

The Impact of COVID-19 on Work-Life Balance of Working Mothers: Evidence from Nigerian Academics

Abstract

Purpose – Given the limiting gender role conditions arising from patriarchy in Nigeria and the shift to staying at home stemming from the deadly spread of COVID-19, this paper explores the impact of the pandemic on work-life balance (WLB) of professional mothers using the work-home resources (W-HR) model as a conceptual lens.

Design/methodology/approach – The qualitative data is based on telephone interviews with 28 married university female academics with children.

Findings – Our findings revealed that the confinement policies enforced in combating the spread of COVID-19 and patriarchal norms deeply embedded in the Nigerian culture exacerbates stress with women continuing to perform significantly more housework and childcare demands alongside working remotely. Specifically, the thematic analysis showed the loss of personal resources (e.g. time, energies, income) resulting into career stagnation, health concerns and male chauvinism arising from the abrupt and drastic changes shaping the ‘new normal’ lifestyle.

Research limitations/implications – The study relies on a limited qualitative sample size, which makes the generalisation of findings tentative. However, the study contributes to emerging global discourse on the profound negative consequences of COVID-19 on lives and livelihoods of millions with a focus on stress and work-family challenges confronting women in a society that is not particularly egalitarian like western cultures.

Originality/value – The paper provides valuable insights on how the global virus pandemic is dramatically affecting professional working mothers from a Sub-Saharan African context where literature is scarce.

Introduction

The first documented outbreak of the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) on humans was reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December, 2019 (Chen and Li, 2020). As at the time this paper was completed and submitted for potential publication to Personnel Review on the 24th of August, 2020, more than 23 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported across over 195 countries and territories resulting in more than 800, 000 fatalities mostly recorded in Europe, North America and Latin America (John Hopkins University coronavirus resource centre, 2020). The deadly disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome primarily spreads during close contact between persons while the world is battling to find a cure or herd of immunity against the highly contagious virus (World Health Organisation, 2020). Multiple preventive measures such as social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions have led to a reduced workforce and caused many job losses across the world as well as widespread chain supply shortages exacerbated by panic buying (Nicola et al., 2020). Schools, colleges and universities were closed either on nationwide or local basis in almost 195 countries, affecting approximately 97.5 percent of the world's student population (Elliot, 2020). Consequently, COVID-19 is adversely affecting WLB of millions and those in the educational sector are no exception.

For university academics, the compulsory ‘stay at home’ policies enforced by many nations have implied a drastic change to working from home leading to an unprecedented transition from the traditional face-to-face, classroom learning to online education (Bao, 2020). Thus, Nash and Churchill (2020) reported emerging evidence from global media suggesting that female academics with caring responsibilities are severely affected as they struggle to work remotely as well as fulfil their mandatory role as primary caregivers. Focusing on Africa, the escalating number of deaths from the spike of COVID-19 in Nigeria also forced the shutting down of all higher education institutions and switching focus to online teaching. While Nigerian university lecturers are grappling with serious economic meltdown due to the pandemic spread, it is worth exploring how working mothers in academia are being disproportionately affected as a result of the masculine hegemony shaping gender roles in Nigeria which is an area where literature is scarce (Akanji et al., 2020). According to Adisa and Isaika, (2019, p. 21), patriarchy is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women in all sphere of life and perpetuates gender inequality, sexism and feminine subordination.

For female academics who are mothers, it becomes a herculean task trying to make it through daily work and family life during COVID-19 especially in Nigeria with a less egalitarian, and collectivistic tradition (Mushiqur et al., 2018). With a population of almost 200 million spread across over 250 ethnic groups (Worldometrics, 2020), the nation accentuates a socio-cultural system that accepts high power distance (Hofstede, 1980) idealising expectations of unquestionable obedience and submission towards superiors (especially men) with acclaimed status and authority (Adisa et al., 2020). Furthermore, the existence of gender stereotypes and marginalisation of female voices based on age-long glass ceiling ideologies is a major hindrance to career development and WLB of professional women (Akanji et al., 2019). Nash and Churchill, (2020) argues that the global pandemic poses challenges to Australian female academics struggling with baby care or home-schooling for their toddlers and at the same time expected to actively engage in research publication, online teaching and other ancillary academic functions with the same tempo and rigour at home. These experiences potentially leads to burnout since personal resources (e.g. time, energy, emotions) are strained in the process of juggling both work and family affairs. While much research has been undertaken on WLB challenges confronting career women in western countries (Beham et al., 2012), similar studies from an Africa context remains at embryonic stages. In particular, little is known from developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Nigeria where cultural orientations differ from more egalitarian, individualistic western cultures.

