

Stressors and coping strategies among working mothers in a Nigerian university: Implications for social work practice

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Abstract

Despite a recent significant increase in the number of working women, the difficulties they face have become a serious social concern. This cross-sectional survey study investigated the causes of stress among working mothers and the coping strategies they employ. Participants included 604 UNN working mothers (596 for the questionnaire study and 8 for the IDI). Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with frequency, and percentages. Findings revealed that 77.0 % of respondents identified that working mothers' competing responsibilities include an inability to cope with professional obligations, time management, maintaining relationships, and making ends meet. The majority of respondents strongly agreed that taking breaks and vacations, social support, and having fewer children (71.5%, 64.6%, and 71.1%, respectively) were helpful strategies for working mothers to alleviate their stress experiences. The study concludes that identifying the stressors that working mothers face is critical in reducing stress and ensuring work-life balance and it recommends that occupational social workers should be employed by organizations so that they can help educate mothers on helpful coping strategies.

Keywords: coping strategies, competing responsibilities, professional obligations, working mothers, work stress.

Introduction

The economic downturn, the desire for career pursuance, and global advocacy for gender equality have all contributed to an increase in the number and percentage of women in the labour force (Dimkpa, 2010; Ajala, 2017). These variables are the result of women's desires for financial independence, self-worth, and, most importantly, the dismantling of the ingrained notion of the "glass ceiling" that prohibits them from holding professional positions (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015; Rajora, 2019; Young et al., 2021). Other studies (Ademuyiwa, et al., 2022; Ajala, 2017) equally attributes women's quest for a

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paid job to their educational improvement, suggesting that family structure is moving from a traditional single-income family to a double-income family in Nigeria, which in turn results in role conflicts from multiple roles being played in the context of family and work. However, in most developing countries, such as Nigeria, employment relationships are structured according to gender norms, resulting in the disproportionate subjugation of women because men are socialized to be breadwinners, while women are always expected to care for the home (Abubakar, 2018). Currently, many families' standard of living is dependent on mothers working in paid employment; as a result, work and family responsibilities become complicated, and their spouses' unshared workload frequently causes stress (Craig & Powell, 2018). Now that many of these mothers have paid jobs, they have not abandoned their roles in their families (Kayode et al., 2012; Nnubia et al., 2022), and these cause some situations such as overloading of roles. Even if they do not work outside the home, women are likely to be stressed by household tasks, motherhood, and being a wife (Hegewisch & DuMonthier, 2016; Rajgariah et al., 2021), hence, the need to conceptualize stress.

There are several causes of stress and the degree of stress in our lives largely hinges on factors such as physical health of individuals, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments and responsibilities we bear, the amount of support we receive from others and the number of chances of traumatic events we go through in our lives (Sokpuwu, & Ibara, 2021). Stress, therefore, is inevitable and unavoidable component of life due to increasing complexities and competitiveness in living standards (Nasreen Khan, 2014; Afrida, 2021). For instance, in a typical Nigerian household, mothers with paid employment are still expected to cook and clean, care for their children, husband, and (in some cases) elderly dependents. Occasionally, she might have to accompany her husband to gatherings with the extended family, weddings, or funerals, regardless of the location, nature, terms, or conditions of her employment (Ibegbulam & Ejikeme, 2021). According to the authors, when family obligations and work demands conflict, working mothers are expected to put their families first because work is rarely seen as a good enough excuse to avoid taking care of their responsibilities to them.

Work stress otherwise known as stressor is an event or situation that causes individuals to feel nervous, challenged, or concerned about their safety; including traumatic incidents, life stresses, unexpected medical crises, and daily challenges are all examples of stressors (Gholamzadeh et al., 2011; Park & Kim, 2013; Ornek & Esin, 2020). Stressor however, is widely recognized as one of the leading causes of work-family conflict, with serious consequences for both the organization and its employees (Esther et al., 2016; Uziel et al., 2018; Uwannah, et al., 2022; Ademuyiwa, et al., 2022). Conversely, the

burden of dual full-time work, working mother's physical, emotional, and mental well-being, as well as their productivity, is negatively impacted by gender norms at home and at work (Roberts, 2014; Uwannah et al, 2022) thereby, making them be more vulnerable to pressures resulting from perceived "maternal walls," which limit their job options once they have children (Thakur et al., 2018).

