

# **FAMILY AND WORK RESPONSIBILITIES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN ACADEMICS**

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## **Abstract**

The study determined the relative weights of the different components of family and work responsibilities (giving birth, raising children, care giving, house chores, supportive or unsupportive spouse, research, teaching and administration services, etc) on the career progression of women in academic and also, identified the strategies employed in striking a balance between the family and the work place responsibilities. This was with a view to improve career progression of women academics. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population for this study consisted of female lecturers in tertiary institutions in Osun State. Two universities were purposively selected based on ownership (public and private) and year of establishment. Also, two polytechnics were purposively selected, one Federal and one State-owned. One College of Education was selected using simple random sampling technique. All the female lecturers in the selected institutions constituted the sample. A self-developed questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Family/Work Issues and Career Progression” (QFWICP) was used to collect relevant data for the study. The reliability of the QFWICP using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was 0.824. Data collected for the study were analysed using, descriptive statistics and Multiple Regression. The results showed that, family responsibility as a whole has a significant weight on women academics career progression with the constant unstandardized coefficient (Beta = 2.091, t = 24.908, p < .05). However,

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 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 (i.e. day care) and annual leave respectively are very effective in coping with family- work responsibilities effects on their academic careers. The study concluded that the career progression of women in academic is affected by the family responsibilities and thus recommend that women academics need good coping strategies to ameliorate the effect.

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## **Keywords:**

## **Introduction**

Work and family are both fundamental aspects of life in most societies. Recent research suggests that finding a balance between the two is an issue of importance to men, women and employers. The traditional view of the male as breadwinner and the female as homemaker has shifted over time, and social norms have resulted in men and women placing a high value on both work and family roles (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005). Currently in Nigeria, the vast majority of men and women now combine work and family roles.

It has been noted that family-work responsibilities is one of the issues affecting the career progression of women in academics. Women in academics most times find themselves allotting too much time and emotional energy in familial activities, while their male counterparts have more time in carrying out research. The literature on gender roles and faculty work paints a complex picture of the various ways that women are constrained into traditionally feminine roles (Myers, & Creswell, 1999; Turner, 2002). However, we know less about how these roles affect individual identity. Over some decades, organizational scholars have noted the prevalence of organizational discourses and social practices that characterize appropriate roles for men and women. These roles include nurturing, caretaking, and exhibiting additional interest in the emotional health of students and fellow faculty members. Tierney and Bensimon (1996), observed that women in academics perceive that their role is to perform domestic work, exhibiting a compassionate and nurturing behavior and also try as much as possible to

avoid conflict. Women in academics usually perform the glue work of the academic department by participating at greater rates than their male counterparts in service activities that often keep departments and universities functioning.

Women are often signaled early in their careers that traditional male traits are expected in senior administrative roles and that promotion depends on their ability to act like men. Similarly, several researchers have noted that women faculty members feel obligated to advise a disproportionate share of students, conduct research that addresses gender relations, and perform “emotional work” that provides emotional support to colleagues and students, thus reinforcing traditional feminine roles (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Bird, Litt, & Wang, 2004). Although the emotional work “is necessary and beneficial to educational institutions” (Knights & Richards, 2003), women do not find it beneficial to their careers. In fact, when women satisfy all the various responsibilities expected of them, including caring for others and being “good” faculty citizens, they acknowledge that the reward system does not value all of the caring and citizenship roles they carry out, leaving them to feel unfulfilled (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996).

Gary Becker (1991) has argued that the resources needed to meet professional responsibilities conflict directly with those needed for home duties. And more recent research confirms that this conflict extends to academics (Gatta and Roos 2002). Also in a study carried out by Suitor, Mecom, and Feld (2001), it was observed that female professors spend considerably more time on domestic chores than their male counterparts. Onakala and Onah (1998), stated that all over the world, the university has remained the domain of men unless women’s perspectives are infused into both the structures and process of university life comparatively, also that only very small percentage of women have acquired the level of education that is necessary for the attainment of purely academic positions in the universities. In addition to this, Valian, 1998; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Perna (2000), noted that the university system in most African countries reflect an imbalance with regard to the percentage of female students and staff in the university, and that women continue to be underrepresented in the upper ranks of faculty and administration. As more women enter the academic profession, there is an increasing need to understand the personal and institutional barriers, challenges, and triumphs that women faculty face as they strive to balance work and family.

