

## **Coping Strategies for Multitasking Challenges of Career Women in Colleges of Education in Anambra State.**

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### **Abstract**

The study determined the multitasking challenges and coping strategies of dual career women in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. A sample of 450 academic staff of colleges of education in Anambra State was used in the study. A 25-item questionnaire was constructed to survey the respondents on career-related, personal care related, and family responsibilities related challenges as well as coping strategies, of career women. Data obtained were analyzed using frequency, mean and standard deviation. The findings were that career women faced career-related and family related challenges to a high extent while personal-care challenges were to a low extent. The study recommended among others, proper time management, family support, networking, flexible work hours as strategies to assist the career women cope with multitasking.

**Key words:** Multitasking, Challenges, Career women, Coping strategies.

### **Introduction**

Dual career women combine household responsibilities (marriages, child bearing, housekeeping etc.) with professional/ career responsibilities. The women are found in all sectors of the economy including education. In

the education sector, they work as teachers/ lecturers and administrators, at various levels of tertiary education, including universities, monotechnics, polytechnics and colleges of Education.

In these institutions, the women teach, carry out research, publish

articles, attend to students and do many other office works. They have work load and therefore need to adopt multitasking to meet up with their responsibilities.

Multitasking involves the performance of multiple tasks at the same time. It is a term that describes the work load of women and men who work to earn money, but also take up home responsibilities for unpaid domestic labour (Sweat, 2013). Martin (2014) noted that multitasking is not just doing two or multiple things at the same time, rather, it is a process that involves attempting to complete several things in tangent and this is accomplished by mentally going back and forth between two or more tasks rapidly that it appears one is doing them simultaneously. Etymologically, the term arises from the fact that many women are responsible for both domestic unpaid labour and their biological role. Shiplaya and Coatsb (2007) reported that there were evidence of stress among working mothers in the study they carried out on their coping strategies.

However, many women were found to obtain benefits from going to work, and there was considerable evidence of good coping, especially in terms of drawing on the informal support of other women. Both the quality of the job and quality of domestic support were found important for the working mothers' stress management. Low income 'single' women reported greatest levels of stress and strain, financial and child-care stress, and work stress.

In another study by Nyako and Ribadu (2004) reported that female staff of Federal College of Education, Yola were faced with challenges in carrying out their daily routine of domestic chores and activities in their work place. They employed the services of house helps to alleviate the burden of multitasking.

Komolafe (2008) examined the effects of married women employment on time usage in home making activities in Katsina metropolis. The study was specifically conducted to examine the extent to which employed wives spend their time on household activities and leisure; the extent to which some household activities are preferred; and how often they performed these household activities. The study found that employment affects the time married women spent in household and leisure activities. It was also found that husbands and children do assist in most cases.

In a study to determine factors associated with job stress among teachers in secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State. Adesope (2009) found that though teachers have moderate stress in their job, female teachers were found to have more stress than their male counterparts. This variation was not unconnected to multitasking, as women extended their work at the home front.

The focus of Azubuike and Nwokolo (2012) study was on time management practices of working class mothers in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Sample was selected from six tertiary institutions across all the

six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The study found, among others that working class mothers procrastinated duties and did not observe time management principles.

Multitasking is considered stressful. Based on this, Isiozor (2010) investigated administrative stress and level of coping among male and female primary school head-teachers in South-Eastern States of Nigeria. The results found no significant difference in the level of administrative stress of male and female stress. The degree of coping between male and female head-teachers was also found to be same.

Similarly, Wogu and Kaegon (2010) sought to find out work life balance preferences of academic staff of tertiary institutions in Rivers State Nigeria. Findings revealed that work life balance preferences of academic staff included attention to children's education, satisfying career, attention to spouse, flexible work schedule, health policies, etc. which nature trusts upon them (caring and nurturing of children).

Multitasking poses a lot of challenges to career women as it can induce stress if not properly managed. Stress is anything that undermines one's mental and physical wellbeing. It is a pressure situation of having feeling of frustration, tenseness and being in conflict situation (Isiozor, 2010). MedicineNet.com (2015) defined stress as a physical, mental or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stress can be good (positive) or bad (negative). Good

stress energizes one towards accomplishment of a task while bad stress has undesirable consequences on individual's health (Fawole, 2005; Nwachukwu and Nwachukwu, 2010).

