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Work-Family Conflicts: Assessing a South African Sample of Urban Employees

David M. Akinnusi[1], Adebukola E. Oyewunmi[1], Olubunkunola Sonubi[2]

1) Covenant University, Nigeria
2) Swaziland College of Technology, Swaziland

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David M. Akinnusi
Covenant University

Adebukola E. Oyewunmi
Covenant University

Olubukunola Sonubi
Swaziland College of Technology

Abstract

The article explores the scope and impact of employees' work responsibilities on the family life and vice-versa. It describes the coping styles adopted by a sample of urban employees and the efficacies of these styles. A semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews were the means of collecting data from 48 respondents who were either dual career couples or single parents. The findings reveal that virtually all the respondents experience serious work-family conflicts, especially with managing their time, domestic chores, and stress. The challenge is for the employer, the employee, trade unions and partners to support each other to alleviate work-family conflicts. The findings are important given the focus of South African government on emancipating and empowering women through legislation and the setting up of national women. The contributions of women would be undermined, if family-work conflicts such as identified here were not addressed.

Keywords: African family system, dual career couples, employees, coping strategies, work-family conflicts, South Africa, urban workers

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Conflictos Familia-Trabajo: Evaluando una Muestra de Empleados en la Sudáfrica Urbana

David M. Akinnusi
Covenant University

Adebukola E. Oyewunmi
Covenant University

Olubukunola Sonubi
Swaziland College of Technology

Resumen

El artículo explora el alcance y el impacto de las responsabilidades laborales de los empleados en la vida familiar y viceversa. Describe la variedad de estilos adoptados por una muestra de empleados en el medio urbano y la eficacia de tales estilos. Se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad mediante cuestionarios semiestructurados a 48 personas, tanto parejas en las que ambas personas trabajan como madres solteras. Los hallazgos revelan que prácticamente todas las personas entrevistadas experimentan conflictos familia-trabajo serios, especialmente para gestionar su tiempo, tareas domésticas y estrés. El reto es para el empleador, el empleado, los sindicatos y las parejas para apoyarse mútuamente a aliviar los conflictos familia-trabajo. Los hallazgos son importantes dado la importancia que el gobierno sudafricano da a emancipar y empoderar a las mujeres a través de la legislación y del establecimiento de mujeres nacionales. Las contribuciones de las mujeres estarían menoscabadas si conflictos familia-trabajo como los identificados en este trabajo no se abordaran.

Palabras clave: sí sistema familiar africano, parejas trabajadoras, empleados, estrategias resolutivas, conflictos familia-trabajo, Sudáfrica, trabajadores urbanos

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Prior to 1994, under the apartheid regime in South Africa, women's status was unequal to their male counterparts. According to Mathur-Helm (2005), South African women, irrespective of their racial identity, have always stood in the secondary echelon of society. Nevertheless, women contributed significantly to the liberation of the nation through matches and demonstrations. The position changed radically after 1994, when the Constitution (1996, Chapter 2) proclaimed, among other things, that '*everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law*' and it enjoined the State to promote equality through legislative and other measures to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination. The Constitution ended discrimination on all grounds, including gender. This was followed by a spate of legislations, which directly or indirectly gave effect to the Constitutional stance on gender equality and empowerment, among which are the Labour Relations Act Number 66 of 1995; the Employment Equity Act Number 55 of 1998, and the Policy on Affirmative Action, all of which banned discrimination on all grounds and enjoined the representation of women in all professions and grades, at equal pay and guarantees maternity rights. South Africa has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) without reservations, established national gender machinery and introduced legislation to address social, economic and political inequalities between men and women; i.e. Offices of the Status of Women in the Presidency, Premiers and Mayoral Offices; Commission for Gender Equality; Gender desks in all Departments; Gender committees in Parliament and Legislatures.

Within the policies of government, political parties and business, women (albeit in small numbers) have since taken up opportunities to demonstrate capabilities and participate in matters for the benefit of society. Noteworthy has been the participation of women in the political sphere, in terms of numbers and portfolios. The South African calendar month and day, August 9th, is annually celebrated since 1956 by all South African women in commemoration of the bravery of those who marched for equality and emancipation. In a message by North West Premier Edna Molewa on National Women's Day 9 August 2006 and the 50th Anniversary of the Women's March to the Union Buildings, she stated that *we must stop at*

nothing to remedy the historical legacy of discrimination against our women. She further highlighted that through the Office on the Status of Women of the Office of the Premier, *we shall endeavor to take the march by women of 1956 to its logical conclusion by intensifying our efforts at building a humane society that respects and protects its women*.