According to Ademuyiwa et al., (2022), mothers' dual roles are often in conflict with one another and cause WFC because they divide their time and energy between the two spheres of activity. According to some studies (Chandola et al., 2019), mothers who work full time and have two or more children experience 40% more stress than other mothers, particularly those whose children are poorly spaced and are of school age. The majority of mothers give birth continuously without adequate spacing and may even have a high number of children, despite the claim that 67% of working mothers experience excessive stress in both spheres (Sundaresan, 2014). They face difficulties managing their children's tasks, careers, and social circles. Due to their determination to achieve the desired results in both settings, mothers may find it difficult to distinguish between their responsibilities at home and at work, which can lead to work-family conflict (Nkulenu, 2015).

Work-family conflict can as well be exacerbated by long working hours, inflexibility, and a less pleasant work environment, particularly in the lives of working mothers (Lupu et al., 2018; Owodunni, 2022). Oruh et al. (2021) also pointed out that the lack of effective management and leadership is reflected in Nigeria's employment sector, where workers lack governmental protection against unfair workplace practices and stressors such as exploitation, work overload, and poor working conditions. Other studies (Fadel et al., 2019; Fontinha et al., 2019; Meng & Wang, 2018; Ibegbulam & Ejikeme, 2021; Owodunni, 2022) have also found that administrative challenges, income and benefits issues; as well as heavy workload (Owolabi & Ajibosi, 2019; Uwannah et al, 2020) as sources of stress for working mothers. Moreover, workplace conditions including pollution, poor ventilation, insecurity, and overcrowding; combined with job demands like role overload, ambiguity, conflict, a lack of resources and control; and lack of social support and solitary parenting are some of the factors that have exacerbated the stress of working mothers (WHO, 2018; Ojiha et al. 2020). Therefore, managing WFC requires a career-focused mother to have more physical stamina, personal skill, and intelligence. Additionally, her employer and husband, who are also part of her "role set," must simultaneously adjust their expectations.

Despite the exposure to work overload, most mothers believe they can handle all of their responsibilities, but this comes at the expense of stress and

exhaustion (Rendon, 2016). Working mothers who were exhausted have little or no time to care for themselves as a result of the conflict between work and family life (De Ravindranath et al., 2021). The majority of Sundaesan (2014) survey respondents admitted to experiencing high levels of stress and worry, that discouraged them from wanting to advance in their careers because of exhaustion from a poor work-life balance thus, preventing working mothers from reaching their full potential. Also, work stress has a devastating effect on educational institutions in terms of absenteeism, low performance, lower organizational commitment, and lower productivity (Ubangari & Bako, 2014). Again, individual dysfunction, low motivation, low morale, dampened initiative, decreased interest in working, high absenteeism rates, decreased capacity to perform, poor job performance, reduced efficiency, poor quality control, and a decline in productivity and quality of goods and services are all outcomes of workplace stress (Thabo-Fako, 2010; Owodunni, 2022). American Psychological Association and the American Institute of Stress estimate that 77 % of people experience bodily symptoms as a result of stress on a daily basis. Among those who reported physical symptoms, 51% reported exhaustion, 44% headaches, and 34% upset stomach (Price, 2014). Working mothers' negative stress experiences necessitate strategies to cope in order to maintain their mental health and productivity.