Therefore, this article is a rudimentary effort to fill this gap in response to calls for context-specific studies focusing on Africa in order to extend knowledge and broaden our understanding of patriarchal proclivities and WLB issues facing Nigerian female academics working remotely and caring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on contributing to contemporary debates on stress, professional women, work and family experiences during the period of the lockdown and specifically using (W-HR) theory as an explanatory model, this study hopes to answer from a non-western perspective the following: what is the impact of the pandemic on WLB of mothers in academia who live in a patriarchal society?

In answering this research question, the rest of the paper is structured as follows: a brief theoretical background on understanding WLB and the (W-HR) model are examined. Thereafter, the methodology adopted in collecting and analysing is presented, along with the

study's findings and discussion. The paper concludes by explaining the study's research, theoretical and practical implications. The study limitations and areas for future research are also presented.

Understanding WLB and the (W-HR) model

Much of academic research and policy debates, on WLB has, in the main, focused on the imperative need for the working class (especially women) to improve the quality of their work-life aspirations and how employers might implement family-friendly policies to foster it (Kelliher et al., 2018). More importantly, organisational interventions such as flexible work arrangements are proffered as incentives to engender work-life enrichment, facilitation and positive spillovers (Haar, 2013). Greenhaus et al., (2003, p. 513) argues that achieving WLB is “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role”. Although WLB is widely assumed to be a matter of individual choice and circumstances, but realities of work-life intensity today is making employees strenuously trying to juggle their work, family and personal lives suitably (Morris et al., 2011). Stress and work-life conflicts are attendant consequences when this occurs. Often, work-life and occupational stress researchers have heavily relied on the role theory (Kahn et al., 1964) to elucidate how conflict within roles result into undesirable state. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) asserts that the struggles to attain a balance may result into a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are incompatible. In recent times for instance, participation at work, with organisational researchers primarily focusing on traditional working arrangements – complying with standard working time and physical presence at work is making it difficult for adequate involvement in home affairs as organisations now push for almost round-the-clock working hours resulting into role overload.

From this perspective, extant occupational stress and work-life scholarship have given considerable attention to scrutinising work stressors (e.g. role ambiguity, role conflict, roles involving working long hours) – aspects of the work environment that can potentially harm job attitude (e.g. work commitment) and overall life satisfaction of employees (Bowling et al., 2017). Given this context however, we argued that the role theory irrespective of its importance, has, in the main adopted a restricted focus on office or workplace experiences with less attention to recent development in ‘life worlds’ and the changing mode of employment places and non-work spaces (Kelliher et al., 2018). This argument is particularly relevant during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic which have made work and non-work domains become entwined like never before as millions of working adults have compulsorily transitioned to working from home in compliance with confinement policies (Corbera et al., 2020). Accordingly, Sinclair et al., (2020, p. 3) argues that struggles in harmonising work and family roles arising from employee work role commonly enacted at organisational locations during specific office hours (Monday-Friday) conflicting with family roles expected to physically happen at home during evenings and weekends are fast disappearing as the pandemic is now making people to work from their kitchen tables, sitting rooms and other altered home-office spaces.

As such, the overwhelming evidence of how ‘work’ occurring as a distinct sphere and distracting family matters has triggered critics to recommend a rethink of popular notions surrounding the social concept of WLB (Eikhof et al., 2007). In re-evaluating work-life research, critics have argued that WLB often re-echoes narratives based on how working time

