January 2024

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Available at: [https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss1/9](https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss1/9)

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This article is available in Journal of International Women's Studies: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss1/9
Work-Family Conflict and Stress: A Triangulated Analysis of the Plight of Working Mothers in Nigerian Universities

By Ngozi Christiana Nwadike,¹ John T. Okpa,² Nnana Okoi Ofem,³ Godfrey Ekene Odinka,⁴ Frank Mbeh Attah,⁵ Pius Otu Abang,⁶ and Antigha Umo Bassey⁷

Abstract

This study investigated the plight of working mothers of children under the age of 18 at the University of Nigeria within the context of work-family conflict, using data from a cross-sectional sample of 485 academic and non-academic staff selected through a multi-staged sampling technique. Data were obtained using questionnaires and seven IDI (in-depth interview) respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables, while the Chi-square was used to examine the study variables. The results indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between couples living together and the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children. The findings further show that there is a statistically significant relationship between the staff category of working mothers and the experience of stress. This underscored the recommendation that the government needs to review the working conditions of women and support workplace policies that allow flexibility and support for working mothers. Social workers are also recommended to be involved in some government and organization policies that will help to reduce work overload for working mothers.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Stress, Working mothers, Nigerian universities, Higher education.

Introduction

Nowadays, mothers are expanding their lives in different careers while maintaining their traditional obligations at home (Adhikari, 2012). As a result, balancing family and work responsibilities remains a crucial difficulty of life for contemporary working mothers with children under the age of 18 (Rani & Bhuvaneswari, 2014; Okpa et al., 2022). Women’s involvement in paid employment has expanded significantly because it provides a sense of identity and facilitates the achievement of self-esteem, status, and the fulfillment of economic needs and desires (Theunissen et al., 2003; Gambles et al., 2003). On International Mother’s Day, the Federal Radio

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Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) (2013) aired that a mother spends eight hours daily to care for her under-age children and the same amount of hours are also expected of her at the office. She is equally expected to meet the needs of her husband at home as much as she meets that of her employers. Working mothers with under-age children are faced with these role ambiguities that have often resulted in stress with severe psycho-social and health implications (Abechi & Egbuche, 2018; Okoi et al., 2022). According to Abechi and associates (2018), the inter-role conflict occurs because it is often difficult for women to satisfy all expectations of their work at the office or their work at home since each role requires time, energy, and commitment.

Work-family conflict occurs when the demands of one’s professional and personal lives clash. Gabriel (2012) argues that “work-family conflict occurs when work related demands interfere with home responsibilities and when experiences at work interfere with family, like extensive, irregular or inflexible work hours, work overload, bringing work into home domain, and trying to complete it at the expense of family time and other forms of job stress” (p. 19). Work-life balance can take the form of work clashing with family life (known as work-family conflict) or family life clashing with professional life (known as family-work conflict). Either way, Khan (2014) argues that work-family conflict is produced by simultaneous pressures from work and family roles that are incompatible.

The Nigerian corporate world is a high-stress environment for working women with young children (Abechi et al., 2017; Omang et al., 2020). This is due to pressing demands to balance work and family roles, especially that of attending to the needs of their growing children (Egbule, 2015; Omang, et al., 2022). University staff, especially women academic and non-academic staff, tend to be more exposed to work related stress as they tussle between attending to their children’s needs and the demands of students, lecturing, research, and attending conferences as well as workshops (Omoniyi & Ongunsanmi, 2012; Peter et al., 2020). The magnitude of stress experienced by Nigerian citizens generally and working mothers specifically came to a global light in 2015 when Bloomberg published its report recording Nigeria as the most stressful country in the world (Green, 2015; Ofem et al., 2021). Working mothers with under-age children in Nigeria are even more susceptible to stress.

The reality is more intense considering Egbule’s (2015) observation that a lot of Nigerian women in the formal sector continued to face a lot of challenges in balancing work and family because of the time schedule at work. This reality is further evident in the country’s ranking as the worst performing country in both the Human Development and Gender Equality Indices (Ferrant & Thim, 2019). This has further resulted in gender discrimination in the labor force as some companies prefer to hire men than women whom they consider as having a higher tendency to losing workdays. For example, out of 9.9 million workdays lost between 2014 and 2015 to work related stress, working mothers dominated with over 50% (Health and Safety Executive, 2015). Given such realities, working mothers with under-age children are perceived as missing out on caring for their children at home but also being distracted in the workplace.