According to the South African Corporate Survey commissioned and released by the Business Women's Association, women are still under-represented in the corporate world. South Africa had historically no incentives to promote the job prospect of its women, due to structural disadvantages caused by male-dominated attitudes and behaviors (Mathur-Helm, 2005). The discriminatory legislation of the apartheid era had not only afforded white people with racial privileges, it also simultaneously permitted discrimination based on gender as well. Government initiatives have brought women to the forefront of the work environment and made them legal equals in the workplace. These initiatives include:

(a) National Women's Empowerment policy,
(b) The signing of a number of United Nations Conventions on Women,
(c) The Joint Standing Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women,
(d) The Commission of Gender Equality,
(e) The passing of significant number of laws, which touch upon central gender issues such as: the rewriting of the tax tables in 1995, the Liberation of Abortion Act: 1996, the Customary Marriage and Domestic Violence Acts: 1998, the Maternity Provisions and Breast-Feeding Code: 1997, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1996 and the Sexual Harassment Code in the Labour Relations Act 1995, along with reproductive health and nutrition, equality in education and employment, child care and related policies, have successfully brought South Africa's women to the forefront of the work environment.

Conflicts between work and family domains trigger stress that affects the psychological and physical health of employees and subsequently, organizational performance (Oyewunmi, Oyewunmi, Ojo & Oludayo, 2015). For business, this means low workplace morale, high labour turnover, increased training costs, needless lost days of work, high production costs and low profits. For the individual worker, high job dissatisfaction can result

in chronic levels of stress, depression, job burnout and work or family problems. It is, therefore, important for organizations and individuals to maintain a positive balance between workplace and personal needs. Therefore, studying the relationship between family commitments and individual's work demands will help to create a balance between the two. Research aimed at measuring work-family conflicts will assist both the organization and employees to find better ways of coping, with benefits to both sides.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to explore the scope and impact of employees' work responsibilities on the family life and vice-versa; describe the various ways by which employees cope with work-family conflicts; determine the successes or otherwise of the various strategies used to cope with work-family conflicts and suggest ways by which organizations can assist employees to cope with work-family conflicts. In the rest of this study, the theoretical framework and review of the literature are discussed; followed by the research design and findings. Recommendations and conclusions are addressed in the final section of the article.

Work-family Conflict: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The creation of organizations as corporate entities, separate and distinct from homes, has inevitably created work-family conflicts, which has attracted much attention, much conceptualizations, and theoretical developments in the literature (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Frone, Russel & Cooper, 1992; Ernst Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Lior & Liron, 2017; Zakaria & Ismail, 2018). It has now been established that work-family conflict is a multi-dimensional concept that originates under various conditions. Greenhaus and Beutel (1985) describe work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and the family domains are incompatible in some respect. Much of the conflict is characterized as two major forms: time and psychological strain. Time-based conflict occurs when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in, or comply with, the expectations of another role, while strain-based conflict is viewed as strain from the demands of one role intruding into and interfering with participation in another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Charkhabi, Sartori & Ceschi, 2016). The work-family interface has a permeable boundary,

although Frone, Russel and Barnes (1996) show that work which interferes with the family domain (WIF) is independent of the demands within the family which interfere with the work domain (FIW). In reviewing the literature, therefore, attention will focus on how the family and work setting variables have both conspired to constitute work-family conflicts, with examples and illustrations drawn from South Africa, the context of this study.

The Changing Role of the Family and Associated Work-Family Conflicts

Traditionally, men were regarded as the sole breadwinners of their families. The dual-career family represents a marked shift from the traditional relationship in which man is the breadwinner and the woman, the homemaker (Lee & Duxbury, 1998; Bosch, de Bruin, Kgaladi & de Bruin, 2012). There seemed to be a growing number of dual-earner families in which both parents are pursuing their careers and work continuously full-time over a period of years (Popenoe, Boult & Cunnignham, 1997). It is for this reason that families are experiencing conflicts between work and family life. Women are expected to hold their traditional roles with respect to their family care-taking roles and, at the same time, pursue their careers. One of the problems of a dual-career marriage is that it is not easy to combine these roles. Also, single parenting is one contributing aspect to the increasing conflict in work-family conflicts. The growing number of single-headed families further confirms this. Schellenberger (1992) noted that single parents are the fastest growing kind of family in the work force and that the growth in the number of two-career couples and single fathers/mothers, have made work family issues increasingly important to men, many of whom are finding that the same anti-family stereotypes that hobble women can also work against them. The evidence gathered in a study of work-family conflicts in the United States noted that *working women-dual earners as well as dual-career women – still carry primary responsibility for family work, even though equity seemed to be more important than equality* (Burley, 1995, p. 483).

