Work-life balance practices and female lecturers’ career progression in Ghana
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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance issues have attracted the attention of both international and national policy makers especially over the past few decades. A number of legislations have been enacted at both international and national levels over the years to respond to crisis and the conflict between work and life. For example, Convention No. 156 (1981) of the International Labor Organization, (ILO) requires that signatories make it an aim of national policy that all workers with family responsibilities – both women and men – can engage in employment without discrimination or, as far as possible, conflict between work and family obligations. The Convention puts forward a set of policy devices including leave policies, social care services, social security, flexible working time and work organization arrangements and workforce reintegration policies as well as gender-responsive awareness-raising and education (Articles 4–7). Obviously, work-life balance issues have therefore become a strategic focus for businesses and a public policy priority. In the late 1970s, the expression work-life balance was first used to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life in the United Kingdom. Several theorists have written about the increasing blurring of the boundaries between work and life. Work-family conflict is based on role conflict theory. Khan et al (1964) developed a theory of role dynamics which assumes that stress results from conflicting or incompatible expectations and unclear or vague expectations. When these expectations are in conflict, they may result in the role conflict for the individual. And expectations that are unclear or vague may cause role ambiguity. Many authors believe that parents being affected by work-life conflict will either reduce the number of hours they work whiles other authors suggest that a parent may run away from family life or work more hours at a workplace (Reynolds, 2005). Clark (200), defines work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. Ugerson and Yeandle (2005) and Clark (2000) as cited in Jang and Zippay (2011), describe work-life balance as the self-perceived, satisfactory integration of personal time, family care, and work with a minimum of role conflict.

World-wide, work related stress has been recognized as a major challenge to workers’ health and the healthiness of their organizations (ILO, 1986; 1992). Pressures both form home and work can lead to stress. Whiles employers cannot protect their employees from stress resulting from family demands, a lot more can be done to reduce stress arising through work. This is very critical given that the increase in the reported incidence of stress affects companies bottom line as employees who are stressed are likely to be unhealthy, have low levels of motivation and less productive at work. Research has established and documented that conflict between the work and family domains has a number of significant negative consequences for individuals. Employers are therefore under increasing pressure to design more healthy jobs to reduce stress at work. A healthy job is likely to be one where the
pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work, and to the support they receive from people who matter to them. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (WHO, 1986), a healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but an abundance of health-promoting ones. It is for the above reasons and many more that this study is conducted to investigate into work-life balance practices and how it affects female lecturers and their career progression.

Keywords: Work life balance, Stress, depression.

1. Theoretical background of the study

Studies have found that work–life conflict is associated with stress, depression, and a variety of stress-related poor health and mental health effects, and that such ill health increases work absenteeism, turnover, and low morale (Emslie, Hunt, and Macintyre, 2004; Grzywacz, Almeida, and McDonald, 2002; Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey, and Townsend, 2007). Murphy-Lawless et al (2004), asserted that “As a society, we now face the complex task of supporting women, no matter what they decide, while at the same time working to provide a far more equitable distribution of life chances, so that the scope for decision making is evened out across the strata for all women”. As women everywhere continue to have more hours in unpaid care and family chores the questions that arise is whether there are specific policies and practices concerning work-life balance for female lecturers. Does family-life affect the career progression of female lecturers? What are the challenges that female lecturers face in combining work and family-life? And does the nature and size of workplace affect the likelihood of availability, awareness and implementation of work-life balance practices? To answer these questions and to make a case for the relevance of work-life balance practices at the workplace, it is important to investigate the phenomena within the context of Ghana. For example a chronically ill child, parent or spouse will increase parents’ absenteeism. It will also be interesting therefore to understand both the organizational support system and family support systems that can help workers reduce work-family conflict.

