THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Probing Work-life Balance through Gender and Professions' Lens: Reportage on Academics and Nurses in Ife Central Local Government, Osun-State, Nigeria

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Abstract:
This paper evaluates work-life balance among professionals in Ife Central Local Government, Osun State, Southwestern, Nigeria, by focusing on academics and nurses, professions that are respectively key to the education and health sectors of the nation.
Eighty-nine respondents provided useful questionnaires from a population of academics in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and nurses located at OAU Health Centre and the University Community Health Clinic at the town centre of the local government sampled for this study. The collected data was quantitatively analysed using SPSS 21; the results provided descriptive statistics, charts and cross-tabulations to illuminate key issues.
The overall results indicated that employees' gender and their professions impact their capability to manage their work-life balance (WLB). In more specific terms, the female gender was more challenged in achieving WLB than their male colleagues. Additionally, despite members of both professions experiencing work-life imbalance, the situation among academics was more precarious than among nurses.
The study concluded that in spite of gender-based and profession-linked WLB challenges faced by employees of the sampled organisations, awareness of related policies, their adequate implementation and positive perception from employees could boost organisational cost-effectiveness.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Gender, Profession, Academic, Nurses, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Otherwise denoted as "…work organisations' practices…" (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills & Simeaton, 2003, p. 175), the concept of work-life balance (WLB) incorporates a family-friendly work notion into business organisations with a view to assist employees' in achieving a fit between their professions and private life. The authors opine that when employers pursue family-related policies linked to employees' working time, there are business benefits to be gained by employers alongside economic advantages for employees triggering a win-win situation for both parties concerned. However, such assumption of seemingly trouble-free fit between work and private life "… is not self-evident" (White et al., 2003, p. 176). This is despite the existence of WLB-related policies put in place by many nations and organisations operating within them, including the UK (White et al., 2003) and Nigeria (Akanji, 2012).

The significant role of managers in achieving this fit is not farfetched; McCarthy, Darcy & Grady (2010) suggest that organisation's WLB policies influence line managers' personal attitude towards such policies. McCarthy and colleagues also indicate that such organisational line managers' attitudes in turn affect employees' WLB policy awareness, uptake and satisfaction. Arguably, if employees become aware of, accept and are committed to organisational WLB policies, they are better prepared to utilise such to their advantage in achieving the desired fit between their work and private life, a feat that each employee is likely to favour.

It is contended that as a fundamental Human Resource Development (HRD) function, WLB is capable of enhancing both individuals' and organisation's cost-effectiveness (Shankar &Bhatnagar, 2010); this acknowledgement from relevant WLB studies about organisations of advanced nations have further improved our knowledge of the phenomenon. In spite of the significance of the need for employees to achieve this 'fit' between their profession and private life (McCarthy et al., 2010) irrespective of national context, research shows that the concept has attracted little attention and interest in non-western context like Nigeria (Mordi & Ojo, 2011). The authors opine that WLB policies and practices in Nigeria, particularly in the private sector are a charade rather than reality to the extent that there is *"…a general sense of lack of awareness of work-life balance policies"* (Mordi &Ojo, pg. 285) among employees in the private sector. This is an indication of a serious deficiency in WLB literature, empirical data and knowledge for context such as Nigeria that needs addressing.

This paper fills part of the identified gap in literature by broadly exploring the concept being discussed whilst also evaluating it from the perspectives of gender and professions with specific focus on the academics and nurses in Ife Central local government of Osun State, Nigeria. Moreover, that *gender* is included in the frame of analysis for this study has an added significance in WLB and *work-*

life conflict (WLC) literature; Reddick, Rochlen, Grasso, Reilly & Spikes (2011) view extant WLB literature as biased toward females and urge future researchers to include male employees, particularly in the academia, in future studies.WFC depicts a situation *"…in which the demands of one role make participation in the other role more difficult…"* (Voydanoff, 1988, p. 752).

The significance of WLB in organisations, and related empirical data on the same subject-matter is reflected in the fact that the 10 companies that Fortune 500 named as the best companies to work for in 2009 are those *"…where employees feel encouraged to balance their work and personal life"*(Shankar & Bhatnagar, 2010, p. 79). By implication, policies that focus on assisting employees' ability to balance work/profession with family/personal life are key to organisations/businesses' continuity and development. On achieving WLB in Nigeria, Akanji (2012), one of the few relevant contextual studies, opines that although work-life enrichment is also achievable amongst Nigerian employees, the realities of WLB inthis and, perhaps, similar contexts is often accompanied by perceptions of role conflict necessitating the need to initiate coping beliefs/mechanisms perceived to assist the concerned employees. The following section examines WLB from the perspective of gender.