Culture also plays a role in coping with work-family strategies. Different countries have different strategies to deal with family issues and are ideologically at different places concerning family roles and gender equity. The issue as put by Bailyn (1992) is between *breadwinning* and *care-taking*. Googins and Goonyea (1992) suggested the need for a fundamental shift in deeply held cultural beliefs regarding traditional boundaries separating the worlds of work and family. This is important for countries where traditional values are still effective determinants and patriarchal family structure is prevalent, as in most African countries, including South Africa. Being a mother, wife, and housewife and relative are roles that are among family groups. As Hatum and Ozlen (2001, p. 98) noted, *'the woman has other roles as a professional, a member of the society and an individual'*. As the individual's role is determined by social and cultural values, the society continues to see the woman as an individual belonging to the family group and that her most important role will be evaluated as one inside the family, and yet she is expected to work and earn money. These, as stated by Hatum and Ozlen (2001) might cause role-overload, which originate from the fact that women continuously play many roles at a time. This leads to role conflicts especially when the demands of one of the multiple roles make it difficult to fulfill the demands of another role. Role conflict refers to the extent to which a person experiences pressures within one role that are incompatible with the pressures that arise within another role.

Single Parenting and Work-Family Conflicts

Popenoe et al. (1997) states that the consequences of divorce, separation, desertion and widowhood are that the numbers of single parent families in South Africa is increasing. Research studies into black teenage pregnancy in South Africa further indicate that single-parent female-headed household are more associated with this phenomenon than are nuclear or extended families (Boult & Cunningham, 1991). A growing number of adults experience at least a transitory phase in which they are solely responsible for their dependent children. Lee and Duxbury (1998) indicate that single parents may face additional challenges in balancing work and family life. They

further state that the family's dependence on a single income makes employment of the parent an economic imperative.

Both single parents and their children face an ever-broader range of stresses including feelings of responsibility, task, and emotional overload on the part of the parent (Lauer, 1998). Six single fathers were interviewed in a local South African magazine and they all wished things would have been far much better if things worked positively between themselves and their ex-wives in that they felt the emotional burden of child-rearing is not a proper way if they are doing it alone. Those single fathers further indicated the heavy financial overload they are carrying, since their ex-partners are just contributing for odd things or not contributing at all for the maintenance of their children

Socialisation of children outside of the family

Smith (1979) expressed that the movement of married women into labour force has been described as one of the most significant social revolutions of this century. Such entry of married women into the paid force has had significance effects on the family. Most importantly *it is altering the traditional gender roles in the families* especially in cases where *women tend to be more career-oriented than women working in the lower classes* (Popenoe et al., 1997, p. 285).

The unforeseen results of changing gender roles are that *infants and children are mainly socialized outside the family by grandmothers, day mother, or staff at day-care centers* (Popenoe et al., 1997, p. 285). The South African situation is a little bit different as women are complaining about lack of crèches and nursery schools at their places of employment. Even organizations are not doing enough to ensure that their workers' children are taken care of. Similarly, single fathers are also experiencing the same problems in that if they are working until late, they will have to arrange with their neighbours to look after their children. This confirms what Popenoe et al. (1997) has already indicated that children are mainly socialized outside their families.

Consequences of Work-Family Conflicts

Lobel (1992) has shown that work-family conflict is prevalent and has a negative impact on employees and family members in that employees do not find enough time to sit with their families and discuss other important issues because of work pressures. It is therefore important to understand sources of work-family conflicts and to develop strategies to reduce them. Burnout refers to the syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion, involving the development of negative job attitudes and loss of concern and feeling for others. The most common definition of burnout is the three–component conceptualization used by Maslach and Jackson (1981) i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

It has been found that emotional exhaustion occurs in *intensive* and *people-oriented* occupations, jobs which involve intensive interpersonal interactions. Depersonalization represents the tendency to treat individuals or clients as objects rather than people. Such individuals may display cynical, callous, uncaring and negative attitudes towards co-workers, clients and the organization. Reduced personal accomplishment is characterized by a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively. In extreme burnout, individuals no longer believe their actions make a difference and, consequently, they quit.

