



Freedom and Flexibility: The Work-Family Balance of Single Female Entrepreneurs in Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose – Work-family research has mainly focused on nuclear families, neglecting other types of families, such as single self-employed parents. To what extent does the freedom and flexibility attached to being single and self-employed hinder or enhance single parents' work-family balance? Using role theory as a theoretical lens, this study examines single self-employed parents' work-family balance.

Methodology – Drawing on the accounts of 25 single self-employed parents in Nigeria, the article uses semi-structured interviews to examine how this group achieves work-family balance.

Findings – We found that the freedom and flexibility associated with being single and self-employed form a double-edged sword that increases the spate of singlehood and intensifies commitments to work, altogether preventing the participants in the study from achieving work-family balance. The findings also indicate that singlehood and a lack of spousal support cause and exacerbate work-family imbalance for this group. The findings further indicate that the reconstruction of functions, and the recreation of the traditional masculine gender role overwhelm single self-employed women in their entrepreneurial activities, thereby causing a lack of time and the energy required to function well in a family role, thus creating imbalance between the different spheres of life.

Research limitations – The extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is constrained by the limited sample and scope of the research.

Practical implications – While literature espouses freedom and flexibility as important ingredients needed to achieve work-family balance, this study shows that they enhance inter-role conflict. The study suggests creation of private or family time, devoid of work or entrepreneurial engagements, for single female entrepreneurs. This will ensure quality time and energy for the family and for fresh relationship – all of which will impact business positively.

Originality/value – Rather than enhancing work-family balance, the freedom and flexibility attached to being single and self-employed remain the main source of work-family imbalance for Nigerian single self-employed parents.

Keywords: Work-family balance, single parent, female entrepreneurs, Nigeria, role theory

Introduction

The growing global interest in female entrepreneurs (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Marlow et al., 2009) and the corresponding increase in women-owned businesses continue to contribute to both local economies and global economic development (Ács, Autio and Szerb, 2014; Gender Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2011; Verheul et al., 2006; Wong, Ho and Autio, 2005). Over a period of 20 years, the number of women-owned businesses has increased tremendously across the globe (Huang et al., 2020; Tlaiss, 2019). For example, in the US, women-owned businesses have increased by 114% (Lebowitz, 2018); in the UK, women-owned businesses contribute a staggering £105 billion to the economy (The Federation for Small Businesses, 2018). Similarly, the World Bank (2018) and Monde (2018) postulated that Africa is the only region in the world in which there are more female than male entrepreneurs. For example, The Conversation (2019) found that 40% of Nigerian women are entrepreneurs. On the other hand, globally, single parenthood is on the rise (Gingerbread, 2020; Grall, 2016), with a particular emphasis on Nigeria (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008; Akintomide, 2017).

However, despite having the highest number of female entrepreneurs and despite the rise in the number of single parents in Nigeria, there is a lack of research on single self-employed parents and how they deal with societal and other social phenomena, such as work-family balance (WFB). Even though entrepreneurs differ in their innovativeness (Li, Qu and Huang, 2018), research on female entrepreneurs has largely concentrated on Western contexts, such as the UK and the US (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), focusing mostly on entrepreneurial opportunities and modes of organisation (Busenitz et al., 2003), networking formation (Watson, 2012), and the process of authoring female entrepreneurs (Gherardi, 2015). Such research has neglected the social consequences and WFB of single self-employed parents in the global South, specifically Nigeria, a country that has experienced an increase in single working women (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008).

Therefore, due to the call from researchers (Ozbligin et al., 2011) to expand work-family research to different types of family (i.e. to consider not just nuclear families but also single parents and Casper and Swanberg's (2009) argument that single parent workers without children may deal with work-life issues differently because of their single status, this study examines the WFB experiences of single self-employed parents in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that employees' WFB in Western developed countries is not an accurate reflection of employees' WFB in Africa, especially in Nigeria (Epie and Ituma, 2014).

Therefore, understanding the WFB of this rarely studied group is apposite. By exploring how single self-employed parents manage their multiple roles to achieve WFB in the context of a strongly patriarchal society, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and contextual understanding of WFB and role theory in country-specific terms.

In particular, we investigate the extent to which entrepreneurial work demands and singlehood affect female entrepreneurs' WFB experiences. We use role theory (Katz and Kahn, 1978) to understand the patterns of WFB among single self-employed parents and how they achieve and maintain balance in their various life roles. To accomplish our goal, we interpretively explore one critical question: How would you describe the patterns of your WFB, considering your status as 'single' and your roles as entrepreneurs, mothers, and caregivers?

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we briefly explain WFB and role theory. WFB. This section is followed by a brief discussion on single self-employed parents and the Nigerian context. We then explain our research methodology and subsequently present the findings of our empirical inquiry. In the penultimate section, we discuss our findings and then present our conclusion, the limitations of the study, and an agenda for future research.