1.1. Gendered Perspective of Work-Life Balance

As previously indicated, although a qualitative research by Reddick et al. (2011) acknowledged that relevant studies recognise the importance of more in-depth knowledge about the challenges faced by academics in managing and balancing their professional vs family/personal roles, most of the studies have been biased towards the female gender. Therefore, the authors suggest that future studies should also consider the male perspectives too. This research by Reddick and colleagues indicates that male academics with children who are pursuing tenure also experience heavier workload alongside already conflicting roles; they also reported that the effects on both male and female academics cannot be differentiated. The research by Darcy et al. (2012) clarifies this lack of effect-differentiation by submitting that gender and parenthood had no significant correlation with WLB of the respondents represented in their research. Notwithstanding, conflicting roles is a serious issue for professional academics irrespective of gender.

However, the extent of the conflict may differ for male and female depending on the context of research. For example, it is plausible that the extent of conflict in a context like Nigeria adjudged by Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (1991) as a *masculine society* may be disparate for both male and female genders for reasons relating to gender biases in such context as highlighted by Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper & Sparrow (2010). Burnett and collaborators argue that, overall, WLB policies are gender-based and focus more on paid work and child care while largely ignoring the burden of domestic labour that is continuously carried by women in many developing societies. The authors believe that this action limit the uptake of gender-related policies. Also, while reporting the stories of early career women physicians who left the academia, Levine, Lin, Kern, Wright & Carrese (2011) revealed that lack of role models who have successfully combined career and family responsibilities, and biases favouring male faculty are two of key challenges militating against female professional physicians. These combined issues reveal the enormity of challenges female professionals have to contend with on regular basis.

In a study of how faculty at a research-intensive university spend their overall time on research, Misra, Lundquist & Templer (2012) find that while both male and female members generally devote equal time to their employment each week, the females with young children spend less time on research that counts mostly towards their career development. The authors also reported that the time both male and female faculty members devote to housework significantly differ. In view of all these results, it can be argued that these gender differentials could be potentially significant in determining individual professional's commitment, WLB and even attrition rate within an organisation (Chawla &Sondhi, 2011).Apart from gender, the connection between WLB and being in the academia is evaluated in the next section.

1.2. Work-Life Balance among Academics

The general perception about academics is that their jobs are highly flexible and autonomous with freedom to decide where, how and when to work (Rafnsdottir &Heijstra, 2011). Other related studies (e.g. Doherty & Manfredi, 2006 and Jacobs & Winslow, 2004) have, however, added that flexibility notwithstanding, the intensity, workload and long working hours accompanying academic profession are enormous. Bell, Rajendran & Theiller (2012) contend that although heightened stress, pressures and organisational change within universities necessitate that research into the impact of stress, WLB and Work-life Conflict (WLC) among academics be intensified, *"…very few studies have examined academics' ability to balance work and personal life, and overcome work-life conflict"*(p. 25). The authors explain that WLC will occur in situations where employees' work roles interfere with his/her private life and vice versa. Although, the research by Bell and colleagues was based on their study of Australian universities, it is arguably hard to justify that the situation for universities in other countries differ; this is particularly so for such institutions in Africa and West African sub-region within which Nigeria is situated.

On Nigeria, Akanji (2012) notes that Nigerian employees perceive role conflict as an accomplice of WLB, and with such perception, organisational policies would have to be positively strong for managers to keep employees positive about balancing the professional and family/private roles; a feat that may be challenging given that Nigerian employees' awareness of WLB may be limited (Mordi &Ojo, 2011).