Individual coping mechanisms may lessen the connection between demanding professional expectations and family obligations, according to Higgins et al. (2010). Coping therefore is an effort, according to these researchers (Bani-Issa et al., 2020; Ornek & Esin, 2020), that enables mothers to keep working toward their goals. Coping mechanisms, therefore, constitute the skills that working mothers need in order to lessen the effects of stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified two models of coping strategies: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, to manage internal or external demands that are assessed as potentially harmful and stressful to the individual. Working mothers use problem-focused coping, which is defined by behaviours that promote acceptance, social support, and positive reappraisal of stressors, as a proactive measure to reduce, alter, or eliminate stressors, thereby lowering the perceived level of stress. Working mothers frequently use this strategy when the circumstances are advantageous and practical (Reeve et al., 2013). Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, refers to working mothers' behaviour that demonstrates psychological endurance or tolerance of stressful encounters, with the goal of reducing emotional pain through avoidance, minimization, careful attention, and positive judgment, and is typically used when working mothers perceive the situation to be unavoidable and uncontrollable (Shueh-Yi & Cai, 2014; Ofei et al., 2018).

The study employed Lazarus and Cohen's (1977) transactional model of stress and coping, which considers stress to be a negative mental state with cognitive and emotional influences that allow the interpretation of stressful situations as a type of appraisal. The model found two appraisal processes (primary and secondary), where primary appraisal assesses the relevance of the situation, however stressful or convenient it may be, and secondary appraisal discusses what mothers may do about the situation. These processes offer meaning to stressful experiences and the resources needed to help working mothers cope. This indicates that when demands exceed their perceived abilities to handle them, working mothers will adopt reactive coping techniques to reduce or remove stress. These thought processes assist working mothers in deciding what type of coping strategy to use, such as taking protective measures like seeking professional advice from social workers or managing their emotional distress through avoidance, minimization, selective attention, and positive comparison, especially if she perceives the situation as uncontrollable. However, a working mother's capacity for coping is determined by the tactics she employs to deal with stressful situations caused by work-family conflict, or vice versa and by her access to the professional services of social workers.

According to Ogundipe and Edewor (2012), social workers engage in activities that help improve the quality of life of people who are struggling to carry out their daily responsibilities, relieve their distress, and achieve their goals. Because stress is a part of working mothers' daily lives, social workers must also educate them on how to deal with it. According to Eisengart et al. (2006), providing information on active coping skills to mothers can help them improve their relationships in both formal and informal settings. Social workers now counsel employees on a wide range of personal, familial, and social issues, provide corporate executives with community engagement policy perspectives, mediate disputes, develop and implement stress management programs, and assist businesses with layoffs and retirements (Googins & Godfrey, 1985; Ajala, 2017). According to the authors, these and other initiatives demonstrate the social worker's responsiveness and ability to detect and resolve challenges that working mothers face as a result of excessive role demands, which were previously ignored or underserved.

Several studies on work stress have been conducted in Nigeria, including stress among University lecturers (Sokpuwu, & Ibara, 2021; Ademuyiwa et al., 2022; Akanji et al., 2022; Uwannah et al., 2022); Others on work-life balance among women in other professions (Ajala, 2017; Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019; Ibegbulam, & Ejikeme, 2021; Oruh et al., 2021; Ozoemena et al., 2021; Nnubia et al., 2022) but, none had been conducted at either public or private Nigerian Universities to determine the factors that contribute to work stress among University working mothers. As a result, the current study's goal was

to identify stressors in working mothers and strategies for dealing with them, utilizing the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) as the study area. The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the factors that influence occupational stress among working mothers at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka? What are the coping strategies adopted by working mothers to manage occupational stress?

Method

Design and study setting

The study adopted a mixed method approach in exploring stress antecedence and strategies that will ensure a work-life balance for working mothers in Nigerian Universities. This study was conducted at UNN which is one of the Federal Universities in Nigeria. The institution has two main campuses (Nsukka campus and Enugu campus popularly called UNEC) with 16 faculties and 102 academic departments domiciled across the two campuses. 10 faculties are domiciled within the Nsukka campus while six faculties are within the Enugu campus. We opted to conduct the study at the UNN campus because of the proximity and familiarity with working mothers.

