



Changing Roles of Women: Examining the Reciprocal Effects of Female Academics' Job and Family Roles in Public Universities in Ghana

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Abstract

The role of women in society seems to be predefined in terms of cultural and physiological lines. Some people think the woman is not capable of taking up some executive positions, because they are weak and too feeble to handle certain kinds of work. However, the last decade has seen huge progress in the employment of women in the formal sector. This study therefore explores the factors that affect the work and family life of female lecturers. Data was generated from the administration of questionnaires on 105 women lecturers, who were conveniently selected from two public universities in the central region of Ghana. Our findings from the study indicated that factors such as teaching large classes, lack of teaching/learning materials, family responsibilities and pressure and demanding Deans and Heads of Departments, affected female lecturers' job performance. The results also suggest that females academics involved in the study were least bothered about issues on their promotion and personal goals. We recommended that University management would have to come to terms with the requirements of managing tension among women to make the environment potentiating and favourable so as to keep adroit women in higher education.

Keywords: *Work, family life, role conflict, job performance, Women lecturers*

1. Introduction

The role of women in society has been mundane and predefined in cultural and physiological terms due to the reason that women are seen weak and too feeble to handle certain kinds of work. However, the last decade has seen an increase in the number of women in formal employment. For example, the available data in Ghana shows that, women account for nearly 50% of the labour force. These women are found in different kinds of economic activities in the economy: agriculture (including fishing and forestry), industry (manufacturing) and trading services (especially wholesale and retail trade) (Amu, 2005, p. 11). About four percent of the women labour force are in formal or public sector employment. Increases in the employment of women with full time jobs have brought to fore the need for research that explores the association between family roles and work, a need that is principally critical in the university setting. According to Currie, Harris and Thiele (2000), due to the increasing economic pressure and managerial culture and the growing institutional demands of accountability and work intensification associated with university life (Barry, Chandler, & Clark, 2001), jobs in academia have turned out to be more demanding in relation to energy expended and

time used.

In the view of Franks, Schurink and Fourie (2006), women have become more concerned about how to balance the needs of family life and work, especially, among working mothers in higher institutions. In modern times, women's involvement in the field of labour has advanced significantly (Barker, 2003) and Ghana is not out of this universal change (Patel, Govender, Paruk, & Ramgoon, 2006). That notwithstanding, females are still required to perform their traditional gender responsibilities of being helpmeets and mothers (Bornstein & Weber, 2008; Williams, & Bornstein, 2008; Biernat & Wortman, 1991). But current demands and exigencies call for a rethink of the 'husband-wife' roles in contemporary society.

In general, many societies have communal belief and value systems that still support traditional gender roles for males and females. These value structures view females who accomplish in unconventional ways as exceptions to a predetermined rule. Mitchell (1993) contends that women who challenge the status quo but express the challenges they face in dealing with some of the obligations get the response *you chose it* by both males and females. In the view of Mitchell, this reaction suggests that the woman had the choice of one predefined gender role, so if she chooses to perform that of men as well, she should be ready to bear the brunt. Conventionally, men are infrequently, if ever, expected to make a choice between work and family. However, it is believed that females have the superior predisposition to cause a little or no change or to interfere in their career in a manner that restricts their progress and professional development (Ford, 2016; Dent & Holton, 2016). This gradually has led to a situation that women who compete like men in the workplace or home are considered unfeminine. Those who emphasize family in the workplace are considered uncommitted (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). This situation might have arisen as a result of having male dominance in leadership both at home and the corporate world.

In recent times, however, perceptions and standpoints about suitable roles for males and females are gradually changing. The orthodox responsibilities for women now transcend the concepts of the child-bearing individual, mother daughter, girlfriend, and wife (Laurin, Kille, & Eibach, 2013; Close, 2012). Present fiscal tendencies show that females' labour force involvement will continue to rise. In a similar vein, the call for their effort both in the paid labour force and in the family will upsurge, and these may result in high stress levels and speed-up of social life for female employees (Ma, 2013; Lee, 2009; Gane, 2006; Granrose, 2005). Females in higher education environments are faced with the teaching of large classes due to massification of university education. Coupled with the large classes, there is the statutory requirement that academics should be publishing a number of peer-reviewed research papers in support of their job contract renewals and progressions. The female lecturer with other responsibilities aside that of her professional job must be able to draw a parallel line between the various roles in which she partakes to bring about harmony, both in the home and at the place of work. This inevitably would have some consequences on individual's well-being - life satisfaction and work engagement (Fiksenbaum, 2014).

