

PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL LIVES OF CAREER WOMEN: STRIKING THE BALANCE

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ABSTRACT: *This research work sought to examine the job demands of women. It sought to analyze the work-life balance of women in selected business entities in Ghana. A quantitative method was employed and data were collected using questionnaires. In all the three firms, 150 questionnaires were distributed but only 100 responses were used for the analysis because some were incomplete. The questionnaires were administered to employees in the banking and insurance sector comprising of those in managerial and non-managerial positions. With the support of statistical tools (crosstabs and chi square) the data was analyzed. The findings suggest that increases in the employment rates and relative earnings of women have increased the opportunity costs of child care and domestic responsibilities which were common to womanhood some years back. It was observed that all the women who worked for more than 8 hours were experiencing work-family conflicts.*

KEYWORDS: Career, Entrepreneurship, Behaviour, Human resource, Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender has always attracted considerable research interest as an area of study that is complex, challenging and controversial. In the past decades, women were shadowed in terms of corporate activities. There was several literature supporting or presenting disparity in females' representation in most corporate activities (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Women were considered as weaker vessels and homemakers (Brett & Reilly, 1992). It was uncommon to see women holding higher positions in the various business organizations. Until the 20th century, less was recorded in terms of females' career achievements. The few who were engaged in the business world faced a number of discrimination to the advantage of their male counterparts in terms of salary difference (Blau et al., 2006; Calas and Smircich, 1996) and participation in decision making (Miller, 2003; Halford, 2003; Thomas and Davies, 2002; Whitehead and Moodley, 1999 s cited in Barry, Berg & John Chandler, 2012). Women actually did not have a say in organizational issues or matters. Matters relating to child care and domestic activity management were considered as the main responsibilities of women.

However, due to gender activists and policy makers the pattern has now changed as women all over the world are now increasingly locking horns with men in their hitherto male dominated business environment and they are excelling with compelling success stories that inspire many more women and even men (Business World Magazine, 2013). According to Astin (1984), Farmer (1985), Stephenson & Burge (1997), Labor market participation among women increased from 30% in 1950 to more than 50% in 1980 as cited by Domenico & Jones (2006). By the late

1970s, nearly 50% of all married women and 40% of all women over age 16 were working (Nieva & Gutek, 1981).

Organizations expect their employees and staff to work hard towards the achievement of the organizational goals which are mostly challenging. Due to the challenging nature of the work, stress is paramount. Females are those who experience significant amount of this stress because, they combine both domestic and organizational activities. International Labour Organization (ILO) on its Women's Entrepreneurship Development Program (WED) project, a global program that promotes women's entrepreneurship development with an overall objective to promoting decent employment and poverty reduction through the economic empowerment of women (<http://vitalvoices.org>). With these achievements of the today's woman, there have been questions as who then perform their household domestic responsibilities. Research has proven that with this new shift in women's roles or combination, women are engaged most of the time with their professional work leaving them little or no time for their social lives (Jones & Westman, 2006; Peeters, Montgomery & Bakker, 2005).

Despite the rather extant literature on work and social issues of women, much of the focus were on the developed world [June & Mahmood, 2011; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Rout, Lewis & Kagan, 1999] with less works from the south-Saharan Africa. According to Lu et al (2008), the case is different within the developing world. As a result of this, there is a need for more studies to test these earlier findings in different contexts for better understanding of the impact of career achievements on social lives of career women. This exploratory study sought to examine how these professional women balance their professional and social lives within the Ghanaian context. This then led to the development of the research question of this study which states that, are women who work for 8 hours outside home more likely to experience work-family conflicts as compared to men?

Earlier, Boyar, Maertz, & Pearson (2005) and Yang & Hawkins (2004) posit that as a result of the dual roles of employees where the new generation is keen to take on both job-related responsibilities as well as family roles, there is a possibility of inter-role or work-family conflict involving incompatible demands of employees. The implication therefore is that the labour force now has to choose between where their hearts belong. According to Ahmad (2008), findings pertaining to the effect of work-family imbalances have resulted in mixed outcomes. Thus whereas some researchers find the impact of this as negative against job performance in some contexts (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Butler & Skkattebo, 2004; Frone, Yardley, & Markel (1997) others found no relationship. In the work of Cole (2004) concerning an assessment of women in leadership positions, it was found that when employees choose to love their jobs and devote most of their time to job-related issues at the expense of their family, there is a conflict. Thus, there is an inverse relationship between work and family life. Some studies equally reported an inverse relationship between career women and behavioral and cognitive development of their children. One of such studies is that of Han, Waldfoegel, and Brooks-Gunn (2001) which found that formal employment of parent could sometimes lead to behavioral problems in children as well as academic performance (Gennetian, Lopoo & London, 2008). This was as a result of the varying degrees of discipline that these children are often exposed to (from both out-of-home care providers and parents) which ends up confusing them.