Persistent stress can affect all parts of the body (brain, heart, lungs, blood vessels and muscles) leading to under-activation (Okoli, 2013). These may produce physical or psychological damage overtime.

Career women therefore, need to be selvedge from the burden and stress of multitasking by coming up with effective and efficient coping strategies so that none of their tasks suffers. How can these women be helped? Deepthi (2013), emphasized that for a career woman to properly manage the challenging tasks of the day, that time is of essence. A good time management is a requisite key to unlock a challenging day. Contending for proper time management, (Israel, 2004) stated that playing dual tasks of home and office management require extra-hard work and judicious management of time.

Time management for the career woman is critical and the key word is "prioritize". Some useful time management tips have been suggested by Deepthi (2013) as follows beginning the day early, doing domestic chores early in the morning before heading for work, doing shopping during the weekends, involving the spouse in carrying out house chores. This paper therefore, looked at the coping strategies for Multitasking challenges of career women in two communities in Anambra State Nigeria.

Career women combine their traditional roles with the demand of work that culminate in multi-tasking. These multiple tasks can constitute huge burden to these women and consequently, jeopardize their health, family responsibilities and work, if not properly managed. These career women, need good health to play these roles. Their family responsibilities cannot be sacrificed on the altar of career and the career cannot be foregone in the midst of socio-economic realities of now. How career women can cope at the cross roads of Multitasking is the problem of this study.

### **Objectives of the study**

The major purpose was to find out coping strategies for multitasking challenges of dual career woman in colleges of Education in Anambra State. Specifically the study sort to determine;

- 1) career related challenges of career women
- 2) family related challenges of career women
- 3) personal care related challenges of career women
- 4) coping strategies of career women with multitasking

### **Research Questions**

The following research question guided the study.

- 1) What are career related challenges of career women?
- 2) What family responsibilities constitute challenges to career women?

- 3) What personal care related challenges are encountered by career women?
- 4) How can career women cope with multitasks?

### **Methodology:**

**Area of study:** The study was carried out in Umuze and Nsugbe in Anambra State. In these two towns, are located tertiary institutions - Federal College of Education(T) Umuze and Nwafor Orizu college of Education, Nsugbe. In these institutions, married women work as teaching and non-teaching staff.

**Design of Study:** The study employed descriptive survey design, where information was elicited from married female staff of the two colleges.

**Population for the Study:** The population for the study comprised 517 of married women in Colleges of Education in Anambra State. Ninety six female academic staff and 193 female non academic staff from Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze while 76 female academic staff and 152 female non academic staff from Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe made up the population. The data was collected from personnel unit of each of the colleges.

**Sample for Study:** The entire 517 married women from the two colleges were used for the study.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** Data for the study were collected using structured questionnaire of a 4 point scale. The questionnaire items were

arranged in four clusters reflecting the four research objectives. The questionnaire titled Coping Strategies for multitasking Challenges of Career Women (CSMTCCW) was validated by three experts. The reliability index using Cronbach Alpha coefficient for each of the objectives were 0.72, 0.81, 0.83 and 0.69.

**Data Collection and Analysis:** Five hundred and seventeen copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents by hand and with the help of research assistance in the various colleges. In all 450 copies of the questioners were collected. Simple descriptive statistics, namely frequency, mean and standard

deviation were used in analyzing the data.

### Findings

The following findings were made by this study.

- 1) Eight career related multitasking challenges of career women were identified (Table 1)
- 2) Eight family - responsibility related multitasking challenges of career women were ascertained (Table 2)
- 3) Three out of five personal care-related multitasking challenges of career women were found out. (see Table 3)
- 4) Eleven coping strategies were determined. (Table 4)

**Table 1:** Career - related Multitasking challenges of career women. N=450

| S/N | Career-related challenges  | $\bar{x}$ | SD    | Remarks |
|-----|--|-----------|-------|---------|
| 1   | Job Schedule interferes with other engagements   | 3.23      | 0.860 | CLG     |
| 2   | Employers do not permit the use of work hours for personal activities                            | 3.69      | 0.70  | "       |
| 3   | Bosses do not always grant approval for time off/leave   | 2.77      | 1.216 | "       |
| 4   |  | 3.30      | 0.905 | "       |
| 5   | The work hours are not flexible  | 3.33      | 0.917 | "       |
| 6   | Bosses undermines women's capabilities for certain positions                                     | 3.14      | 0.793 | "       |
| 7   | Women of child bearing age are not given certain appointments                                    | 3.68      | 0.859 | "       |
| 8   | Teaching staff (women inclusive) are often denied annual leave                                   | 3.30      | 0.905 | "       |
|     | Non-teaching staff (including the females) in most cases are called back to duty while on leave. |           |       |         |

CLG - Challenge,  $\bar{x}$  - Mean response, SD - Standard deviation.