Sampling procedure

The study employed a multi-stage cluster sampling techniques including purposive selection, and simple random sampling, with respondents selected from the faculties, departments, administrative units, and centres. The survey included all female employees who were 18 years or older and had a child or children because they are best suited to contribute useful information on the subject. We purposefully chose 425 of the 433 academic female staff members, leaving eight out for IDI. The decision was taken to choose all of the teaching staff since they are in limited supply and are more likely to feel stress than their counterparts because their work tasks included both academic and administrative obligations, as well as family commitments. The remaining respondents were picked by ballot from five administrative unit sections, including the Registry, Personnel, Students' Affairs, Bursary, and Medical Centre, using simple random selection (SRS). A sample of 35 people were chosen from each of the five Unit sections. As a result, the researchers were able to sample 175 respondents, and when combined with the 425 respondents from the teaching staff, the total was 600 respondents

The researchers utilized judgemental criteria to choose mothers who were thought to be more competent to provide qualitative data regarding the stress they faced. We performed in-depth interviews with eight more female teaching staff (department heads) who were not included in the questionnaire survey. These eight female department heads were carefully selected from four faculties that had female department heads. Among the faculties

represented were arts, education, pharmaceutical sciences, and social sciences. Two female department heads were chosen from each faculty to ensure fair representation.

Data collection

The researchers adopted the use of the questionnaire and In-depth Interview (IDI) for data collection. Given the sample size (600) for the quantitative study, two research assistants were hired and trained on the study's methodology and objectives. The research assistants were recruited because they were knowledgeable about the subject and can help us better. For the qualitative data collection, we used semi-structured questions to probe for more responses that will complement the quantitative data. The study instrument was prepared in the English language and was designed to allow each session of the interviews to last for about 30-45 minutes. We assured our respondents of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering of confidentiality and anonymity as well as the opportunity to withdraw from participation at any time they are not comfortable after informing them of the aim of the study.

The IDIs were conducted with the consent of the respondents at the specified locations, days, and times, with the researcher coordinating the interview and the research assistants recording and taking notes. All the interviews with the female Heads of Departments were carried out in their offices on different days and times of their choice. Adherence to their choices was considered to ensure confidentiality and conduciveness. Permission to use a digital recorder was obtained from the participants before the discussions.

Results**Table 1:** General demographic characteristics of the study population

Demographic variables	Questionnaire respondents	Respondents in IDIs
	Frequency/Percentage (n=596)	Frequency/Percentage (n=8)
Age		
18 – 28	76(12.8)	0(0)
29 – 39	258(43.2)	0(0)
40 – 50	231(38.8)	0(0)
51 – 61	25(4.2)	6(75)
62 and above	6(1.0)	2(25)
Marital status		
Married	506(84.9)	8(100)
Single	7(1.2)	0(0)
Separated	5(0.8)	0(0)
Divorced	5(0.8)	0(0)
Widowed	73(12.3)	0(0)
Edu. Qualification		
FSLC	23(3.9)	0(0)
SSCE/WASC	99(16.6)	0(0)
First degree/HND	170(28.5)	0(0)
M.Sc.	145(24.3)	0(0)
PhD	108(18.1)	8(100)
Monthly income		
20,000-40,000	25(4.2)	0(0)
41,000-61,000	38(6.4)	0(0)
62,000-82,000	89(14.9)	0(0)
83,000-103,000	143(24.0)	0(0)
104,000 and above	301(50.5)	8(100)
Number of children		
1-5	197(33.1)	8(100)
6-10	283(47.5)	0(0)
11-15	98(16.4)	0(0)
16 and above	18(3.0)	0(0)
Age of oldest child		
≤ 12years old	226(38.0)	0(0)
> 12 years old	370(62.0)	8(100)

Source: Fieldwork 2021

According to Table 1, married women made up 84.9% of those who took part in the quantitative research and 100% of those who took part in the IDIs. With 28%, 24.3% and 18.1% having first degree/HND, M.Sc and Ph D credentials

respectively, the majority of the respondents held graduate degrees. 55% of the quantitative responders and 100% of the participants that were used for qualitative data collection earn above N 104,000.00 per month. The majority of respondents (47.5% of quantitative respondents and 0% of qualitative participants) had 6-10 children who relied on them financially, whereas 62.0% of quantitative respondents and 100% of qualitative respondents had children above the age of 12.

