However, if flexibility occurs and allows the individual to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space successfully, then positive spillover has occurred.

(Clark, 2001) Work Family Border theory centers on devotion only to work and family domains. The result of this theory is the work family balance. According to this theory, work and home contentment is goal. The theory addresses how domain integration and segmentation, border creation and management can influence work and family balance (Clarke & Hill, 2004).

The Role theory is a perspective in sociology which suggests that people behave in predictable ways based on social positions. This includes appropriate or acceptable forms of behavior which is guided by societal norms. Role conflict occurs when there are important differences among the ratings given for various expectations. Role theory proposes that the human behaviour is guided by expectations held both by the individual and by other people. The expectations correspond to different roles individuals perform or enact in their daily lives (Hindin, 2007). This theory highlights constraints working women face as they seek to balance their work and home life. Women engaged in paid labour experience greater pressure as they are faced with role conflicts. (Horschild, 2009) describes this as the second shift where women get home from work to 'resume' a second shift whereas her spouse does not increase his own proportion of household chores.

## METHODOLOGY

This study selected four sectors from the Nigerian economy; the bank, the power sector, the education sector and the healthcare sector. This research is purely qualitative as it focussed on words rather than numerical data. The work relied on the perceptions of the current study. By using the qualitative method, the researcher was allowed to be part of the context and understand the concept of things happening. The use of qualitative research helped create a clear understanding of social construct which would have been difficult to convey if quantitative method was used. The research was conducted within the four sectors in Enugu State where 60 women were randomly selected, 15 from each sector.

The study was carried out in Enugu State Nigeria and participants of the study were within the age bracket of 25-40 years old. All were married with kids. The interview was conducted at each respondent's place of work after permission was sought and granted by their employers. A semi structured interview was used for this research. All interviews were conducted in English Language and lasted between 30- 45minutes depending on the responses. Participants were made to understand the purpose of the research as well as their rights to stop the interviews at any time. These respondents participated without any coercion. Participants were informed of the tape recorder before any interview commenced and in order to confirm their anonymity, they did not have to state their names. Finally, the data collected was gathered and transcribed, each transcript was reviewed.

### Design

Gary (2009) opines that scientific theories of the research philosophies includes; epistemology, ontology and methodology. Epistemology provides philosophical background for deciding the kind of knowledge that is adequate (Cameron & Price, 2009). Ontology studies nature and its existence and Methodology describes how data is accumulated and evaluated (Bloomberg et al., 2005). This research used an epistemology stance because according to (Harding, 1987) in (Collins, 2009), '*epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge which includes why we believe what we believe to be true, who is believed and why, due to power relations*'. Epistemology has a universal truth which would be difficult to analyse through methodology or ontology. The research also used the phenomenological view as it helped get new meanings or renewed meanings by laying aside previous understanding and revisiting new experiences. It is based on the shared experiences of working women and Work Life Balance where they get to share real life situations, challenges and experiences. All interviews for this research were verbally recorded and immediately transcribed word for word in order to retain its validity. The interview was based on structures that were designed carefully. The data analyses began with coding similar themes which were put in parts for future references. Using open coding, relevant themes began to emerge.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Role Overload

One of the salient themes which emerged from the interviews conducted suggests that women face difficulties managing their family and professional life. Conceptual knowledge emanating from the data suggests that the respondents agree that the primary role of a typical Nigerian woman should be the domestic role where she cleans, cooks and attends to her kids. It is the responsibility of the woman to make sure her home is in order and should make it a priority above every other thing. When the woman is unable to meet up with the demands of her home due to work, she begins to face role conflicts. Existing literature suggests that women would fail to reach the peak of their careers or get frequent promotions because they would not be able to meet up with the long hours of work expected due to their family responsibilities and in a culture where the woman's role is first to be subservient and submissive. She would be forced to quit the job to get societal approval, for if she continues with the job (Ogenyi, 2004).

I get up every morning by 5am, prepare breakfast and my kids' lunch, get the kids ready, make sure they have breakfast then take my bath and we all rush off. I get off work by 4pm and then go to pick my kids from my friend's house. We usually get back home around 6pm and I go to prepare dinner, only to repeat the same cycle the next day. Sometimes I forget to check and see if they have any homework and they end up not getting it done. This is because I am usually very tired. (xxx respondent, teacher)

I forgot to pick my son from school one day. I had a very busy day at the office. An important customer came in and as his accounts officer I had to stay put to resolve some issues with his account. When I checked my phone, I saw that I had 15 missed calls from my child's school. I was 2 hours late and the school had already called my husband. My husband asked me to quit my job but I cannot because we need the extra income (xxx respondent, banker).