Yentsch and Sindermann (2013) argue that the successes of women with full time careers depend on a careful analysis and planning. However, work-family conflicts may ensue once the capacity to accomplish duties and responsibilities at the work place inhibits one's ability to satisfy family needs and vice versa (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006). As explained by Odle-Dusseau, Britt and Greene-Shorridge (2012), role conflict is unavoidable when an individual tries to perform both job and family roles concurrently. Therefore, career women who have responsibilities outside of their work must work to achieve a balance between their homes, personal needs and work (Hanner, Statham, & Hanmer, 2016). This study therefore investigated the impact of work-family role conflict on female lecturers' academic work and family life as precursor to work intensification of their career.

2. Conceptual Issues

A number of theories have been propounded to illustrate conflict between work and family domains. Duxbury, Higgins and Lee (1994) note that due to the complexity of linking the domains of work and

family, no single theoretical framework exists in the literature of work-family roles conflict. Work and family conflict theories that are relevant to the current study are: role conflict theory (Mihelic & Tekavcic, 2014; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), the rational view (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994), resource drain theory (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) and the scarcity hypothesis (Coser, 1974). An overview of each of these theories is next presented.

Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal (1964) as cited by Biddle (2013), assert that roles are a set of expectations defined by other role senders or oneself about what behaviour is appropriate to enact in a specific situation. Work and family role conflict is perceived as a psychological tension that occurs as a result of the occurrence of two or more role pressures concurrently in a manner that engaging in any of the roles makes participation in the other problematic. From this viewpoint, work-family conflict according to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985: 77), is a "form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect", and takes place when there is a simultaneous occurrence of work and family tensions such that the performance of one would make the performance of the other more challenging (Edwards & Rothbard, 2005). This in no mean way can lead to stressful situations among people, especially women who would have to mostly perform household chores and meet their job deadlines. Role theory has therefore given an essential contribution in understanding the tensions between work and family role conflict.

The Role conflict theory states that when an individual participates in several roles that are not compatible, it leads to conflict between the roles (O'Neil, Denke, & Blazina, 2016; Graham & Folkes, 2014). Teh, Yong and Lin (2014) in their view state that any role trait that influences an individual's time because of his or her involvement in that role can produce conflict between that role and another equally important role to be performed. In this theory, time spent on activities within the family role such as providing care for children or adult dependents cannot be assigned to activities within the work role (Graham & Folkes, 2014). The requirements of diverse roles may compete for a person's scarce time resources and the pressures related to participation in one role may make it actually impossible to conform to the demands from another role (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Essentially, time and energy spent on family-related activities cannot be used for work-related activities, thereby creating family-work conflict for the individual.

The rational notion of role conflict suggests that the total amount of time expended in performing work and family roles is positively related with role encumbrance, which can be explained as the perception of having too many things to do in a given role and not enough time to perform (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Frone, Yardley, and Markel (1997) note that if an individual has an excess role to perform at a time, she or he may have an increased time allocation for such roles. Therefore, extensive commitments in one domain will decrease the capital resources in other areas such as time and motivation necessary for performance in the other domain. The rational stand has been supported by research findings, demonstrating that an increase in the number of hours a person spends in work and family activities also leads to an increase in work and family conflict, and the likelihood of an individual experiencing family-work conflict (Keith & Schafer, 1984; Byron, 2005).

The Resource drain theory proposes that the transfer of personal resources from one area to another such as time, attention (Brotheridge, & Lee, 2005), and energy (physical and psychological) is finite (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990). The concept of finite resources has been used to suggest a negative relationship between the work of an academic and household roles. Thus, time and energy used in executing an academic work cannot be available for household chores. In Small and Riley's (1990) view, work and family interfere with each other through three separate processes: time, psychological energy, and physical energy. These three processes can be thought of as finite resources in which any quantity of a resource that is utilized in one domain is unavailable for the other, thus providing support for an inverse relationship between work and family domains. Therefore, the resources one uses to fulfill role obligations in the family domain takes away from existing resources that could be used to achieve commitments in the work place, and vice versa. For example, the time spent on one's family demands, such as taking care of one's child, subtracts from the time that is available to the individual to perform their work duties.

