Strain-Based Work Interference with Family and Depersonalization among Female Teachers

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Abstract
Cultural values and socialization processes in Africa especially in the South-eastern part of Nigeria often leave women with majority of family (domestic) responsibilities despite their engagement in paid employment. Considering this, therefore, this study investigated the relationship between strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization among female teachers. It was hypothesized that strain-based work interference with family will not be related to depersonalization. Thus, 304 female secondary school teachers between the ages of 26 to 54 years (M= 40.37 and SD =4.09) with educational qualifications ranging from National Certification of Education to Masters of Education Degree were drawn from 24 Government Secondary Schools within Enugu, the capital city of Enugu State in the South-eastern part of Nigeria using criterion sampling technique. Okonkwo (2011) 6-item strain-based work interference with family scale and 5-item depersonalization scale drawn from Maslach and Jackson (1986) 22-item burnout inventory were administered. Correlational design was used. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used as statistical test for data analysis. Strain-based work interference with family was not related to depersonalization, r (302) = 0.07, p >.05. The result which is in contrast to findings from earlier studies conducted in Western countries was discussed in the light of individualism-collectivism cultural orientations and traditional gender-role socialization in South-eastern Nigeria, thereby highlighting cultural variations in the present and previous findings. However, it was concluded that strain emanating from work responsibilities interfering with family responsibilities had no implications for the behavior of these female teachers who have deep rooted African traditional gender-role orientation.

Key words: Strain, work interference with family and depersonalization.

Introduction
Nigerian workforce like most part of Africa and the world at large has in the recent decades experienced tremendous changes in the demographic representations of employees. Gender representation has appeared to be quite obvious in these changes. Following this evolutionary trends, more women have moved into paid employment. Thus, this has given the female gender nearly a fair representation in the world of work. Today, the role of Nigerian women has shifted from just taking charge of family (domestic) responsibilities to engagement in paid employment like the men folk. To this end they have been found to be caught between the cross role demands of work and family responsibilities which often leave them with the challenge of work interference with family. According to Okonkwo (2011) work interference with family occurs when participation in work responsibilities makes it difficult for an employee to carry out family responsibilities (e.g. cooking, washing, child care e.t.c.). It has been observed that job-related variables have strong bearing on work interference with family. According to Adebola (2005) work interference with family is primarily determined by excessive work demands and predicts negative family outcome. This excessive work demands often drain an employee’s resources resulting in strain-based work interference with family. Strain-based work interference with family is a form of work-family conflict in which strain symptoms, such as stress, pressure, tension, anxiety, and fatigue, experienced within work role intrude into the family role and affect one’s performance in it. In the case of work-family conflict, the two roles are incompatible in the sense that the strain and stress generated by work demands make it difficult for an employee to comply with the demands of family. A number of work role characteristics (including role ambiguity, work demands, stressors, and job autonomy) were found to be related to this form of work-family conflict (Jones & Bulte, 1980).

Both work and family domains are potentially stressful. The emotional, physical and mental demands of roles within either domain may exceed an individual’s resource (Leiter & Durup, 1996). The interdependency between the two domains may also have an impact on the other domain. Previous studies
have found work-to-family interactions more highly correlated with work outcome such as job stress (Pal & Saksvik, 2008), and family-to-work interactions more strongly related to family outcomes (Grandey & Copranzano, 1999, Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Work-family conflict and job stress directly predict burnout such as depersonalization (Schreurs & Schaufeli, 2001). It has been shown that higher the work to family conflict, greater the risk of burnout (Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000). Higher levels of strain-based work interference with family have been found to be associated with higher levels of burnout (Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer, 2010).

Burnout as a psychological stress syndrome characterized by depersonalization is a result of prolonged exposure to chronic workplace stress (Maslach, 2003). To this end, Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) noted that job-related stress is a direct antecedent of job burnout, such as depersonalization (Taris, Peeters & Le Blanc, 2001).