Table 1 shows that the mean ratings on career related challenges of career women range from 2.77 to 3.69 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. These show acceptance of all the items. These are indications that there are career-related multitasking challenges encountered by career women which are very significant.

**Table 2:** Family – responsibility related multitasking challenges of career – women. (N=450)

| S/N | Family Responsibility Related Multitasking challenges.             | $\bar{x}$ | SD    | Remarks |
|-----|--|-----------|-------|---------|
| 1   | Being pregnant and working affects career women                    | 3.15      | 1.014 | CLG     |
| 2   | Taking proper care of family members is difficult                  | 3.12      | 1.063 | “       |
| 3   | House hold chores affect career women                              | 3.30      | 0.994 | “       |
| 4   | They deprive themselves of social engagements                      | 3.26      | 1.20  | “       |
| 5   | Sex life of career women suffers                                   | 3.11      | 1.044 | “       |
| 6   | Children are not properly guided in their studies                  | 2.91      | 1.445 | “       |
| 7   | They rarely have time to cook for their families                   | 2.66      | 1.276 | “       |
| 8   | Career women give little or no time to interact with the children. | 3.30      | 0.994 | “       |

$\bar{x}$  – mean, SD – Standard deviation, CLG – Challenge.

Table 2 reveals mean ratings on family – responsibilities related multitasking challenges of career women. Items had means ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 2.66 to 3.30 and a cluster mean of 3.10 are above the criterion mean of 2.50 an indication that career women have family responsibility related challenges.

**Table 3:** Personal care – related multitasking challenges of career women. N = (450)

| S/N | Personal care-related multitasking challenges                         | $\bar{x}$ | SD    | Remarks |
|-----|---|-----------|-------|---------|
| 1   | Career women have little or no time for rest                          | 3.340     | 0.830 | CLG     |
| 2   | They have little or no time for medical check                         | 2.36      | 1.195 | NCLG    |
| 3   | They have no time for leisure   | 3.16      | 0.994 | CLG     |
| 4   | Most career women seek medical help only when they are down in health | 2.95      | 1.20  | CLG     |
| 5   | Most of them do not have time for physical fitness exercise .         | 2.42      | 1.170 | NCLG    |

NCLG – Not a challenge, CLG – challenge,  $\bar{x}$ – Mean, SD – Standard deviation.

The results in table 3 shows that items 1, 3 and 4 with means ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 3.34, 3.16 and 2.95 are above the criterion mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 2.50 and constitute challenges to career women. On the contrary, items 2 and 5 which were rated below the criterion mean do not constitute a challenge to career women. However, the grand mean ( $\bar{x}_g$ ) of 2.85 is an indication that career women are faced with personal care related multitasking challenges to some extent.

**Table 4:** Coping Strategies for multitasking of career women (N = 450)

| S/N | Coping Strategies | $\bar{x}$ | SD | Remarks |
|-----|-------------------|-----------|----|---------|
|-----|-------------------|-----------|----|---------|

|   |   |              |                |        |
|---|---|--------------|----------------|--------|
| 1 | Career women need house -helps in the house   | 3.37         | 0.989          | CS     |
| 2 | Those with babies need day-care facilities or assistance of nannies                       | 3.50         | 0.871          | "      |
| 3 | They should be given longer maternity leave to care for their babies.                     | 3.79         | 0.489          | "      |
| 4 | Husbands should give helping hands in the house chores                                    | 3.86         | 0.458          | "      |
| 5 | Career women should manage their time properly<br>Beginning the day early will be of help | 3.90         | 0.412          | "      |
| 6 | Having more flexible working hours for career   | 3.60         | 0.268          | "      |
| 7 | women<br>Avoidance of distraction   | 3.83<br>3.34 | 0.567<br>0.830 | "<br>" |
| 8 | Having "to do" list   | 3.30         | 0.994          | "      |
| 9 | Prioritizing her works  | 3.33         | 0.917          | "      |
|   | Solving tasks in blocks   | 3.26         | 1.20           | "      |

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CS- Coping Strategy.