Murtaza and Siddiqui (2011) describe the causes of stress among working mothers as ranging from socio-economic, occupational, and environmental stressors. Environmental stressors for Arif and associates (2017) include stereotyping, discrimination, and work/home conflict. Among the socio-economic stressors, low income is seen as contributing to working mothers’ experience of stress because it affects their capacity to afford support services for their children like the cost of child care services or the outsourcing of some of their domestic responsibilities (Lonetti, 2012). Taking low income as one of the issues, one may argue that getting working mothers with young children involved in high paying job positions will naturally address some of
their stress experience. However, Direnzo and associates (2011) contend that higher income earners reportedly experience more work-family conflict as they are usually engaged in extensively demanding jobs. The contradiction implies that emphasis on one sole factor is inefficient to account for stress among working mothers with under-age children, as Gardazi and Mobeen (2016) are of the view that such stress is caused by women working outside their homes, tending to their children, and taking care of their aging parents. Other factors like lack of social support and number of children have equally been implicated as contributing to stress experiences of working mothers (Loo-See & Leap-Han, 2012; Frone et al., 2012). Examining the nexus between work-life balance and stress of working mothers of under-age children at the University of Nigeria can help provide greater clarity of the plight of working mothers within the contexts of this study.

**Materials and Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. Cross sectional studies involve an examination of a sample or representative of the population made at one point in time (Barbie, 2010). This design was considered appropriate for the study because it enabled the researchers to obtain data from a randomly selected sample and employ the findings from such data to analyze the plight of working mothers with children within the context of work-life balance and stress.

**Area and Scope of the Study**

The study was carried out at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus, Enugu State. The University of Nigeria Nsukka was founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1955, and was formally opened on 7th October 1960. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus is made up of 10 academic faculties and some units and institutes like Library, School of General Studies, CEDR, and various administrative units categorized under non-academic departments. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus comprises academic and non-academic staff and both categories were relatively sampled in the study.

**Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique**

The population of the study consists of 2,206 women. The spread of the study population shows that 755 are academic staff while 1,451 are non-teaching staff. The sample size for this study was statistically derived using Fisher and associates’ (1991) sample size derivation formulae for when the population is less than 10,000. A total of 511 was used for the study with 504 for quantitative study and 7 for qualitative study.

Multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were used in the study. This method involves breaking the sample area into component clusters, and from such clusters, the respondents were selected. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus is by its nature clustered into academic and non-academic sections. The academic section comprises faculties like Agriculture, Arts, Biological Science, Education, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Vocational Teacher Education, School of General Studies and Institutes and Centers. The non-academic section consists of the Registry Department, School of Postgraduate Studies, Works Services Unit, Security Department, Bursary Department, ICT, Student Affairs, Vice-Chancellor’s Office, Library, Medical Centre, Institutes and Centers.

In the first stage of the sampling, four larger clusters, each from academic and non-academic sections, were selected using balloting. In doing this, the researchers wrote the names of
all the constituent elements of the cluster as listed in the above paragraph, each on a separate sheet of paper and placed inside a ballot bag. A sheet of paper was picked after the ballot bag was shaken. The process was repeated four times for academic clusters and four times for non-academic clusters. This was to select a total of eight clusters for the first stage. In the second stage of the sampling, four subunits, like academic departments or units in an institute and non-academic sub-units like the personnel services unit, were selected each from the already selected larger clusters above. In doing this, the process of selection described in stage one was repeated in each of the earlier selected eight clusters to select 32 sub-units.

In the third stage, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique where the list of women staff members with under-age children was obtained from the subunits’ secretary. This served as the sampling frame for the unit. Women staff in the departments or units, where their total number is less than 20, were all selected and studied. However, in situations where they are above 20, a systematic sampling technique was applied using appropriate intervals to select 20 respondents from such units or departments. At the end of the third stage, the targeted sample size was not obtained. Stage one was repeated to pick three sub-clusters each from the academic and non-academic clusters after which stage two and three were repeated on the two clusters. This continued till the desired sample size (504) was obtained.

Finally, purposive and availability sampling techniques were used to select seven respondents from four non-academic units and three academic departments. The selection criteria for academic and non-academic women staff were heads of department and unit heads that were mothers of under-age children. They were interviewed to provide in-depth information on the subject matter.