### Poor Management Practices

Another theme that emerged from the interview indicates that respondents agree that their organizations have Work Life Balance policy guidelines but this is only on paper and is usually not implemented. Policies are not seen as sacred rules but as formalities which can be waved at any time by organisations. The Nigerian labour are so weak that companies can breach said policies and would not be penalised. The culture of corruption also plays a strong role. Leave extensions or leave requests are suddenly based on the relationship an employee has with his or her supervisor as opposed to by merit.

The organization I work with usually gives three months of maternity leave. Most of us prefer to work until our due date so we can make proper use of the months. However I had some complications which required me to be on bed rest 3 weeks before my due date. I told my manager about this but he asked me to use the three months stipulated for maternity leave which I ended using. As a result, my child is not up to three months and I haven't even finished recovering but I am back to work. My mother is currently helping me to take care of my baby but I am worried because it is difficult for me to keep up with exclusive breastfeeding as I only get off work an hour earlier than normal. This is causing me serious anxiety. (xxx respondent, banker)

Most people don't understand how difficult it is for us. I have three kids ages 6, 4 and 2. They all go to school because I have to work. The standard practice here should be that resident doctors are only on call at most once a week, this is apart from the regular 9hrs per day. However you find my consultant placing me on call three times sometimes four times a week. I hardly have time for my kids as I am so usually so exhausted. It's taking its toll on me but I hope it would be better soon because I love my job. I thank God that my husband is the supportive kind if not he would asked me to resign (xxx respondent, healthcare worker).

### **Alternative Working Arrangement**

The respondents all agreed that they would be more productive and perform better at work if they did not have to worry about their home and kids. Most of the respondents agreed that they would rather have an alternate means of employment that would help balance their respective roles. An average Nigerian woman will feel irresponsible if her family duties and responsibilities are not met.

I love my job. However, I feel I would be more active in my job if I don't have to worry so much about how and what my child is doing every minute. I have a nanny cam installed at home and I have noticed that I spend more hours at work looking at my phone to make sure my baby is doing okay. I end up not getting most of my work done. It would be wonderful if the organization can set up an after school care centre within the building for parents with kids so at least I can pop in and see how my kid is doing and then go back to work. (xxx respondent, power sector)

I work in the customer care department; most of the work I do is online either by email or telephone. This work can be done from the comfort of my home where I can also watch my twins. I feel I would even be able to work past my scheduled number of hours because I am already at home and I am not worried or rushing off to anywhere (xxx respondent, bank sector)

I would really appreciate a flexible work arrangement. The issue is that most companies do not hire on flexibility. Everyone wants permanent worker because then they do not have to pay by the hour. It is very difficult to see a company that hires part time or flexible workers. I enjoy working but I also have other tight responsibilities. (xxx respondent, power sector)

For women, the interplay between work and family demands puts so much pressure on them that even though they are stuck between choosing to either be efficient at their jobs or in their homes.

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to scholarly knowledge in areas of women and Work Life Balance. The Nigerian experience reveals that Work Life Balance although mildly talked about, is not being implemented in organizations. As a result women experience work overload, work life conflict and poor management practices. This study asserts that Work Life Balance should not be seen as a means of social responsibility but as a means of achieving competitive advantage. The economy of any nation is driven by its workforce; studies have revealed that that Nigeria's workforce comprises of more women than men. It is therefore necessary to introduce best practices that are sustainable; yielding positive outcomes. The Labour Act especially as applies to women should be reviewed and strongly implemented. Flexible working arrangements such as working from home and compressed hours should be introduced and applied where possible. Institutionalised support system should be set up by the government to circumvent the ideals and practices of Work Life Balance. Long working hours (i.e. more than 48 hours a week) are associated with increased errors, workplace injuries and health problems (Sparks et al 1997). Work Life Balance is a growing trend that eliminates burn outs as a result of stress; encourages attention to be paid where due and helps employees experience fewer health problems.

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