Although, increasing number of women are employed as academic and academic administrative staff in Nigerian Universities in recent years, there has not been any comprehensive study of the gender distribution of academic staff and those in senior administrative positions (Onakala, 1998). Researchers have looked into various reasons for women's under-representation at senior levels of the academic workforce. A study carried out by Probert, (2004), found that there has been too little analysis of the impact of family and caring responsibilities on women. Also according to him, research has also established that career progression of women in academics is relatively slow compared with their male counterparts. Primary Data from Obafemi Awolowo University Budgeting and Planning Unit (2009), shows that there is a large disparity between the number of female academics in senior ranks compared to that of their male counterparts. Arising from this, it could be deduced that family-work responsibilities are often times contributing factors to these problems, however the relative contributions of the components of family-work responsibilities to career progression of women in academics has not been established.

Often times, the responsibilities and expectations of the work place often compete with those of the home for most career women. According to Bett 1999, large numbers of women are training for academic positions, but a large gender gap in professional success remains. A key point to note is that academic jobs are very demanding and it also requires a lot of time. From my interaction with some academics, they often complain that the demands of their jobs never end and that meeting up with their family responsibilities is also a challenge too. These conflicts could have various effects in the life of a career woman, such as having to give up family for career or career for family as the case may be. While some in attempt to balance the two experience a delay in their career progression or delay in childbearing, and in some cases this women do not derive satisfaction from both spheres of life (happiness, productivity and mental health). This conflict continues to affect the number of women in the professional jobs which includes the academic profession.

According to Ogbogu (2010), Women in the university labour force are not as productive as their male counterparts due to certain attributes and roles associated with their gender. She indicated that female academics lag behind their male counterparts in paper publication and are hardly visible at the top of the university career ladder where decisions that affect them are

taken. It has also been established that family-work responsibilities affects the career progression of women generally. It is important to note that this responsibilities are made of different components such as childrearing, caregiving, house chores, teaching, administrative assignments, supervision, etc. therefore it is necessary to examine the extent to which this responsibilities affect the career progression of women in academics. For example, a job that requires long hours or excessive travel, an unsupportive partner, inequities in the division of housework and child care, significant health problems in family members, or changing child care arrangements can have a negative impact on an individual's work and also inflexible work hours, an overbearing supervisor, or a less-than-positive work environment can have a negative impact on an individual's work and also one's family life. In view of this, there is need to empirically establish the relative weight of the components of family-work responsibilities on the career progression of women in academics. The main purpose of this study is to ascertain to what extent the various components of family-work responsibilities affect the career progression of women in academics. Specifically, the study is to:

1. determine the relative weights of the different components of family and work responsibilities (giving birth, raising children, care giving, house chores, supportive or unsupportive spouse, research, teaching and administration services, etc) on the career progression of women in academics;
2. identify the strategies employed in striking a balance between the family and the work place responsibilities

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relative weight of family responsibility components (child bearing, raising children, care giving, house chores and family engagement/obligations) that affect the career progression of women academics?
2. What strategies do women adopt and how effective are the strategies in striking a balance between family and work place responsibilities?

### **Method**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examined the extent to which the family-work responsibilities affects the career progression of women in academics in selected tertiary institutions in Osun

State. The design was considered appropriate because it involved the description of a given state of affair as fully and as carefully as possible. The population for this study consists of female lecturers in tertiary institutions in Osun State. There are eleven recognized and approved tertiary institutions in Osun State, comprising five universities, four polytechnics, and two colleges of education. Two universities were purposively selected based on ownership (public and private) and year of establishment. Also, two polytechnics were purposively selected, one Federal and one State-owned. One College of Education was selected using simple random sampling technique. All the female lecturers in the selected institutions constituted the sample.