Methods of Data Analysis

The researcher made use of both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth interview) tools of data collection. The data in this research was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to process and analyze quantitative data from the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used in presenting the results. The qualitative data was transcribed first in the local language, and then translated into the English language. When looking through the transcription for illustrative quotations to support the statistical data, phrases with particular meanings were picked.

Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to all of the established ethical guidelines for Social Science investigation. Some of the observed ethical principles are informed consent disclosure policy, safety protocols, anonymity, and confidentiality. The ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Results

Respondent Data

Respondent data on the number of children show that 30.3% of the respondents had one or two kids, 49.1% had three or more kids, 20% had five or more kids, and 0.6% had more than six kids. Women who work at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka have an average ratio of about 1:4 children (one mother to 4 kids), but almost one-third (30.3%) had either one or two children. Distribution of respondents by the age and sex of their under-age children shows that 33.4% of the
study participants had male children of 0-2 years old while 26.8% had female children of the same age range. Also, 37.3% had male children of 3-5 years old while 28.9% had female children of the same age cluster. The result also reveals that 47.8% of the respondents had male children of 6-8 years while 40.8% had female children of the same age cluster. Furthermore, 26.4% had male children of 9-11 years while 23.9% had female children of 9-11 years. The data also show that 25.4% of the respondents had male children of 12-14 years while the percentage of respondents with female children of the same age cluster is 20.2%. For children 15-17 years of age, the table shows that 13% of the respondents had male children in this age bracket while 14.4% of the respondents had female children of the same age range. Given that more than one-third of the respondents had either a male or female child within the age cluster of 6-8 years, it implies that children (both male and female) within 6-8 years were the common age cluster in the distribution of the children of working mothers with under-age children in UNN.

Data on highest educational attainment of responses show that 2.3% of the respondents had their First School Leaving Certificate, 2.1% had their West African School certificate, 7.8% had their National Certificate of Education (NCE) or National Diploma (ND), 50.3% had their First Degree, while 37.5% had their masters’ degree or PhD. Data on staff category demonstrated that 24.7% of the study participants were lecturers, while 75.3% were administrative workers. From the data on respondents’ religious affiliations, out of 485 respondents that took part in the study, 96.5% were Christians, 1.9% were Muslims, while 1.6% belonged to other religions such as Jehovah Witnesses. This implies that the majority of the respondents (96.5%) were Christians, which is typical of states in southeast Nigeria. Data on spouse’s monthly income show that 2.9% had spouses that earn below ₦20,000 per month, 7.0% had spouses that earn between ₦20,000-₦50,000 per month, 8.0% had spouses that earn between ₦51,000-₦80,000 per month, 15.5% had spouses that earn between ₦81,000-₦110,000 per month, 13.4% had spouses that earn between ₦111,000-₦140,000 per month, while 35.7% had spouses that earn from ₦171,000 and above per month. This implies that more than one-third of the respondents had spouses that earn from ₦171,000 and above on their monthly salary.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Whether They Have Heard of Stress (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heard of Stress?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>97.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

Data presented in Table 1 reveal that out of 485 respondents, 475 (97.9%) indicated that they have heard of stress, while 1.2% indicated that they have not heard of stress. Also, 0.8% of the respondents were unsure whether they had heard of stress or not. This implies that the majority of the respondents (97.9%) have heard of stress and probably know what it means, which further validates their views on stress.
Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by What They Understand by Stress (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of Stress</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working or living condition beyond one’s capacity</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions that result from pressure and recent demands</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of self-inflicted or unrealistic demands</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions that demand unusual physical and emotional response</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>485</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

The implication of data presented in Table 2 is that most of the study participants (50.5%) understood stress as capable of taking different forms such as working or living conditions that are beyond one’s capacity, conditions that result from pressure and recent demands, conditions that contained within it self-inflicted or unrealistic demands, and conditions that demand unusually physical and emotional responses. The majority of those surveyed via in-depth interviews also reported feeling stressed because of their workload, unfulfilled objectives, and external pressures. According to a 48-year-old woman lecturer, “Stress is a condition or situation that puts pressure on someone especially when trying to fulfill/meet up with things,” and “It is a mental or physical torture that accompanies an individual’s unmet goal/unrealistic goals” (personal interview). This participant perceived stress as pressure that results from unaccomplished goals.