Table 4 shows that all the eleven coping strategies for multitasking of career women received high mean rating between 3.26 – 3.90. These mean ratings of the respondents were above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster/grand mean ( $\bar{x}_g$ ) of 3.55 indicates that the strategies could be adopted so as to cope with multitasking to a very high extent.

### Discussion of Findings

The study found that career-related challenges face career women to a high extent. It is expected that employers would not permit use of work hour for personal activities ( $\bar{x}$  3.69). Women capabilities are also undermined by bosses ( $\bar{x}$  3.33) and as such they may not be appointed into certain positions. The study also found that the work hours are not flexible ( $\bar{x}$  3.30) and job schedules interferes with other engagements ( $\bar{x}$  3.23), etc.

The finding of the study is consistent with the earlier observation in Adesope (2009) that women are challenged by job-related stress, and that it is relatively higher in women than in men.

The study also found that career women are challenged by family responsibilities to a high extent. For instance, and most importantly, the fact that they engage in household chores ( $\bar{x}$  3.30) before and after work pose challenge and have little time to interact with their children ( $\bar{x}$  3.30). They also deprive themselves of social engagements ( $\bar{x}$  3.26). Pregnancy while working also constitutes a challenge ( $\bar{x}$  3.15). Others include taking proper care of family ( $\bar{x}$  3.12), sex life ( $\bar{x}$  3.11), assistance to children in homework ( $\bar{x}$  2.91) and cooking ( $\bar{x}$  2.66), although, the last two are to a low extent, but they pose challenges. The findings support the earlier work

of Wogu and Kaegon (2010) on work life balance preference of academic staff of tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The earlier study identified children education, attention of spouse as areas staffs were in dire need of achieving balance.

In terms of personal care related challenges, the study found the following as challenging: time for rest that is barely unavailable (¶ 3.34); in time for leisure (¶ 3.16); and the career woman seeks medical help only when she is down (¶ 2.95). These conditions can be threatening. Although, career women rejected the fact that they do not exercise (¶ 2.42) and have no time for medical check (¶ 2.36) which conversely mean that they have time for medical check and do exercises, these are not enough. They need rest and leisure to ease off their burden, and overcome stress. Okoli (2013) reported that persistent stress can affect all parts of the body leading to under-activation.

For coping strategies, respondents accepted all items as a way forward. These strategies include; in the following hierarchical order: proper time management (¶ 3.90), spouse assistance (¶ 3.86), flexible working hours (¶ 3.83), elongated maternity leave (¶ 3.79), early beginning of day (¶ 3.60), day-care facilities (¶ 3.50), house help (¶ 3.37), avoidance of distraction (¶ 3.34), prioritizing of works (¶ 3.33), having "to do" list

(¶ 3.30) and solving tasks in blocks (¶ 3.26).

These findings are consistent with earlier works of Nyako and Ribadu (2004) that found assistance of house help as coping strategy; Komolafe (2008) view the assistance of spouse and children as strategy and Azubuike and Nwokolo (2012) who made case for proper time management will enable the career woman make optimal use of her time and so achieve work-life balance.

### Conclusion

Multitasking poses enormous challenges to the career woman who must strike a balance not only between work and family responsibility, but also her personal care and other engagements. The study found that career women are challenged to varying degrees of career-related problems, family responsibility and related issues as well as personal care related issues. The career woman therefore needs to adopt positive coping strategies as identified in this study in order to strike a balance.

### Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. The home should be supportive of the career woman in view of the socioeconomic value the career woman adds to the home. This means that the husband and children should assist in lessening her burden through assistance in domestic affairs.



2. Maternity leave should be made adequate for the career woman to rear her child.
3. The workplace should be made more gender-sensitive. This includes flexible work hours to enable the career woman give her best without compromising family responsibilities which is equally important for the sustenance of the society.
4. Women in career should adopt proper time management by making judicious use of their time. They should not be involved in idle talks and gossips that do not add value to their life.
5. Career women should form a network of support for one another so that they can exchange ideas and share challenges in order to overcome them.
6. Career women should take proper care of their health through regular health check, adequate sleep, good exercises, etc.

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