Coping with Work-Family Conflicts: Organizational, Spousal and Social Support

We create goals with attention to job and family and personal life and fit them into an overall plan, we are less likely to burn out, derail, or make precipitous life decisions. In finding strategies to cope with work-family conflicts, Chatman (1991) demonstrated that individuals whose values align with those of the organization feel more satisfied and both intend to and remain with the organization longer. Thus, it is in the organizations' and the individual's interests to maximize person-organization fit (Lobel, 1992; Iyiola et al., 2016). The important aspect of the person-organisation fit in South Africa is such that employers do not take any responsibility for childcare 'even though working class parents with pre-school children make up the largest proportion of the workforce, and despite the fact that the

number of women employed is growing steadily in South Africa – between 1973 and 1981, there was a 58% increase in the number of women employed – employers refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for child care. Most still believe that it is the women's responsibility to make arrangement about who is going to look after their children (LCRP & SACCAWU, 1991).

Much of the research on spousal support for employed parents has focused on tangible ways that married partners help one another fulfill work and family responsibilities (Lee & Duxbury, 1998). It is further assumed that equity in task sharing relieves the employed mother of some household responsibilities and reduces her feelings of being overwhelmed. However, gender inequalities continue with women carrying the greater burden (Blair, 1993). Family life, on the other hand, is important and we treasure the love and support families provide. On the other hand, traditional view of the family life supports the idea that a woman's place is in the home, doing the housework and the cooking and looking after children- even after a full day's work. Men are still regarded as breadwinners, the ones with power and control, and certainly without the time or the inclination to do any household chores.

Single parent families are the ones experiencing less support in this case. It is for this reason that most of them are unable to cope emotionally and financially since they must play both the roles of mother and father alone. Research also shows that parents who have emotionally supportive partners with liberal sex role attitudes are more likely to benefit from multiple roles (Marshall & Barnett, 1993).

Challenges faced by employed parents include scheduling conflicts, inadequate childcare, and lack of time to fulfill both work and family responsibilities. A study conducted by Lee and Duxbury (1998) found that despite the difficulties of balancing work and family responsibilities, multiple roles are inevitably associated with distress. Program and policy support at the organizational level and informal social support from partners and friends may also play a crucial role in facilitating or widening employee's efforts to balance work and family. Social support positively influences the family, everyone's health and their overall well-being. It is also believed that family involvement and higher levels of social support will create high levels of life satisfaction.

One out of the six single fathers interviewed indicated that he gets social support from his neighbours. That is, if he is late due to the demands of his job, he makes arrangements with his neighbours to take care of his children until he is back. In summary, the entry of women into the labour force has merely accentuated work-family conflicts, especially in traditional societies, like in South Africa, where men are predominantly seen as bread winners, where domestic responsibilities are still largely seen as belonging to women and where the increasing incidence of single parenting exposes single fathers and single mothers to the vagaries of coping with work-home duties, with little spousal, social or organizational support.

Methodology

This study was conducted in a provincial seat of government, which has obviously attracted workers to seek employment in government departments and municipalities. Respondents were drawn from these government departments. A semi-structured instrument was designed to collect data relating to (1) personal information such as gender, age, level of education, number of years in their organizations, number of family members and other dependents, the kind of sector they work in, whether they are working part-time or full-time and (2) issues relating to nature, type and consequences of work-family conflicts, their coping styles and suggestions for improving the situation. A select group of 10 subjects were later interviewed for in-depth information and explanation. With assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, the researchers were able to overcome the initial hesitation by respondents to participate in the study. The typical respondent in this study is between 31 and 40 years of age; female (60%); married (58%); has a first degree or equivalent and at least five years of working experience; holding a middle management position and having dependents of between 4 and 6; they are mostly full-time (90%) and permanent (85%).

Results

The results are presented under themes which neatly describe the issues identified. They are spiced with relevant quotations from the interviews.