An instrument titled “Questionnaire on Family/Work Issues and Career Progression” (QFWICP) was self-developed for the study. The QFWICP is made of three sections. Section A contains demographic data and information on career progression of respondents. Section B elicited information on the components of family and work responsibilities in their capacity to slow down or constrain the pace at which respondents progress in their academic career using five-point Likert rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and neither disagree nor agree, which was scored 4,3,2,1 and 0 respectively. The minimum and maximum expected score is five and twenty respectively. By the procedure, the higher the score of an individual the higher the effect of family/work responsibilities on the career progression of the woman academic. For the purpose of this study strongly agree is interpreted to mean strong effect while agree is interpreted to mean slight effect and strongly disagree/disagree are interpreted to mean no effect. Section C deals with the coping strategies employed by respondents in handling family and work responsibilities, and the perceived effectiveness of such strategies using a five-point Likert scale of very effective, effective, fairly effective, not effective and not applicable which was scored 4,3,2,1, and 0 respectively. In order to validate the instrument, it was distributed to 30 female academic for appropriateness of items and for any ambiguity in items in order to have assurances of validity. Consequently the data were subjected to factor analysis. The value of the determinant of the correlation matrix generated for section B is given as 0.001 and 0.0035 for Section C. Both values are greater than the 0.00001 recommended by Fields (2005) beyond which Multicollinearity can be said to set in and in which factorial validity will no longer be suitable for the data. Also, a look at the correlation coefficients did not show any item possessing particularly

very large value (0.95 and above), hence, there is no need to consider eliminating any of the items at this stage. For factor extraction and starting with the original data matrix and using multiple correlation as the estimates of communalities, principal factor were extracted after interacting of communalities. Each factor with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 was retained for rotation. The procedure yielded three factors for each of Sections B and C. The Cronbach's Alpha was obtained from the SPSS 16 software and the test retest validity was obtained by determining the Pearson Moment correlation coefficient between the two values obtained from respondents in a repeated administration over a period of four weeks. The reliability of the final instrument using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was 0.824 for section B and 0.947 for section C. Data collected for the study were analysed using, frequency count, simple percentage and multiple regression.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What is the relative weight of family responsibility components (child bearing, raising children, care giving, house chores and family engagement/obligations) that affect the career progression of women academics?

To answer this question the relative weight of each of the component of family responsibility on career progression of women academics was determined by categorising the women responses into strong effect, slight effect and no effect. These categories of responses were then cross-tabulated with the components. The result is as presented on Table 1.

**Table 1: The effect of family responsibility components on career progression of women academic**

Family Responsibilities Components	Effect on Women Academic Career Progression				Total
	Strong effect	Slight Effect	No Effect	Not Applicable	
Child bearing (Pregnancy to child birth)	95(45.7%)	56(26.9%)	20(9.6%)	37(17.8%)	208(100.0%)
Raising Children	62(29.8%)	66(31.7%)	43(20.7%)	37(17.8%)	208(100.0%)
Care giving (of aged, the sick, dependants and others)	91(43.8%)	39(18.8%)	78(37.5%)	0(.0%)	208(100.0%)
House chores	78(37.5%)	65(31.3%)	65(31.3%)	0(.0%)	208(100.0%)
Family engagement/obligations	65(31.3%)	91(43.8%)	52(25.0%)	0(.0%)	208(100.0%)

From Table 1, it could be observed that ninety five (45.7%) of the respondents indicated that child bearing has strong effect on their career progression while 26.9% indicated has slight effect on their career progression. It could also be seen in the Table that while 43.8% reported that care giving has strong effect on their career progression, 37.5% indicated that house chores have strong effect on their career progression. In addition 37 of the women academics involved in the study who are likely to be single reported that child bearing as well as care giving is not applicable to them.