For a 51-year-old woman lecturer, she related stress to a condition of imbalances in the physical and mental condition of an individual: “I think stress is a situation or a condition when your body that is, physically and mentally is not balance or not feeling too relaxed or is disturbed which affects every other thing that you do, due to certain circumstance, sickness or any other thing” (personal interview, Igbo Center).
Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by their Stress Experience  
(using the average stress experience of all the respondents as the intercept point (N=485))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less stress</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More stress</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

Table 3 above shows that out of the 485 respondents, 48.2% experience less stress while 51.8% experience more stress. This implies that more than half of the respondents (51.8%) experience more stress judging by the average stress experience of all.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by the Condition that Relates Most to their Stress Experience (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition relating to stress experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work related stress only</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family related stress only</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family related stress</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-inflicted stress</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

A total of 485 respondents indicated that they had experienced stress in Table 3 with 3.9% reporting that their stress stemmed from a work-related stressor. 12.8% claimed that their stress stemmed from family issues, 77.3% indicated that their stress stemmed from a combination of work-family issues, and 2.1% asserted that their stress was self-inflicted. According to the data, 77.3% of respondents reported experiencing stress because of their work-family situation. Most of the people who were interviewed reported stress caused by juggling work and family responsibilities. A 36-year-old non-teaching employee described how a mother’s constant absence from home due to work might lead to stress. She remarked:

For many working parents, juggling the demands of their careers with those of their children is an uphill battle fraught with peril. As an example, a lady may leave her children with the housekeeper in the morning and return late at night, without knowing what occurred while she was away. Then, before you know it, your kids will start behaving badly. This can make you even more stressed out. It is hard to keep both at the same time and it makes you stressed too. (personal interview, Bursary)
Work-Family Conflict

In Table 4, the majority of the respondents (77.3%) that have been exposed to stressors were of the opinion that such conditions relate to their work-family demand, thus substantiating the pre-existing argument that working mothers with under-age children are more prone to work-family conflict. Therefore, this section presents data on work-family conflict experiences of working mothers with under-age children by ascertaining the demanding nature of their job, difficulty attending to family needs, nature of dual roles, and factors responsible for the dual role conflict.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by How Demanding their Work Is (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Demandingness</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very demanding</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately demanding</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly demanding</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not demanding</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>485</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

Table 5 above shows that out of 485 respondents, 36.9% indicated that their jobs are very demanding, 46.8% indicated that their jobs are moderately demanding, 10.7% were of the opinion that their jobs are slightly demanding, while 5.6% indicated that their jobs are not demanding. The implication is that almost half of the respondents (46.8%) had jobs that are moderately demanding while more than one-third (36.9%) had jobs that are very demanding. A summation of the two categories further shows that 83.7% of the respondents were engaged in jobs that are demanding, which may in turn affect their ability to attend to domestic chores at home.

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by How Often They Experience Difficulty Attending to their Family Needs (N=485)
Data presented in Figure 1 show that out of 485 respondents, 10.3% were of the opinion that they have never experienced difficulty attending to their family needs, while 6.0% indicated that they rarely experience difficulty attending to their family needs. The figure also shows that 53.2% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes experience difficulty in attending to their family needs. Furthermore, 10.3% opined that they experienced difficulty attending to their family needs most times, while 20.2% indicated that they always experience difficulty attending to their family needs. It can therefore be deduced from the above that the majority of the respondents (53.2%) sometimes experience difficulty in attending to their family needs. Also, 80.7% of the respondent’s experience difficulty most times and always in attending to their family needs.

Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by the Nature of their Dual Roles (N=485)

![Dual Role Conflict Chart]

Source: Field Survey

Figure 2 shows that 19.8% of the respondent classified their dual role of performing weekday’s office duties and domestic work at home to be conflicting, 49.5% classified same to be moderately conflicting, 21.0% were of the view that such a dual role is slightly conflicting for them, while 9.7% indicated that such a dual role is not conflicting for them. This implies that almost half of the respondents (49.5%) experience moderate dual role conflict of performing their official duties and domestic roles as mothers. Added to the 19.8% that reported very conflicting experiences in that regard, and the 21.0% that experience slight conflicts, it implies that 90.3% of the respondents experience dual role conflict. Dual role conflict not only results in stress, but equally affects the overall wellbeing of the family. Data obtained through in-depth interviews provided insight into how dual role conflict affects working mothers with under-age children. A 50-year-old woman lecturer in Education explained how dual role conflict can induce stress thus:

You see, when a woman is working, it’s an additional job because originally, she is saddled with domestic work that can exhaust someone so much. But she can’t quit because of that. As a result, she is faced with family and work demands and you know, when one serves two masters, one will surely suffer it. So it’s either the woman stresses herself a lot or will have to raise children that lack proper home training. (Personal interview)
Another respondent who is a 40-year-old woman in a non-teaching staff position at the Medical Center equally provided an account of how dual role conflict affects working mothers with children. According to her:

Working and taking care of your children when they are still small like my own children is lots of work. Sometimes you feel like you are going to collapse. For example, you will have something serious going on in the office, and they will call you from your child’s school that your child is not feeling fine. Sometimes two or three of them will be sick at the same time, and you will still have so many files at the office to attend to. That is when you will realize what stress really is. (Personal interview)

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by the Factors that Are Most Responsible for Dual Role Conflict (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors causing dual conflict</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving most domestic work for the women</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The age of a mother</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavailability of help at home</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the children</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s negative attitude to domestic work</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of employment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>485</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey

Table 6 above shows that out of the 485 respondents, 12.6% were of the opinion that finance is the most responsible factor for dual role conflicts experienced by working mothers of under-age children. Also, 13.6% indicated that the act of leaving most domestic work for the women is why they experience dual role conflict. Furthermore, 1.4% indicated the age of a mother, 23.7% indicated unavailability of help at home, 18.8% indicated the age of the children, 2.7% indicated husband’s negative attitude to domestic work, 2.1% indicated type of employment, while 25.2% indicated that all the factors earlier mentioned are responsible for the dual role conflict experienced by working mothers with under-age children. This implies that an array of factors exist that are seen as most responsible for the dual role conflict of working mothers with under-age children, and more than a quarter of the respondents (25.2%) pointed to all the factors as responsible: finance, the tradition of leaving most domestic work for the women, age of a mother, availability of help at home, age of the children, husband’s attitude towards domestic work, and the working mother’s nature of employment.
Husbands’ Income, Occupation, and Stress among Working Mothers

Attempts were made below to cross tabulate husbands’ income and occupation with the respondents’ stress experience to find out if husbands’ income and occupation relates with the stress experience of working mothers.

Table 7: Respondents’ Husbands’ Income and Stress Experience (N=485)

| Stress Experience | Husband’s Income Number (Percentage) | Total (Number/Percentage) | $\chi^2$ | df | p
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|----|---
|                   | Lower  | Higher | 162 (100%) | 323 (100%) | 485 (100%) | 0.643 | 1 | >0.422
| Less stress       | 74 (45.7%) | 160 (49.5%) | 234 (48.2%) | &nbsp; |
| More stress       | 88 (54.3%) | 163 (50.5%) | 251 (51.8%) | &nbsp; |

Source: Field Survey

From Table 7, it is evident that less than 5% difference exists in the stress experience of working mothers whose husbands have lower income (<₦111,000 per month) compared to that of higher income (>₦111,000 per month). For example, out of 162 respondents whose husbands’ monthly incomes are low, 45.7% experience less stress while 54.3% experience more stress. Though this seems to differ in a way, the fact that 49.5% of the 323 respondents whose husbands’ monthly incomes are high experience less stress while 50.5% experience more stress shows that husbands’ incomes have little to do with the stress experience of working mothers. Furthermore, the obtained Chi-square value of 0.643, df = 1 and p > 0.422 shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between husbands’ monthly incomes and the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children.