It is also widely acknowledged that as technological innovation evolves, its impact on employees' working, family and private roles balance also increases. This is because, as Currie &Eveline (2011) observed, e-technology, that make it easy for some employees' work to be done anywhere and anytime, has also made the transfer of work to home a lot easier. Consequently, most employees view the advent of e-technology as a paradox*"…delivering a blessing and a curse"* (Currie & Eveline, 2011, p.533); a blessing because being able to use e-technology at home was beneficial to their work and a curse since the positives for the work is at a cost to their family life.Arguably, such seemingly delicately-balanced mixed feelings among employees may not necessarily be a cause of worry

for employers or management of organisations, particularly if the feelings is more positive than negative. To buttress this point, Noor (2011) reports that academics' perception of satisfaction with WLB correlates negatively with intent to leave their workplaces. This suggests that when academics feel they appear incapable of adequately managing their varied and competing life roles, exiting intention may preoccupy their thoughts, creating a nightmare scenario for the employing organisation or management. Another set of lens to view WLB in this article is the nursing profession that is explained next.

1.3. Work-Life Balance among Nurses
Although nurses sampled in Sakthifel & Jayakrishnan's (2012) study recounted being able to manage their work and family roles effectively, many also claimed that work has significantly interfered with their family life or vice versa to some extent; however, other authors are of the opinion that the effect appears lower than it is the other way round. This shows some form of interconnectivity between work, family and even personal life of individual employees. The linkage mean that such employees' roles are likely to either conflict or be in harmony with each other. With the connectivity conjecture in mind, Cortese, Colombo & Ghislieri (2010) examined the association between Work-family Conflict (WFC) and professional nurses' job satisfaction. Cortese and colleagues found that both WFC and some of its predictors (e.g. supportive management, job demands and emotional charge) predict the level of satisfaction amongst the sampled nurses.

Reporting on the research about nurses working in a Danish elderly care nursing home, Munir, Nielsen, Garde, Albertsen & Carneiro (2012) found that nurses WLC, job satisfaction and psychological wellbeing directly correlate with leadership style, particularly transformational leadership style. The authors suggest that such leadership style can potentially improve the professionals' positive perception about WLB and wellbeing. When such perception is absent, views about quality of work-life could be impacted. Almalki, Fitzgerald & Clark (2012) observe that although nurses may be satisfied to be in their profession and with their co-workers, challenges could still occur due to issues such as inability to balance work with family needs, inadequate facilities, unsuitable working hours, poor staffing and poor welfare, inadequate professional development opportunities, supervisor issues etc.Having examined the connections between work-life balance and the trio issues of gender, academia and nursing in extant literature, the next segment describe the methods adopted.

2. Methodology
The population for this study comprise male and female academics and nurses located in Ife Central Local Government, Osun State. Academics' sample was drawn from Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), while nurses' sample was from two separate locations: OAU Health Centre located within the university and the University Community Health Clinic located at the town centre. While academics were sampled randomly, nurses' sample was stratified based on whether they worked *morning, afternoon* or *nightshifts*. Although both genders were sampled, the sampling focused more on female respondents because the research assumed that female professionals in a context like Nigeria may be more challenged in balancing their professions and personal/family roles due to family commitments and other expected roles. The assumption was based on Hofstede et al.'s (1991) research results that classifies Nigeria as a masculine society where males are at an advantage in terms of rights, expected roles and functions in the society.

The research design was in *two phases*: the first considered *the relationship between gender and work-life balance (WLB)*, while the second *assessed how each of the two professions (i.e. academia and nursing) related to organisational employees' WLB*. Eighty-nine (89)returned and usable questionnaires produced the primary data collected from respondents described in the previous paragraph. Descriptive statistics were adopted in the quantitative analysis of the collected data using SPSS 21. More specifically, bar charts and cross-tabulation analyses were employed to explain the data. The findings are presented next.

3. Research Findings
Results from this research evaluate employees' ability to strike a balance between their professions and personal/family life from two broad angles: *gender and professions* (i.e. academia and nursing). Each of the two aspects is considered next.

3.1. Gender and Work-Life Balance: The Nexus
In this section of the paper, the connection between gender and capability to balance one's profession and private life is evaluated from three diverse perspectives: *the typical day in the life of a woman vis-à-vis man, percentage of housework a man or woman does* and *the ability of each gender to balance work and private life*. Results based on the three dimensions are sequentially presented in the following three sub-sections.