A further analysis was carried out to determine the strength of each of the components weight on career progression through the use of multiple regressions. In doing this participants scores on each of the family responsibilities component were used as independent variables while a score was also generated for every individual participant on career progression. To generate career progression score participants' present rank were awarded with points that ranged between three and eighteen from assistant/lecture III to professor/chief lecturer respectively. The number of years it takes each participant to get to her present rank was then used to divide obtained points on present rank. Whatever is obtained is used as career progression point that is used as dependent variable in the multiple regressions.

Table 2 present the result of multiple regressions.

**Table 2: Multiple Regression Table showing the Weight of Family Responsibility Components on Women Academic Career Progression**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	2.091	.084		24.908	.000	1.926	2.257
Child bearing	-.146	.028	-.406	-5.283	.000	-.201	-.092
Raising children	-.017	.021	-.043	-.791	.430	-.058	.025
Care giving	-.101	.025	-.268	-3.986	.000	-.151	-.051
House chores	-.069	.024	-.195	-2.846	.005	-.117	-.021
Family engagement/obligation	-.015	.020	-.035	-.751	.454	-.056	.025

It could be observed in Table 2 that, family responsibility as a whole has a significant weight on women academics career progression with the constant unstandardized coefficient (Beta = 2.091, t = 24.908, p < .05).



However, 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 significant predictors of women academic progression. That is the weight of these three family responsibility components on career progression of female academics is significant. Raising children and family engagement/obligation even though they have their own contribution on the career progression of women academics the weight of their contribution on career progression of women academics is not significant.

**Research Question 2:** What strategies do women adopt and how effective are the strategies in striking a balance between family and work place responsibilities?

To answer this question participant response to section C of QFWICP was categorise into two, coping strategies and coping strategies effectiveness. The two categories were then cross-tabulated to determine participant perceived effectiveness of the coping strategies. Table 3 presents the result of the analysis.

**Table 3: Coping Strategies adopted by Women Academics and the perceived Effectiveness of each strategy.**

Coping Mechanism	Coping Mechanism Effectiveness					Total
	Very Effective	Effective	Fairly Effective	Not Effective	Not Applicable	
Maternity Leave	63(30.3%)	61(26.3%)	0	42(20.2%)	42(20.2%)	208
Active support from spouse/partner in carrying out household chore	21(10.1%)	167(80.3%)	20(9.6%)	0	0	208
Active support from spouse/partner when there is need to stay late at work, travel for conference e.t.c.	104(50.0%)	41(19.7%)	21(10.1%)	42(20.2%)	0	208
Support from extended family members	41(19.7%)	83(39.9%)	42(20.2%)	0	42(20.2%)	208
Support from junior academic colleagues in carrying out official assignments	21(10.1%)	42(20.2%)	42(20.2%)	0	103(49.5%)	208
Support from senior academic colleagues in carrying out official assignments.	0	42(20.2%)	21(10.1%)	0	145(69.7%)	208
Staying away from work	0	21(10.1%)	0	0	187(89.9%)	208
Resuming work and closing at convenient times when you feel the workload is mush	62(29.8%)	62(29.8%)	63(30.3%)	21(10.1%)	0	208

Annual leave	83(39.9%)	62(29.8%)	0	0	63(30.3%)	208
Securing outside help such as house help/house keeper	83(39.9%)	21(10.1%)	41(19.7%)	63(30.3%)	0	208
Hiring tutors for children	42(20.2%)	62(29.8%)	62(29.8%)	21(10.1%)	21(10.1%)	208
Securing the help of health care professional for sick children or dependents	21(10.1%)	83(39.9%)	41(19.7%)	0	63(30.3%)	208
Making use of childcare centres close to your workplace(i.e. day care)	83(39.9%)	83(39.9%)	21(10.1%)	0	21(10.1%)	208
Sharing of household chores among/between the children	62(29.8%)	21(10.1%)	63(30.3%)	21(10.1%)	41(19.7%)	208
Obtaining goods and services through the help housekeepers	20(9.6%)	84(40.4%)	83(39.9%)	0	21(10.1%)	208