Views of the respondents on the conflicting roles facing working mothers

Table 2: *Percentage distribution of respondents' conflicting roles*

Mothers' conflicting roles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Job demand	11	1.8
Time management	24	4.0
Relationships	7	1.2
Making ends to meet	45	7.6
All of the above	459	77.0
None of the above	12	2.0
Not applicable	38	6.4
Total	596	100.0

Source: *Fieldwork, 2021*

Table 2 depicts the conflicting responsibilities that working mothers face. Working mothers' conflicting roles are mentioned by 77.0 % of the 596 respondents as job demand, time management, sustaining relationships, and making ends meet whereas, 38% of the respondents indicated not applicable. These findings are supported by the views of one of the participants from the qualitative study who stated that;

A mother who is overworked at work may go home exhausted and be unable to care for her children or husband's sexual needs, among other family needs. If she lacks strong social support, particularly at home, she may arrive at work exhausted after juggling all of her responsibilities at home and may end up performing poorly. Tackling these responsibilities is so challenging and is often contradictory (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Social Sciences**).

Opinions on the experience of work-related stress

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by the level of work related stress they have experienced

Work related stress experienced	High	Medium	Low	Very low	Total (%)
Chronic headache	174(29.2%)	328 (55.0%)	47 (7.9%)	47(7.9%)	596(100%)
Feeling of exhaustion	406 (68.1%)	95(15.9%)	44(7.4%)	51(8.6%)	596(100%)
Low self esteem	124 (20.8%)	344(57.7%)	74(12.4%)	54(9.1%)	596(100%)
Poor quality control	224(37.6%)	264(44.3%)	63(10.6%)	45(7.5%)	596(100%)
Absent from work	312(52.3%)	161(27.0%)	85(14.3%)	38(6.4%)	596(100%)
Sleeping disorder	416(69.8%)	90(15.1%)	54(9.1%)	36 (6.0%)	596(100%)
Reduced interest in having sex	232(38.9%)	271(45.5%)	33(5.5%)	60(10.1%)	596(100%)
Inadequate attention to family needs	118 (19.8%)	393(65.9%)	43(7.2%)	42(7.0%)	596(100%)
Misunderstanding in the family	237 (39.8%)	253(42.4%)	68(11.4%)	38(6.4%)	596(100%)
Depression	401(67.3%)	94(15.7%)	47(7.9%)	54(9.1%)	596(100%)
High blood pressure	236(39.6%)	258(43.3%)	56(9.4%)	46(7.7%)	596(100%)

Source: *Fieldwork, 2021*

Table 3 shows the severity of the negative impact of work stress on working mothers' well-being including their family and workplace. Other views from the qualitative study include;

Some women might be so worn out that they have no time for their husbands and, as a result of their exhaustion, are unable to satisfy their husband's sexual needs. This could lead to the man looking for another woman to fulfil his sexual needs tomorrow, which would only make things worse for his wife (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Social Sciences**).

Most mothers who don't have good social support, especially at home, may show up at work exhausted after juggling all of their responsibilities at home and may perform poorly. She might not be keeping her appointments and arrive at work late every time, even if there is an urgent need to complete some tasks (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Education**).