and environment is ruining personal and caring needs at home (Özbilgin et al., 2010). This conception is however, becoming irrelevant especially during the global pandemic as the world is grappling with a ‘new normal lifestyle’ – of how work has become home and home becoming work (Hochschild, 1997) with heavy reliance on information and communication technology. In keeping work-life research more aligned with contemporary social trends before the pandemic, Grawitch and Barber (2010), using the conservation of resource (COR) framework, re-conceptualised WLB to focus on ways people try to manage diverse personal pursuits and expend their finite personal resources (e.g. time, money, emotions, and energy) in reconciling the increasing multiplicity of life’s demands whether it is required (work) or preferred (i.e. family and private life affairs). Thus, the COR known as a prominent stress theory conceptualised by (Hobfoll, 1989), offers explanations of how people regardless of their environment, attempt to acquire, retain and conserve resources. On the contrary, stress may occur at the risk of losing, or actual loss of such resources (Hobfoll, 2001). This is because people bring considerable amount of resources to their daily lives and seek to achieve spiral gains, through desires for resources to positively accumulate. On the contrary, people often experience repeated demands on these resources as they choose when, where and how to allocate them due to their definable limits (Hobfoll, 2011). Despite the deep conceptual insights into the general loss-gain dynamics described by the COR theory, ten Brummehuis and Bakker, (2012), provided a richer concept – the work-home resources (W-HR) model which builds on the COR theory to integrally explain the interplay between demands and resources experienced in peoples’ work and private life domains.

At the heart of the (W-HR) model lies the assumption that conflict becomes inevitable when contextual demands, either from work or family domains deplete contextual resources and/or personal resources, which then results into diminished outcomes in either or both domains (ten Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012). In more explicit details are major highlights of the (W-HR) are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Constructs	Subtypes	Examples
Contextual demands	Overload Physical Emotional Cognitive	Working overtime, many household chores, urgent care tasks Lifting weights, childcare, elderly care Dealing with work stress, conflicts at home, disappointments Writing a report, multitasking, coordination of household
Contextual resources	Social support Autonomy Feedback Development opportunities	Managerial support, respect from friends, help from co-workers Control over work, planning leisure time, allocating home tasks Supervisor evaluation, open communication at home New work tasks, attending courses, participating in sports, hobbies
Personal resources	Physical Psychological Affective Intellectual Capital	Physical energy, health, vigour, sleep, strength Optimism, self-efficacy, mental resilience, focus Fulfilment, mood, empathy, gratefulness Perspectives, skill, knowledge, experience, competence Time, money
Outcomes	Production Behavioural Attitudinal	Meeting deadlines, completing tasks, quality care tasks Absenteeism, turnover, availability at home, family protection Commitment, satisfaction, wellbeing, relationship quality

Source: Adopted from ten Brummehuis and Bakker, (2012)

From the constructs in the tabular content, contextual demands either from work or family domain ranges from quantitative demands (i.e. overload) to cognitive demands with specific examples of each subtype. On the contrary, contextual resources (see subtypes) are conventionally located outside oneself and may be found within the social context of the

individual to serve as buffers against the exacerbating effects of contextual demands (see examples). In addition, personal resources are those illustrated in the subtypes with some examples therein. According to the (W-HR) model, these personal resources are often proximate to oneself and functional in achieving work goals and family demands. In sum, the adverse or enriching consequences of combining these dual roles have been demonstrated to lead to certain outcomes that are also exemplified in Table 1. ten Brummehuis and Bakker (2012) further argues that macro features, such as cultural values and economic prosperity of a country can potentially influence the intensity of work-life conflict or enrichment that may likely occur. For instance, Mushfiqur et al., (2018) found that professional women such as female medical doctors experiencing excessive working hours, inflexible shifts, coupled with the limiting conditions of gender role expectations especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroun where there are high unemployment rates and pronounced culture of masculine hegemony often leads to stressful outcomes as a result of personal resources (see Table 1) been lost in the process of trying to integrate work and family life. A typical patriarchal society, such as Nigeria, tends to idealise a high power distance index which is a cultural dimension that endorses uneven distribution of power, authority and status symbols among members (Hofstede, 1980).