Similar to resource drain theory, Goode (1960) presented the **scarcity hypothesis** which was later expanded by Coser (1974) that proposes that individuals have an inadequate amount of resources (e.g., time and energy) (Jawahar, Kisamore, Stone, & Rahn, 2012). In view of this limited amount of energy, resources (energy, time and other tangibles) available to fulfill all of these roles decrease when one is involved in many roles, thereby causing conflicts between work and family (Vieira, Lopez, & Matos, 2013; Jawahar, Kisamore, Stone, & Rahn, 2012). In this theory, work-family conflict occurs because there are not enough resources to fulfill all of the obligations in both the work and family domains. Resource drain theory and the scarcity hypothesis are also known as the “depletion argument” (Rothbard, 2001). The depletion argument states that individuals make trade-offs between work and family domains to accommodate the finite resources they have available to expend between the domains. Rothbard (2001) asserts that a large number of research studies in work-family conflict are framed in terms of the depletion argument.

Work-family conflict occurs when there is an inter-role clash in which work and family demands are mutually incompatible. This makes an individual meeting the demands of both the family and work roles quite difficult (Higgins, Duxbury & Lyons, 2007). Scientific evidence suggests that work-family conflict is often a serious stress factor at work leading to several adverse outcomes including impaired employee well-being (Karatepe & Tekinkus, 2006; Hellgren, & Sverke, 2003). Work-family conflict arises when there are irreconcilable needs to be fulfilled between work and family roles of an individual. This situation makes the participation in both roles more challenging.

The literature on work and family role conflict shows that work and family tensions and conflicts may arise as a result of multiple factors (Finney, Stergiopoulos, Hensel, Bonato, & Dewa, 2013). The myriad of factors could be as a result of organisational demands and or household needs and challenges. Generally, the nature of an individual’s occupation, age, caring for children, taking care of domestic chores, working time and schedules, and organisational support and formal policies are some of the major factors impelling the degree of work-family conflict. All in all, work seems to have a greater (negative) influence on family life than the other way round (Eby et al., 2005).

More so, a number of empirical studies have been carried out to address the problem of work-family conflict in the work place. For example, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) investigated the backgrounds of conflict between work and family, while Greenhaus and Powell (2006) examined the impacts of family responsibilities on the work commitment and job performance of women. In examining organisational commitment, researchers (O’Neil, Denke, & Blazina, 2016; O’Neill, Harrison, Cleveland, Almeida, Stawski, & Crouter, 2009) concluded that both work-family conflict and job stress are associated with organisational fidelity.

Findings of researches have continually showed that work and family role conflict is widespread and a common phenomenon among females in the labour force. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), there are three main forms of conflict. These are: strain-, time-, and behaviour-based conflicts. Time-based conflict is demonstrated when time-related pressures as a result of the performance of one role thwarts the efforts of a worker to be able to assign time to meet the demands of another role (Crespi, 2003). This can inevitably affect morale, motivation and productivity in higher education (McDonald, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Strain-based conflict arises when there is carryover effect in the performance of two conflicting duties – thus, pressure or stress from one role impinges on how a person executes the other role. Behaviour-based conflict on the other hand ensues when behavioural patterns vital for the execution of one role are not compatible with those needed for carrying out another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). According to Crespi (2003), Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen (2006), many of these conflicting demands, more often than not, fall on women who feel the effect of the different demands and needs of the workplace as well as the home. When this happens, it makes reciprocal effect of work and female roles almost unavoidable. This study therefore examines the reciprocal effect of job and family roles, and their implications on the work performance and the well-being of the female academic in public universities.

3. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the background characteristics and professional ranks of female lecturers in public universities?
2. What factors influence work and family roles of women lecturers?
3. How do female academics' family-work roles affect their well-being and job performance?

4. Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design in collecting and analyzing data. Two Ghanaian public universities were purposively selected. In order to find women who were involved in work and family roles, only married academic women with children were considered for this study. Consequently, the convenient sampling technique was used in selecting 120 of such female academics from the Universities located in the Central Region of Ghana. Of the 120 sampled, 105 agreed to participate in the study, giving a response rate of 88%. The study used these academics because the main focus of the study was to explore the lived experiences of women in the academia and the conflicts that may arise due to the performance of their work while keeping with family roles and responsibilities (Levin-Epstein, 2006). A four-point Likert-type questionnaire with both open- and closed-ended questions was used to collect demographic data, information on factors that affect female academics' job performance, and the influence of work-family roles of women lecturers on their health. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, percentages and graphs.