3.1.1. A Typical Day in the Life of Male and Female Academic and Nursing Professionals
When respondents were asked to indicate what their typical day was like, they were given three options. The first relate to whether they moved from home to office and back to home (i.e. Home-Office-Home), the second asked whether they moved from home to office, then to club/friend's, and finally to home (i.e. Home-Office-Club/friend's-Home*)*, and the third assesses whether they normally moved from home to office, go back home, and then go to club/friend's before finally going back home (i.e. Home-Office-Home-Club/Friend's-Home).Results in figure 1 show that while the majority (94.9%) of female professionals routinely moved from their homes to office and then back home, nearly 29% of male professionals were able to get home from office and then go back to either the club or a friend's house, perhaps for relaxation, before going back home. The proportion of females whose routine followed the latter part were insignificant at 1.7%.

By interpretation, while in a typical day, nearly a third of male academic and nursing professionals were able to enjoy social life outside of their careers, such was almost non-existing for their female counterparts with a significant proportion of female professionals living a life that revolves around their career and families. This is hardly a balance between work and personal/family life, particularly for females.

3.1.2. Gendered Discrepancy in the Share of Household Responsibilities
To further grasp the prospect of achieving WLB, the percentage of household responsibilities was considered based on respondents' gender. Findings revealed that while nearly three-quarters (73.7%) of male academics and nurses reported that they perform $\leq 40\%$ of household chores, nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of their female counterparts perform $\geq 71\%$ of same responsibilities (figure 2). By inference, in addition to their different professions, female career professionals have an additional burden of disproportionately higher home-based chores to contend with compared to male.
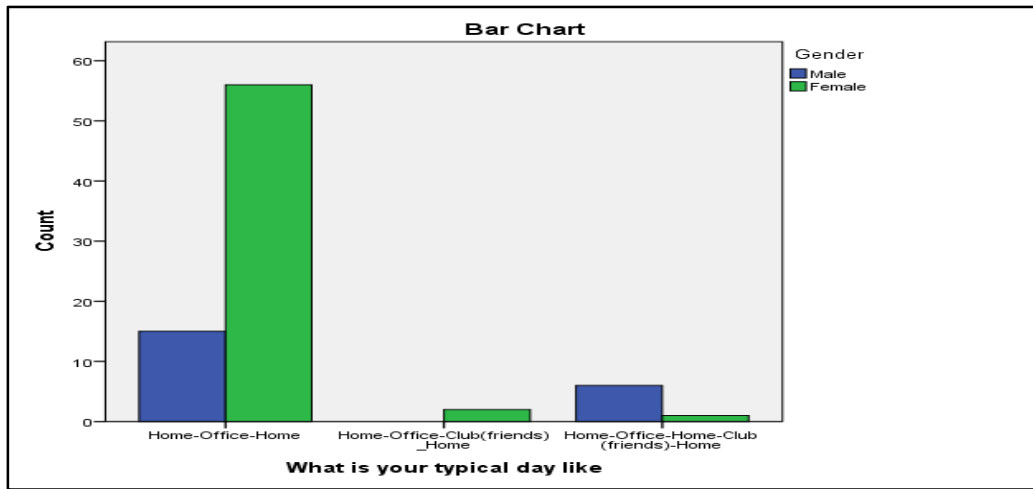

Figure 1: Graph illustrating what a typical day is like in the life of male and female academic and nursing professionals
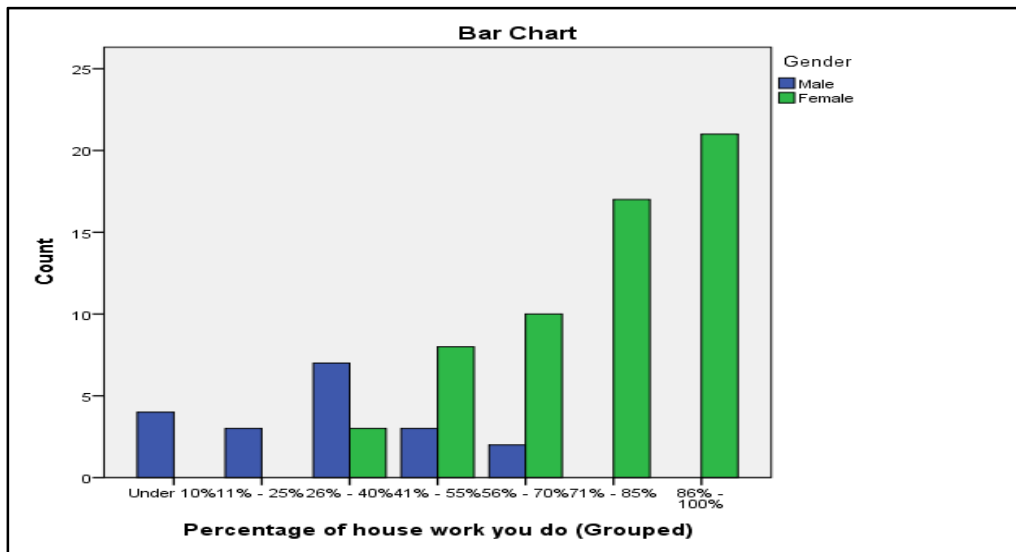Source: Plotted from responses to the question: "What is your typical day like"?