LITERATURE

Gender, Work and Family

Work-life balance is the separation between one's job-related responsibilities and his personal life. It is the boundary that you create between your profession, career, or business and every other segment that makes up your life. Aside from career, these other segments include family, personal growth, spirituality, fitness and health, and community and friendships. Work-family balance refers to having enough time to fulfill activities in both work and family contexts (De Cieri et al, 2005; Voydanoff, 2002). Work family conflict is a "form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of work and family roles are incompatible in some respect so that the participation in one role is more difficult because of participation in the other role" (Voydanoff, 2005). In considering the nexus between work and family, Chapman (2004) identified gender as a significant issue worth considering. Moreover, the specific "women-in-management" literature suggests that women's insertion in the workforce continues to be characterized by discrimination (Calas and Smircich, 1996). Recent studies on gender confirm that inequalities persist (Blau et al., 2006).

Many men have explained that factors beyond uncongenial workplace cultures also matters concerning the extent to which work can be made to accommodate family responsibilities. Strong among such factors is the kind of work they do as men (Ranson, 2012). Other scholars such as Schwartz, (1994) equally suggest the need to consider job choice in ensuring gender equality relations in sharing household responsibilities and explained that some jobs 'simply do not allow' the sharing required by peer relationships and equitably shared child-caregiving (as cited by Ranson, 2012). Shows and Gerstel (2009) also affirm that this change is more appreciated or effective in working-class families. They noted that work arrangements in terms of occupation and class linkages in the way both kinds of work were organized and in the domestic relationships contributes to men's family involvement. In their findings in a study concerning male emergency medical technicians it was observed that men who are likely to share domestic chores with their wives were those whose wives work full-time and earn salaries similar to theirs.

Moreover, research indicates that the "rate of change in the sharing of household tasks within the family lags behind the dramatic rise in female labour force participation" (Blau et al., 2006). In other words, although the female labour force has been widely accepted, their place and responsibilities as homemaker has not been affected as women still continue to carry the major burden of family responsibilities (Chapman, 2004; Whitehouse et al., 2007). Thus, the issue of gender stereotype in home making is still an ongoing practices (Todd & Binns, 2013). Besides, Ranson (2012) suggests that men, who see more to fathering than breadwinning and who do accommodate paid employment to family responsibilities, face many challenges, often in their own workplaces. From Acker's (1990) researchers in several countries have thoroughly documented the extent to which organizations are gendered, in which expectations about ideal workers are linked to men whose family responsibilities never intrude into their working lives. Thus employees considered to be ideal are those who devote most of their time to job-related issues. Workers who usually seek for leaves or flexible work arrangement due to family responsibility are rated low on their performance appraisals.

The literature on strategies for work-family balance is largely based on two major theoretical approaches (Voydanoff, 2005). A major strategy for achieving work-family balance is the availability of flexible work arrangements (Todd & Binns, 2013). For instance in one of their studies in Australia, Todd & Binns (2013) found that there has been some amount of change in relation to the implementation of Work –Life Balance strategies in all four organizations sampled in their study. There were indications of managers’ showing concern for employees’ personal or social issues. Research regarding the impact of flexible work arrangements on work-family balance is mixed (Hill et al., 2001). For example, Galinsky and Johnson (2002) found that employees in general with flextime had higher job satisfaction and showed more initiative relative to workers with no access to these policies. In contrast it was reported that the perception of flexibility in working time was weakly related to well-being of working parents. Tausig and Fenwick (2001) are equally of the view that flexible work arrangements may enable work-family balance only when the worker has control over the working hours. Their study further found that other work-life balance strategies such as flexible schedule, Part-time employment, and perceived control over schedule had no significant relationship but rather number of “hours worked” between full-time and part-time employees. Tausig and Fenwick (2001) reported that a professional occupation was negatively associated with work-life balance. Research findings concerning the ability of professionals and managers to balance work and family are also mixed. There is some evidence to suggest that highly educated women in well-paid jobs are "best placed to access supportive policies" (Whitehouse et al., 2007). Some managers and professionals may be able to minimize work-life conflict by purchasing support such as cleaners and nannies to enable work-life balance (Graves et al., 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to investigate the effect of career achievements on the social lives of married and working women in Ghana. Questionnaires were sent to employees who were currently working at the sampled organizations (the banking and insurance sectors of Ghana). In all, 150 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents at their various places of work through convenience sampling method but only 100 were found to be appropriate for analysis even though the actual response rate was 78.7% (118) this is because the remaining 12% (18) were found to be either partially completed or not attempted. Two scales of measurement were adopted for this study. Job content questionnaire (Karasek, 1979) and work-family conflict scale (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996) which was made up of five statements to which respondents were supposed to respond based on a 7-point likert scale where 1= strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree. A typical question was “the demands of my work interfere with my home and family life”, “My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill family duties” with Cronbach’s alphas ranges from 0.80 to 0.91 for the five items. The study equally captured the demographic information of respondents where gender, marital status, family size, level of education and job titles of respondents were equally captured (in terms of managers or non managers). Data analysis was done using frequency and percentages.