5. Results

5.1 Background characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the summary of the demographic data of the respondents in terms of the distribution of the number and age range of children of respondents.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Demographic Data

Variable	Count	Percent (%)
Number of Children		
≤3	56	53
≥4	49	47
Total	105	100
Ages of children (in years)		
≤6	32	30.5
7-12	33	31.4
13-17	27	25.7
18 and above	13	12.4
Total	105	100

Of the 105 female academics who took part in the study, all of them indicated that they had at least one child dependent on them. In all, 53% indicated they have at most three children and the rest, (49 of the respondents) indicated they had four or more children. Table 1 further indicates that about 31% have children between the ages 0-6 years, 31% have children whose ages ranges between 7 and 12 years, and 12% of the respondents have children who are 18 years or more. The results generally show that the female academics who took part in the study have relatively younger children as about 88% have children younger than 18 years. In terms of demands on time, it is found that the younger the children, the more intense the role and the conflict, and this might explain why a majority of the sample are below the rank of associate professor (see Figure 1).

5.2 Professional rank of female lecturers

In this study, we examined the professional status of the 105 female academics who responded to the questionnaire to put the study into its academic context and to answer research question 1. The results from the analysis of the field data is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Professional ranks of female lecturers

The line graph as shown in Figure 1 indicates the number of professional ranks available in the sampled universities and their corresponding percentages. Results from the data show that a majority of the faculties are either lecturers or assistant lecturers. Out of the 105 respondents, 40 (38%) were lecturers and 36% were assistant lecturers. Even though the share of senior lecturers seem to have edged up, none of the respondents had a professorial status and only 5% were associate professors. This results is similar to the findings of Higher Education Statistics Agency in the UK, which indicate that some 17.5% of professors in the UK were women in 2006-7, up from 16.7% the year before, and 36.8% of senior lecturers and researchers were women (Johnes, & Tone, 2016). There is scanty statistics on female academics in Ghanaian universities to allow direct comparison between the current findings and existing research. However, this serves as a good start on the trends of female academics and their involvement in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.3 Factors that influence work and family roles of women lecturers

One of our research questions was to find the factors that influence work and family roles of female lecturers in public universities. Table 2 presents a number of factors that influence female academics in their day-to-day activities relating to job and family

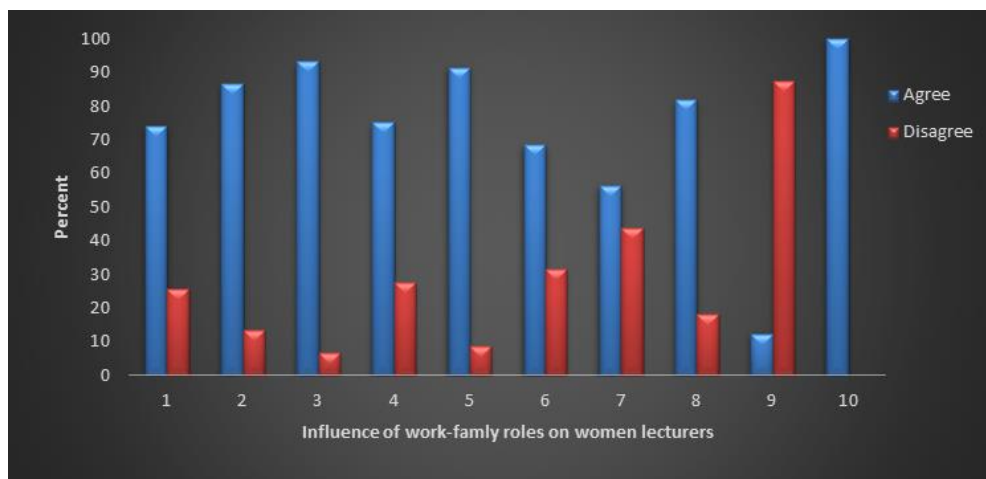
Table 2: Factors that influence work and family roles of women lecturers

Variables	Mean	SD
Large classes	3.50	1.22
Lack of teaching and learning materials	3.36	1.05
Family responsibilities and pressure	3.33	1.06
Demanding HODs and Deans	3.30	0.89
Heavy load of theses supervision	3.20	1.00
Long teaching hours	3.07	0.90
Excessive administrative responsibilities	3.04	0.70
Attendance to meetings	2.98	0.75
Lack of formal policies that cater for women	2.42	0.47
Personal goals and promotion	2.14	0.31
Issue of quality assurance and external assessors	1.96	0.28

The majority of the respondents indicated that large classes ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.22$) impacted on their job and family life. The situation of large classes being ranked as the topmost influencer was not surprising. Most developing countries usually have to deal with large number of students with fewer lecturers as compared to developed countries. The results also indicate that female academics ranked lack of teaching and learning resources as the next factor after large classes that influence their work and family life. As presaged above, lecturers who had younger children reported high on family responsibilities and pressure. On the other hand, respondents were of the view that the issue of quality assurance and external assessors ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.28$) had the least influence on their job and family roles.