Depersonalization is the second component of burnout. This phase of burnout typically occurs after emotional exhaustion and tends to be a direct response to the stressors of the job (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). It refers to an individual’s personal detachment from work. For those who deal with people on a day to day basis (e.g. teachers), it entails treating individuals (e.g. students) as objects rather than people. Depersonalization is characterized by detachment and emotional callousness (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Employees in the depersonalization phase of burnout will take cool, distant attitude toward work and the people on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

However, in Nigeria, teaching job among other challenges exposes teachers to intense contact and involvement with students during the course of a normal workday. Also, teaching responsibilities extend beyond the work setting to the home setting (e.g. reading, preparing lesson note, and marking exam scripts etc). Thus, these intense contact with students and extension of responsibilities from work setting to family setting almost every day are likely to expose this segment of women to work interference with family resulting in chronic strain which if not properly managed may result in treating individuals (e.g. students) as objects, detachment and emotional callousness. In view of this, therefore, this study was interested in strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization among female teachers. Thus, it was hypothesized that strain-based work interference with family will not be related to depersonalization.

Method
Participants
Participants were 304 female secondary school teachers between the ages of 26 to 54 years (M= 40.37, SD= 4.09) and with educational qualifications ranging from National Certificate of Education to Master’s of Education Degree. They were drawn from 24 State Government Secondary Schools within Enugu, the capital city of Enugu State in the South-eastern part of Nigeria using criterion sampling technique. To this end, the female teachers selected for this study met certain criteria which included spending at least one year as teachers in their respective schools, married, living with their husbands, had children (at least one) and living with their children (at least one). Widows and divorcees were not included to avoid confounding of the results.

Instrument
Three instruments were used which included demographic information, 6-item strain-based work interference with family scale drawn from Okonkwo (2011) 32-item Work-Family Conflict Scale and 5-item Depersonalization scale drawn from Maslach and Jackson (1986) 22-item Burnout Inventory.

Demographic information included age, educational qualification, rank, years of experience as a teacher, name of school, marital status, number of children, ages of children starting from the youngest to the oldest.

The item loadings of the 6-item strain-based work interference with family scale ranged from 0.53 to 0.85 and were considered acceptable for validation of the instrument since Mitchel and Jolley
(2004) noted that item loading of 0.30 is good and 0.70 very high. These 6 items yielded split-half reliability of 0.79 and was accepted as a good index of internal consistency since Mitchel and Jolley (2004) noted that an index of 0.70 (and preferably above 0.80) is needed to say that a measure is internally consistent. The 6-item work interference with family scale was in Likert form and had direct scoring for all the items. Therefore, a response of strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree= 2 and strongly disagree = 1.

Split-half reliability coefficient of 1.00 was reported for the 5-item depersonalization scale. The 5 items had direct scoring. Therefore, a response of a few times a year = 1, many times a year = 2, a few times every month = 3, many times every month = 4, a few times every week = 5 and everyday = 6.

Procedure

Stage one, the researcher wrote officially to the Ministry of Education, Enugu State, Nigeria requesting for the number of state Government Secondary Schools within Enugu, the capital city of Enugu state and permission to use a sample of the female teachers in the schools as participants for the study. The requested information and permission were granted within two weeks of the application.

Stage two, the researcher equipped with the requested information (e.g. 24 state secondary schools and their locations) and permission, visited the principals of the schools in their schools respectively. The principals serving as research assistants enabled the researcher to go through the files of these teacher and identified those teachers who met certain criteria which included spending at least one year in the schools, married with children (at least a child of one year per teacher), living with their husbands, living with their children (at least one child per teacher). However, divorces and widows were not included.

Stage three, considering the number (N= 356) of the identified female teachers who possessed these criteria and volunteered to participate in the study, the researcher selected all (N =356) for the study. 356 copies of the questionnaire (measuring demographic variables, strain-based work interference with family, strain-based family interference with work and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment) were given to the principals who administered them to the identified female teachers in their respective schools. The participants were instructed to take the questionnaire home, study it carefully, complete it and return to the principals within one week. This was the procedure in each of the 24 schools.

Stage four; the researcher went back to the schools at the end of the exercise in each school to collect the returned copies of the questionnaire from the principals. Of the 356 copies of the questionnaire administered, 304 (85.39%) copies were properly completed and returned while 43 were returned but not properly completed and 9 were not returned. Therefore, the 304 copies properly completed and returned were used for analyses and testing of the hypotheses.

Design/Statistics

Correlational design was used. This enabled the researcher to administer simultaneously the measures of strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used as statistical test for data analyses and subsequently testing the hypothesis. This enabled the researcher to study simultaneously the degree and direction of the relationship between strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization.

Table 1
Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on the relationship between strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization
Results as shown in table 1 indicated no relationship between strain-based work interference with family and depersonalization, \( r (302) = 0.07, p >.05 \). In other words, neither higher nor lower scores on strain-based work interference with family were related to either higher or lower scores on depersonalization. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that strain-based work interference with family will not be related to depersonalization was confirmed and accepted.