Similar to the African region, the history of patriarchy and its challenging impact on feminism is also dominant in some Asian countries, e.g. Hong Kong, Qatar, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and China, where professional women irrespective of their knowledge-based economy careers such as academia, medicine, ICT and Engineering are culturally mandated to prioritise caregiving responsibilities (Abalkhail, 2017; Matsui et al., 2019). This is found to be in conformity with the high power distance values that sets men (i.e. husbands) as head of the home who hold absolute authority over women, children and property in these nations (Salem and Yount, 2019). As a result of the pandemic lockdown, resource depletion (e.g. time, energy) may affect working mothers more than fathers as extensive body of research has consistently portrayed women as primary caregivers spending more time on familial responsibilities regardless of their occupational demands (Shockley and Shen, 2016). These caregiving duties are more pronounced in developing countries such as Nigeria where employment relations are organised based on gender role norms (Adisa et al., 2019). While depletion of psychological and physical resources (see Table 1) arising from tensions between both domains competing for attention appears universal, the cultural context plays an integral role in understanding the nature of work-life imbalances confronting women. As earlier discussed, patriarchy is a value system that imposes male dominance over women and subjecting them to all unpaid care duties. Therefore, patriarchal norms, which is prevalent in Africa (such as Nigeria) have implications on WLB of working mothers. To the best of our knowledge, there remains paucity of research on the effects of patriarchy on WLB of Nigerian female academics as the fear and threat of the global COVID-19 pandemic soars. The aim of this paper is to fill this research gap using the (W-HR) model as a theoretical framework to explain our findings.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method of enquiry, drawing on social constructionism which epistemologically emphasises discovering rich contextual data from people's lived experiences (Cresswell, 2013). This design was deemed appropriate because it provides a framework for developing in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon under-study and leads to the discovery of taken-for-granted assumptions from detailed narratives (Easterby-Smith et al.,

2012). Drawing on this naturalistic paradigm, telephone interviews were conducted with 28 female lecturers drawn from seven private Nigerian universities. Qualitative interviews are traditionally better when conducted on a face-to-face basis which is often seen as necessary for strong rapport building and imperative for gathering rich qualitative data (Farooq and De Villiers, 2017). However, the lockdown policies enforced by the Nigerian government made it difficult to conduct one-to-one contact interviews. There are reported biases against telephone interviewing to include the lack of avenue to observe facial expressions, body language and nonverbal cues considered as integral parts of the communication process during face-to-face interviewing (Irvine et al., 2012). However, we could discern that telephoning made our participants feel more relaxed and comfortable to disclose sensitive information knowing fully well that the confinement policies warranted the choice of this conversation style. Moreover, the method allowed us to reach a wider geographically dispersed informants (Novick, 2008). Nonetheless, all the participants were from commercial cities in the south-west region of Nigeria (e.g. Ogun, Oyo, Lagos and Osun States) with similar cultural heritage identified with the Yoruba tribe.

Purposive sampling was selected on the assumption that qualitative researchers should have reasonable knowledge of the sample size to be used and target those samples sought (Patton, 2015). Thus, key informants were solicited through personal contacts, and referrals, using a snowballing approach (Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, each participant's eligibility was based on length of time working with their current employers (a minimum of three years), age (between 25-65 years old), and marital status (married with dependent children). Other demographic features included participants' religion, type of university and employment status comprising of tenure track (i.e. full-time employments or non-tenure track made-up of those on renewable yearly contract of employment). In order to fulfil our promise of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to represent the interviewees who were labelled (Participant 1-28) for the purpose of this study (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here

Before the main interviews, pre-interview phone calls were held to briefly build rapport, create interest and negotiate a convenient time for call backs. Subsequently, each semi-structured telephone interviews lasted for 30-40 minutes. During dialogue with one of the researchers who was solely responsible for the data collection process, background noise of children crying, screaming, playing and distracting their mothers were heard which confirmed challenges confronting female academics before questioning them. However, the participants were determined to forge ahead with interviews despite underlying disturbances. The interview style, based on open-ended questions, allowed for flexibility in discussions and exploration of individual perception of patriarchy and WLB experiences during the pandemic. Representative of the questions asked are: 1. from your personal experience, what do you understand as work-life balance? 2. Are you currently experiencing work-life balance as a female academic? 3. If you're not experiencing work-life balance, can you tell me why in more detail? 4. Can you please briefly share your experiences about the impact of patriarchy on your daily life especially during this period of lockdown? The entire telephone interviews were recorded during conversations with consent. Notes were also taken during the process. After 23 interviews, it was felt that the 'saturation point' had been reached because no further information was added that enhanced the findings from the study (Bowen, 2008). To confirm

this position, a further five interviews were undertaken but they merely corroborated existing themes.