RESULTS

Of the 100 respondents, 77 were women with the median age of 38. 52% of them were having children of school going age. 41% of them were married with their youngest children being less than ten years. Single 51% and 8% were divorced. Considering their level of education, 9% of the women who responded were holding HND/Diploma certificates, 67% which is the majority represents First Degree holders, and 24% were Masters Degree holders. In terms of job titles, 22% of the respondents were those in managerial positions out of which 7% were women and the remaining 15% were men. Those in the non-managerial category (78%) were those involved with other administrative activities such as secretaries, customer service personnel, tellers, security and sales representatives.

Table 1 Gender * Hours of Work Per Day Cross tabulation

		hours of work per day					Total	
		5hrs	6hrs	7hrs	8hrs	more than 8hrs		
gender	female	Count	22	3	6	31	15	77
		Expected Count	22.3	3.1	6.9	30.0	14.6	77.0
		% within hours of work per day	75.9%	75.0%	66.7%	79.5%	78.9%	77.0%
male		Count	7	1	3	8	4	23
		Expected Count	6.7	.9	2.1	9.0	4.4	23.0
		% within hours of work per day	24.1%	25.0%	33.3%	20.5%	21.1%	23.0%
Total		Count	29	4	9	39	19	100
		Expected Count	29.0	4.0	9.0	39.0	19.0	100.0
		% within hours of work per day	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Data collected showed that most working females are not able to have enough time for their family after working hours and as such they did not have a balance between work and social life. From the Table 1, it can be inferred that most of the respondents who work for more than eight hours were women (78.9%). According to Thomthwaite (2006), women workers want to have good time with family and to perform domestic duties in order to meet their family role demands but this study found the contrary. The female participants in this study were those suffering from work-family conflicts (WFC). The demands of their jobs are so much that they spend long hours in the office. Also 75% admitted that female workers have just a little or no time for their families after working hours. Only 25% of working woman have enough time for their families after work whiles, 86% felt the demands of their jobs was a hindrance to motherly responsibilities such that they are not able to balance their lives.

In addition respondents were interrogated on management's concern. In relation to this, 91% of the responses indicated a positive intervention in work arrangements. Organizations have strategies towards managing the work-life balance of their employees but 9% of the respondents said even though such initiatives are available; its implementation has not been felt. Yet still, employees in all the organizations sampled attested to the fact that policies for work-life management helps to increase productivity and efficiency in the organization. The strategies available were provision of flexible work hours, job sharing options, extended vacations, day – care services and annual leaves and mostly maternity leaves. Interestingly, similar findings in the UK and France, (Gregory and Milner, 2008) and the Nordic countries (Lammi-Taskula, 2006) supports the suggestion that even though availability of leave provisions and other workplace initiatives could create the possibility for a more equitable sharing of household responsibilities through couple negotiation, fathers as compared to mothers are less likely to take advantage of such initiatives as a means to increase their share of family work.

Besides, 70% of the respondents lamented that it is not an easy task to combine organizational duties with domestic activities. They explained that hours of working, overtime, work from home after working hours, work on holidays and travelling away from home were some of the factors that affected their family commitments and work-life balance. The results of this study therefore affirm the findings of Drew and Murtagh (2005) which equally suggested that, it is difficult in having balance between work and personal lives especially for professionals and those in managerial positions. These findings are not different from those of Callan, (2007); Hochschild, (1997); Ranson, (2001) and Kugelberg, (2006) as cited in Ranson (2012). With regards to this, Ranson, (2012) suggests that men's workplace practices, particularly with respect to balancing family responsibilities, have some way to go before they mirror those of women. Until they do, gender equality both at home and at work will remain elusive.

According to the data collected, women (81%) are no more seen as subordinates in the organizations and they are now given the opportunity to express their views in the organizational decision making. The results (85%) revealed that, the various activities that female workers perform are very stressful yet they are able to work within time to meet organizational deadlines and to satisfy the needs of the organization. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents agreed that their job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill their family duties. A chi square test was used to establish the relationship between gender and work-family conflict (WFC). The test was carried out with .05 alpha levels and a degree of freedom (df = 5)

Table 2 Chi Square Test

($p < 0.05$)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi Square	10.736 ^a	6	.097
Likelihood Ratio	13.088	6	.042
Linear-by-linear association	8.663	1	.003
N of valid cases	100		

In table 2, the Pearson's Chi Square value was 10.736, with an associated significant level of 0.002, a value less than the alpha value of 0.05. This means that the test result is significant. Therefore, there is statistically significant relationship between women's working hours and work-family relationship, in Ghana.

Managerial Implication

By implication, this study suggests that managers should make room for flexible work arrangements for their staff since most of them are not enjoying a balanced lifestyle. Besides, study says that although women's participation in the workforce is on the rise, women still continue to perform their various household responsibilities (Chapman, 2004; Blau et al., 2006; Whitehouse et al., 2007). This is because, if employees have a balance in their work and domestic activities, they will be less stressed and have a sound mind to perform their duties at work. Men should be sensitized on caring and sharing of household responsibilities to help relieve women of some burden of the double responsibilities.

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