**Discussion**

The findings indicated that experience of strain-based work interference with family did not relate to depersonalization among the teachers. Strain from work setting when interfering with family responsibilities was not found to be linked to the teachers being detached from work, students and being emotionally callous. In contrast to this present result, Sonnentag (2001) found that work interference with family resulted in higher strain.

The findings of this study which are not in congruence with previous studies done in Europe and America could be attributed to the cultural differences between the West and Africa. According to Hofstede (1997) as cited in Gorodnicheko and Roland (2010), United Kingdom, United States of America, Netherlands are consistently among the individualist countries, while Nigeria, Pakistan and Peru are among the more collectivist countries. In view of this, individualist culture emphasizes freedom and personal achievement while collectivist culture encourages conformity and cooperation (Gorodnicheko & Roland, 2010). Going by the collectivist culture of Nigeria, it has been argued that Nigerian employees are likely to enjoy social network borne out of conformity and cooperation with coworkers. To this end, coworkers will give one another social support by working cooperatively towards common goals. This collectivist culture cuts across various work settings including teaching. Thus, social support from coworkers is likely to reduce the pressure emanating from work setting which ordinarily would spill over into family responsibilities. In certain cases, coworkers may go out of their ways to help themselves with domestic challenges. For instance, it is a common notion in South-eastern part of Nigeria that a child belongs to all (Nwaora). To this end, coworkers and friends in the workplace on request can either help to pick a colleague’s child/children from school or cover up in the workplace to enable the colleague pick her child/children from school and attend to other domestic responsibilities. In view of this, it has been suggested that collectivist culture among other factors could have accounted for the teachers’ work responsibilities interfering with family responsibilities been reduced which ordinarily would have been high and linked to depersonalization. In support of this view, studies have demonstrated that experienced stress in either domain is related to the level of social support in the other (Durup, 1993, Leiter, 1990). Moreover, social support is a fundamental coping resource in that it provides people with a greater range of options when attempting to address demands (Hobfoll, 1989).

The outcome of this study could, also, be attributed to the traditional gender-role orientation in Africa especially in Nigeria. Precisely in South-eastern Nigeria where the participants for the study were
drawn, socialization processes saddle women with greater portion of domestic responsibilities like childcare, cooking, laundry e.t.c. This view is in line with gender model which contends that on the basis of sex-role socialization, women are socialized to view their status of mother and wife as their primary role, and their social position as determined by the family (Feldberg & Glenn, 1979). Considering this deep seated gender-role orientation, women from this part of the world consider domestic responsibilities their preserve and take delight in shouldering them even when they are combined with paid employment. Thus, in Nigeria, women do not regard any form of domestic work as burden rather it is a way of life and pride of womanhood. In view of this, if shouldering domestic responsibilities is considered an integral part of womanhood, then it is unlikely that external burden like work responsibilities could interfere with their family responsibilities. In addition, these women believe that proceeds (e.g. income) from paid employment provide them with additional resources to shoulder their domestic responsibilities. In line with this, integration of work and family leads to a net gain in resources (psychological, material, or other), which would protect individuals from ill effects of work-life conflict (Innstrand, Langballe, Espnes, Falkum & Aasland, 2008).

Considering this social support engendered by collectivist culture which characterizes Nigeria and gender-role socialization, strain-based work interference with family not found to be related to depersonalization supports one of the assumptions of conservation of resources theory. This assumption suggests that when individuals possess strong resource pools, they are more likely to accept or seek opportunities to risk resources in order to gain more resources (Hobfoll, 1998). Thus, this social support from coworkers might be responsible for the strong resource pool which enabled these working women seek opportunities to risk resources in order to gain more resources (e.g. asking coworkers to pick their children from school or leave their job responsibilities under the care of coworkers to pick their children from school).

**Conclusion**

The inability of strain emanating from work responsibilities interfering with family responsibilities to be associated with depersonalization is a clear reflection of the resolve of the Nigerian women especially those who combine paid employment and family responsibilities (e.g. female teachers). Despite the strain from teaching responsibilities which often spill over into family responsibilities, general poor working conditions and remuneration, this segment of Nigerian workforce remained resolute in shouldering work and family responsibilities. Thus, this has demonstrated the resilience of Nigerian women especially female teachers.

**References**