Views on coping Strategies for Working Mothers

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by coping strategies that should be adopted by working mothers

Coping strategies that should be adopted	Definitely false	False	True	Definitely True	Total (%)
Rest periods and holidays	10(1.7%)	8 (1.3%)	152 (25.5%)	426 (71.5%)	596(100%)
High income	12 (2.0%)	28(4.7%)	192(32.2%)	364 (61.1%)	596(100%)
Effective time management	21 (3.5%)	13(2.2%)	208(34.9%)	354(59.4%)	596(100%)
Social support	10(1.7%)	25(4.2%)	176(29.5%)	385(64.6%)	596(100%)
Fewer children	11(1.8%)	47(7.9%)	114(19.1%)	424(71.1%)	596(100%)

Source: *Fieldwork, 2021*

According to Table 4, a higher proportion of respondents believe that the following coping strategies should be used by working mothers: rest and holidays (25.5%) and (71.5%), high income earnings (32.2%) and (61.1%), effective time management (34.9%) and (59.4%), social support (29.5%) and (59.4%), and fewer children (19.1%) and (71.1%). The findings are also supported with the views of participants from qualitative study as follows;

My usual strategy is to avoid being a jack of all trades. For instance, I only engage in certain areas. If you're in a career, don't try to learn everything; instead, concentrate on one thing and do it well (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences**).

Coping is a special thing; you must evaluate the situation and choose how you will handle it. People do employ nannies and housekeepers. Nowadays, parents and school officials work out a plan to keep kids in school until the end of the workday. Mothers must schedule their time as well (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Arts**).

If you also have strong social supports at home, it will help to mitigate the effects of stress since your mind will be at ease while you are at work because someone is looking after you elsewhere (**IDI participant from the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences**).

In all the discussions it does appear to a large extent that the majority of the respondents/ participants support that mothers should have a resting time, a viable source of income, plan their activities for the day to maximize time, have social support by either engaging the services of a house-help, nannies, driver even relations as the case maybe, have fewer children that she can

adequately care for among others. By doing these, the experience of stress even though, is unavoidable it can be reduced to the barest minimum.

Discussion

This study explored stressors and coping strategies among mothers working at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Findings from the study revealed that 62% of quantitative & 100% of qualitative respondents have children over the age of 12, and 47.5% & 0% have 6–10 dependent children respectively. It is obvious that being a mother entails having a child or children who are essentially dependent on their parents, these findings were not unexpected but it's crucial to ascertain whether the mother's stress level is impacted by the children's ages. According to Chandola et al. (2019), full-time working mothers with two or more children experience 40% more stress than other mothers. Ajala (2017) also noted that a typical working mother or career woman experiences conflicting role expectations while at work and at home, including having to manage their children's tasks, careers, and social circles, which present them with challenges. Most studies as mentioned above only demonstrate that women who are of childbearing age or who have a large number of children experience higher levels of stress. For instance, attention is usually paid to the mother's dual responsibilities of caring for her family's needs at home—her children, her spouse, and everyone else as well as her job at the office. However, their studies made no mention of whether the age of the children of working mothers affect the level of stress these women experience today as employees.

The finding also revealed that working mothers at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka demonstrated a good grasp of the impacts of job stress on mothers, with more respondents (77%) reporting having experienced work stress by way of trying to meet up with time, maintaining relationships, dealing with demands on the job and trying to make both ends meet. The findings are not misleading, as most studies (Ajala, 2017; Chandola et al., 2019; Ibegbulam & Ejikeme, 2021; Afrida, 2021) stressed that the full-time dual roles of working mothers are often contradictory. Work-family spillover, according to Afrida, (2021), may also happen as a result of juggling multiple responsibilities and may appear when the pressures from work have an impact on the mother's attitude and behaviour within the family. As revealed by the study, mothers without strong social support, particularly at home, may arrive at work exhausted after juggling all of their responsibilities at home and may end up performing poorly. Owodunni (2022) claimed that stressed workers are more likely to be ill, unmotivated, underproductive, and unsafe at work.

Additionally, the study found that working mothers' stress experiences were linked to feelings of exhaustion, sleep disorders, depression, high blood

pressure, persistent headaches, low self-esteem, and absences from work. These results concur with those of Price (2014), who listed physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, stomach upset, etc. Rendon (2016) also pointed out that most mothers, even those who assert they manage all of their responsibilities on their own, frequently experience stress and exhaustion. They consequently have little or no time to take care of themselves (De Ravindranath et al., 2021).