Work-Family Balance and Role Theory

WFB has always been understood from a role conflict perspective (for work-family conflict [WFC]) or a role accumulation perspective (for work-family enrichment [WFE]) (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). However, using a role balance perspective, researchers have found that WFB is conceptually and empirically different to WFC and WFE (Carlson, Grzywacz and Zivnuska, 2009; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007). WFB is the quest for balance between conflicting work and family roles. This is because participation in one role (often work) has often made desired participation in another role (usually family) difficult (Shaffer, Joplin and Hsu, 2011).

Due to the multifaceted nature of the WFB concept (McCarthy et al., 2013), a generally acceptable definition of the term is elusive. While some researchers equate balance with an absence of (or low levels) of conflict or low levels of negative spillover between work and family roles (Buffardi et al., 1999), others (Frone, 2003) have defined 'balance' as the simultaneous experience of low conflict and high enrichment between work and family roles. Researchers often use conflict and enrichment to define the balance between work and family roles (Casper et al., 2014). Based on Buffardi et al. (1999) and Frone (2003), WFB could then

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3 be defined as a 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and home', with minimum role
4 conflict (Clark, 2000, p. 751). Role theory deals with individual conflicting and demanding
5 roles and interpersonal relationships (Katz and Kahn, 1978). It has been argued that people
6 with more balanced role systems will experience less role strain, more role ease, greater
7 wellbeing, and a more positive role-specific experience than people with a less-balanced role
8 system (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). While positive role balance facilitates good
9 performance in every role in the entire role system, negative role balance results in
10 disengagement in the performance of every role. In their roles at work and at home, employees
11 are confronted with role expectations that can be fulfilled by certain behaviours (Rodham,
12 2000). In other words, 'role balance is both a behavioural pattern of acting across roles in a
13 certain way and a corresponding cognitive-affective pattern of organizing one's inner life of
14 multiple selves' (Marks and MacDermid, 1996, p. 421).

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16 Individual participation in multiple life roles can be described from two perspectives: scarcity
17 and enhancement (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; Frone, 2003). According to the scarcity
18 perspective, human energy is fixed and limited (Barnett and Gareis, 2006). As a result, when
19 an individual engages in multiple roles, the roles compete for their limited time and energy.
20 Thus, the time and energy used in one life domain (e.g. work) become scarce for use in another
21 domain (e.g. family) (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014). This is one of the reasons why people
22 performing multiple life roles with conflicting demands often have difficulties in performing
23 each role successfully (Ruderman et al., 2002). Being involved in multiple roles often causes
24 conflicts between work and family domains (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; Maertz and Boyar,
25 2011). Enhancement perspective, on the other hand, suggests that involvement in multiple roles
26 is beneficial because experience in one role positively affects experience in the other role
27 (Frone, 2003). This means that engaging in multiple roles enhances individuals' overall
28 available energy (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014).

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30 Even though the extant literature has been dominated by the scarcity perspective (Barnett and
31 Gareis, 2006), both perspectives have been found to best describe individuals' involvement in
32 multiple roles, which is important for gaining a better understanding of employees' WFB
33 (Frone, 2003; Rothbard, 2001). Therefore, considering their multiple roles as self-employed
34 women, mothers, and caregivers as well as the freedom and flexibility associated with
35 singlehood and being self-employed, this study seeks to examine single female entrepreneurs'
36 WFB. How do single female entrepreneurs manage and balance their roles as self-employed
37 women, mothers, and caregivers? The majority of the WFB research has been undertaken in

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3 the setting of a 'normal' nuclear family. As mentioned above, in response to calls from
4 researchers (Ozbligin et al., 2011) to expand work-family research to types of family other than
5 the nuclear family, this study examines single self-employed parents' WFB. We aim to
6 examine whether their luxury of freedom, flexibility, and involvement in multiple roles
7 contribute to WFB (enhancement) or imbalance (scarcity).
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12 **Single Self-employed Parents: the Nigerian Context**

14 Recent studies have included single workers in research on WFB (Casper and Swanberg, 2009;
15 Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga, 2007). Research has indicated that single parents do experience
16 more WFC than coupled parents (Duxbury et al., 1994; Pedersen and Minnotte, 2012). For
17 example, Baxter and Alexander (2008) in their study undertaken in Australia found that single
18 mothers experience a higher level of WFC than mothers in dual-parent families. Regardless of
19 status, however, both single mothers and mothers in two-parent families have to deal with the
20 conflicting roles of work and family (Reimann, Marx and Diewald, 2019). While dual-parent
21 families share the demands of family between the two parents, single parents, in contrast, are
22 solely responsible for negotiating and striking a balance between work and family roles
23 (Voydanoff, 1988).
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26 Women account for 80% of business start-ups in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kitching and Woldie,
27 2004) and Nigeria, according to one BBC report (2017). The region therefore has the highest
28 number of female entrepreneurs in the world. The involvement and level of entrepreneurial
29 activities are higher among women (41%) than men (29%) in Nigeria (Adetoyinbo, 2019). This
30 shows that more Nigerian women than men engage in entrepreneurship. The higher number of
31 self-employed women in developing countries (especially Nigeria) could be attributed to
32 societal challenges; a desire for social and financial independence; and many other possible
33 reasons (Vossenber, 2013). However, despite the immense contribution of female
34 entrepreneurs to the Nigerian economy and their recorded success rate over the years, they are
35 impeded by many challenges and difficulties (Remi-Alarape et al., 2009). These challenges
36 could be personal, family-, gender-, and/or market-based issues (Remi-Alarape et al., 2009).
37 The family-and gender-based challenges are often the result of gender roles and responsibilities
38 that society places on women regardless of their employment status (Adisa et al., 2014). This
39 often exacerbates WFC for women who are married with children (Adisa et al., 2016).
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42 Globally, single parenthood is on the rise, with approximately 13.7 million single parents in
43 the US, almost 2 million single parents in the UK, and about 28% of South African women are
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3 single parents (Gingerbread, 2020; Grall, 2016). In Nigeria, single parenthood used to be
4 regarded as something that is both culturally and socially unacceptable. However, nowadays,
5 single-parenthood is fast becoming a norm (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008). Although there
6 are no clear statistics on single parents in Nigeria, practical experience and newspaper reports
7 show that there has been an increase in the number of single parents in Nigeria (Akintomide,
8 2017). Due to the increasing prevalence of single parents and female entrepreneurs in Nigeria
9 (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008; Akintomide, 2017), this study explores the WFB experiences
10 of single self-employed parents in Nigeria.
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18 **Methodology**