1.1 Family-life and the career progression of female lecturers

In traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes in the African context, women are expected to perform their duties as wives and mothers in addition to fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Valdez and Gutek (1987), argue that because women’s work and family demands are contemporaneous, these demands are likely to impact significantly on women’s career. For academics, the core criteria normally used in their promotion is human capital (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999). Becker (1993), defines human capital as the productive things that employees own (i.e. skills and knowledge). For an academic, there are five factors that can be included as human capital: academic qualifications, years of experience, research productivity, administration, and teaching quality/responsibility (Allen, 1990; Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999; Deane et al., 1996). An unconscious and unquestioned assumption throughout most of the twentieth century, according Bradley (1989) in male dominated organizations was that a woman should retire, if not after marrying, then certainly after the birth of any children. Sutherland (1985) pointed out that although many women no longer had to sacrifice their careers in this way by the early-1990s, it was still a widely-held view that women should remain at home during their children’s formative years. A research findings summarized by Dines (1993) in (West Africa, Arab States, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, the South Pacific, Peru, the United States, the Caribbean, Finland and France) on
the status of women in higher education management and factors hindering their participation in higher education management. She observed that country after country, women held less than 50% of academic and administrative posts in higher education institutions. Representation varied between about 10 and 20% at middle management level and from 0 to 10% at senior management level. Several studies have indicated that combining family and career can hinder a woman’s career progression. Powell and Graves (2003), opine that in the West women make difficult choices such remaining single or childless in comparison to their male counterparts who the majority of case are married with children. According to Russell and Banks (2011), the pattern that has emerged in Ireland for example shows that, the greatest drop in employment occurs after a women’s first child, followed by a further dramatic drop when a woman has a third child. We expect family-life to relate to career progression. We propose the following:

\[ H_1 \] Family-life will negatively relate to the career progression of female lecturers

1.2 Child bearing, child care and female Lecturer’s job progression

The feminist theory tries to understand women’s oppression and the structures in society that espouse this oppression and subordination and argues that there is a pervasive influence of gender divisions and social life. This perspective looked at the similarities between the genders and concluded that women and men have equal potential for individual development. Differences in the realization of that potential therefore must result from externally imposed constraints and from the influence of social institutions (Nzomo, 1995). Smoulder (1998), explored the cultural factors which link gender factors and social cultural beliefs. In her analysis of the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations to women and men, Smoulder (1998) concluded that “the gender based roles’’ irrelevant to the work place, are carried into the work place and kept in place because the actors involved both dominant and subordinate, subscribe to social and organization reality” cited in Kria and Kobia (2012). Hochschild (1997) and Wirth (2000), mentioned that family responsibilities such as childcare, child rear, and housekeeping create some conflicts for women’s job progression. Sutherland (1985) pointed out that although many women no longer had to sacrifice their careers for childbearing and child care by the early-1990s, it was still a widely-held view that women should remain at home during their children’s formative years. She observed that this view was shared by some of the women academics involved in her study. She however concluded that the decision to have a family can affect career progression.

A survey conducted by Lund (1998), on female staff numbers in commonwealth universities to identify the positions occupied by women in both academic and administrative hierarchies. Using secondary data obtained from the Commonwealth Universities Yearbook, the survey found that women are still seriously under-represented amongst full time staff in both administrative and academic hierarchies of commonwealth Universities. Halversen (1999), reported that there were still hardly any women vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors, college principals or faculty deans in the UK. The only good news is that the proportion of women in the “new” universities is higher (at 20 per cent) than in the “old” university sector (at 14 per cent). Bradley (1999) suggested that domestic related commitments limit the opportunities for many women academics to build their academic capital, such as research outcomes or administrative experience, which may eventually affect their chances for promotion.
The Berkeley research team of the University of California spent more than a decade studying why so many women begin the climb but do not make it to the top of the Ivory Tower: the tenured faculty, full professors, deans, and presidents. The answer turns out to be what you’d expect: Babies matter. They concluded that women pay a “baby penalty” over the course of a career in academia—from the tentative graduate school years through the pressure cooker of tenure, the long midcareer march, and finally retirement. But babies matter in different ways at different times. Mason et al (2013) studied several surveys that have tracked tens of thousands of graduate students over their careers, as well as original research. The most important finding of the study was that family formation negatively affects women’s, but not men’s, academic careers. The study concluded that for men, having children is a career advantage; for women, it is a career killer. We posit child bearing and child affect the career progression of female lecturers.