Table 3 shows the perceived effectiveness of the coping strategies as reported by the women academics. From the Table it could be observed that 104 (50%) of the women academic reported that Active support from spouse/partner when there is need to stay late at work, travel for conference etc. is very effective in coping with family- work responsibilities effects on their academic careers. A total of 83(39.9%) of the women reported that “Making use of childcare centres close to your workplace (i.e. day care)\* is very effective and effective. This makes the strategy the second best of the strategies women employed to neutralise the effect of family-work responsibilities on women academic career progression. It could also be observed in the Table that 39.9% and 29.8% respectively considered going on “annual leave” as very effective and effective, making it the third best method reported by women academics as a means of coping with the effect of family-work responsibilities career progression. It also reported by 33.3% of the women academics used in this study that “Securing outside help such as house help/house keeper” is not an effective way of coping with the effect of family-work responsibilities on academic career progression.

## Discussion

Generally, it can be deduced from the findings of the study that the components of family responsibilities (child bearing, raising children, care giving, house chores, family engagement/obligation) has effect on the career progression of women in academics. Result from the analysis of the data indicated that the extent to which these responsibilities affect the career

progression of women in academics varies. Majority of the women in this study indicated that child bearing which is the period between pregnancy and childbirth is the family responsibility that strongly affects their career progression, followed by care giving, house chores, family engagements/obligations and raising children respectively.

According to Leonard and Malina (1994), women's lives as mothers remain invisible in the academic milieu. Considering the fact that women are traditionally known to be mothers, homemakers, caregivers, and also performing other nurturing roles, it could indeed be difficult combining these roles and an academic career. Jacobs and Winslow (2004) found out in their study that female faculty often delay having children as long as possible in order to meet tenure demands. Also, Cooney and Uhlenberg, (1989) in their study compared female faculty to women in other professions (i.e., medicine and law) and the result showed that female faculty are less likely to have children than women in these professions. This could probably explain the reason why majority of the women in this study indicated that childbearing strongly affects their career progression.

Care giving is another responsibility that these women believe has a strong effect on their career progression, the care for dependants such as aged parents, the care of any member of the family (immediate or extended), with any health challenge etc. To buttress the findings of this study, many studies have shown that women have less time to devote to their careers than men because of domestic and care giving responsibilities (Hochschild 1989; Press and Townsley 1998; Robinson 1988; Shelton and John 1996). Employed women are more likely than employed men to take time off work to care for sick children or elderly relatives (Pyle & Pelletier, 2003). Tower and Alkadry (2008), noted in their study that these trends leave women at a disadvantage where they have to do more to demonstrate their leadership abilities at work, while maintaining their gendered roles within their families. Women may suffer a setback at home (e.g., divorce), work (e.g., delayed upward mobility), or in both places. A setback indicates that a "balance" within the current norms of home and employment is more difficult to achieve for women than for men. This could be responsible for the response of 37 of the women academics involved in the study who are likely to be single reported that child bearing as well as care giving is not applicable to them. Probably they have premonitions of the cost of both responsibilities on their career progression. This agrees with Frazier (1996), who opined that

individuals may delay marriage because of barriers imposed by other activities in their life, such as the perception of an inability to do both work and family at the same time.

When it comes to raising children most of the women feels it slightly affects their career progression, some indicated that it has a strong effect and few indicated that it has no effect while minority said it is not applicable. Also, studies comparing female faculty to women in other professions (i.e., medicine and law) show that female faculty are less likely to have children than are women in these professions ( Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1989). The above research does not conclusively answer whether the comparative lack of female faculty with children results from institutional expectations and environment or whether it is a personal choice of those who enter the academic career. In other words, it can be inferred that child bearing and raising children for some women could impact on their carrier progression. Oili-Helen & Hans (2003), described the present pace of academic work as something that is often suitable only for those who do not have young children.