19 Given the nature of the issue that this study seeks to address (the WFB of single female
20 entrepreneurs), a qualitative exploratory approach (Corbin and Straus, 2014; Creswell, 2013)
21 was deemed appropriate for advancing our understanding of the phenomenon under study. We
22 conducted our study in Lagos, Nigeria. The participants were recruited through the method of
23 ‘snowballing’, where one participant guided the researchers to another (Ekman, 2015). We
24 devised three theoretical sampling criteria (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to select our research
25 participants. Firstly, the participants were required to be self-employed business owners who
26 are solely responsible for running and managing the day-to-day activities of their business.
27 Secondly, they were required to be single (i.e. not married). This could be as a result of ‘never
28 having married’, being widowed, or getting divorced. Thirdly, they were required to have
29 children and other care responsibilities, e.g. care for elderly parents. We employed a range of
30 strategies to reach and recruit our research participants, who met the aforementioned criteria.
31 These strategies included referrals, snowballing (Noy, 2008), a local institutional contact, local
32 churches, and local mosques (Sarpong and Maclean, 2015).
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44 While incentives for participation were not offered, 32 participants expressed an interest to
45 participate in our study. However, following the purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002),
46 25 single female entrepreneurs met our sampling criteria. All the participants had a very good
47 command of the English language – they were educated to at least the level of a first university
48 degree (18 have bachelor’s degrees and seven have master’s degrees). They were aged between
49 35 and 49 – all single. While 14 had never married, 11 were single following divorce. Together,
50 they reported an average seven years of having been self-employed. Table 1 provides the
51 biographical summaries of the participants. We adopted a semi-structured interview style,
52 which allowed both new and predetermined issues to be examined (Cooper and Schlinder,
53 2008). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed us to elicit the participants’
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3 viewpoints more effectively than standardised interviews or questionnaires (Yin, 2003). The
4 data for the study was collected in Lagos, the commercial centre of Nigeria.
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7 All interviews were conducted individually at times and places that suited the participants.
8 Furthermore, all the interviews were digitally recorded, and each lasted between 60 and 90
9 minutes. Each interview began with information about the aims of the study and assurances of
10 anonymity. Participant were then asked to complete a short biographical data form to capture
11 contextual factors like age, the nature/cause of their singlehood, number of children, and other
12 basic information (see Table 1). Thereafter, the participants were invited to relate their WFB
13 patterns; the reality of their WFB considering their single status; and their roles as
14 entrepreneurs, mothers, and caregivers. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, with
15 participants being accorded pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.
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23 **Insert Table 1 about here**
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26 ‘Years’ refers to the number of years the individual has been engaged in self-employed work.
27 ‘Other care receiver(s)’ means the number of other people that they care for besides their
28 children.
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31 **Data Analysis**

32 In an iterative fashion, we analysed the qualitative data by travelling back and forth between
33 the data and an emerging structure of theoretical arguments (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The
34 data analysis was done in three major stages, following Pratt et al.’s (2006) pattern. Firstly, we
35 created provisional categories and first-order codes. We began by identifying statements
36 regarding the participants’ views of their WFB patterns via open coding (Locke, 2001) and
37 then drew on common statements to form provisional categories and first-order codes.
38 Following the procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), we used a content
39 summary form to record the provisional categories revealed in each interview at each point in
40 time. For example, there were several data fragments that related to research question one,
41 ‘how would you describe the patterns of your WFB, considering your status as “single” and
42 your roles as entrepreneur, mother, and caregiver?’. After the codes were named and the
43 categories were constructed, we meticulously reviewed the interview data to evaluate important
44 narratives in the participants’ accounts (Labov, 1997) and to see which, if any, fitted each
45 category. Sometimes the revisited data did not fit well into a category, and we had to revise the
46 category.
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3 Secondly, we integrated the first-order codes and created theoretical categories. We developed
4 two aggregate categories (base on role theory): enhancement and scarcity – we analysed the
5 interview data based on the participants' involvement in multiple roles and how it contributes
6 to WFB (enhancement) or work-family imbalance (scarcity). These categories helped us make
7 the data intelligible for analysis and for viable theoretical explanations. Finally, we delimited
8 theory by aggregating theoretical dimensions. We then searched for the dimensions underlying
9 the theoretical categories that were generated in order to understand the participants' patterns
10 of WFB. Before we present our research findings, it is important for us to reflect on our
11 methodological limitations. Firstly, by employing semi-structured interviews, we could not
12 rule out the potential impact of self-serving bias in attribution (Mezulis et al., 2004), as we
13 invited only single female entrepreneurs to discuss their pattern of WFB based on their status
14 and roles. Furthermore, the researchers' kinship connection to the research context might shape
15 our assumptions and latently influence our understanding of the phenomena that we studied.