Table 8: Respondents’ Husbands’ Occupation and Stress Experience (N=485)

| Stress Experience | Husband’s Occupation Number (Percentage) | Total (Number/Percentage) | $\chi^2$ | df | p
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|----|---
|                   | Civil servant | Non-civil servant | 338 (100.0%) | 147 (100.0%) | 485 (100.0%) | 0.045 | 1 | >0.830
| Less stress       | 162 (47.9%) | 72 (49.0%) | 234 (48.2%) | &nbsp; |
| More stress       | 176 (52.1%) | 75 (51.0%) | 251 (51.8%) | &nbsp; |
Table 8 above shows that 47.9% of respondents whose husbands were civil servants experienced less stress while 52.1% experienced more stress. Also 49.0% of those whose husbands were not civil servants experienced less stress while 51.0% experienced more stress. Given that \( \chi^2 = .045; \) df = 1; p > .830, it shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between working mothers’ husbands’ occupation and their stress experience. Deductively, husbands’ occupation and the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children seem not to have any logical connection. However, when the same was inductively examined via a consideration of how the husband’s job can influence his ability to assist in some domestic duties, the connection becomes quite clear. However, with the above findings, the study concluded that working mothers of under-age children whose husbands were civil servants do not experience stress differently from those whose husbands engage in other forms of occupation.

**Living Arrangement, Staff Category, and Stress among Working Mothers**

Given that elements pertaining to the husbands were taken into consideration, it was deemed beneficial to investigate specific aspects pertaining to the working mothers’ immediate socio-contextual milieu in order to determine how each component connects to their stress experience. Two of such variables that were considered because of their frequent occurrence in extant literature includes: couples living together and staff category.

**Table 9: Living Arrangement with Spouse and Stress Experience (N=485)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Experience</th>
<th>Living together?</th>
<th>Total (Number/Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living together</td>
<td>Not living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less stress</td>
<td>208 (50.4%)</td>
<td>26 (36.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More stress</td>
<td>203 (49.6%)</td>
<td>46 (63.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>413 (100.0%)</td>
<td>72 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Field Survey*

Traditionally, couples live together in the same house. However, the growing trends in modern occupation and profession have made it possible for two people that are married to live separately. This marriage arrangement could be beneficial to the family economically; however, it may impact negatively on the stress experience of a working mother who is most likely to be the one living with the under-age children. In the current study, 14.8% of the respondents currently operate with this kind of marriage arrangement. Table 9 shows that 50.4% of the respondents who live together with their husbands experience less stress while 49.6% experience more stress. However, for respondents who are not living together with their husbands, 36.1% experience lesser stress while 63.9% experience more stress. This shows that a greater percentage of working mothers with under-age children, who are not living together with their husbands, experience more
stress. Furthermore, given that $\chi^2 = 4.99; \text{df} = 1$ and $p < .027$, it therefore shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between couples’ cohabitation and the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children.

### Table 10: Respondents’ Staff Category and Stress Experience (N=485)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Experience</th>
<th>Staff Category</th>
<th>Total (Number/Percentage)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$=5.27 df=1 p&lt;.014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Non-Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less stress</td>
<td>47 (39.2%)</td>
<td>187 (51.2%)</td>
<td>234 (48.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More stress</td>
<td>73 (60.8%)</td>
<td>178 (48.8%)</td>
<td>251 (51.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120 (100.0%)</td>
<td>365 (100.0%)</td>
<td>485 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Field Survey*

From Table 10, it is evident that out of 120 respondents who are teaching staff, 39.2% experience less stress while 60.8% experience more stress. Also, out of 365 respondents that are non-teaching staff, 51.2% experience less stress while 48.8% experience more stress. This shows that the discrepancies in the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children who are teaching staff vary noticeably from that of the non-teaching staff. Furthermore, the $\chi^2 = 5.27; \text{df} = 1$ and $p < .014$ which therefore implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between the job description of working mothers and their stress experience.

A working mother’s job description was identified as having the potential to influence her stress experience in the qualitative data. It is ironic, however, that each member of staff thinks that their work is more demanding than that of their colleagues. For example, one of the respondents, a member of the non-teaching staff, stated how the nature of a working mother's employment might impact her stress experience in the following way:

Yes I believe the nature of the job does affect them because if you are self-employed, for instance, you have time, you work at your own pace, you carry out your job when you feel like or when you have the opportunity. But when you have the kind of job that civil servants do, especially non-teaching staff that are time bound, you have to meet certain targets, certain schedules, you must meet up whether you are ready or not despite having your home chores. (Personal interview, 39-year-old non-teaching staff in Personnel)

Another participant argued that the nature of a job affects one’s stress experience when it doesn’t give room for planning. She said:

It is true that the kind of work a working mother does affect her stress. Take for example as a non-academic staff, I am expected to come to work every working day and must come on time, sign in and wait till 4: pm before I leave the office. But the academic staff...
only has to go to class once or twice and from there, can go home and take care of their children. (Personal interview, 36-year-old non-teaching staff in Bursary)