Data analysis

Upon completion of collecting all material data, the digital recordings were electronically distributed to researchers for thorough transcription. Thereafter, a thematic analysis procedure (TAP) was used to analyse the transcribed recordings. TAP is a qualitative design employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage, the researchers collectively started a meticulous data reduction process through open coding that involves identifying key points in the transcribed interviews relevant to the research inquiry and thereby creating a word or phrase that significantly assigns a salient, summative, and essence-capturing feature directly addressing our research question (Cresswell, 2013). Thereafter, cognate codes were identified and appropriately amalgamated to create conceptual categories which made the first-order codes more compact and representational of similar underlying ideas. We did not impose codes a priori but rather remained open minded to emerging categories (Patton, 2015). Finally, the main categories were refined and further consolidated in a bid to generate theoretical explanations of the phenomenon under study. In doing this, we continued cross-comparisons of all material codes and intense interrogation of our conceptual categories during our debriefing sessions until we reached a compromise on what should constitute the main theoretical claims (i.e. themes) grounded in the data (Miles et al., 2014) on the impact that COVID-19 is having on work-life balance of female academics living in a patriarchal society.

Findings and discussion

In-depth analysis of the main themes emerging as responses to the research question are as follows:

Career stagnation

There were strong beliefs among participants that the pervasive nature of the COVID-19 is making academic job more demanding in terms of efforts as well as time dedicated to remote working and meeting caring obligations simultaneously. Although all participants generally conceived WLB as the ability to balance work with family commitments, many grumbled about how the confinement policies is creating less accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes. On accounts of how WLB is defined, the following quotations typify shared views:

For me, WLB means ability to have sufficient time to meet my work demands as a lecturer and enough time for parenthood and leisure. However, mothering and at the same time working long hours from home has not been easy for me during the pandemic (Participant 1)

My understanding of WLB is achieving desirable involvement and commitment to my work as an academic as well as other private life matters such as my role as a wife, mother and carer to my husband's elderly mother living with us but I'm struggling with working from home (Participant 2)

I think WLB is ensuring I gain some level of fulfilment from work as a senior lecturer aspiring to become a Professor some day and also enjoy my family life which is not only restricted to motherhood but also attending social functions such naming ceremonies, weddings and other important family occasions. The fear of coronavirus and movement restrictions is making my career and daily family routine very difficult (Participant 16).

The preceding excerpts suggests WLB to mean giving time, involvement and satisfactory attention to work, parenting, leisure as well as being able to socialise in person. The findings underlines the importance of family relations in Nigeria. In this context, a significant part of the social fabric of Nigeria is its collectivist culture, which emphasises the primacy of family institutions and communal living, firmly embedded in the country's collective identity (Ituma et al., 2011). Within household settings, Nigerians (particularly women) develop social bounds by mandatorily growing a family support system regardless of their career pursuits (Mordi et al. 2013). As a prescription, WLB is interpreted as embracing mothering to be a compulsory obligation taking place within the confines of the home in conjunction with paid work. However, our study findings show women struggling to balance motherhood and office work within a particular location (i.e. the home) due to the pandemic lockdown. This drastic changes shaping the 'new normal' lifestyle tells us about the difficulties facing women living and working simultaneously within a primary location predominantly meant for home affairs (Dillaway and Pare, 2008). The challenges confronting these professional women are further exacerbated by the Nigerian culture that is notable for extreme attitudes of well-defined domesticated expectations from mothers (Nwagbara, 2021). Despite the prevailing gender role expectations of homemaking, further evidence showed that about 45% of participants were discontent with the unlimited hours devoted to academic work which they claim is no longer commensurate with their salaries as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Here, participants defined career success in terms of financial stability with particular interest in receiving steady income and being seen as economically viable in supporting family needs.

I have been experiencing career and family difficulties since the spread of the deadly coronavirus which is now hitting hard on many Nigerian private universities since the lockdown. For instance, we had no choice but to accept pay cuts despite being mandated to continue lectures and teaching online at home. I'm stressed, lack motivation and feeling my career prospect is plummeting because being financially capable is the ultimate in Nigeria. Making enough money from academia to cater for my family and having some to save for the raining day is what I call success but this is not the case today despite working tirelessly from home during this global pandemic (Participant 4).

WLB for me is problematic as the infectious virus is destroying lives and livelihood. After all the hard work and spending long hours teaching online, our efforts aren't receiving the right credits as lecturers. I now only get paid my basic salary because my university can't afford to pay other bonuses and allowances which is a career decline for me. This is more strenuous because I'm also expected to supervise my children's classwork since we are all home due to the lockdown. I'm no longer enjoying gainful employment and findings it challenging to financially support my immediate and extended families (Participant 11).

Central to the above statements is the monetary measurement of career success and the difficulty in achieving career economic gains during the period of the lockdown. With clear relevance for conservation of resources, the desire for sufficient financial resources ranked significantly important in Nigeria. The current findings is in line with prior studies (e.g. Ituma et al., 2011; Aluko et al., 2017) that have shown career-driven individuals in Nigeria prioritise wealth and gain admiration from being able to support their families economically. Nigerians are often willingly to subject their career goals and aspirations to this socio-cultural obligation. As such, a lack of finances is associated with career stagnation. From this perspective, financial resources (e.g. salaries, raises and bonuses) are appraised as insufficient and resulting into stress and strain.

Apart from the foregoing findings, additional evidence from 40% of participants expressed experiencing negative career outcomes in other different dimensions:

My WLB is far from being ideal. I experience mental chaos coming from anger and frustration at the way my publication track record is suffering because I'm overburdened with my children screaming, playing and always disturbing me. I feel so tired and stressed every day. The COVID-19 lockdown is adversely affecting everything (Participant 19).

I am currently not enjoying a balance since the period of the compulsory lockdown. Unfortunately, I don't have any quiet space in my house where I can use as an office or a hiding place from my children. I literally carry my laptop with me everywhere in my house with my four year old son always crying behind me for unnecessary attention. Given the uncondusive nature of my home, I'm very worried about my career progression (promotion) this year (Participant 7).

The hardship imposed by the pandemic is making it hard to say I'm experiencing WLB because the lockdown is sapping away positive energy, sense of accomplishment and intrinsic satisfaction I derived from attending academic conferences, workshops and being appointed as a visiting professor. I have never being used to sitting down at home for this long. The sudden change in lifestyle due to the COVID-19 crisis is one of the most stressful period of my life but what can anyone do? (Participant 14).

As a result of the pandemic lockdown, the participants in this category expressed anger, frustration, worry and emotional stress as a result of struggles experienced from inadequacies to meaningfully engage with academic research, unsuitability of home work spaces and inability to attend academic conferences, workshops and other career advancement agendas in person. Conceptually, these responses highlights how adversities from COVID-19 is threatening, taxing and/or exceeding personal resources contextualised as psychological conditions (e.g. positive emotions), career advancement (i.e. producing research publications), quality of life (e.g. work-life balance), physical environment (i.e. good home-office space) and personal characteristics (i.e. achieving personal career fulfilment). Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that the primacy of the foregoing resource losses without prospects of gaining them while the pandemic persists, confirms that it is more psychologically harmful for individuals to loose resources when such losses can have profound negative impact on career (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Following the unpleasant effects of COVID-19 on the world of work, our findings further suggest the depletion of energy perceived as insufficient physical, mental and emotional resources for responding to childcare pressures (e.g. 'I'm overburdened with my children screaming, playing and always disturbing me') as well as academic work demands happening almost simultaneously. Drawing on (W-HR) model, people are presumably motivated to spend energy on personal pursuits they find meaningful and rewarding (Grawitch et al., 2010). However, the confinement policies forcing a compulsory switch to home-work is claiming to adversely affect career success conceptualised in terms of personal fulfilment derived from finding satisfaction and excitement when participating in scholarly activities illustrated in one of the sampled excerpt – ('...the lockdown is sapping away positive energy, sense of accomplishment and intrinsic satisfaction...'). Furthermore, work-family conflict spillover literature (e.g. Sok et al., 2014; 2010; Du et al., 2018) suggests that some experiences occurring in one domain can be carried into the other (whether it is work-to-home negative spillover or otherwise). This argument is particularly relevant as boundaries between work and family affairs are becoming increasingly blurred due to the lockdown. Given the finite nature of resources (e.g. mood, feelings, energy), the repeated demands in one sphere drains the availability of these resources and thereby limiting what is left for optimal functioning in other domains which is evident from concerns raised by some participants.

Health concerns

Majority of the participants were also concerned about how the global COVID-19 is taking a toll on their physical well-being with claims of inability to find respite, even in the solace of their homes. These key informants were of the view that WLB is achievable in good health but the pandemic is making it difficult to adequately deal with health-related issues: One of the participants commented that:

WLB is feasible when a person is healthy [...] but for me, it is has been a tough experience because the pandemic forced everyone to stay at home doing less in terms of social interactions and exercise. This is really affecting my health. I have been diagnosed with high blood pressure and made worse by the lack of physical activity during this period of lockdown coupled with intense family and academic responsibilities. More agonising is my pay cut which is making it very difficult for me to purchase medications on regular basis (Participant 13).

No, I'm not enjoying WLB as COVID-19 continues to escalate at an unprecedented scale. As an academic, I'm always less physically active, having longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns because of my children as well as worse diets, resulting in weight gain. Moreover, sitting for long hours working on my laptop causes me backache and stiff neck [...] the financial strain I am currently enduring as a result of slashed salary is another problem (Participant 22).

The expressions above illustrates how the unexpected shift to remote working and prolonged effects of the lockdown is having negative health outcomes on professional working mothers. In addition, our findings resonates with prior studies (e.g. Wajeman et al., 2009; Mordi et al., 2013) whose findings suggest that WLB is sometimes defined in terms of health concerns. For instance, Porns et al., (2016) argues that poor WLB have shown to have more adverse effects on cardiovascular and mental health of women. Similarly, our study reveals disruptions waged by COVID-19 triggering stressors in career, family life and personal finances. Drawing on (W-HR) theory, it is suggested that people usually benefit psychologically and recover faster when they feel as though they are financially capable to meet certain life demands such as health challenges (Hobfoll, 2011).

However, emerging findings on the impact of COVID-19 highlights how the pandemic is not only compromising work-life integration and physical well-being of female academics, but also indicate concerns about their jobs been disproportionately affected by pay cuts and slashed salaries which leaves them with insufficient financial resources to attend to personal healthcare. According to Grawitch et al., (2010), a lack of financial resources has been associated with stress, anxiety and decreased life gratifications because working adults are normally motivated to retain or enhance economic resources in a bid to potentially boost capabilities in solving life problems or cope with difficult realities as the need arises.

Since women take on greater care demands at home with being active dual earners, it is possible to project that the effects of the COVID-19 will result in a prolonged dip in women's incomes (Nash and Churchill, 2020). Such impacts risk rolling back the already fragile economic gains made in female labour force participation, limiting women's ability to support themselves and their families as the pandemic persists (Nicola et al., 2020). In pursuing strategies aimed at mitigating financial hardships arising from slashed income, further evidence from the study revealed these women claiming to re-adjust their monthly budgets, cutting back on discretionary spending (i.e. non-essential expenses) and temporarily stopping their retirement contributions (i.e. pension scheme) in order to free up more cash needed to meet family demands. For example, expressions such as *"the salary cuts made me seriously downsize my monthly shopping list for the family"*; *"...in coping with the difficult financial hardships as a result of income cuts, I only buy what I need and no longer what I want"*; *"I had to suspend*

my monthly pension funds to free up some cash for me to spend” underpin some plan of actions aimed at attenuating financial losses. Drawing on the (W-HR) model which is built of the COR theory, our findings here justifies propositions that people attempt to retain and protect personal resources (e.g. finances) by demonstrating coping behaviours targeted at mitigating demanding situations appraised as stressors causing conflicts between both work–family domains (Hobfoll, 2011).

Male chauvinism

An overwhelming percentage of female academics (99 per cent) admitted experiencing a high level of role overload and caregiving strain during the lockdown based on the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society where a system of social and gender stratification empowers men to dominate women in almost every sphere of life (Adisa et al., 2019). This supports previous studies (e.g. Mordi et al., 2013) suggesting women as traditionally home keepers and are expected to deploy considerable amount of emotional resources (e.g. affection, love, empathy) to caring responsibilities more than men who are considered as the absolute head of the home. Since all the participants reached on phone were drawn from a particular region of Nigeria (i.e. the South-West region of the country) comprising of Ogun, Oyo, Lagos and Osun States respectively, they all gave similar accounts of the extent to which patriarchal values adversely constrained their WLB especially where Yoruba women as an ingrained tradition are expected to respect and comply to their husbands dictates relating to work and family affairs (). Further from our findings, very few of the participants acknowledged that patriarchal ideologies are more severe in rural areas particularly in some northern parts of Nigeria. Rural women are said to be highly discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities, access to social and productive resources, education, health status, religious background, family decisions, among others (Aderinto, 2017). Illustrative quotes that aligns with these findings are as follows:

“Since some of our husbands particularly from the south-west of Nigeria value education unlike some other parts of Nigeria, we see a higher number of female academics from this part of the country. However, the COVID lockdown is making our WLB problematic because we are home with our husbands that feels a typical Yoruba woman is expected to respect the authority of the man”.