26 **Research Findings**

28 ***Lack of Spousal Support: Exacerbating Work-family Imbalance***

30 A lack of spousal presence to offer assistance with family duties was widely reported as a major
31 source of work-family imbalance among single female entrepreneurs. The participants shared
32 their experiences of their involvement in and the necessity of dealing with multiple roles within
33 the family domain (as mothers and caregivers) without spousal assistance as well as how
34 combining these roles with their very demanding roles as female entrepreneurs makes WFB
35 difficult for them. Ordinarily, female entrepreneurs often struggle to combine their demanding
36 and time-consuming entrepreneurial activities with domestic responsibilities (Jennings and
37 Brush, 2013). The lack of spousal support further exacerbates the pressure and role conflict,
38 leading to severe imbalance between the work and family domains. As Fredina explained:

46 I used to have a husband who was helpful, and even with him, I struggled a
47 bit to achieve a balance between my self-managing business activities and
48 family duties. Now that I am divorced, the struggle has worsened because of
49 my involvement in multiple roles at work and at home. I do everything alone,
50 making WFB really difficult for me (Fredina, 45 years old).

52 Corroborating Fredina's statement, Barbara also mentioned that spousal support would have
53 helped her achieve WFB:

57 My work demands as a female entrepreneur are huge. They require a lot of
58 time and energy, and my domestic duties as a single mother of three with an
59 aged mother to care for are also huge. In fact, they overwhelm me. Balancing
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these two roles is a big struggle, which would have been easier if I had a husband. At least my husband would have supported my entrepreneurial adventures and would have helped me with domestic duties. My being single makes involvement in multiple roles at work and home difficult...both work and family suffer (Barbara, 41 years old).

Discharging multiple roles without spousal support exacerbates single female entrepreneurs' WFB as the participants' found domains' activities competing for their time and energy. Wendy also explained:

I have no husband to help with my entrepreneurial activities and no man to help with my domestic chores. My being single means that I have to discharge these multiple roles and duties alone...most of the time, they negatively affect each other. My WFB suffers the consequences of my being a single female entrepreneur (Wendy, 47 years old).

Our data reveals that being single affects female entrepreneurs' WFB because there is no husband/partner to help them with their self-managed business activities and familial duties. As a result, their entrepreneurial activities and domestic duties compete for their time and energy. Even though the concept of 'mumpreneurship' evinces women's balancing of multiple roles as entrepreneurs and mothers (Duberley and Carrigan, 2013; Nel Maritz and Thongprovati, 2010), our data reveals that single female entrepreneurs struggle to achieve WFB without a spouse to assist in discharging their roles.

Breadwinner Status: A Huge Family Responsibility

Rather than taking the traditional position of a homemaker, all the participants have experienced shifts in their roles and are now the breadwinners of their family – a phenomenon that is attributed to their status as single entrepreneurs. This means they have a huge familial responsibility in terms of providing for their families. Family as a specific configuration in Nigeria is extended, thus the pressure on the breadwinner is amplified and, in some cases, multiplied. The participants' breadwinner status does not help them achieve WFB. Teresa elaborated on this point:

I am the breadwinner of my family – with two children, my mother, and a list of other relatives to support. Honestly, I don't think about work-family balance. The pressure to make more money to support my family is huge...I just concentrate on that (Teresa, 44 years old).

Here, Teresa's status as the breadwinner of her family piles pressure on her and negatively affects her WFB. This is a consequence of the cultural requirement to support one's extended family in the global South, particularly in Nigeria. Another participant commented:

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3 The responsibility of being the breadwinner of the family is huge and
4 excruciating for me as a single lady. I work harder to be able pay the rent, the
5 children's school fees, and pay my dad's and my aunt's medical bills. I also
6 support three of my nieces. I dedicate my time and energy to my business so
7 that I can more money to be able provide for all of these people. It is difficult
8 to create time to do other things (Amanda, 42 years old).
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11 In a related comment, Helen said:

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13 Supporting my nuclear and extended family means I must work hard to make
14 more money. I am a woman, but I am fulfilling the breadwinner
15 responsibility of a man. So, other important things such as attending parent
16 meetings in my daughters' school or attending family social functions suffer
17 (Helen, 35 years old).
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20 In Nigeria, from a cultural perspective, men are considered the breadwinners of their families,
21 who must provide for their wife/wives, children, and extended family (Akanle and Ejiade,
22 2012; Bammeke, 2007). However, the participants' status as a single entrepreneur has
23 reconstructed this cultural position and placed them in the difficult position of being the
24 breadwinner for their family. **Therefore, the single female entrepreneurs' participation in
25 multiple roles as breadwinners, mothers, and entrepreneurs results in scarcity, which means
26 that these roles compete for their time and energy resulting in role conflict (see Barnett and
27 Gareis, 2006; Ruderman et al., 2002). Furthermore, the reconstruction of gender roles is a
28 stressor for their WFB.**
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36 ***Less Time for Building and Nurturing Relationships***

37 The participants revealed that being single has considerably increased their working time,
38 which has then affected the time they spend attending to domestic duties. The participants
39 spend little or, in some cases, no time at all in building and nurturing relationships such as
40 friendships and romantic relationships. Having to deal alone with work demands and domestic
41 duties depletes the participants' time and energy for building and nurturing such relationships.
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46 Paula commented:

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48 I am a single lady with many roles. My time and energy are mainly divided
49 between my entrepreneurial activities, my children, and attending to my sick
50 dad. I really don't have enough time [for friendships] – visiting and
51 socialising with my friends suffers (Paula, 37 years old).
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54 Another participant explained how she has tried to enter into another relationship after her
55 divorce, but lack of time and energy has prevented her from doing so:
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58 I have been divorced twice, and my lack of time was a huge contributory
59 factor on both occasions. I devote a lot of time to my business, otherwise it
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3 won't be a success. This leaves me with little time for my family, and I'm
4 often very tired when I'm eventually around. I tried going into another
5 relationship, but it lasted only a month because I practically have no time for
6 it...I'm used to it (Lesley, 48 years old).
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8 Similarly, Rebecca explained also how entrepreneurial activities including business trips
9 deprive her chances of nurturing a romantic relationships and how business activities and trips
10 sometimes keep her away for weeks. She explained:
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14 I have tried being in relationships, but it didn't work. My business and
15 entrepreneurial activities take up a lot of my time. I travel a lot. I'm simply
16 not always available for nuptial relationships...even my relationships with
17 my family and friends suffer because of lack of time. For example,
18 sometimes, I don't get to see my child for days because I'm away on a
19 business trip...so, I have no WFB at the moment. I think I'm used to being
20 single...it's psychological (Rebecca, 40 years old).
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23 Reflecting on this theme, the participants unanimously averred that they have very little or no
24 time to build and nurture relationships. The lack of time and frequent 'busyness', which have
25 widely been reported as features of modern life (Lewis, 2003; Rotondo et al., 2003), are
26 responsible for single female entrepreneurs' inability to build and nurture relationships.
27 Scholars have argued that relationships that are based on friendship are a source of social glue,
28 are important for wellbeing, and are important for social integration (Spencer and Pahl, 2006;
29 Uchino, 2004). However, single female entrepreneurs tend to devote a lot of their time to
30 entrepreneurial activities in order to make success of them, thereby pressuring and even
31 extinguishing relationships. Rebecca and five other participants mentioned being
32 psychologically attached to being single. This could explain the lack of time and energy for the
33 family domain for single female entrepreneurs.
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42 ***The Spate of Divorce among Single Female Entrepreneurs***

43 The data analysis reveals the spate of divorce among single female entrepreneurs and its
44 connection to work-family issues. Forty-four per cent (11) of the participants are single
45 following a divorce. They explained that a change in priorities, a neglect for domestic
46 responsibilities, and a strong desire for entrepreneurial success were the factors responsible for
47 their failed marriages that eventually led to their becoming single. For example, Chantell felt
48 that a change in her priorities led to the dissolution of her marriage. She explains:
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55 My priority was just my family, but this, at some point, changed to family
56 and my business. I gave my business the same attention and importance that
57 I accord my business. My husband did not like it. He wanted me to change
58 my priority to giving less time and attention to my business and more to my
59 family...but I had invested too much money, energy, and time in the
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3 business...we could not reconcile our priorities, so we had to go our separate
4 ways (Chantell, 35 years old).
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6 The participants also commented on their neglect of domestic responsibilities as another reason
7 that led to the dissolution of their marriages. Women often struggle to combine demanding and
8 time-consuming entrepreneurial activities with their domestic responsibilities and ambitions
9 (Jennings and Brush, 2013). Many participants agreed that, although unintended, neglecting
10 their family and domestic responsibilities was responsible for their marriage failure. This was
11 caused by the very demanding nature of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. A participant commented:
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17 Yes. I admit that it was neglectful, and I think that was the sacrifice I had to
18 make for building a successful business. Putting in the required time, energy,
19 and attention into my business led to my abandonment of some familial
20 duties. My husband kept complaining about it, but I was determined to make
21 a success of my business. We both could not come to a common ground;
22 consequently, it affected my marriage and family. It's sad that I lost my
23 marriage, but my business flourishes (Esther, 40 years old).
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27 Wilma recounted her experience of the three factors:
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30 I think it was priorities (I mean giving my business a high priority), an
31 inability to attend to domestic duties (as is expected of a typical African
32 woman), and a burning desire to make a success of my business. All of these
33 factors led to incessant role conflict (between work and family roles), which
34 eventually led to the dissolution of my marriage. It happens to many female
35 entrepreneurs who are ambitious and determined to achieve entrepreneurial
36 success (Wilma, 43 years old).
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39 The participants' comments show that the demands for managing and sustaining their privately
40 owned business, the family role (in terms of the responsibilities and expectations of a woman,
41 especially in Africa), and the demands in terms of managing the caregiving role are often in
42 conflict. This role conflict means that the participants allocate more time to their work role and
43 less to the family role, which then results in differing role pressures.
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47 *A Double-edged Sword: Freedom and Flexibility*

48 *Freedom*

49 The data analysis also reveals that singlehood has relieved the participants of the cultural
50 subordination that is grounded in Nigerian patriarchal societal norms (see Adisa et al., 2019),
51 which consigns women to subordination by males. Being single allows the participants to fully
52 engage in their entrepreneurial activities without a husband's hindrance, but it also affects their
53 WFB. A participant commented on how the freedom destroys the 'no travel overnight and no
54 weekend business' regulations:
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3 To be honest, my work-family balance was better when I was married than
4 what it is now. Then, I really could not do much, because my husband would
5 not let me. There were a lot of dos and don'ts. For example, I could not go
6 on any business trip and stay overnight. I had to be home by 6pm every day,
7 and I was to undertake no business activity on Saturdays and Sundays. Yes,
8 I was able to spend time with my family and promptly attend to family duties,
9 but my business suffered. Now, I have freedom, which is good for my
10 business – but I have no work-family balance. Sometimes, I could travel for
11 days and would leave my kids at the mercy of a house help. I work all the
12 time, including weekends. I think that is the price I have to pay for putting
13 my business in order (Camila, 40 years old).
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16 When asked about the freedom associated with being single, Lesley commented:
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19 My time and life were regulated by my husband when I was married. I felt
20 imprisoned, because I practically had no freedom to attend to my business as
21 I want. You know, in Africa, a man makes decisions on everything under his
22 roof. I now enjoy unregulated time and life, but it really is affecting my work-
23 family balance. For example, my child has been with the minder for four days
24 now because I've been really busy with my business, and I have not seen my
25 mum for days as well. It is not good for family ties, but I have to work hard
26 to pay my bills (Lesley, 48 years old).
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29 Elizabeth said:
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31 I'm single, and I have all the time in the world for my business...even though
32 that really is affecting my roles as a mother and a daughter. On the one hand,
33 I am happy because my business strives, but on the other hand, I am not
34 happy because my family suffers. I cannot not discharge my roles as expected
35 (Elizabeth, 37 years old).
36
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38 The participants believed that the freedom associated with being single distances them from
39 their family (as no one regulates their time and lives), thus making them spend most of their
40 time and attention on their businesses.
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43 *Flexibility*

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45 Aside from the women's freedom from men's clutches concerning regulation of their time,
46 which single female entrepreneurs affirm is good for their entrepreneurial success but
47 damaging to their WFB, the participants also commented on the flexibility associated with
48 being single and self-employment as a hindrance to their achieving WFB. Flexibility is often
49 mentioned as one of the features of 'good jobs' (Constable et al., 2009). Single female
50 entrepreneurs enjoy high flexibility of work and time. The participants referred to this as one
51 of the benefits of being single and self-employed. However, they feel that the flexibility has
52 negatively affected their WFB. Abigail commented:
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3 Personally, I would say the flexibility associated with being single and self-
4 employed is only good for my business and not good for my work-family
5 balance. I practically work everywhere. Sometimes, I will lock my children
6 in their room so that I could have a Skype meeting, or I could talk to a client
7 (Abigail, 47 years old).
8

9
10 Even though Dickisson (1997) stressed the importance of having a separate room in the home
11 in which to work, Abigail still sometimes locks her children up in their rooms to attend to
12 business activities. Flexibility has been argued to enhance WFB (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004;
13 Reeves et al., 2007). However, Kate described the flexibility associated with being single and
14 self-employed as too much and not good for WFB:
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18 Flexibility is good, but I think the flexibility associated with being single and
19 self-employed is too much and is really not good for work-family balance. I
20 was married, so I know what it was like as a married person and what it is
21 like now. I allocate my time and attention freely and independently, and trust
22 me, my business gets the fattest share (Kate, 48 years old).
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26 Another participant describes the freedom and flexibility associated with being single and self-
27 employed as a double-edged sword that has negatively affected the enactment of her work-
28 family role:
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32 The freedom is sweet because no one regulates my time and life. The
33 flexibility is also sweet because it allows me to work everywhere and at any
34 time. However, it's like a double-edged sword. It is damaging my work-
35 family balance, as I cannot not separate work from home and home from
36 work. It is especially affecting my relationship with my children and aged
37 mother – I have no time and attention for them (Catherine, 41 years old).
38

39
40 The participants described the freedom and flexibility associated with being single female
41 entrepreneurs as good for their entrepreneurial success but not good for their work-family role
42 synthesis and thus damaging for their WFB.
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44 **Practical Implications**

45
46 This study has identified profound inter-role conflict among single female entrepreneurs. While
47 extant literature on this topic espouses freedom and flexibility as important ingredients needed
48 to achieve WFB, this study shows that they enhance inter-role role conflict. Thus, we suggest
49 the creation of private or family time that is devoid of entrepreneurial engagements for single
50 female entrepreneurs. This will ensure quality time and energy for the family as well as fresh
51 and rejuvenated energy for the business at its time. Flexibility is one of the tenets of good WFB
52 (Galea et al., 2014; Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity, 2009). However, single female
53 entrepreneurs use the freedom associated with flexibility to harm their WFB. Therefore, in
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3 order to achieve ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and home’ with minimum role
4 conflict (Clark, 2000), single female entrepreneurs need to take on the right attitude of using
5 flexibility to achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and family roles with little or
6 no conflict. A strong will and desire to achieve good balance between their work and family
7 roles must be reflected in their decisions attitudes, and use of resources. Single female
8 entrepreneurs’ respect for family time and separation thereof from work time will be a good
9 practice for them. Employees’ work and family lives will always overlap, thus causing conflict
10 between the two domains (Galea et al., 2014); however, it is particularly essential that single
11 female entrepreneurs do not misuse the freedom and flexibility associated with singlehood by
12 limiting the influx of their entrepreneurial activities to their family domains.

21 **Discussion**

22
23 This study makes an important contribution by highlighting crucial phenomena that cause and
24 exacerbate single self-employed parents’ WFB. Firstly, contrary to the popular notion in the
25 literature that many women continue to engage in self-employed work in order to gain more
26 flexibility and control (Baber and Monaghan, 1988; Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004; Golden and
27 Veiga, 2005; Machung, 1989; Reeves et al., 2007; Ward, 2007), the participants described the
28 freedom and flexibility associated with being single and self-employed as a double-edged
29 sword that frees them from the bondage of patriarchal norms and the troubles of corporate
30 work. However, it negatively affects their WFB. The freedom and flexibility extend the
31 participants’ scope and hours of work, thus constraining and diminishing the time and energy
32 available for the family domain.

33
34 Secondly, the study highlights the extent to which the reconstruction of functions and the
35 recreation of traditionally masculine gender roles, which place single self-employed parents in
36 the position of breadwinners, immensely contribute to their work-family imbalance. Lack of
37 spousal support further intensifies the recreation of the gender roles for the participants. Single
38 female entrepreneurs struggle to cope with the ‘do it all alone’ syndrome – a situation in which
39 they shoulder all the familial and work responsibilities alone. Spousal support would have
40 allowed for these women to share the available time for the family, enhanced their energy, and
41 fostered a positive mood in the home (Ruderman et al., 2002), which would then enhance their
42 WFB. While women in this study desire WFB, breadwinner role overwhelms them with
43 entrepreneurial activities – causing a lack of time and energy required to function well in a
44 family role, thus creating imbalance between the different spheres of life.

The Time, Energy, and Relationship Paradox

An interesting finding of this study is the link between the participants' time and energy, and their singlehood status. Singlehood has considerably increased the participants' working time, which in turn has affected the time they spend in building and nurturing relationships, such as friendships and romantic relationships. Relationships that are based on friendship are a source of social glue that is required for wellbeing and social integration (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Uchino, 2004). However, single female entrepreneurs' relationships are being pushed out by an increasing lack of time, which is orchestrated by a profound desire for entrepreneurial success. This finding corroborates Lewis's (2003) argument that lack of time and feelings of 'busyness' are features of contemporary life. We found compelling evidence that lack of time and 'busyness' with entrepreneurial activities depleted the participants' time for building and nurturing relationships. The lack of time for building and nurturing relationships and friendships has fuelled the general perception that single people are less sociable (see Casper and DePaulo, 2012; DePaulo, 2011). Furthermore, our data analysis revealed the spate of divorce among single female entrepreneurs and its connection to work-family issues. Forty-four percent (11) of the participants are single following a divorce. The participants explained a change in priorities, a neglect of domestic responsibilities, and a profound desire for entrepreneurial success as the factors responsible for their failed marriages which eventually led to their being single. Similarly and relatedly, time and energy are concentrated on entrepreneurial activities, which cause scarcity in the family domain (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; Barnett, Marshall and Singer, 1992). Consequently, the incompatible role demands lead to conflict and marriage dissolutions. This resonates well with Barnett et al.'s (1992, p. 209) argument that 'the more roles a person – usually a woman – occupies, the greater the pressure on her time and energy and more depleted her reserves'.

Theoretical Contributions

Kossek et al. (1999) argued that a person's ability and skills in managing their work-family roles is dependent on having a work context that affords them with the opportunity to exercise discretion or choice. However, this is not entirely true for the participants in this study, who exercised discretion and yet have an unfavourable WFB due to their involvement in multiple roles that deplete their time and energy. Enhancement, in role theory (Frone, 2003), means that involving in multiple roles is beneficial because experience in one role positively affects experience in the other role. For single self-employed parents, involvement in multiple roles leads to a lack of time and energy, as the time and energy expended in the work domain

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3 becomes extremely scarce for use in the family domain (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014).
4 Furthermore, there is role pressure, which is a result of the participants' single status and desire
5 for entrepreneurial success. All of these factors in combination affect how the participants
6 structure and combine their multiple roles. This study has therefore argued that the relationship
7 between single self-employed parents and WFB is more complex than has been acknowledged
8 in the extant literature (Ezzedeen and Jelena, 2015).
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14 While our study advances our understanding of WFB among single female entrepreneurs in a
15 non-Western context, it also has some limitations, which in turn open up opportunities for
16 future research. Firstly, our study is based on only 25 interviews with single female
17 entrepreneurs. We therefore cannot generalise our results to other research contexts (e.g.
18 Europe and the US) and other demographic groups (e.g. single male entrepreneurs). In future
19 studies, it would be interesting to include single male entrepreneurs to see if they have the same
20 WFB challenges as women. Furthermore, this line of research offers fertile ground for probing
21 the dark side of flexibility in relation to achieving WFB. Secondly, this study employed the
22 qualitative research method, and a future study may employ the longitudinal research method,
23 which would involve many samples, which would allow the results of such a study to be
24 generalised.
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36 **Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research**

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38 Flexibility and freedom are two essential ingredients that are widely believed to be required to
39 achieve WFB. However, as with the participants in this study, these two ingredients form a
40 double-edged sword that deplete the participants' time and energy, making them unable to
41 function appropriately in the family domain. The scarcity perspective of role theory proposes
42 that human energy is fixed and limited (Barnett and Gareis, 2006); therefore, when an
43 individual engages in multiple roles, the roles compete for their limited time and energy (Stock,
44 Bauer and Bieling, 2014). The competition for the participants' time and energy is in favour of
45 their work-life as they spend more time and energy in this domain. Consequently, their family
46 life suffers the unfortunate consequence of their lack of time and energy to attend to family
47 matters and even to build and nurture romantic relationships.
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56 The study has highlighted the importance of spousal support in the management of multiple
57 roles as the participants struggle to manage their multiple roles as single parents, caregivers,
58 and entrepreneurs – a phenomenon that is responsible for some participants' failed marriages.
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3 Conclusively, we argue that long working hours and the ability to work everywhere (borne out
4 of a strong desire for success and a strong effort to fulfil the breadwinner role) increase the
5 time and energy expended on the work role, thus causing a lack of the time and energy required
6 to function well in the family domain. Therefore, the more roles an individual has to perform,
7 the more profound their involvement in all of the roles, the less time they assign to each role,
8 and the more energy that gets depleted. As recommended by Özbilgin et al. (2011), this study
9 has expanded work-family research to types of family other than the nuclear – single self-
10 employed parents. Despite the contributions made by this study, we recognise that its findings
11 cannot be generalised due to the small sample size employed. We also acknowledge the limited
12 generalisability of the study due to the convenience sample adopted here, which is restricted to
13 one group (single self-employed parents) and one country (Nigeria). It is therefore hoped that
14 this study will stimulate further exciting research opportunities in the patterns of single self-
15 employed people and encourage them to reflect on their WFB in terms of drawing boundaries
16 between their work and family demands. Future research may use a longitudinal design with
17 larger representative samples to examine the boundary management and work-family
18 experiences of single self-employed parents and how these experiences change over time –
19 using both male and female representative samples.
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Table 1 Participant Descriptors

No.	Pseudonyms/Age	Gender	Marital status	No of Children	Years	Other care receiver(s)
1	Wilma (43)	Female	Single	2	5	1
2	Chantell (35)	Female	Divorced	2	6	1
3	Rebecca (40)	Female	Single	1	5	2
4	Fredina (45)	Female	Divorced	2	4	1
5	Brenda (38)	Female	Single	3	7	1
6	Debrah (39)	Female	Single	2	6	1
7	Naomi (46)	Female	Divorced	2	6	1
8	Catherine (41)	Female	Single	3	7	1
9	Kate (48)	Female	Divorced	2	3	2
10	Paula (37)	Female	Single	3	9	1
11	Lesley (48)	Female	Divorced	1	10	1
12	Wendy (47)	Female	Single	3	8	1
13	Elizabeth (37)	Female	Single	2	9	1
14	Betty (45)	Female	Divorced	2	6	2
15	Verity (49)	Female	Single	2	12	1
16	Amanda (42)	Female	Single	3	5	2
17	Esther (40)	Female	Divorced	2	6	1
18	Helen (35)	Female	Divorced	2	6	1
19	Teresa (44)	Female	Single	2	8	1
20	Margret (48)	Female	Divorced	1	9	1
21	Edith (39)	Female	Single	3	7	2
22	Daisy (43)	Female	Divorced	2	6	2
23	Abigail (47)	Female	Single	2	5	1
24	Camila (40)	Female	Divorced	2	5	1
25	Barbara (41)	Female	Single	2	10	1