H2 Child bearing and child care negatively conflict with a female Lecturer’s job progression

1.3 Nature and size of an organization and the likelihood of availability, awareness and implementation of WLB practices

In this section, we examine the relationship between the nature and size of firm and work-life balance practices. We argue that large formal organizations are more likely to have work-life balance policies and practices in place and the type of work-life balance policies that are offered. Galinsky and Bond (1998), studied US firms and found that company size was the next best predictor of the presence of work-life balance policies, after industry type. Larger companies (more than 1,000 employees in this case) were more likely to provide flexible work options and longer and paid parental leave. Yasbek (2004), cited a study by Comfort, Johnson and Wallace (2003), that flexi-time and telework are much more available to employees in small workplaces (fewer than 10 employees) in Canada. While other policies such as Child or Elder care, where economies of scale can be achieved, are most available in large organizations of 1000 employees or more. Evans (2001) as cited in Yasbek (2004) reported that work-life balance policies are in general more likely to be reported in large firms in Australia, Japan, the UK and the US.

The preceding discussions suggest that work-life balance issues means different things to different people. Industry type and firm size are also important predictors of the presence of work-life balance policies, with large firms generally having the most generous policies. Firms employing a large number of professionals and technical workers are the most likely to offer work-life balance policies (Konrad and Mangel, 2000). Barai and Bhargava (2011) are of the opinion that because large organizations are more visible and receive more attention from the regulators, the media and the public, they are more likely to provide work-life balance policies. Goodstein (1994), Ingram and Simons (1995) and Osterman, (1995) stated that Because of the institutional pressures, large organizations are likely to be more responsive to work-family issues and provide more WLBPs. We propose that:

H3 Positive relations exist between the nature and size of organization and likelihood of availability, awareness and implementation of WLB practices.

Based on the above discussion, the conceptual framework below shows the relationships between the key variables of the study.
2. Research objectives

1. To find out the effects of work-family conflict on the career progression of female lecturers
2. To find out the challenges that female lecturers face in combining work and family
3. To find out the effects of nature and size of firm on the likelihood of availability, awareness and implementation of work-life balance practices

3. Research methodology

A large questionnaire survey was collected from 89 female lecturers from one of the four public universities in Ghana. The university has Six Hundred and Ninety-Nine lecturers and one Thousand, Six Hundred and Fifty-Five non-teaching staff. Out of the Six Hundred and Fifty-five lecturers, 89 were female lecturers. The sample consisted of 89 female lecturers. Questionnaires were hand delivered to all the female lecturers in all the departments of the university and a follow up was made by the researcher weeks after to collect them. Assurance was given to the respondents about the confidentiality of their responses for research purposes only. A total of 79 questionnaires were completed with a 88.8% response rate. Of the 79 participants, 9 (11.4) per cent were Assistant Lecturers; 41 (51.9) per cent were lecturers; 20 (25.3) per cent were Senior Lectures; 4 (5.1) per cent were Associate Professors; 1 (1.3) per cent was a Doctor; whiles 4 (5.1) per cent gave no responses in relation to their ranks. Out of the 79 respondents, 32.9% had children aged between 11 and 20, 27.8% with children between 21 and 30 years, 17.7% with children from 5 to 10 years. Those whose children were 31 years or more represented 8.9%. Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The presentation of data in this research is done by way of graphs. The questionnaire used for this research contained positive statements related to work-life balance practices and career progression. Most of the questions were asked with responses based on the level of agreement scale. This approach allocates weights
to the frequencies of the responses. For purposes of analysis, a weight is calculated by adding percentages for strongly agree and agree as well as those for disagree and strongly disagree.