Financial Independence

There is an overwhelming sense that working, though costly in many respects, is nevertheless, desirable for the economic independence it provides. As pointed out by a respondent: *I am overloaded with work, but it is fine because I get paid to help my family*. The same sentiments are echoed by others as they emphasize the effect of being financially buoyant: *I am able to provide financial support to my family, e.g. school funds, food etc. I can buy whatever the kids want; if unemployed, one cannot meet these demands, for example, a bicycle for the child.* One respondent summed it up as follows: *The world is changing and demanding. One has to work in order to support the family.*

Lack of Time to be with the Family

Respondents indicated that their role as working parents is seriously affecting their families in that they travel long distances to and from work and as such it leaves them tired and not being able to give the necessary support to their families, especially the children. Responses such as this are common: *I don't have enough time to be with my children since I'm not traveling home on a daily basis. The impact is that I do not have time to take care of my family e.g. I don't have enough time to help my kids with homework and they don't have time to get that motherly love.*

Responses such as these indicate the serious negative impact of working on parents as they satisfy both their families and work lives. Some of this bothers on feelings of being guilty as a respondent indicates: *My family thought I'm ignoring them or avoiding them or lack responsibility.*

On whether their working hours are appropriate for their families, majority (34 or 70%) indicated that their working hours are not appropriate since they don't have enough time to spend with their families, most probably because a lot of them have to travel long distances to and from their places of work. One respondent said: *No, because everyday I wake up at 4h30, prepare lunch boxes for the kids and I leave for work at 6h45 and come back at 17h30.* Another said: *No, because my workplace is far from my home.*

To make matters worse, almost all the respondents are sometimes requested to work overtime. Only a quarter of the respondents felt happy with their working hours. Said one of them: *The start-time is 7h30 and closing time is 16h00. One can get that little time to spend with children before and after working hours.*

Hence, all the respondents eagerly look forward to week-ends, specials holidays and annual leaves to make up for the time they missed being with their families. Even then, much of the available time is also taken up with social responsibilities. Instead of sitting and enjoying with their families, respondents are sometimes expected to attend community meetings and funeral services. One respondent puts it thus: *I spend most of the time at work, and during the weekend, I am expected to attend social events (funerals, weddings etc.).*

Working Father/Mother and Family Responsibilities

Working women domestic responsibilities have not changed since they are still expected to take care of their families even when they come back from work. They are still expected to cook and do other house chores. As one working mother puts it: *I still clean my house before going to work, also cook and do washing for my family.* Another emphasized, saying that: *Being a working mother has not changed my domestic responsibilities because I am a working mother and a housewife at the same time.*

It is hard to break from tradition and culture, as women's traditional roles have remained unchanged even in a modern society. In other words, a woman is still expected to perform family responsibilities even if she is in a full-time job. Similarly, in spite of modernity, men have not broken out with tradition to share in family responsibilities. 60% of the males in the study indicated that their working lives have not changed their family responsibility since, traditionally, it is not expected of them to cook, clean and even take care of the children. Only 40% of them indicated that being working fathers have changed their domestic responsibilities as far as paying attention to their children is concerned: *Yes, as a father to my children, I am also supposed to do some of the responsibilities which were traditionally*

done by women like cooking. A woman remarked: *My husband likes cooking, so he helps a lot with cooking and sometimes help clean the house.*

Given some measure of financial independence and the fact that most women are still saddled with domestic chores, with little help from their partners, it is not surprising that all the women respondents do rely on some form of help or the other. Working mothers, single or dual-career, receive such help either from their domestic helpers, mothers, mothers-in-law, or their siblings.

The Care of Children when Parents are at Work

In traditional households where the extended family still lives together, the grandmother and other relatives take care of the children, when parents are at work. A respondent puts it clearly: *My mother-in law is the one who takes care and looks after my children.* Another says: *my mother looks after my son during the week,* and yet another: *My mother is always standing-by for me.*

In modern families, as more women are now working, more assistance in the care of children is from domestic helpers. 75% of the respondents indicated that they rely solely on their domestic helpers for the care of their children, which means that domestic helpers have to stay a little bit longer until the parents return home. Responses such as, *the children remain home with the servant*, are very common. In other cases, the elder children have to look after their younger siblings after school. This is confirmed by responses such as: *The toddlers are sent to a day care center and are collected by their sisters after school. One goes to school, another one goes to day-care. When they return the older one cares for the younger one*.