Figure 2: Graph Depicting Men and Women Share of Household responsibilities
Source: Plotted from responses to the question: "What percentage of housework do you reckon you do at home?

3.1.3. Gender Differentials in Difficulty in Balancing Professions and Personal/Family Responsibilities
From the results in table 1, more than 70% of female academics and nurses reported difficulty in balancing their professional roles with personal/family responsibilities compared to about 59% of males. By contrast, the figures for both genders in response to the ease with which combining the two roles are possible are disparate. For instance, while close to 41% of males in both professions found it easy to combine the roles, only 28% of females responded positively. These disclosures mean that although many male academics find it difficult to cope with balancing both roles, their female colleagues found it even tougher to strike such balance. This may imply that pressures from both roles could eventually conflict, particularly for the female professionals, where certain situations may demand that a choice be made between carrying out a particular responsibility and neglecting or postponing the other.

a. The link between professions and work-life balance

This section evaluates the relationship between academic or nursing profession and personal/family schedules. Specifically, profession-based disparities in balancing work and personal/family responsibilities are evaluated in the following section.

b. Differentials in the difficulty in balancing academic/nursing profession and personal/family responsibilities

When responses from both professions were assessed on the basis of striking a balance between their working life and personal/family life (table 2), a significantly high percentage of academics (78%) either found it difficult or very difficult to achieve a balance between the two apparently competing roles. By comparison, the size of nursing professionals who found it similarly difficult was a lower 44.4%. Also, nearly 52% of the nurses found the role combination much easier than those in the academia with only 22% for the latter. These results suggests that, generally, academics struggle to balance their teaching, research and other responsibilities with other competing roles of personal/family nature.

Difficulty in balancing professions and personal/family schedules			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	**Very Difficult**	Count	5$_a$	12$_a$	17
		Expected Count	4.3	12.7	17.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	29.4%	70.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**22.7%**	**18.8%**	**19.8%**
		% of Total	5.8%	14.0%	19.8%
		Residual	.7	-.7	
		Std. Residual	.3	-.2	
	Difficult	Count	8$_a$	33$_a$	41
		Expected Count	10.5	30.5	41.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	19.5%	80.5%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**36.4%**	**51.6%**	**47.7%**
		% of Total	9.3%	38.4%	47.7%
		Residual	-2.5	2.5	
		Std. Residual	-.8	.5	
	Easy	Count	9$_a$	11$_b$	20
		Expected Count	5.1	14.9	20.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**40.9%**	**17.2%**	**23.3%**
		% of Total	10.5%	12.8%	23.3%
		Residual	3.9	-3.9	
		Std. Residual	1.7	-1.0	
	Very Easy	Count	0$_a$	7$_a$	7
		Expected Count	1.8	5.2	7.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**0.0%**	**10.9%**	**8.1%**
		% of Total	0.0%	8.1%	8.1%
		Residual	-1.8	1.8	
		Std. Residual	-1.3	.8	
	Unsure	Count	0$_a$	1$_a$	1
		Expected Count	.3	.7	1.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**0.0%**	**1.6%**	**1.2%**
		% of Total	0.0%	1.2%	1.2%
		Residual	-.3	.3	
		Std. Residual	-.5	.3	
Total		Count	22	64	86
		Expected Count	22.0	64.0	86.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	25.6%	74.4%	100.0%
		% within Gender	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
		% of Total	25.6%	74.4%	100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Gender categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Table 1: Crosstabs showing the gender differentials in ability to balance professional and private schedules

Source: Generated from gender-based responses to the question addressing difficulty in balancing the two schedules of work and personal/family life using SPSS 21.