4. Analysis and interpretation

This study is conducted to investigate into work-life balance practices and how it affects female lecturers in their career progression. Primary data was collected through the use of questionnaires and the results are presented through graphs. Family-life will negatively relate to the career progression of female lecturers.

![Graph showing the relationship between work-life balance and female lecturers' career progression](image)

(Source: 2012 field survey)

**Figure 2:** Family-life negatively relates to career progression of female lecturers

The study investigated how family-life relates to career progression of female lecturers. Out total of 79 female lecturers in the sample, (73.4 Per cent) indicated that family-life had a negative effect on their career progression. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up question on the extent of the effect of family-life on the career progression of female lecturers.

![Graph showing the relationship between work-life balance and female lecturers' career progression](image)

(Source: 2012 field survey)

**Figure 3:** Child bearing and child care negatively conflict with a female Lecturer’s jobs progression

However when they were asked to indicate whether family-life affected their ability to pursue further studies elsewhere in the questionnaire, majority of the female lecturers (59.5 per cent) reported that family-life affected their ability to pursue further studies. The findings confirm the views of Valdez and Gutek (1987), that because women’s work and family demands are simultaneous, these demands are likely to impact significantly on women’s career. In an
institution where lack of qualification has been identified as a major factor preventing lecturers from being promoted, it can be concluded that the inability of female lecturers to pursue further studies due to family-life will have serious implications on their career progression. This confirms the position of (Allen, 1990; Coadrake and Stedman, 1999; Deane et al., 1996), that academic qualification, years of experience, research productivity, administration and teaching quality/responsibility are the five factors that are included as human capital. The study investigated the effects of child bearing and child care on the career progression of female lecturers. As evident in the figure above, the result presented shows that (72.1 per cent) of female lecturers reported that child bearing and child care negatively conflict with their job progression. Only (6.4 per cent) of respondents disagreed that child bearing and child care had any effect on job progression while (20.3 per cent) were neutral. Likewise, majority of female lecturers (55.7 per cent) reported that child bearing and child care affected their ability to take up further studies. This confirms the findings of Hochschild (1997) and Wirth (2000), that family responsibilities such as childcare, child rear, and housekeeping create some conflicts for women’s job progression Sutherland. Again, the findings are consistent with the findings of Bradley (1999), who suggested that domestic related commitments limit the opportunities for many women academics to build their academic capital, such as research outcomes or administrative experience, which may eventually affect their chances for promotion.

Positive relations exist between the nature and size of workplace and likelihood of availability, awareness and implementation of WLB practices

![Figure 4: Existence of work-life balance policies in the Public Universities](Source: 2012 field survey)

The result of this study from the figure above shows that overall nature and size of workplace are significantly related to the availability and implementation of work-life balance policies. Thus 70.9 per cent of respondents agreed to the presence of work-life balance policies in the University. Work-life balance policies help to reduce the stress on female lecturers during pregnancy, breast feeding and parenting. When asked about availability, awareness and implementation of work-life balance policies, 93.7% of respondents said part time work policy is implemented. For flexi-time policy, 72.2% of respondents indicated that they are aware of that policy. There was a 100% response to the policy on Study Leave. 98.7% indicated that they were aware of the policy on maternity leave. 73.4% of female lecturers at were aware of child care arrangements. There was a 100% response from respondents on the policy of sabbatical leave at. Casual Leave policy had 97.5% awareness from female lecturers.
The results of the analysis presented above are in line with institutional theory which predicts that, work-life balance employment practices in general are strongly associated with the size of the establishment, the industry in which it is located, whether it is in the public or private sector and the extent to which it is unionized (Felstead et al, 2002). The findings are also in line with the findings of Evans (2001) cited in Yasbek (2004) who reported in his study of Australia, Japan, UK and US that work-life balance policies are in general more likely to be available in large firms. Konrad and Mangel (2000), as stated in the literature also concluded that firms employing a large number of professionals and technical workers are the most likely to offer work-life balance policies. Again the findings are in consonance with the findings of Barai and Bhargava (2011), that because large organizations are more visible and receive more attention from the regulators, the media and the public, they are more likely to provide work-life balance policies.