Data obtained through in-depth interviews provided insight as to why teaching staff are more stressed than non-teaching staff. A 53-year-old woman professor in the Department of Psychology explained why teaching staff are more stressed than non-teaching staff:

There is a lot of pressure on female academics, particularly those who are married and have families, to perform well and compete with their male counterparts in order to satisfy the needs of universities in the 21st century. It is not an easy job being an academic staff member at the Nigerian public or private institutions, particularly for female academic staff members. Increased workload resulting from teaching and administrative responsibilities, not-so-ideal working environment, family expectations, and the pressure to advance one's career on the job; pressure to increase the number of graduates produced; pressure to generate knowledge through research and so on are measurable variables that explains why academic staff are more stressed than non-teaching staff. (Personal interview)

A 41-year-old participant who is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Work equally highlighted why teaching staff are more stressed than non-teaching staff in her submission. According to her:

Working as an academic seems to be more challenging for female lecturers. She maintained that work-related stress is progressively becoming an issue of concern that affects both female academics and female non-academics. However, while non-teaching staff perform only administrative functions, most female lecturers perform both administrative and academic functions. Other factors that can explain why female lecturers are more stressed than their non-teaching counterparts are: school interruption, strike, delay and irregular payment of salary and lack of instructional facilities, role ambiguity and performance pressure, academic workload, student related issues and role conflicts, research and publications. (Personal interview)

Another respondent, a 35-year-old woman, who is a Lecturer in the Sociology Department, described the condition that caused more women academics being stressed than their female non-teaching staff: long hours, heavy workload, ineffective management, dwindling resources, an unfavorable student-to-staff ratio, pressure to attract external funds, lack of recognition and reward, and ambiguity in their roles. According to her:

Strenuous promotion criteria/guidelines, heavy academic workload, overcrowded classrooms, outdated laboratory facilities for research activities, and teaching, poor working condition, dissatisfaction with the amount of work that is required to get articles published in respected and local journals, the catchphrase in Nigerian universities “publish or perish syndrome” are reasonable stressors that makes the work demand of female lecturers more difficult that the female non-teaching staff. (Personal interview)
Discussion of Findings

In the examination of elements that contribute to stress, it was deemed essential to determine whether or not working mothers of under-age children at the University of Nigeria are aware of stress and also what they see as stress. The study revealed that 97.9% of working mothers at UNN have heard about stress (Table 1) while a significant number of the study participants believed that stress encompasses different things like working or living conditions that are beyond one’s capacity, a condition that results from pressure and recent demands, a condition of self-inflicted or unrealistic demands, and a condition that demands unusual physical and emotional response (Table 2). The responses are in line with existing literature on stress. Oboegbulam (2007) notes that stress occurs when the working and living conditions of an individual are demanding in a way that supersedes the individual’s physical and emotional capacity to deal with it. Mian and associates (2016) also adopt a similar conception in their model representation of stress which noted that the higher the perceived demand, the higher the level of stress. Also, the acknowledgement of stress as multi-dimensional by the majority of the respondents corroborates Malik and associates’ (2017) position that stress is multi-faceted and occurs in various aspects of our daily activities.

Furthermore, the nature of stress experienced by more than two-third of the respondents was work-family related (Table 4). This implies that the most common pattern of stress experienced by working mothers at UNN is that which emanated from overly demanding work and family conditions which a working mother finds hard to cope with. Though they did their own study in Iran, Nezhad and associates (2010) also arrived at a similar conclusion that the demanding nature of an occupation mixed with family difficulties was the most explanatory feature of the stress experienced by working mothers. Such evidence of work-family induced stress further led our team of researchers to find out whether the working mothers also experience friction in their work-family life. It was found that 83.7% of the respondents are involved in jobs that are demanding (Table 5); consequently, 80.7% experience difficulties attending to their family needs (Figure 1) while 90.3% experience varying degrees of dual role conflict.