Day-care centers, crèches as well as after-care centers also play an important role by extending their closing time to accommodate those parents without domestic helpers. In some instances, some parents have even formed *clubs or syndicate groups* so that they take turns in fetching their children from school.

Working Role Versus the Mother/Husband/Father /Wife/ Role

Both single and dual parents find it very difficult to fulfill their respective roles as fathers, mothers, husbands and wives as well as their working roles. Those who seem to be experiencing the most conflict in these roles are working women, single or partnered, as they are still expected to provide and take care of the whole family and also perform at their places of employment. They have deadlines to meet and sometimes have to travel outside their communities; that in itself results in a conflict. Sixty percent (60%) of the women indicated that they experience role conflict when:

> …a child is ill and I feel I have to spend enough time with him/her'
> and that 'Sometimes my children desperately need me to be with
> them or to take them for an outing and on the other hand I'm always
> wanted at work'.

For dual career families, 54% of the women are the ones experiencing conflicts between their roles as wives and mothers. Their attention is divided between work and their families. When at home, all the family members, including the extended families, expect full attention from the working mothers. The same applies at their workplaces. They are expected to perform satisfactorily even when members of their families are sick. In families where there is no helper at all, the conflict of roles is heightened because women are still expected to cook and clean for the family before coming to work and after arriving from work.

Not Having Enough Time for One's Self at Home

From the responses in this study, fifty–two percent (52%) of the respondents do not have enough time for themselves at home. Reasons cited are, *preparing children school uniforms and own working clothes*, which clearly indicates that there is not enough time for them to rest. Others are unable to get sufficient rest *because of social responsibility within the community as well as taking care of other extended families*.

In the case of working mothers, *the limited time (weekends) is used for cleaning and cooking*, which clearly shows that there is indeed not enough time for them. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the respondents experience the

same problem of not having enough time. What compounds the situation is that some of the respondents still have to *take some of the duties/work schedules home*.

Stress due to Work and Family Roles

Fifty-two percent (52%) of the respondents indicated that they experience tiredness due to their working and family lives. One respondent wryly said: *There is no time to sit down and 'recharge your batteries*. 60% of the respondents indicated that their stress is due to the long distances they are traveling to and from their place of work and work-related problems. It was also found that apart from the fact that most of them travel long distances, 60 to 100 km, to and from their work places, their working hours are long and in the case of working women, they also have to do other domestic chores like washing and cooking. They further indicated that problems related to their work are also a major cause for their tiredness. Apart from workload at work and at home, others are also pursuing their studies as well.

Coping with Stress

Forty percent (40%) of the respondents indicated that they share family responsibilities so that they may have time to rest as a way of coping with tiredness. They get support from friends and relatives. Some of the coping strategies mentioned are: bed-rest, reading magazines, changing eating habits, walking, and listening to the music. Males and females use different coping strategies with most males using exercise or music, while females change their eating habits and take to bed-rest. In general, women socialize as a way of relieving stress.

Provision of Employer Benefits

On whether there is provision for benefits such as child-care, flexi-time, paternity/ maternity and other related benefits, it was found that ninety-five (95%) of employees enjoy paternity, maternity sick and family responsibilities leave, as these are mandated by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. An overwhelming majority (90%) of the respondents are satisfied with the benefits provided by their employers, although they wished

that their employers could also provide other benefits such as child care facilities and flexi-time

The Atmosphere and Relationship at Home

Table 1
Quality of relationship at home

Item	N	%
Very Cordial	13	27.08
Cordial	24	50.00
Could be better	7	14.58
Just tolerating it	4	8.34
Total	48	100.00

Thirty percent (30%) of the respondents found the atmosphere in their families as 'very cordial'. Forty-seven (47%) of the respondents experienced a 'cordial' relationship, and only fourteen (23%) said it could be better or only just tolerable. It is evident from the interviews that most of the women are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of their families' well-being.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the nature of work-family conflicts as experienced by a sample of urban employees in South Africa. Specifically, it looked at how work impacts on family life and the adjustments, if any, made to the traditional roles played by African women and how they coped with the inevitable stress and strains of modern work and family lives. The following are the major findings of this study:

i. Employees find work beneficial in providing financial independence, which enables them to meet their family obligations.

ii. Financial independence, however, comes with a lot of costs such as very limited time for the family, and especially, the children. To make up for this, the respondents look forward to weekends, special holidays and annual leaves. Again, this is also taken up with other social and community responsibilities.