Difficulty in balancing professions and personal/family life			Profession		Total
			Academics	Nurses	
How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	**Very Difficult**	Count	17	0	17
		Expected Count	11.7	5.3	17.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Profession	**28.8%**	**0.0%**	**19.8%**
		% of Total	19.8%	0.0%	19.8%
	Difficult	Count	29	12	41
		Expected Count	28.1	12.9	41.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	70.7%	29.3%	100.0%
		% within Profession	**49.2%**	**44.4%**	**47.7%**
		% of Total	33.7%	14.0%	47.7%
	Easy	Count	12	8	20
		Expected Count	13.7	6.3	20.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within Profession	**20.3%**	**29.6%**	**23.3%**
		% of Total	14.0%	9.3%	23.3%
	Very Easy	Count	1	6	7
		Expected Count	4.8	2.2	7.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
		% within Profession	**1.7%**	**22.2%**	**8.1%**
		% of Total	1.2%	7.0%	8.1%
	Unsure	Count	0	1	1
		Expected Count	.7	.3	1.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Profession	**0.0%**	**3.7%**	**1.2%**
		% of Total	0.0%	1.2%	1.2%
Total		Count	59	27	86
		Expected Count	59.0	27.0	86.0
		% within How difficult is it to balance your professional and private life schedules	68.6%	31.4%	100.0%
		% within Profession	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	**68.6%**	**31.4%**	**100.0%**

Table 2: Crosstabs showing the professional differentials in ability to balance professional and private schedules
Source: Generated from profession-based responses to the question addressing difficulty in balancing the two schedules of work and personal/family life using SPSS 21.

4. Discussion of Findings

Having assessed work-life balance from dual lens: *gender and professions*, the study shows both to have significant effects on individual employee's ability to balance his/her career and personal/family responsibilities. From the standpoint of gender, a typical day for a male versus female professional showed huge discrepancy. While close to a third of male professionals were able to have recreational life after work, an inconsequential1.7% of females were able to do so. In fact, an overwhelming majority of females (about 95%) routinely go from home to work and back to home after the day's work. Additionally, there was an imbalance in the share of household responsibilities between both genders with almost two-thirds of females performing more than 70% while most males(close to 74%) perform less than 40%. More importantly, more of men (40%) reported having no difficulty in combining their career with private/family responsibilities compared to female (28%).

These results are in line with Misra et al. (2012) and Levine et al. (2011) in which female professionals were found to be challenged in combining professions with personal/family roles. For instance, Misra and colleagues reported that although both genders devoted

equal weekly time to their employment, females with younger children spent less time on research that counts towards their career development; essentially, female professionals with families lag behind male colleagues in career progression terms. The results further reiterates Hofstede et al.'s (1991) assertion of Nigeria as a masculine society that favours the male gender over female in such cultures.

With regards to professions, although members of both groups reported difficulty in balancing the job-related roles with personal/family responsibilities, the imbalance was profoundly higher among those in the academia than nursing. For example, while over three quarters (78%) of academics reported role balance difficulty, a much lower percentage of nurses (44.4%) reported similar issues. In line with the results, those who reported ease of role combination were more among nurses than academics. While the reasons for a higher imbalance among the latter than former in this study is unclear, results corroborate the heightened role-balance disparity among academics in existing studies (e.g. Doherty & Manfredi, 2006; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). Both sets of studies argue that despite the flexibility and autonomy that the academia purports to offer (Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2011), the workload, its intensity and long working hours is gargantuan. These issues could explain the wide gap in the imbalance found between the results for academics and nurses in this study, especially as Nigerian employees perceive role conflict as an accomplice of WLB (Akanji, 2012),and such employees' awareness about the concept may be limited too (Mordi &Ojo, 2011).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Largely and from the dual lens of gender and professions (i.e. academia and nursing), employees' WLB is impacted. Professionally, both academic and nurses had difficulty in balancing their roles with private and family schedules; disaggregated profession-linked results also signify that academics find WLB harder to achieve than their nursing pals. With reference to gender, female professionals had less social life and a higher share of household responsibilities leading to a greater potential for *'work-life imbalance'* compared to their male colleagues. In the final analysis, it is suggested that organisations or businesses, particularly in the private sector, with excessively high employees' work-life imbalance can improve cost-effectiveness (Shankar and Bhatnagar, 2010) by making WLB policies and practices awareness a reality rather than a farce (Mordi &Ojo, 2011), thereby encouraging employees to have a positive discernment of tangible balance achievement for the good of all stakeholders.

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