

## **Challenges and Coping Strategies of Career Mothers Teaching in Selected Senior High Schools in The New Juaben Municipality of Ghana**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Over the years, women's position has changed remarkably from just a home keeper and baby maker and they are seen in various sector actively engaged in work outside the home. Despite these great strides, women seem to face many challenges, including discrimination and gender stereotypes. This study explored the challenges and coping strategies of career mothers teaching in selected senior high school in the New Juaben Municipality. The study adopted the qualitative research approach and used a case study design to explore the experiences of these career mothers. The study population consisted of career mothers teaching in senior high schools in the New Juaben Municipality. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select twenty participants for the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the participants. The data was analysed using thematic approach. The study revealed that career mothers teaching in senior high schools face challenges associated with role conflict between their work role and family responsibilities. They indicated that they managed the conflict through careful structuring and planning of their activities, prioritizing their responsibilities. It was also revealed that career mothers needed support from spouses, families, and colleagues in order to cope with their multiple roles. It is recommended that Ministry of Education through Ghana Education Service develop policies that enable career mothers to achieve work-life balance. Such policies may include career breaks, job sharing, flexible working arrangements and childcare policies.*

**Keywords:** career mothers, challenges, coping strategies, Ghana, senior high school

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The place of women in society has changed and continues to change. Their space is no longer restricted to the home. Today women have the opportunity to explore the labour market and live challenging lives as formal sector workers because of formal education. Women presence in the world of work increased in recent times and many have achieved professional recognition and success. With these glimpses of achievements, others find it more difficult to reconcile the multiple roles, commitments and career interruptions. The quandary that these mothers face is combining employment with motherhood. Educated women with family responsibilities often face challenges

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(Knowles, Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2009). Women's representation in the workforce has increased dramatically over the past 30 years, yet, women still take a greater responsibility for the family especially the care for children (Guendouzi, 2006). Knowles, Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2009) argued that mothers struggle to understand themselves by feeling a sense of acute division when attempting to reconcile the two worlds. Many mothers seem to feel exhausted and overwhelmed trying to balance paid work commitments with parenting commitments.

Women's labour force participation is considered as economic indicator since it helps to reduce unemployment rate, poverty and increases the overall standard of living. Similarly, as part of women's labour force participation, women's involvement in the teaching profession is beneficial to the country as both male and female teachers have positive impact on students of diverse background within the nation (Sultana, Norhirdawati, Zahir, Norzalan & Yaacob, 2014). According to a report by Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO (2011), historical patterns of the movement of women into the teaching profession are those in western countries, which have had the longest experiences of mass education. The presence of a significant proportion of female teachers - particularly in the early childhood and primary levels - is a long-standing phenomenon that characterizes the education systems of many countries. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are examples of countries often referred to as having 'feminised' teaching professions, denoting that, women represent a significant majority of the teaching workforce. An increased number of females in the teaching profession is often associated with education systems that have achieved or nearly achieved universal basic education. On the other hand, those countries that continue to strive towards Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more frequently associated with having a deficit of women teachers. Cortina and San-Roman (2006) posited that historical analysis indicates that an influx of women into the teaching profession has been central to the successful performances of girls. Teaching like any other profession also comes with its difficulties.

Teaching is not only a noble profession, but also a demanding occupation where teachers need to maintain a high level of professional performance. They must accept personal responsibility for their own performance, growth and development (Naik, 2008). Therefore, teaching is considered one of the highest stress occupations, especially for the women who need to deal with both work and family responsibilities in most developing countries. Although there are a number of factors contributing to challenges women in teaching profession face, literature focuses on domestic gender ideology. Women are more naturally disposed towards nurture than men, based on the traditional gender roles found in many societies that place women within the domestic domain as caregivers (Drudy, 2008). From this belief, female teachers who give priority to family responsibilities over career would be interpreted as lacking commitment that will hinder their personal career goals (Acker, 1989).

In most developing countries, including Ghana, the recruitment of female teachers is an issue that has become increasingly important. The presence of women in education sector in sub-Saharan Africa is still in the minority. According to UNESCO (2010), sub-Saharan Africa in 2007 had 44%

and 30% of female teachers in primary and secondary education respectively being the lowest. The report further indicated that in Ghana the female teachers within the education sector was 32% in 1999 and it increased by one percent to 33% in the area of primary education in 2007. Again, in the area of secondary education, there were 22% of female teachers in 1999 and it still remains 22% as one of the lowest in the sub region in 2007. From the data, there is clear indication of insignificant growth in the number of females within the teaching profession. Recent statistics may not deviate from this much. The male dominance in the educational sector especially at the second cycle and tertiary levels continues to be high and eminent in Ghana, where democracy is becoming an idol. In as much as the number of female teachers is still below expectation, research conducted by Sultana et al. (2014) has shown that some positive qualities such as honesty, creative thinking, problem solving and patient are appearing in female that are appropriate for the highest achievement in the teaching profession.

Although women's participation in the teaching profession is contributing to economic and social development of the country, they are facing several difficulties in managing family as well as their profession. There are a number of factors that influence female teachers' challenges such as increased duties and demands on time, working more than normal working hours and gender norms. Also, in literature, studies only show how mothers are juggling with the pursuit of education and nursing babies simultaneously (Guyas & Poling, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). In related area, there are few studies on balancing parenthood and career (Guendouzi, 2006). Studies on how women negotiate their world in specific careers seem to be rare. In accordance with this background, the study attempts to examine how career mothers balance motherhood and the teaching profession in selected secondary school in the New Juaben Municipality. The study explored the experiences of career mothers in teaching profession focusing on the challenges they faced in managing their work and family from Ghanaian perspective using New Juaben Municipality as a case study.

The study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the perceptions of career mothers in teaching profession regarding possible barriers to women advancement in Career?, (2) What are the challenges of career mothers teaching in selected schools in the New Juaben Municipality?, (3) How do career mothers cope with their teaching profession and family responsibilities in the New Juaben Municipality? and (4) What are the support systems available for career mothers in teaching profession in the New Juaben Municipality? The study was delimited to career mothers teaching in selected schools in the New Juaben Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW AND BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN THE WORLD OF WORK**

The Social Role Conflict Theory was adopted in this study. The theory of social role conflict was applied in this study to explore the challenges of career mothers who are teaching and at the same time having the responsibility of taking care of the home and how they combined these

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responsibilities. Within social role theory, an individual's behaviour is explained by using the concept of role (Mantere, 2008). A role is the set of behaviours that others expect of individuals in a certain context (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Situations in which individuals feel the need to take on a role that collides with their personal values, take on several incompatible roles or a clash between two or more of a person's roles is referred to as role conflict (Wolf, 2011). Nicklaus (2007) posits that role conflict is an incongruence of role expectation in which activities and behaviour to be carried by an individual do not conform to job description and how employees should act in carrying their task because of other pressing job. Social role conflict occurs as concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible behaviours are expected from a person. The ideas associated with role conflict are attractive and appear to capture some of the subjective problems associated with participation in the complex social system (Biddle, 1986).

Social role theory suggests the coping strategies women may use when juggling multiple roles depend on individual characteristics and organizational climate. Two strategies are highlighted; these are boundary management and role management (Dulin, 2007). Boundary management is the strategies, principles and practices one uses to organize and separate role demands and expectations into specific realms of work roles from family roles by doing work during work hours without allowing interruptions of personal matter (Dulin, 2007). This theory stipulates that one must attend to family roles when at home without bringing work home or answering work calls when at home. In other words, these individuals are able to separate the roles by emphasizing strong boundaries.

According to Malhotra and Sachdeva (2005), many writers have also argued that women are subjected to conflicts between expectations associated with traditional roles, such as homemaking, and those for occupational or professional careers. These arguments have also been supported by studies demonstrating the prevalence of role conflicts and associations between role conflicts and stress for women. In such cases, it is argued, the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects and the person has to resolve the problem by adopting some form of coping behaviour (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Societal pressure acts as potential external source to create conflicts between women's work and family lives (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). Women, whether in the past or present, are always expected to perform duties of wife and mother in addition to fulfilling their professional duties. If they somehow put their career interest first, often experience feelings of guilt and selfishness (Bhattacharya & Pramanik, 2016). Choosing to become a mother gives the appearance that a woman is unmotivated, less committed, less interested in doing what she must do to get the next step on the ladder (Williams, 2007). This makes women experience great conflict, tension and strain. Conflicts were considered likely when women perceived their home and career roles as highly desirable but mutually exclusive.

Inter-role conflict occurs when employees need to carry out many roles at one time and the roles are incongruent and incompatible (Kamel, 2011). It is likely to increase as the demands of either the work role or family role increases. Similarly, inter-role conflict can increase as one's obligations to the family expand through marriage and the arrival of children. However, Barnett and Baruch (1985) found that role conflict and levels of overload were significantly associated with occupying the role of mother but were not significantly associated with occupying the role of paid worker or wife. In opinion of Kahn and Langlieb (2003), the prevalence of stress and burnout is rising due to conflicting demands of work and family experienced by most working adults.

This study which sought to explore the experiences of career mothers in combining teaching profession with motherhood is situated within this theory of social role conflict. Career mother in this study is a woman who has children and is working in the formal sectors as professional. This theory is found appropriate because it explains basic tenets of what career mothers in teaching profession can do to strike a good balance between motherhood and career. It is therefore, pertinent to review scholarly literature on barriers to the advancement of women in the world of work

One important factor in understanding the obstacles to the advancement of women is patriarchy. There are several issues centred on patriarchy, gender roles and gender related values on the challenges of career mothers. Ruby (2003, p. 38) defines patriarchy as "a form of society where men's needs, concerns, and interests are central; whereby the authority of the father/husband over both wife and children is revered". The patriarchal system insists that men control everything, including women's bodies and children. Men claim superior positions in every situation including workplaces, whereby male bosses expect to dominate and be obeyed. Patriarchy oppresses women and awards men authority and power over women (Ruby, 2003).

According to Managa (2013), although some women have made strides, the culture still oppresses women and discourages them from fully competing with male counterparts. The patriarchal system forces women to continuously attempt to perform as men do while trying to negotiate traditional gender roles to accommodate their careers. It is also argued that women's work goes unnoticed and women are stereotyped as unproductive. These perceptions put strain on women and place a lot of stress on both their work and private lives resulting in a decrease in women's morale (Kiamba, 2008).

According to Booysen and Nkomo (2010), cultural factors that interpret gender-based roles, expectations and responsibilities are liable to limit women's advancement into higher positions. Furthermore, these factors impact on women so as to make them choose to quit their positions despite their expertise. Booysen and Nkomo (2010) further noted that in African societies, women are not allowed to express themselves and be assertive, but are expected to be obedient to their husbands and to men in general. Furthermore, these societies regard a good woman as one who is submissive and passive to her husband so that she can be accepted in the society. However, it seems that some women have been able to defeat their cultural obstacles and societal norms to

stand up for positions, even though they had to juggle such positions with cultural expectations (Burke & Collins, 2001; Kiamba, 2008).

The way children are raised also contributes to gender inequality within our societies (Kiamba, 2008). In African societies, a boy child is socialized to occupy leadership positions, whether in private or in public, while a girl child is socialized to be caring for children and being a good wife. This illustrates how women are expected to behave right from birth (Burke & Collins, 2001). Rosette and Tost (2011) assert that normal gender roles and behaviours are rewarded, while opposite gender roles are restricted. The conventional gender roles that position women through culture, beliefs and values constitute their identity. Culture plays a very crucial role for an individual and her/his social environment. Consequently, children learn from their social environment, and their identities form from a very young age. Culture also contributes to the socialization of these gender roles and behaviours, and women are socialized in a manner that is expected by society. However, women may change their identities if they feel that their identities are oppressive and not progressive (Foster, 2006). These are highly seen because of gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Stereotyping is one of the major constraints to women's advancement in the world of work. It is still believed that women are incapable of undertaking certain professions and occupying higher positions in the world of work due to family responsibilities and their feminine traits (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Kiaye & Singh, 2013). Furthermore, it is assumed that women cannot devote themselves to their work because they are devoted to their care giving responsibilities. Therefore, they are treated with mistrust regarding their ability to undertake certain careers. On the other hand, it is emphasized that women are stereotyped as possessing a soft spot, as being emotional and as portraying feminine attributes which are regarded as inappropriate in certain positions (Kanjere, Thaba & Teffo, 2011; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Women's abilities to progress in the world of work are undermined, even the fact that women are in control of affairs in their homes is not taken into account, considering that some women manage their families, especially when men are absent. Women should not be judged by their gender but their ability, skills and qualifications be considered for jobs and positions (Kanjere, Thaba & Teffo, 2011).

Sometimes, women are seen occupying top positions in ways that are contrary to the rules that have been set by the patriarchal culture, such as women being 'home makers' and to care for children (Zwane, 2003). Women are believed to experience more work-family conflict than their male counterparts. These perceptions obstruct women to progress in the careers. This kind of stereotyping also leads to discrimination against women in the workplace in such a way that men are normally appointed to higher positions while most people doubt women's ability to perform in high positions (Hoobler, Wayne & Lemmon, 2009).

Zwane (2003) asserts that discrimination is also shown through favouritism towards male over female in the work place. Women experience discrimination in the following three forms: overt discrimination; covert discrimination and self-discrimination. According to Zwane (2003), overt

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discrimination takes place where rules, regulations and policies in an organization favours men over women, in the form of working weekends and discriminatory reproductive health policies in the workplace. Covert discrimination is subtle discrimination and can take place when the job activities are assigned which are above a particular woman's abilities, or when a job does not allow flexibility to enable a woman attend to family responsibilities. Self-discrimination is a combination of both covert and overt discrimination. The female herself is often a major source of a gate keeping activity towards herself. She sees herself as being unaccepted. This discrimination can be demonstrated indirectly or seen through actions (Zwane, 2003).

Gunpath (2006) explains how females face discriminatory practices and suffer ups and downs in their management positions. Sometimes, they fail to meet the high standards set by other people. The potential of females is usually underestimated. Despite females' advancement in education, stereotypes and barriers continue to exist. Some of the females do not get the back-up of authority that would normally be accorded to males. Sometimes they struggle to gain acceptance or recognition as capable individuals. They lose their independence when they seek help from males, although they are expected to turn to males for assistance. They may also be expected to attain extraordinary work results and to prove their achievement, whereas males may not be expected to perform in that manner (Steyn & Jackson, 2014).

There is also the issue of organizational structure barriers. Organizational settings, culture and conditions may subject women to challenges that would not otherwise be experienced by their male counterparts (Jacobs & Schain, 2009). Rowe and Crafford (2003) declare that limited support structures and networking opportunities prevent women in career advancement; these may take the form of corporate culture and structure, and low salaries. Such structures continue to obstruct the advancement of women through policies including part-time and job sharing, and telecommuting that do not favour their balancing work and family responsibilities. Jacobs and Schain (2009), maintain that women who do not have flexible working schedules experience more work-family conflict compared to women who have options to work flexible hours. Additionally, higher positions tend to be demanding, and characterized by work overload resulting in work often not being completed at the end of the day. As a result, women may carry a work overload and therefore work extended working hours in order to meet deadlines. Cheung and Halpern (2010) also identified work overload as a major threat to women's development. Work overload results in lack of support in terms of resources and personal assistance. Sanichar (2004) affirms that organizational culture has a huge impact on balancing work and family. If the employees in an organization work long hours in order to complete work, other employees will also be pressurized by that culture to work long hours in order to meet deadlines and be seen as committed to their work. This kind of organizational culture is perpetuated when executives value employees who come early and leave late from work, and value employees who are less concerned with work-life balance (Sanichar, 2004).

The concept of work-life balance has gained momentum recently in the literature, and within organisations. The reason for this is that it affects employees' wellbeing and has work-related

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outcomes such as productivity and occupational stress (Ajala, 2013). Each individual experiences the work-life balance differently, depending on circumstance like gender and marital status, as a result of societal expectations of gender roles that require women to spend more time on family and house chores compared to paid work (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). Despite the fact that women are joining the formal sector workforce as professional teachers, they are still subjected to roles emphasizing family and caretaking responsibilities. Consequently, conflict emerges between their work and family roles. Clark (2009) defines work-life balance as a satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. According to Kasper, Meyer and Schmidt (2005), there is always discomfort whenever the concept of work-life balance is discussed because there is a contradiction between the professional life and family life. It has been shown that many women are affected by these two domains, work life and family life, and how to maintain a balance between the two.

It has also been shown that women in the 21st century experience challenges in terms of balancing these dual roles. However, a recent study conducted by Okonkwo (2014) revealed that women in management did not experience work-family conflict because of their economic status. They were able to hire 'house help' or employ people to perform household chores for them. Such people see to some of the home responsibilities such as cleaning and childcare. It is argued that women who experience challenges in terms of work and family conflict are women who do not earn enough to afford some of the services like a domestic worker and laundry. In addition, Okonkwo's (2014) study reveals that many African families depend on extended family members for social support, especially with childcare. In some African families, working women would leave their children with the grandparents or in-laws (Jacobs & Schain, 2009). With this kind of available resources and social support, Okonkwo (2014) found out that there was no conflict between work and family roles amongst professional women. This assertion is however contentious as some career women are not staying with extended family members.

Women hold multiple statuses as wife, mother, family member, employee, and caretaker of the house with role expectations including tidying up the house, cooking and laundry. Some women are also involved in church committees and so on. These roles are self-imposed as the women decided to undertake, whereas others are socially imposed on women (Jang & Zippay, 2011). According to Bolino and Turnley (2005), individuals also hold multiple roles in organizations - a 'job-holder role' and an 'organizational-member role'.

The job-holder role refers to the work title one occupies within the organization whereas the organizational member role refers the degree of loyalty one shows to an organization, like being committed and motivated to work for the success of the organization. Arising from stereotypes about women, they have to work extra hard, more than their male counterparts, to prove that they can handle their positions. This means that women may do work that is beyond their scope in order to prove their commitment to the organization. So, women may find it difficult to execute these roles due to lack of resources such as time and energy (Rothman & Baumann 2014).

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It has been shown that occupying multiple roles may have a negative impact on women's career development, because some women may take a break from work to raise their children (Wallace & Smith, 2011). Furthermore, women who experience challenges when balancing work and family are likely to develop occupational stress, burn out, loss of appetite, insomnia, overindulgence and back pains (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). However, Jacobs and Schain (2009) argue that multiple role-playing has been found to have both positive and negative effects on women in management, because occupying multiple roles enhances feelings of personal worth and security, and promotes psychological wellbeing by providing a sense of meaning and purpose to one's life. Furthermore, a highly paid position is associated with good mental health, self-sufficiency, self-confidence in women, as well as a positive interaction between work and family requirements (Jacobs & Schain, 2009; Maki, Moore & Grunberg, 2005; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). These are all ideal working conditions worthy of the career mother in the teaching profession.

However, gender inequalities affect women in the education sector in different ways. Poor working conditions adversely affect female teachers. Deeply ingrained gender biases lead to labour divisions and behaviours at the school level that favour men. Female secondary school teachers in a study in Uganda reported that they were expected to teach more classes per week, were expected to take on more tasks outside the classroom, and earned less because they had fewer opportunities to earn extra money outside the classroom than their male counterparts at the same school (Molyneaux, 2011). Female teachers are often assigned to lower primary grades. The lowest grades often have extremely large class sizes so the burden of teaching large numbers of young students falls almost exclusively to women (Bennell, 2004; Shriberg, 2007). In Botswana and Ghana, male students were more likely to challenge the authority of their female teachers and refused their punishments, exhibit inappropriate behaviours they did not portray to their male teachers (Dunne, 2007).

A qualitative study in Botswana and Ghana (Dunne, 2007) reported that female head teachers consistently had to fight for legitimacy in the eyes of male teachers. They often had to deal with men who refused to honour their authority. Female teachers reported being overlooked for promotion, and studies observed teachers performing traditional gendered roles (males in charge of sports, females in charge of cooking). The study concluded that schools are extremely gendered places – everything from behaviours to space to policy implementation. Educators rarely, if ever, were aware of the gender dynamics in their schools. While urban areas in Botswana and Ghana have large numbers of female teachers, these teachers are subjected to serious gender discrimination.

Also, males fill a vast majority of administrative positions, so supervision becomes much gendered activity. The women in the study from Ghana and Botswana reported being overlooked for promotions due to family responsibilities, and male administrators used negative words such as lazy to describe female teachers that prevented their promotion (Dunne, 2007). Even when women assume leadership roles, gender can still work against them. In South Africa, for instance, female secondary department heads stated that male teachers often disregarded their authority, deferring

to male supervisors instead. Supervisory councils created under a new national policy were intended to give voice to all stakeholders at the school level, but the committee (dominated by males) stated that the most powerful male member should be given authority to make all the decisions and females were virtually voiceless in the decision process (Diko, 2007). Teachers in Liberia also reported that all members of the education community including parents, other teachers, and administrators paid female teachers less respect (Shriberg, 2007).

Shriberg's (2007) research in Liberia adds an additional gender dimension to women's school experiences. She found that sexual violence and exploitation of female students and teachers were common in schools. Administrators were reluctant to discipline perpetrators because they feared those teachers would leave, and finding a replacement was exceedingly difficult due to teacher shortages and long bureaucratic processes that burden school hiring and firing processes. Therefore, these administrators were in essence institutionally supporting violence against girls and women. Sexual exploitation also applied to teacher-administrator relationships. Female teachers were often coerced into having sex with principals in order to keep their jobs in part, because reassignment after losing one's position is a lengthy process that many female teachers could not afford (Shriberg, 2007). These challenges call for proper social support for female teachers, especially those who are mothers.

Studies have revealed that work-life balance is influenced by many factors, such as the size of the family, the number of hours spent outside the home, the age and number of children living at home, marital status, the amount of support accorded an individual, the level of control one has over working hours, flexibility of working hours, and the kind of support one has at the workplace as well as at home (Nelson & Burke 2000). Downes and Koekemoer (2011) maintain that women who have pre-school going children experience more work-and-family conflict, especially if they do not receive support. Women who are married and receive support from their husbands experience less work-life conflict compared with unmarried women and single parents (Evbouma, 2008).

The vast majority of women depend on various support systems in order to be able to cope with their work role and with family responsibilities. Support means the ability to have a balanced life outside the workplace with assistance from others, that is, to receive help from their superiors, supervisors, and colleagues in order to have a good fit between family and work roles (Ajala, 2013; Sanichar, 2004). Social support refers to "interpersonal relationships and social interactions that help to protect individuals from the effects of stress" (Aycan & Eskin, 2005, p. 454). The sources of support include, but are not limited to, spousal support, organizational support and supervisory support, as well as cultural work-life support and structural life support (Ajala, 2013; Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Downes & Koekemoer, 2011).

The family responsibilities of women may affect their work role in an organization; at the same time, women need assistance at home with household chores, elder care duties and childcare so that they can focus on their work role (Ajala, 2013; Imbaya, 2012). This kind of support would

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enable women to perform exceptionally well in both their work and family roles. A study conducted by Jacobs and Schain (2009) indicates that many African families depend on extended family members for social support, and especially with childcare. In some African families, working women will leave their children with the grandparents or in-laws leaving the woman to focus on work roles (Okonkwo, 2014). Performance of traditional role within the family is demanding and married women need their spouses' support in order to succeed in their career (Imbaya, 2012).

Furthermore, cultural values may be in conflict with a woman's freedom of movement such as travelling, sleeping outside the home and socialising with men (Kiamba, 2008). Moreover, family responsibilities are involved. Imbaya (2012) asserts that family is the most substantial system in the life of an individual, and therefore, a woman's success in a career depends on the support family gives her. This support may take the form of moral support, support with house chores and childcare, and spousal support. Spousal support is the "help, advice, understanding, and the like that spouse provide for one another" (Aycan & Eskin, 2005: p. 459). The spouse may support his partner emotionally or instrumentally. Women feel emotionally supported when their partners show understanding for their roles, are empathetic, give advice and show interest in and appreciation for what they do. The emotional support enhances women's self-efficacy and self-confidence. The spouse can also support the partner by sharing the house chores and childcare. This kind of support is termed instrumental support in that it alleviates the burden of family responsibilities on a woman so that she can focus more on her career. Spousal support has been proven to have a positive impact on how women balance their work role with family responsibilities (Ajala, 2013; Evbouma, 2007; Imbaya, 2012).

Organizations can also support career mothers in the teaching profession in many ways. Many women do not perform maximally when attending to organizational roles alongside family roles because both organizations and society do not understand women's needs within a family framework (Evbouma, 2008). The risk of imbalance between work and family roles does not affect only individuals, but also the family, the organization in which they work, the government, as well as the society at large (Ajala, 2013). In order for women to perform maximally within their organizational roles, the organization should seek to support women by lessening work-family role conflict so that they can focus on their work (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). Organizational support is defined as "the extent to which employees perceive that they value their contributions and cares about their wellbeing" (Sinha & Subramanian, 2012, p. 72). According to Ajala (2013), it has been found that organizational support has a relationship to employees' commitment to the organization and a good quality of work-life balance, which results in employees being more satisfied with their jobs. Many contemporary organizations are beginning to initiate gender sensitive and family-friendly policies and programmes in support of their employees (Evbouma, 2008; Sanichar, 2004). The aim of these programmes is to ease stress relating to balancing work and family responsibilities (Evbouma, 2008). Gender sensitive and family-friendly services were found to improve women's performance in the workplace (Evbouma, 2008). The services are also made to enhance the employees' morale and self-worth. Organizations may support women by

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providing on-the-job training, access to decision-making processes, advancement to managerial positions and support for equitable distribution of gender responsibilities, mentoring programmes and removal of 'glass ceiling' phenomena (Evbouma, 2008). Ajala (2013) asserts that, nowadays, organizations do not just offer employees training for the job, but are also trying to equip employees with support systems that promote workplace learning. Offering employees capacity building in the organization has proven to have a positive impact on job satisfaction, and leads to increased productivity, which enhances quality of work life.

The organizational support includes structural supports that involve restructuring one's job, or flexible job design and changing human resource policies in order to enable an individual to have control over her workload and work hours (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer, 2010). Having structural work-life support will enhance women's opportunities to balance work, non-work role and other roles outside the workplace. Other examples of structural work-life support include, teleworking, working at home, reduced workload, work sharing, vacations, sick leaves, childcare facilities within the organization of employment, occupational health and safety programmes, sabbatical and career breaks (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). There is therefore the need to map out strategies that enable women to cope with family-work conflict.

Cheung and Halpern (2010) conducted a study to find out what strategies women in management used to overcome role conflict. They then developed a model for addressing the work-family life; this model was called selection, optimizing and compensation (SOC). According to the authors, *selection* means the women need to set their goals straight in terms of their work and family responsibilities, and set time for such goals on a daily basis. *Optimizing* means prioritising what needs to be done first and developing the ability to multi-task. Lastly, *compensation* means delegating and outsourcing some work in the workplace, relying on the house helper for house chores. Apparently, women who succeeded in their career are those who have refined the roles placed upon them by the larger society by letting go some duties, such as house chores, but on the other hand still remain good mothers and good career women (Wallace & Smith, 2011).

These strategies are similar to those described by Matias and Fontaine (2015) whose study revealed work-family coping strategies that address role conflict. The first one involves having good time at work-family in order to minimize the functions of work-family responsibilities to a lower level. The second strategy implies being a 'superwoman' both at work and at home by performing all roles single-handedly and to best ability. Thirdly, to be able to cope, one has to delegate some duties at work and at home to other people. Another strategy involves the ability to prioritize responsibilities by arranging duties in order and timeous. According to Matias and Fontaine (2015), the first strategy and the fourth strategy seem more like problem solving strategies, whereas strategy two seems like avoiding the situation. It is also highlighted that delegating some duties, being "super" and "being good enough" have been proven to work, unlike prioritizing, which has been found not to be a useful coping strategy.

On the other hand, Hall as cited in Matias and Fontaine (2015), revealed three coping strategies

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with work-life conflict. The first one involves Structural Role Definition, which means changing what is expected of the roles played. The second strategy is called Personal Role Definition, and means changing conceptions about what is expected of certain roles, or changing one's character in order to be able to cope with multiple roles. The last strategy involves Reactive Behaviour, which means working hard to meet all role expectations without changing anything about one's life (Matias & Fontaine, 2015). The difficulties in achieving the coping mechanisms call for better work-life balance policies.

Policies that support employees and organizations with work-life balance programmes have become popular in the modern day (Cooke & Jin, 2009). Work-life policies or programmes offer employees opportunity to integrate work life and family responsibilities (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). Many organizations are beginning to adopt the work-life programmes because they give a competitive advantage in industry and also serve as a means to retain top talent (Sanichar, 2004). According to Downes and Koekemoer (2011), there are many different work-life policies initiated by different organizations. Some work-life policies include having onsite childcare facilities, subsidized elder care and employee assistance programmes. Downes and Koekemoer (2011) categorised the work-life balance policies into five categories.

- i. Flexi time schedule: meaning that an employee has the right to choose a working schedule to suit her, including tea breaks, lunch time, and time for knocking off. But these arrangements are subjected to management's approval.
- ii. Flexi place or tele-commuting: means that employee may opt to work some days from home or any place other than the organization's premises.
- iii. Job sharing: means that two or more people can share duties in one position in order to allow individuals to have flexi-times to attend to non-work roles.
- iv. Sabbatical leave or career breaks: is when employees are allowed to take some time off work to advance their careers.
- v. Part-time flexi place: implies that employees can work one to three days per week, at their location of choice subject to management approval.

The work-life balance policies help employees to manage their family responsibility and still place focus on their work role. There are many research studies that have focused on work-life balance policies and flexi time internationally, but there is limited research on flexi time and work-life policies in Ghana working context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed in order to elicit information about how career mothers balance work and family responsibilities. Creswell (2009, p. 4) states "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human issues". Qualitative approach seeks to make sense of personal narratives and experiences, thus, experiences of career mothers in combining motherhood and

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teaching. A case study is explained by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005) as a method that aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The multi-case study was applied, as evidenced by the fact that the data was collected from career mothers teaching at different schools. In this study, the researchers focused on how career mothers manage their expected gender roles and their profession as teachers. Yin (2013, p. 12) emphasizes that “multiple case studies enhance the outcomes of the study by reflecting on the themes, thereby intensifying the findings”. The case study was appropriate for this study it produced detailed descriptions of the work-life balance phenomenon experienced by career mothers.

The study was carried out in Koforidua Township in the New Juaben Municipality. The New Juaben Municipality is one of the districts in the Eastern Region and was established in 1988 by the Legislative Instrument (LI) 1426. The municipality shares common boundaries with East-Akim Municipal to the North-East, Akwapim North District to the East and South and Suhum-Krabo-Coaltar District to the East (Ghana Statistical Services [GSS], 2012). There are four second cycle institutions in the municipality but for the purpose of this study, two secondary schools were selected.

The target population for the study was constituted by career mothers in Senior High School in Koforidua Township in the New Juaben Municipality. Career mothers in the two schools selected for the study were the accessible population. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 participants for the study. Creswell (2014) notes that between 5 and 25 participants in qualitative study is appropriate. Twenty participants were selected because the data reached saturation point after interviewing the 20<sup>th</sup> participants and new ideas were not forthcoming. Purposive sampling technique was appropriate due to the fact that the participants had fair knowledge of the issues that were relevant to the study. Royce (2011) suggests that purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Criteria for inclusion for the selection of the sample included being a career mother who is married and has biological children.

This study relied on semi-structured interview technique in order to probe and develop a composite description of commonalities of the study. Semi-structured interview method was chosen because it allows for flexibility and provides opportunity for unanticipated findings to be discovered, for mid interview clarification and for further questions to be asked and explored (O’Toole & Beckett, 2010). Data was thematically analyzed employing Thomas, Magilvy, and Faan (2011) steps in qualitative data analysis. The purpose of thematic content analysis is to search through data to identify any recurrent patterns (Bryman, 2012). Thomas, Magilvy, and Faan (2011, p. 165) outlined four steps in qualitative data analysis, and these were strictly followed:

1. The conversations, interviews or responses were transcribed and written down.
2. The source material was carefully read, and key segments of text were highlighted.
3. Themes or categories and subcategories were coded (identified).

4. Patterns were sought that made sense of the most important themes or categories. The foregoing data analytical process were strictly adhered to.

Issues of trustworthiness was taken care of. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005), to establish the trustworthiness of the study, it is important to address factors that ensure that the findings are credible, transferrable, dependable and confirmable. Ethically, participants were ensured of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section begins by giving demographic profile of participants. This is followed by the findings that emerged from the research questions.

### **Background Information of Participants**

This part describes the characteristics of the participants involved in the study. Data was gathered on their age, marital status, number of children and number of years in teaching service. The bio-data of the participants help to put their responses into proper perspective and to get better understanding of the issue under study.

The age distribution of the participants indicates that 3 (15%) of them were within 21-30 age group whilst 10 (50%) were between 31-40years. Six (30%) were within the age group of 41-50. Again, 1 (5%) of the participants was within 51-60 age group being the lowest. From the data, it could be seen that majority of the respondents were within the age group of 31-40 which is an indication of relatively youthful population who are within the reproductive stage.

In terms of marital status, all the respondents were married and none was singled or divorced. The data further revealed that majority of the participants 12 (60%) have 1 or 2 children, whilst 8 (40%) have 3 or 4 children. No one had more than 4 children. The finding gives indication that among the career mothers, giving birth to so many children is not a preference. This support the view that formal education is inversely related to population growth.

With regards to number of years the participants have been in the teaching profession, it was indicated that 4(20%) have been in the teaching field for 1 to 5years. Three (15%) participants have been teaching for 6 to 10 years. Again, 7(35%) indicated that they have taught for 11 to 15years whilst 4(20%) have been teaching for 16 to 20 years. Two (10%) of the participants have teaching experience of 21years.

### **Perceptions of Career Mothers on Barriers to Career Advancement of Women**

The first objective of the study was to explore the perceptions of career mothers on barriers to career advancement of women. The objective guided in providing insightful information about barriers that obstruct women from advancing in their career. The perceptions of the participants

were that there were some barriers that obstruct women from advancing in their careers. Some of the barriers identified by the participants are detailed as child nurturing, marital duties, pregnancy and its related problems.

The participants believe that there are barriers to women's advancement in their career. They indicated that there are wide range of barriers which work in unison against their career advancement. Some of the barriers include child nurturing, performance of marital duties, pregnancy challenges among others. It was agreed that a married woman is bound to experience these conditions that hinder career advancement. Participant 3 indicated:

*"I am a married woman; therefore, it is expected of me to perform my marital responsibilities. I have to take care of my children... and these are time demanding responsibilities. In combining them with my teaching profession, it limits my advancement because I want to go and undertake my master's degree but I cannot go because of my numerous responsibilities at home".*

Similarly, Participant 9 recounted:

*"As a woman in a marital home, I am expected to perform many duties. These include taking care of the home, nurturing my children, and performing other family responsibilities. I think these duties place some form of limitation on our teaching profession especially if I want to progress. From my own experience, I was planning to attend a workshop but due to pregnant complications, I had to forgo it. My male counterparts went without any stress to learn new things regarding the profession. It is understandable that my situation could not allow me to go. I couldn't be part of that programme because of my condition".*

It is very obvious that these obstacles identified undermine the career advancement of women even though women see them as expectation due to their biological make up. Thus, being a woman who is married, definitely, childbearing and other marital responsibilities have the capacity to limit opportunities in the area of career development.

Also, the participants believed that stereotypes associated with socio-cultural belief about women were barrier to career advancement of women. Such stereotypes stem from cultural beliefs that women are not capable of working as men. Such beliefs extend even into the work environment whereby people believe that they do not have the same potentials as men. Respondents were asked to elaborate on the barriers that militate against women's advancement.

Participant 1 expressed her views and stated:

*"Experience of a woman in a world of work is different from that of men. You are disrespected, and not recognized. People still think that women cannot have positive impacts and ideas in the workplace. Your decisions are always questioned, if you are undertaking a task, you are either to assist a male counterpart or made a subordinate under him."*

Participant 15 shared these sentiments:

*“As women we are undermined by our male counterparts. Sometimes other women create problems for us. When you come up with a positive idea or criticism, it would not be taken seriously, but when a male come up with the same idea his opinion is taken into consideration. Even if you are more qualified than him, his opinion matters than yours, simply because you are a woman. Women are undermined irrespective of their qualifications. This issue belittle women’s capabilities because they are rated according to gender not according to qualifications and ability.”*

It is clear that the participants hold the perception that women are not treated the same way as their male counterpart. They felt that men were favoured over their female counterparts. The stereotypes hold women back because they internalize them. In the participants’ view, women were denied recognition because people still associated a good work done to a male figure. This finding confirms an earlier finding by Schain (2007) that gender stereotypes constrain women’s advancement in the world of work. Men and other women often believe that women are incapable of working independently, due to the belief that women are too emotional and soft. The participants’ sentiments are supported by Schain’s (2001) findings that, despite societal and organizational changes, people still believe that men possess better characteristics in the world of work than women. Kiaye and Singh (2013) indicate that even though women are accepted in the labour market, they still experience some form of discrimination when it comes to career advancement.

### **Challenges of Career Mothers in Teaching**

The second objective of the study was to explore challenges of career mothers in teaching. The objective was to help understand what kinds of challenges career mothers face in striking a balance between work and family. Some of the participants argued that they were constantly faced with the challenge of balancing their work with their expected roles as women in the families and in the society as a whole. From the participants’ point of view, it is difficult to manage the boundaries between work and family. Participants 11 explained:

*“It is hard to maintain a balance when you are a nursing mother and at the same time a teacher because the teaching job are physically and emotionally demanding. When you get home the family also need your full attention. Two years ago, I even went for counselling because the work was overwhelming. Apart from the workload I had to care for my child and sick father.”*

Participants 14 reiterated:

*“It is hard to maintain a balance when you are teaching and at the same time taking care of your children especially the young ones. You are expected to go to school every day whether you have class or not. After you have been exhausted by school activities, you arrive home and the family duties also take the little energy left in you. For me it is even harder because I teach almost throughout the week”.*

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Apart from their demanding work, the participants also have family responsibilities including childcare, providing care for the aged and the sick in the family and taking care of the house in general. The participants indicated that they were struggling to balance work and family roles due to the nature of their work. They have to go to school early in the morning. As a result, the work role interfered with family roles and sometimes family roles interfered with work role, which caused role conflict. Bhattacharya and Pramanik (2016) indicated that work-life interferences may occur when one cannot stop thinking about uncompleted activities at work at the workplace while she is at home. Furthermore, one may be too exhausted from work strain to carry out family responsibilities. Jang and Zippay (2011) argue that work-family conflict arises when the performance of one role interferes with the time and demands due to other roles, and also from the stress resulting from one role spilling over onto another role.

It was also reported that due to insufficient time, combining work and family responsibilities affect their preparations to go to class and even in the class, there is divided attention. In the words of Participants 20, inadequate time poses a challenge and it affects her preparation towards work. She stated:

*“Because of lack of time, I am not able to prepare detailed and effective lesson plan before attending class and this is partly affecting my students.”*

Again, during the field work, it was indicated that women who are teachers are facing some challenges at their work place. The women revealed that when they ask permission to attend to their sick children they are sometimes denied. They are often threatened to be replaced if they spend much time at home after delivery. Participant 8 recounted

*“The other day, my baby was not feeling well so I came to school to ask permission to take care of her at home but to my surprise the headmaster refused to grant me the permission. He said we have been using our children as excuse to run away from school to do other things. I had no option so I went home but I was summoned the following day at his (headmaster) office to explain why I disrespected him”.*

These narratives show some of the challenges teachers who are mothers go through as a result of their biological make up and functions. They are expected to separate roles into specific realms of work roles and family roles as emphasised by the social role conflict theory (Dulin, 2007). This finding falls in tandem with observation made by Dunne (2007) that female teachers are treated unfairly due to the fact that they are females and may have some challenges.

### **Coping Strategies of Career Mothers in Combining Teaching Profession and Family Responsibilities**

The third objective sought to find out the coping strategies of career mothers in combining teaching profession and family responsibilities. The objective helped to understand what kinds of strategies women use when trying to strike a balance between work and family. It was indicated that one of

the strategies respondents used to balance work and family was structuring and planning the tasks and activities to be performed within a specified period. Participant 19 indicated;

*“When I’m at home I ensure that I address issues concerning family, so that I don’t worry about family issues while I’m at school”. Anything that will require that I come home when I’m in school, I try to deal with them except the unexpected circumstances”.*

Participant 8 had this to say:

*“I am good at managing my time, because I ensure thorough planning before, I do anything. To me, planning and time management is like budgeting. In order to save money, you do not buy something you have not budgeted for. In my planning, I also include time for everything that concerns my life including family responsibilities, my teaching profession among others.”*

The participants showed that what is important when managing multiple roles, is time management and organizing tasks according to the availability of time or the priority status of a role. They also described their coping strategies for dealing with work-life conflict such as putting boundaries between teaching profession and family. This finding is in support of the social role conflict theory which stipulates boundary management and role management (Dulin, 2007). Uys and McLellan (2009), states that women’s life satisfaction derives from the control she has over her life. The participants in this study showed that they prioritized their roles by ensuring that they do not spend much time on unconstructive activities.

Moreover, some of the participants indicated they were able to set boundaries between work and family life by way of prioritizing. Prioritizing means focusing more on the role one regards as essential. Respondent 8 said:

*“Anyway, my children are all grown up, they can take care of themselves. For now, my focus is more on my profession to follow what is expected of me at work, because as a woman you have to work harder than our male counterpart. We always have to prove ourselves that we can be successful in the profession, otherwise when you fail it is because you are a woman.”*

Respondent 17 was emphatic about her priorities, pointing out that:

*“Being a mother is something you cannot ignore when you have children, especially the small ones. The young children demand attention, but I am working for them anyway. So, they come first.”*

The participants in the study identified many roles that are expected of them. This is as a result of their many statuses including teacher, mother, wife, family member, daughter and sibling. Each of these statuses has its role expectations. According to the participants, they have to identify

themselves with a certain role at different times, for instance the role associated with being a mother is performed at home. It was observed from the study that the roles associated with the different statuses have different meanings to each participant; some prioritise the roles associated with being a mother, whereas other participants prioritised roles associated with their profession. According to Jacobs and Schain (2009), women regard the role of mother as their primary responsibility, especially women with younger children. From the foregoing, it is therefore deduced that, the importance of each role depended on the life stage and life priorities of the participants. Participants with small children prioritised a mother role before the work role, unlike participants with grown up children. Those with matured children had time for their career progression because their children were independent and can perform certain roles such as cleaning the house, cooking, caring for the sick to support the family. The finding is in line with the views of Cortina and San-Roman (2006) who argue that women's career success is often related to their age. Participants with grown up children indicated that they were free to focus on their work role without worrying about small children who still demand more parenting time.

### **Support System for Career Mothers in Teaching**

The fourth objective of the study was to establish the support systems available to career mothers in teaching profession that enable them to balance work and family responsibilities. The findings of the study showed that career mothers in teaching profession need support in order to cope with the demands of their roles. The participants identified the following support systems. Some participants indicated that they enjoyed family and spousal support. For instance, Participant 6 indicated:

*"The following constitute my personal support system: friends, family members, and children, some of my colleagues, my husband and relatives. These people support me by providing spiritual upliftment, motivation, advice, resources, love and warmth."*

Participant 2 had this to say:

*"After school I would be exhausted, fortunately, I have a husband who assists with cooking. He is supportive and encourages me to work hard on my work role. He takes part in house chores to assist me. He is empathetic and understanding."*

Participant 7 noted:

*"I do not have a domestic worker. I rely on my sister for assistance because I trust her when it comes to caring for my children. I do not have to worry when I go to school because she is reliable."*

The participants pointed out that the presence and degree of support structures was important in maintaining work-life balance. The participants indicated that they depended on their family members for emotional support and assistance for the care of their children. The findings are in line with the observation by Okonkwo (2014) that most African families depend on extended family members for support. Some of the participants revealed that their husbands do not only provide emotional support, but also assists in terms of cooking and washing dishes. These give

women motivation and the opportunity to focus on other roles than that of home maker. It proves that sharing of house chores between partners has positive impact on career advancement of women. A study by Imbaya (2012) shows that women with spousal support report less work-life conflict and are satisfied with their jobs and enjoy their marriages.

Apart from family support, the participants mentioned that they also needed organizational support to be able to achieve a balance between their work role and non-work activities. They indicated that organizational support might be in the form of providing women with family responsibility leave. Almost all the participants indicated that there is no support system for career mothers in the school.

Participant 1 shared her experience and said:

*“In our school we do not have support for career mothers in terms of balancing work and family responsibilities. We do only have maternity benefits anyway. Aside the maternity leave, there are no support systems for us”*

According to the findings of this study, career mothers in teaching did not see maternity leave as a major organizational support. The women revealed that they do not have access to many of the work-life balances policies and services mentioned. The work-life initiatives such as flexible working hours, job sharing, and flexi place are not promoted and were not known to participants. All the participants regarded maternity leave as the only benefit that support women in balancing work and parenting roles.

The participants also mentioned that the support of colleagues played an important role in their balance of career and motherhood. Participant 13 had this to say:

*“I normally communicate with other women on the same staff with me. Surprisingly they experience same challenges as I do. So, I find comfort in sharing my personal experience with people who are going through similar experience.”*

The participants indicated that they were encouraged by cooperation they received from other colleagues. Some participants indicated that they found emotional support from their colleagues who are at the same level with them in terms of work and family demands.

The foregoing revealed that career mothers still faced gender related issues in the teaching profession as a result of their biological make up and gender roles. This is taking toll on them in relation to their work-life activities. The issue of role conflict was also revealed by the study. However, the study revealed that planning, time management, family and spousal support are some of the ways through which career mothers in teaching resort to as coping strategies in dealing with the complexity of combining family with work (teaching). This, therefore, shows the essence of incorporating the theory of social role conflict in this study to explore the challenges of career mothers who are teaching and at the same time having the responsibility of taking care of the home and how they combined such responsibilities. In this study, the concept of social role conflict is

explained as the parallel exhibition of two or more mismatched expectations for the behaviour of a person. The findings gave credence to the views expressed by the social role conflict theory that suggests that the coping strategies women may use when juggling multiple roles depended on individual characteristics and organizational climate.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Career mothers are constantly striving to balance their multiple roles because there will always be a degree of conflict between family responsibilities and work roles. The work-life balance of career mothers involves many dynamics, and depends on many issues such as age and assistance from family. Successful work-life balance depends on whether a woman has young children or children who are already independent. It also depends on whether the woman is married or not and, if she is, whether the husband is supportive or not. Some of the career mothers in teaching profession do not progress in their career because of their inability to attend workshops and training. Consequently, their advancement is delayed.

The following recommendations made in relation to the experiences of career mothers in teaching profession: The Ministry of Education in collaboration with Ghana Education Service should develop policies that provide career mothers in teaching profession with a quality work-life balance. Policies such as career breaks, job sharing, flexible working arrangements and childcare policies can be instituted to support career mother; and Schools should be made aware of challenges faced by career mothers, especially nursing ones so that they may take proactive steps in terms of implementing strategies, policies, trainings and programmes to promote work-life balance. Stakeholder in education such as the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, school administrator should consider flexible time for workshops, training and other on the job training opportunities to benefit all staff including career mothers. School administrators should provide psych-social support in terms of counselling and gender responsive services for career mothers in order to support them.

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