iii. The respondents face serious time pressures and work and family role conflicts, especially the women folk, who have to combine their work responsibilities with their domestic responsibilities.

iv. Sharing the family responsibilities helps in reducing the stress even though traditional gender-based expectations make it difficult for most of the men to become more active in family concerns

v. Women, therefore, have to rely on outside help in the form of paid helpers, mothers, mothers-in-law and older children in order to cope with their family and career commitments.

vi. While the respondents are happy with the benefits received at work in the form of mandated leaves, they would want their organisations to argument this with more enlightened benefits such as child care facilities and flexi-time.

vii. The respondents cope with stress along gender lines, with females using food habits, socializing and bed rests, while men use exercise and music more often.

viii. On the whole, the home atmospheres are "cordial" for most of the respondents.

ix. Employees believe that organizational, spousal and social supports are of importance if they are to succeed in the balancing act.

Pleck (1989) found that women have more spillover from family to work and men have more work spill into the family system. Either way, given the findings of this study, the work and home settings are likely to be negatively impacted by the pressures exerted on work-family roles and relationships. This study has contributed to the literature on work-family conflicts in South Africa, as the situation depicted by the respondents are generally applicable to other urban employees in South Africa, since most of the jobs are to be

found in urban areas. The effective involvement of women in the economic life of the nation is significant in terms of the development of the country and improvement of the quality of life of the families. However, rapidly changing roles in modern society increase the possibility of role conflict. Family members can respond to the dynamic environments by changing both their role expectations and role performance, both of which calls for effective distribution of the responsibilities among the members of the family.

Literature on work-family conflicts has highlighted that organizational support is important to coping with work-family conflicts. In the case of South Africa, a lot of organizations are yet to provide their employees with basic amenities such as childcare facilities. As one study noted,

> people still believe things like childcare are their own burden. They are not society's burden, they are not their employer's burden, and it is not the union's job. It is just something they have to do. They chose to have these kids, and they just have to deal with it (SACCAWWU, 1991)

The study further found out that the culture of the South African society is such that people believe that

> if you have kids, then it's your problem; that people really haven't broken through yet that society should be taking some responsibility for working parents' responsibility for their kids. The norm out there is that if you can't handle it, you shouldn't have had them (LCRP & SACCAWU, 1991)

Even though legislation has made provision for different kinds of benefits in the form of paternity, maternity, sick and family responsibility leaves, it is still not enough for those with small children. As soon as workers have problems at home it automatically affects their performance, and this results in declining productivity for the company and ultimately, the nation.

Recommendations

Work-family conflicts affect both dual career and single families. For the dual-career families, the traditional culture that expects women to carry the load alone should be done away with. In other words, tradition should be modified to allow men to take part in the care of the family, not only by providing financially, but also understanding that sharing household chores is the only way to support their partners. In supporting their wives at home, they will also be showing a great of concern in the lives of those women who are trying to move up the ladder in their careers. Without the necessary spousal support, most working mothers find themselves not eager for promotion partly because a promotion often entails more hours at work, which means fewer hours at home.

For single parents, most of them prefer that organizations provide the necessary childcare facilities or subsidize them so that they are always near their children. The family's dependence on a single income makes employment of the single parent an economic imperative and lack of a partner to share the household and childcare tasks increases the responsibilities of single parents for both day-to-day tasks. Work becomes so important to single parents that a helper is needed and to get that helper means one has to work very hard so that the helper can also be satisfactorily remunerated. With so many programmes that employers can implement to assist their employees in balancing work and family, employees want to know that organizations recognize the issues, understand their struggle and are interested in helping. Employees' morale rises when organizations acknowledge that its employees have problems.

Organizations should be involved in assisting their employees with their family problems so there are no spillovers which affect the organization's productivity because it is very hard for employees to focus on their work if they have family problems. Family-friendly organizational cultures might help in reducing work-family conflict. Thus, organizations that understand that their employees' lives do not end up at knock-off time and starts again the following day, such organizations create environments where employees feel a sense of belonging and can easily rely on management for support. It is when the organization starts understanding the family welfare that it will

respect its employees' self-development by balancing work and family. Employers should be more concerned with the work-family conflict as a source of stress in the lives of their employees and as a potential liability in terms of productivity.