4.1 Findings

The percentage of women at the workplace has registered a consistent steady increase over the years. Work-life balance has become a dominant issue in the workplace and a serious concern for employers, business owners and managers to find ways to help employees to have a life and a job. The major implications of the study are as follows,

Our findings suggest that family-life have a negative effect on the career progression of female lecturers. While the study did not measure the extent of effects, majority of the respondents agreed that combining family and work-life affect their ability to pursue further studies. However because academic qualification and research productivity are a major factor in career progression, the findings are very crucial and critical. A survey by Danielle Bossaert of the European Institute of Public Administration (2003), revealed very clearly that early promotion is perceived as an additional psychological reward, while “late promotion” or “getting stuck” can often result in anxiety, frustration and self-doubt. It is therefore recommended that work-life balance practices that make it possible for female Lecturers in particular to pursue further studies, engage in research productivity and create opportunities for career advancement will be a significant source of job satisfaction, employee retention and career development. This we believe can reduce absenteeism, increase morale and retention resulting in increased experience and higher productivity.

We found evidence of a strong positive relationship between child bearing and child care and job progression of female lecturers. Our research shows that, (72.1 per cent) agreed that childbearing and child care negatively conflict with their job progression. Studies have shown that implementation of work-life balance policies help to reduce work-life conflict, increase productivity, ability to attract, job satisfaction, staff retention and reduce absenteeism. We recommend more flexible work schedules for female lecturers to balance their work and family-life.

The availability, awareness and implementation of work-life balance policies affect business performance in many ways. Our findings confirm the findings of several studies stated in the literature that large firms are more likely to have work-life balance policies than smaller firms. Several studies also show that work-life balance policies in smaller firm tend to be informal and are negotiated by individual employees on a case to case basis. The implication is that whether a company is large or small, formal or informal, work-life balance affects the company’s bottom line. We recommend that, regardless of size and nature, institutions must demonstrate total commitment to work-life balance policies to be part of the organizational culture and strategic plans and must be communicated to the employees.
4.2 Limitation of the study

The present study has a few limitations that need to be highlighted. The study was intentionally focused on one institution and data collection was only restricted to female lecturers in one public university noted for academic and professional standards. The study also failed to take into account contextual influences. For example, researchers (Adler, 2002; Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Hofstede, 1983, 1993, 2001; Johns, 2006) have identified national culture as an important constraint in management practice. For example, it is possible that female lecturers are able to balance their work and family-life as a result of support from the extended family system. Care must be taken therefore not to over generalize the findings to other occupations in different national contexts.

5. Conclusions

The present study has highlighted the importance of work-life balance policies at the workplace. However, there are a number of questions that could be addressed by extension of this work. For example, while the business case for work-life balance is well documented, it is important to emphasize that these conclusions are context specific and care must be taken not to over generalize the benefits. There is strong evidence of the increasing number of women in the workforce. For example in 1965, Canadian workforce was 70% male; in 2005, almost half of the workforce (46%) was female (KFL and A Public Health). Globally, according to a speech delivered by the group President of the World Bank Kim Yong Kim at U.S. State Department/Gallup event on “Evidence and Impact: Closing the Gender Gap” Washington, DC, United States on the 19th of July 2012, women now make up 40% of the global workforce. The percentage of women in the workplace will continue to register a steady increase. As a result work-life balance practices must be deliberately design to become a significant part of organizations benefits programs. Reducing work-life conflict could help to create a healthier, productive and motivated workforce and help to position the organization as an employer of choice.

6. References


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