Also, findings from the present study showed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that strategies to be adopted by working mothers include the use of rest periods and holidays, high earnings, effective time management, social support, and having fewer numbers of children. The findings supported those of Ofei et al. (2018), whose study discovered that time management and priority setting would help working mothers cope with the demands of their jobs. More so, the study revealed that marital status and family size (.000) were found to be the strongest predictors of work stress due to their significant link, followed by level of income (.024) as demonstrated when predicting the experience of work stress based on certain demographic characteristics. This is consistent with the findings of Ojiha et al. (2020), who claim that married status, high number of children, lack of social support, and hazard exposure are all associated with job stress. Other studies show that administrative challenges, as well as issues with income and benefits, are sources of stress for working mothers (Fadel et al., 2019; Fontinha et al., 2019; and Meng & Wang, 2018).

The findings of this study have significant policy and practice implications for Nigerian social workers. Working mothers are more likely to experience high levels of stress as a result of job function mismatch caused by demand-ability misfit. As a result, many of these women may experience despair and anxiety if they are unable to control their stress. Therefore, there is a need for organizations to employ social workers who will be in a position to work with women to help them to understand the factors that induce stress and how to deal with it. Bakker and de Vries, (2021) note that organizational resources such as human resource practices which may include employing social workers and also having a counselling unit in the organization will help women to cope better with stress. This is because social workers will have a better understanding of coping strategies working mothers can adopt to ensure work-family balance.

Social work is essential for designing, implementing, monitoring, and sustaining work stress policies in Nigerian organizations. As policy experts, social workers should be consulted or included by organizations in their human resource team. This is because, as generalists, social workers have

knowledge that can help society address a wide range of social issues, including work stress among working mothers. In addition, the Nigerian government must recognize the social work profession by placing them in appropriate positions in various offices such as families, institutions, courts, and ministries so that they can carry out their duties effectively. Other comparable professions, such as sociology and psychology, should not be used to replace social workers because they do not perform the same function.

Conclusion

This study looked into the stresses that contribute to a work-life imbalance among mothers at a Nigerian University, as well as coping techniques and the implications for social work practice. The findings emphasized the sources of stress, the conflicting tasks that mothers confront, the detrimental effects of work stress, coping techniques for working mothers to adopt, and the role of social workers in reducing stress for working mothers. The study concludes that while stress experiences by working mothers are unavoidable due to their multiple obligations, emphasis must be devoted to understanding those stressors to minimize stressful experiences and ensure a work-life balance for mothers.

We, therefore, recommend that government and policy-makers design policies that will take into consideration the number of family members who live with working mothers. Social workers can as well help young adults, married women, teaching and non-teaching employees, less-educated and low-income earners to benefit from learning more about the factors that contribute to work stress and how to cope with them in a university environment. Governments and non-governmental groups must also seek measures to lessen the level of job stress experienced by working mothers by constructing well-equipped leisure centers at all institutions and localities for working mothers' relaxation whenever they feel stressed. The study also recommends that government officials and policymakers in all institutions and organizations should ensure that every working mother takes annual leave, goes for breaks, and leaves the office at the official closing time. Families should attempt to assist working mothers with domestic tasks, including husbands, children, and other family members. This will enable the family members to better comprehend the difficulties and responsibilities faced by working mothers which will in turn give mothers a feeling of "we-ness" thereby reducing their stress levels.

The study acknowledged certain limitations. First, due to financial constraints, the study was limited to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; otherwise, the researchers would have included other institutions in various locations to enrich the data collected. Second, the study showed that almost all of the participants had children who were older than 12 years old, but the

researchers were unable to determine whether the children's age had any bearing on their stress levels. This is because adult children in a family should offer their mother social support, lowering her level of stress. Therefore, we propose that a more thorough investigation of working mothers' stress levels is necessary to ascertain whether the age of their children has any discernible effects.

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