The government can, through its legislation, ensure that organizations adhere to those policies and regulations as set out. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act states the kinds of leaves that employees can enjoy. The big question is whether employers, in private and public sector, are really offering them. It is the duty of the government to monitor the different practices of organizations as far as such benefits are concerned to ensure that employees really enjoy paternity, maternity, sick and family leaves as stated in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Long hours of work and overtimes should also be appraised through the set legislation. There are instances where pregnant women are working under health-hazardous conditions; they find themselves with nowhere to go, or else they end up losing their jobs that they desperately need to meet their family needs. It is in such instances that the government, through its many structures, must enforce the law upon organizations that do not respect their employees.

Very little literature examines the role of trade unions in helping employees deal with family responsibilities. It is through unions that the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employers Act are in operation today, but work-family issues such as child-care seemed to be neglected. People still believe that things like childcare are employees' own burden, they are not society's burden, they are not their employer's burden, and it is not the union's job. It is due to such a belief that even if there is poll women or men are not likely to list children as an employee benefit as something new to put high on their list; they are far more likely to identify higher pay or health care as top priority (Gerstel, 2001). The fact that unions are predominantly male makes it difficult to understand the importance of family care, as they are not the primary care givers. Women's presence in the union is the key to the ability to make family issues a part of the union's agenda and contract negotiations. To improve the domestic and work lives, women have to start managing their lives more efficiently so that they have time for all other aspects that are important for them. They need to ask themselves questions like; what do I really want? where am I going? what

price am I prepared to pay? and most importantly, how can I manage my time more effectively?

Women are tugged in opposite directions. When they focus on work and career, they feel guilty that they are depriving their children of their company. And yet when they decide to stay at home or make job sacrifices for their families, they wonder if they are making the right career move. While others feel that the whole two-job syndrome (mom and career women) is a recipe for burnout, others say the balancing act can be achieved with a strong support system. It is up to women to assert themselves, learn to delegate and not just continue assuming responsibilities. They need to encourage their men to take a more active role in child rearing. They need to make men understand how important it is that women contribute to the economy and to themselves as individuals, by working. As Humphrey, Fleming and O'Donnell (2000) stated, "working moms should toss out their lists of things to do and focus on one or two things that they have to or want to do. And the same goes for cleaning. It does not hurt anyone to learn to live with a little disorder". Working women should never let anyone make them feel guilty for being working mothers.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Studies

Family life is so important that we treasure the love and support it provides. The traditional view of family life supports the idea that a woman's place is in the home, doing all the housework and cooking, and looking after children even after a full day's work. Men are still regarded as breadwinners, the ones with the power to control and certainly without the time or the inclination to do any household chores. True equality between men and women at all levels of society implies that both mothers and fathers share in childcare responsibilities. Employers and the government are called on to share in the load by providing necessary facilities and support for proper childcare. Work should not put workers under undue stress; it should not damage or degrade their humaneness. It should, at least, contribute to the general social advancement.

It is therefore important for organizations to recognize their responsibility to develop jobs and working conditions that are excellent for people as well

as the economic health of the organizations in trying to reduce work-family conflicts. Organizational culture may also play an important role in providing support to their employees as traditional gender-based expectations for men's and women's roles in the organization makes it difficult for men to become more active in family concerns.

Generally, the results indicate that employees desire a wide range of work and family support from their organizations. A supportive workplace and access to adequate and affordable childcare facilities is very common across the various supports desired. Although organizations offer benefits such as maternity and paternity leaves as required by legislation, unsupportive managers may restrict access to such. These suggest that those family-friendly policies and benefits must be supplemented by changes in organizational culture and managerial behaviours (Oyewunmi, 2018) and, certainly, more legislative enforcement. Further research is needed to explore how work-family conflicts affect the work situation and work performance of female employees vis-à-vis male employees. Also, future studies should focus attention on lone fathers as opposed to lone mothers or dual career women.

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David M. Akinnusi is Professor of Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations at Covenant University, Nigeria

Adebukola E. Oyewunmi is Assistant Professor of Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations at Covenant University, Nigeria

Olubukunola Sonubi is Assistant Professor of Human Resource Management at Swaziland College of Technology, Swaziland

Contact Address: Department of Business Management, College of Business and Social Sciences, Covenant University, Ogun State, Nigeria. Email: adebukola.oyewunmi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng