

Strategies Adopted by Dual Career Women for Coping with Stress in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated strategies adopted by dual career women to cope with stress. Specifically, the study determined the sources of stress among dual career women; work and home related coping strategies dual career women in Benue State could adopt to reduce stress. The Area of the study was Benue State while the population was made up of all the dual career women in Benue State. Purposive sampling of 384 dual career women was used. Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used as instruments for data collection. Means and standard deviations were used for data analysis while the FGD results were summarized. Findings include among others, 15 sources of stress; 14 work related coping strategies and 12 home related coping strategies. Based on the findings, it is recommended, among others, that the employers of labour should offer counseling services to dual career women on how to manage stress better.

Keywords: Career, Coping, Strategies, Stress, Women, Home

Introduction

Dual career women are those women who are homemakers in charge of the smooth running of their homes and at the same time, pursuing career paths in different works of life. In today's

world, women are presently pursuing careers in areas considered exclusively preserve for men (such areas include among others banking sector, health and medical sector, lawyers journalism, engineering, building and

road construction, politics, teaching etc) in order to assist their family. This paradigm shift has resulted to dual career among women. According to Uthayasutiyana and Gunapalan (2011) dual career women are individuals who, rather than being simply employed, have "jobs which require a high degree of commitment and which have a continuous developmental character." With the present dearth of employment opportunities, existing work environment for women is increasingly becoming harsh, highly competitive, with job security being seriously threatened women are in many cases made to put in more working hours even on weekends due to heavy workloads at work (Anyakoha, 2017). This is a big challenge which results to stress on women. Eremie and Kennedy (2015) noted that dual career women have to attend to two major life roles. That is, doing their prescribed jobs at the work place and managing the home. This problem is most common in traditional African societies where the responsibility of taking care of the home is believed to be that of the woman. In a typical African society, dual career women are often involved in preparing the family meal, taking care of the children, washing the husband and children clothes while at the same time performing their official activities in their places of work. These

roles demand that dual career women wake up early to perform their domestic responsibilities before going to work, they come home late to perform the evening domestic chores and the circle continues. All these lead to stress and stress related challenges hence, the need for coping strategies.

Dual career for women may have its advantages such as gender equality, personal growth, high autonomy, and mutual respect (Abele, 2009; Boehnke, 2007). However, Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) usually regarded as the first study on dual career which provided guidelines for further studies identified high stress levels as one of the disadvantages of dual career women.

Stress is a perceived imbalance between environmental demands required for survival and an individual's ability to adapt to these requirements (Calvarese, 2015; Kranner, Minibayeva, Beckett & Seal 2010). Stress is an unhealthy situation that leads to emotional and psychological imbalance. Ganapathi (2014) stated that stress is the single non-specific reaction of the body to a demand made upon it and that everyone experiences some form of stress or the other and in many cases, the stress or the adverse reaction, to the demand of the situation gets reduced with the passage of time or when one gets used to the situation. The

transactional theory of stress has been found more appropriate to explain studies on stress. The theory was propounded by Lazarus and Folkman, in 1984 (Zhang 2001). According to this cognitive phenomenological theory, stress is a troubled relationship between the person and the environment in which an environmental constraint, or opportunities, are judged either to tax or to exceed an individual's resources. Stress has negative consequences on the physical and emotional well-being of women. Nekoranec and Kmošena (2015) identified the three broad consequences of stress to include: physiological disorders - including blood pressure changes, breathing problems, gastrointestinal disorders, emotional disorders; such as depressions, anxiety, aggression, low self-esteem, bad intellectual functions, inability to concentrate, and behavioral disorders - including lower performance, injuries, higher fluctuation, the use of addictive substances, communication problems. Considering the negative consequences of stress on dual career women, coping strategies are needed to address the problem.

Coping, involves the efforts (thought and actions) made by an individual to manage the stressful demands, and the emotions they generate. Dual career women need to

cope with the situation by managing work and the home successfully. Supriti, Dubey, Ruchi, Saxena and Neetu Bajpai (2010) cited in Mitta and Joshi (2013) agreed that a successful work life balance helps in achieving personal as well as professional goals of a person. Ayayi, Ojo and Mordi (2015) affirm that changing family and work structures in Nigeria makes coping with work and family roles a challenging one for women to handle even with organizational interventions.

Over the years, scholars (Ajayi, Ojo & Mordi 2015, Ogbogu 2013, Zhang 2001, Fatoki & Kobiowu 2015) have investigated the coping strategies for dual career women and reported different results. Ajayi, Ojo and Mordi found that age of the respondents, children in parity ratio, marital status, staff category and religion are significant determinants of work-family balance. Ajayi et al added that women with children in parity ratio of 1-2, 3-4 and 5 and above are 1.654, 1.455 and 1.235 times more likely to be unable to balance work-family roles compared to those with zero parity. Ajayi et al finally reported significant influence of work status on the work-family balance.

Fatoki and Kobiowu (2015) reported that family responsibility as a whole has a significant weight on women academics career progression. Also, child bearing (Beta = -0.406, t = -

5.283 $p < .05$), care giving (Beta = -0.268, $t = -3.986$, $p < .05$) and house chores (Beta = -0.195, $t = -2.846$ $p < .05$) were reported as significant predictors of women academic progression. It was also revealed that active support from spouse/partner when there is need to stay late at work, travel for conference etc, making use of childcare centres close to the workplace and annual leave respectively are very effective in coping with family- work responsibilities effects on their academic careers. Going by the studies reviewed, it is obvious that coping strategies for dual career women has to span between the home and work. That is, domestic coping strategies and work coping strategies. In Benue State, it has been observed that there are many dual career women. In the civil service, for example, women work in different ministries agencies and parastatals. These same women are also expected to play key role in domestic activities. Tenuche (2011), regrets that domestic pressure is one of the problems facing dual career women in Benue State. Therefore, an understanding of sources of stress and how dual career women cope with it in Benue State is essential.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to find out the strategies career women adopt to cope with stress and

improve work life balances. Specifically, the study determined:

1. sources of stress among dual career women in Benue State.
2. work related coping strategies dual career women in Benue State could adopt to reduce stress.
3. home related coping strategies dual career women in Benue state could adopt to reduce stress.

Research Questions

1. What are the sources of stress among dual career women in Benue State?
2. What are the work related coping strategies which dual career women in Benue State can adopt to reduce stress?
3. What are the home related coping strategies dual career women in Benue state adopt to reduce stress?

Methodology

Design and Area of the Study:

Descriptive survey design was used for this study. It covered Benue State, North - Central Nigeria. The study was conducted in Benue State, north central Nigeria. Benue was chosen for this study because the survey of the National Bureau of Statistics (2014), indicate that there are more women in the Labour force than men. Also, it was decided that Benue State was the most appropriate place to conduct the study because it is one of the states in northern Nigeria where women are

expected to perform all the domestic work. In Benue, it is strange to see a man assists his wife in domestic chores as such situation is considered an indication of the woman's 'dominion-ship'.

Population of the Study: The population for the study was made up of all the dual career women in Benue State civil service. The target population is 15, 457 (Source Benue State Ministry of Information, June, 2017). Women civil servants in Benue State are appropriate for this study because the tradition and culture of Benue people demands that they perform all the domestic chores such as cooking, sweeping the compound, bathing the children, washing the husband's clothes, among others. These activities are likely to weigh heavily on them.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample size for this study was made up of 384 civil servants. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample size. This was to ensure that only dual career state civil servants were used. State civil servants were used because there is monitoring at the state level to ensure workers perform their duties. Also, 10 respondents were purposively selected from the Ministry of education for a Focus Group discussion (FGD). The researcher opted for 10 so as to have a manageable group.

Instrument for Data Collection: The questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. It was developed based on literature review and the specific purpose of the study. It had a four point scale of strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (1). It was face validated by three Home Economics experts from University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The reliability of the instrument was ensured through a test re-test procedure which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86. A focus group was developed based on the specific purpose of the study.

Data Collection Techniques: A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by hand with the help of an assistant and there was 100% return rate. One focus group discussion session was also held. The session began with an explanation of the purpose of the study to the participants after which they were assured that their names will not be used in the study but that they will be described as participants. The session lasted for thirty minutes.

Data Analysis Techniques: Means and standard deviations were used for data analysis while the FGD results were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Dual Career Women on the Sources of Stress

S/N	Sources of Stress	Mean	SD	RE
1	Heavy Work load at place of work	3.0	0.87	A
2	Hostile boss at place of work	2.9	0.70	A
3	Anxiety over unforeseen work challenges	3.5	0.67	A
4	Anxiety over unforeseen family challenges	2.9	0.78	A
5	Feeling of job insecurity as a result of queries from boss	3.2	0.59	A
6	High job output (target) expectation	3.1	0.68	A
7	Threat to marriage and family due to over lack of time for the family	3.4	0.37	A
8	Thought of children's wellness when women are at work	2.8	0.76	A
9	Feeling of security of life when closing late	3.1	0.77	A
10	Working under stress condition such as short deadlines	3.0	0.68	A
11	Being insecure about career advancement like promotion	3.2	0.59	A
12	Being insecure about husband's fidelity	3.1	0.78	A
13	Going to bed late (keeping awake past midnight)	2.7	0.74	A
14	Working up early to commence domestic work like cooking	3.2	0.57	A
15	Being unsure about means of transportation to and fro work	2.8	0.68	A

SD=Standard deviation; RE=Remark; A=Agree

Table 1 reveals that all the items were accepted as sources of stress that dual career women from Benue State face. Based on the result, it was found that threat to marriage and family over lack of time for the family had the highest mean (Mean= 3.4, SD=0.37) while the

least item was going to bed late (M=0.74, SD= 0.74).

In addition, findings from the focus group discussion reveal the following sources of stress: polygamy, family squabbles, tight and demanding work schedule, demands from children and anxiety.

Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Dual Career Women on work related coping strategies they could adopt to reduce stress

S/N	Coping Strategies	Mean	SD	RE
		3.2	0.57	A
2	Develop healthy responses on work aspects that cause stress.	2.8	0.76	A
3	Providing a clear difference between working and non-working hours	3.2	0.65	A
4	Learning how to relax when appropriate	3.0	0.98	A
5	Talking to supervisor on official issues that cause work stress	3.1	0.69	A
6	Involvement in physical activities	3.2	0.66	A
7	Getting more sleep	3.1	0.82	A
8	Using Relaxation as a strategy	2.6	0.71	A
9	Talking to people	3.2	0.67	A
10	Good time management	2.9	0.68	A
11	Avoiding worrying self-on trivial work issues	3.2	0.89	A
12	Good eating habit at work	2.6	0.58	A
13	Thinking positive and avoiding negative thoughts about work	3.1	0.79	A
14	Seeking support from colleagues on aspects of work schedule that cause stress	3.3	0.61	A

SD= Standard deviation, A= Agree, RE=Remarks

Table 2 reveals that all the items were accepted as coping strategies dual career women adopt to manage work stress. This is because all the items in the table had mean scores of 2.5 and above which is within the acceptable benchmark for the study. According to the result, the highest item was seeking support from colleagues on aspects of work schedule that cause stress with a mean score of 3.3 and standard deviation of 0.61. The item with the

least mean score is good eating habit with a mean score of 2.6 and standardization of 0.58.

Findings from the FGD also reveal more work related coping strategies to include: Patience when executing challenging task; Good working relationship with colleagues; Spirit of team work; Seeking assistance from colleagues where necessary; and Avoiding squabbles with colleagues work.

Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Dual Career Women on Home related Coping Strategies they could adopt to reduce stress

S/N	Work Related Coping Strategies	Mean	SD	RE
		2.7	.82	A
2	I take part in exercise as a domestic stress copying strategy	2.2	0.69	R
3	I watch movies to manage my domestic stress	3.1	0.78	A
4	I avoid unnecessary squabbles at home	2.5	0.99	A
5	I engage house help to assist in domestic chores	3.2	0.72	A
6	I see a mental health professional at regular interval	2.4	0.66	R
7	Going to bed early	2.9	0.92	A
8	Avoiding squabbles with in-laws	3.0	0.99	R
9	Maintaining a domestic work schedule	3.2	0.88	A
10	Thinking positive about the family future	3.1	0.69	A
11	Avoiding shouting at children	3.1	0.72	A
12	Resting during weekends	3.0	0.90	A

SD=Standard deviation; RE=Remark; A=Agree

Table 3 reveals that the nine items out of the twelve items presented in the table above were accepted as domestic coping strategies for coping with stress among dual career women in Benue State. The respondents rejected taking part in exercise as a domestic stress copying strategy and seeing a mental health professional at regular interval.

FGD findings also reveal: Using dialogue in resolving domestic issues instead of confrontations; Constant communication with husbands on issues that may led to stress; Sharing of problems with husband; Early commencements of domestic chores; and Use of forgiveness.

Discussion of Findings

This study found that the sources of stress among dual career women are both from places of work and the home. This finding agree with that of Tenuche (2011) who reported that career women face both home and work stress. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2010) reported that women are very likely to have stress as a result of their work. APA further reported that the common stress symptoms are headache, nervousness, tiredness, sadness, among others. In the same vein, Nekoranec and Kmošena (2015) reported that domestic chores constitute a significant source of stress. This could be as a result of emerging challenges in the

area of work-family imbalance which is a serious challenge in many families. The study also showed that the strategies dual career women adopt to cope with stress at work include: Keeping track stressors and developing ways of managing them; Developing healthy responses on work aspects that cause stress; Establishing boundaries between working and non-working hours; Talking to supervisor on official issues that cause work stress; and Seeking support from colleagues on aspects of work schedule that cause stress. Coping with stress is very essential for dual career women because they experience more stress than their male counterparts. Boehnke's (2007) study showed that when dual career women implement successful coping strategies, it guides them better in their work. The findings is also consistent with that of Ajayi, Ojo and Mordi (2015) who found that career women suffer from stress arising from the work they do and as such, develop different coping strategies. The findings of this study also showed that the strategies dual career women adopt to cope with domestic stress include: Reading of books on domestic stress management; Watch movies to manage domestic stress; Avoid unnecessary squabbles at home; and Engaging a house help to assist in domestic chores. These findings corroborate the transactional theory of

stress which posits that when a person is faced with a stress situation, he/she adopts a coping strategy. Zhang (2001) noted that coping strategy is an essential aspect of coping with stress. Zhang sums: "work/family role conflicts or career obstacles can be viewed as troublesome person-environment relationships. But if women can cope with them, they may not perceive them as being stressful. Thus, coping is a critical mediator of stressful person-environment relationships and their immediate and long-term outcomes" (Zhang, 2001). Also, Domenico and Jones, (2006) found that effective coping strategy has a corresponding influence on the performance of dual career women both at home and at work.

Conclusion

This study has shown that dual career women from Benue State face stress as a result of their work and home chores. The manifestation of this stress is both in the physical, emotional and psychological behaviour of these women. This has implication on family wellness as family wellness will be better achieved when dual career women face less stress. Therefore it is necessary for these women to adopt different coping strategies that will enhance their wellness as well as that of their families and society at large.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

- Dual career women should be encouraged to develop and implement work related coping strategies to help them cope at work and at home.
- Husbands should also support their spouses who are dual career in implementing domestic related stress coping strategies.
- Career women should, as a matter of necessity, make use of mental health professionals in the elimination of work stress.

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