The indication that more working mothers with under-age children experience dual role conflict was also evident in the works of Sultana (2011), Dhanabhakym and Malarvizhi (2014), Egbule (2015), and Khan (2014). Dhanabhakym and Malarvizhi (2014) report a high level of work-family conflict and stress among working mothers in South Africa. Rani and Bhuvaneswari (2014) also note that most women are caught in the web of managing/balancing work and family roles. Given that in the current study such a high number of respondents experience difficulty balancing work-family roles, it is not surprising that 51.8% of the respondents, relatively, experience more stress (Table 3). This implies that more than half of the respondent’s experience stress in levels that are equal to or above the average stress experience of all the respondents. The proportion however is relatively low compared to the reports of Adhikari (2012) and Balogun (2014). For example, Balogun’s study of the banking sector in Lagos, Nigeria found that 60% suffers from high levels of stress-related symptoms. A cross tabulation of some social and cultural factors showed that staff category and cohabitation/living together were all associated with the stress experience of working mothers of under-age children at p < .05 respectively. However, spousal income and occupation have no statistically significant relationship with the stress experience of the working mother at p < .05.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The study highlighted the plight of working mothers of under-age children at the University of Nigeria as it relates to work-family conflict and stress. Based on the empirical evidence emanating from both descriptive and inferential statistics employed in the analysis of the data, it has been observed that the majority (51.8%) of the respondents, relatively, experience more stress. Conversely, more than two-thirds of the respondents reported experiencing work-family related stress. This suggests that the most prevalent cause of stress among UNN working mothers with children is the strain of juggling a full-time job with full-time family responsibilities. Although the study revealed that stress impacts negatively on the health of working mothers of under-age children, a significant number of the study has been able to conquer stress through planning and proper allocation of time. Also, given that the current nature of global economic affairs have caused more commuter marriages which disrupt family lives and lead to stress, public sector policy needs to favor easy transfer of married couples to enable them to live together with their spouses. This is because the study found that such cohabitation lessens the stress experience of working mothers with under-age children. Whereas the current day Nigeria public sector accommodates the transfer of a wife to another location of the same establishment to enable her to stay with the husband, specific policies needed to be enacted to make the process more efficient.

Furthermore, the staff category was equally found to be related with stress experience of working mothers. This implies that certain categories of workers and in the case of the current study, academic staff by the nature of their jobs have more occupational demands that could strain them physically and mentally, thus inducing greater stress when accompanied by the demands of domestic chores. A multifaceted approach which focuses on both policies, programs, and cultural change is required to address the work-family conflict that women with under-age children are facing. Work-family policies such as access to paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, fair scheduling practices, workplace flexibility, and affordable childcare have been recommended as panaceas to the untenable circumstances in which many working mothers with under-age children find themselves (Shepherd-Banigan, & Bell, 2014; Asfaw & Colopy, 2017).

Working mothers’s lack of spare time illustrates how vital work-life policies are to enable people to maintain their employment and income while addressing the unpredictability of modern life. Also, working mothers with under-age children need greater control over how they choose to divide their time rather than have their choices constrained by a lack of workplace policies. Every society has sets of norms that influence behavior. However, the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities, because it is both time-consuming and resource-intensive, is holding back women from advancing in other areas of their lives. Notably, on average, most men would not be able to put in longer hours in paid work if there were not a woman taking on the majority of the duties at home, in essence, working a second shift without pay. Equity in the workplace will not be possible until there is also equity within the home. There are complex socio-cultural reasons that impact gendered dynamics within families, but public policies can make a difference in helping to alleviate some of the burden on working women while increasing family caregiving opportunities for men. Women should talk to their partners on how this imbalance affects them and educate them on the need to create a more egalitarian distribution of duties at home where household chores and children’s care are every adult’s responsibility.

However, research has shown that men have been slow to adopt the idea of performing household chores, a phenomenon referred to in the literature as a “stalled revolution,” and this has made it more difficult for women to progress in the workplace (Carrim, 2017). This underscores our recommendation that national legislation is necessary to ensure that working mothers across
the country have equitable access to workplace policies they need to meet their responsibilities without having to choose between their families and their jobs. Social workers are also recommended to be involved in some government and organization policies that will help to reduce work overload for working mothers and allow greater flexibility.

While all working mothers in all corporate organizations can experience similar stress, the scope of this study is limited to issues of stress as they affect women who are university workers. However, the authors will carry out a fresh study to examine the issue of stress in corporate organizations and compare stress problems in the university and corporate worlds to determine which workers are the worst hit by stress.

Acknowledgements
We appreciate the contributions of Prof. (Mrs.) Uzoma Odera Okoye at various stages of this work.

References