5.4 Influence of work-family roles of women lecturers

The study inquired about the effect of work-family roles of the respondents on their health and job performance and the results is as indicated in Figure 2. Of the 105 respondents, there was an agreement on the issues of work-family roles resulting in poor health conditions. About 93% of the women who took part in the study agreed that family roles reduce one's ability to meet up with deadlines in academic and professional duties. However, only 12% agreed to the statement that work-family roles increase emotional fatigue.



1. Reduces the overall quality of life of women; 2. Reduces research activities; 3. Family Roles Reduce ability to meet up with deadlines; 4. Reduces participation in conferences and academic workshops; 5. Reduces quality contact hours with children; 6. Reduces participation in extracurricular Activities; 7. Lowers productivity level both at home and at work; 8. Brings about psychological stress; 9. Increases emotional fatigue; 10. Results in poor health conditions

Figure 2: The Influence of work-family roles of women lecturers on their health and job performance

Respondents were split on the influence of their roles on productivity levels both at home and at work. Forty-four percent of the respondents disagreed to the statement, while 56% agreed. One most compelling evidence from the study was the indication by the respondents that their roles absolutely affect their health conditions. In fact, all the 105 respondents affirmed that both family and academic related roles results in poor health conditions. For example, some of the respondents complained about stress, changes in their sleeping pattern, fatigue and hypertension.

6. Discussion

The main aim of the study was to examine the factors that affect the work and family life of female lecturers. As we noted earlier, the levels of professional status of the respondents tend to confirm the fact that females are usually not interested in promotions and activities that contribute to their personal growth and development. They are concerned in most cases, about the issues that affect others. For example in three separate studies conducted in USA by Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, and Small (2003), they found out that females often do not get what they want and what is worth their effort because they do not usually ask for it. This position is clearly affirmed by the results from the analysis of field data on factors that influence work and family roles of women lecturers, which revealed that, participants were least bothered about issues that concern their personal goals and career development. This may stem from what Babcock et al. (2003) believed to be a socialisation problem that encourages women not to actively encourage their own interests from an early age, and to pay attention instead to the needs of students and family members (p. 14). Leaders of Universities have to urgently tackle this challenge head-on. They can support the females they supervise by counselling them on the benefits of being proactive in seeking and enquiring about what they need to do their work efficiently and fulfil their professional aspirations.

On the effect of work-family roles of the respondents on their health and job performance, the results from the study clearly indicate that respondents found it difficult dealing with the stress and strains thrown at them by the fact that they have to meet work deadlines and equally meet important family responsibilities. Consequently, because of the work overload from both dimensions, their health is mostly affected. It would be beneficial for university authorities to think of solutions to reduce the workload among female lecturers. Due to work overload, work and family conflict creates work stress for lecturers. Accordingly, the universities should establish and coordinate programmes that emphasizes how to improve workers' health and wellbeing.

7. Conclusion

Work-family conflicts have been studied quite often in many social science fields such as human resource management, education, industrial and organisational psychology. In this article, we have discussed female academics and their roles, both at home and the job place. This descriptive survey explored the influence of family and work role conflict on the health and professional development of the female academic in public universities. The evidence suggests that fewer female academics are progressing in the professional ladder as none of the respondents was of higher professorial status. It was apparent from the findings that as employees try to balance ever increasing workloads and family responsibilities, organisations would have to decide the extent to which they will go to minimise this conflict. The results from our study clearly indicated that female academics more often selflessly seek the betterment of either their students, children or other family members to the detriment of their own professional growth. Therefore, management of the universities must provide life-long learning, mentoring, counselling, and openings for self-development.

Our findings provide further impetus for the provision of optimal employment conditions to foster the development of female lecturers in their quest to achieve balance in their day-to-day activities of achieving organizational goals and sustaining a healthy family. Stress management conferences should be organised by counselling and psychology units to promote the well-being of faculty members. University management have to appreciate the need to help manage pressure among females to make the environment potentiating enough so as to keep gifted female academics.

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