Various studies examine the relationship between academic careers and family life and conclude that childrearing serves as a holdup to the career progression of women academics. Finkel and Olswang (1996) find that women assistant professors identify the time needed to care for young children as significantly detrimental to achieving tenure. Davis and Astin (1990), in their survey including both female and male faculty, discover that only women identify family commitments as obstacles to publication productivity. Not surprisingly, women academics report that they devote more time to child care and household duties and that they have less time for research, teaching, and leisure than their male colleagues (Duxbury, Heslop, & Marshall. 1993).

Women professors are more likely than their male counterparts to believe they experience work overload (Duxbury *et al.*, 1993; Acker & Feuerverger, 1996), and pre-tenure women academics have more difficulty than men in balancing work and family activities while adjusting to academic life (Sorcinelli & Billings, 1993). McElrath (1992) describes how some women academics subordinate their professional careers to those of their partner by accepting part-time research or teaching positions, and/or by interrupting their careers, both actions that reduce their probability of

obtaining tenure. The primary reason women professors subordinate their careers is to assume childrearing responsibilities.

McElrath (1992) points out that when a woman interrupts her academic career the likelihood of acquiring tenure decreases and the time-span to tenure increases. She hypothesizes that work interruptions serve as indications to tenure committee members that the woman is not serious about her career and that she may continue to interrupt her work in the future. This fact presents special challenges for women because the career-building years in which extensive commitment is critical to career progress generally overlap with the high-demand years of family formation, resulting in an overwhelming load of work and family demands that inhibits women's ability to live up to organizational career norms (Bailyn, 2004).

Having children tends to negatively affect women's careers, whereas children may even benefit men's careers (Miree & Frieze, 1999), caring for this children could lead to women leaving the workforce, or child bearing may have delayed them from getting to the top as opined by Paull, (2006). Results suggested that majority of the women believed that research and teaching strongly affects their career progression, while some opined that it has slight effect and a few others indicated that it has no effect on their career progression. On the contrary one would have thought that supervision of students project will have a strong effect on the career progression of women in academics, considering the fact that it could be time consuming and it could take part of the time that should be used in carrying out research which will enhance the career progression of this women than supervision of projects which isn't mainly a criteria for academic career progression, the results shows that many of them indicated that it has slight effect on their career progression.

The coping strategies and their perceived effectiveness as reported by the women academics revealed that a significant number of the women academic agreed that active support from spouse/partner when there is need to stay late at work, travel for conference etc. is very effective in reducing the effects of family- work responsibilities on their career progression. Ordinarily it is assumed that most men find it difficult to release their wives to be away from home for about three days, and some due to lack of trust, while some cannot simply cope with keeping the home going (care for the children, house chores and care giving responsibilities) when there is need for their wives to be out of town on matters that could enhance their career

progression. Surprisingly, from the results an impressive number of the women also indicated they find the active support of their spouse/partner in carrying out household chores effective. This study has therefore revealed that majority of the participants find the support of their spouse/partner very effective in coping with work and family issues.

Also, a significant number of the women reported that “Making use of childcare centres close to your workplace (i.e. day care)” is very effective. This makes the strategy the second best out of the strategies women academics employed to neutralise the effect of family-work responsibilities on their career progression. It could also be observed from the result that going on “annual leave” was considered as very effective, making it the third best method reported by women academics as a means of coping with the effect of family-work responsibilities career progression. But one would wonder why quite a number of the women indicated that going on annual leave is not effective. It was also reported by the women academics used in this study that “Securing outside help such as house help/house keeper” is not an effective way of coping with the effect of family-work responsibilities on academic career progression. Also sharing of household chores which ordinarily one would expect to be very effective was revealed to be fairly effective.

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