“...masculine supremacy is so much embedded in our society but harsher in rural (e.g. few northern) areas of the country where female illiteracy is very high. Despite being educated, we are still mandated to prioritise the home affairs...”.

Being full-time academics, our findings indicate that these women as home carers work to support the family purse, but the male breadwinner ideology implies that men still holds authority over women in terms of finances. Based on this societal perception and internalised assumptions of masculine supremacy, concerns were raised by participants about the lack of spousal support in helping with family care during the period of the lockdown, which exacerbates WLB difficulties and stress:

The dominance of patriarchal norms in our society is frustrating and stressful. My husband believes that the attributes of a good wife is to carry the entire burden of cooking family meals, childcare, washing and cleaning the home while the man is the financier. During this lockdown, I work almost round the clock as a mother at the expense of my academic work. I have to keep late nights to record my class lessons for my students to watch online when my two year old is asleep while I dose off sometimes on the couch. Although having children in Nigeria is priceless and I draw strength from always having them around me, but I still feel so exhausted keeping-up with family responsibilities especially now that everything happens at home with little or no help from my husband (Participant 15).

One exasperating experience for me is our societal ideology that women, regardless of their status and profession, should be solely responsible for household chores and children needs, while our men (husbands) hold authority over us. The extremity of the lockdown is making it difficult for me and my husband to negotiate our work schedules appropriately. He always demands his schedules should be prioritised as head of the home. Women are always subservient [...] exposing us to time squeeze and work-family conflict (Participant 10).

Ordinarily, it appears Nigerian universities traditionally organise career in academics to fit male life patterns which is making it more problematic for women to advance their careers. The period of the lockdown has worsened the situation for me because my husband who is also an academic believes that I should always focus on family matters at home more than work [...] the institutional and social nature of patriarchy makes it difficult to allocate time appropriately (Participant 5).

Perspectives shared by participants demonstrates how patriarchal proclivities embedded in Nigeria's cultural and institutional structure undervalues the WLB of professional women and particularly citing the propagation of male chauvinism during the pandemic as exacerbating time-based conflicts. For instance, evidence of time-based conflict, emerging from the propensities of masculine hegemony is making time devoted to mothering difficult to perform occupational demands (e.g. 'During this lockdown, I work almost round the clock as a mother at the expense of my academic work'). In this context, patriarchy represents a significant hindrance to the amount of time spent working from home. Although time with family is viewed as a valuable resource (e.g. '*Although having children in Nigeria is priceless and I draw strength from always having them around me...*'), this is mainly driven by patriarchal expectations which results into exhaustion and stress. This occurs due to the inability to adequately allocate time to meet career obligations following its investment in family matters with 'little or no help from my husband' (expressed by Participant 15). This is because domestic duties in Nigeria are gender sensitive. Our findings on patriarchy are generalizable to some other male dominated cultures such as those of the Arabs (e.g. India, Indonesia, Iran) and Palestinian territories (e.g. Gaza) identified with stronger male domination as a result of the higher power distance orientation found in those parts of the world (Haj-Yahia, 2005). Generally, gender inequality, sexism and masculine superiority, inter alia, are characteristics of these societies where culture and religion have exclusively imposes caregiving responsibilities on women regardless of their white collar profession (Sultana, 2011) similar to the cultural and gender dynamics existing in Nigeria.

Indeed, during the pandemic, it evident that resources (e.g. time, energy) are often hard to acquire and maintain desirably, and resource loss according to the (W-HR) model is considered to be more salient and of greater impact than resource gain (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Even at the best of time, Nash and Churchill (2020) argues that female academics with caring needs rarely enjoy the luxury of being overwhelmed with career focus but are rather immersed in domestic tasks more than men based on gender role ideologies. Reflecting on some participant's views, it is expected for women to work outside of the home but are still perceived as housewives while their husbands' are meant to be superior earners. Mushfiqur et al., (2018) further highlights this situation is embedded in management ethos and organisational culture prioritising economic resources and financial prowess of men at the expense of women's WLB needs. Thus, prior studies have found that extreme patriarchy breeds gender stereotyping which are more severe in South Asia and Africa than it is in western countries (Adya, 2008). For instance, gender equality has been a well-established priority of European Union (EU) member nations. Significantly, it is known as an integral feature of EU sustainability objectives and strategy through the implementation of policies on gender mainstreaming (Grosser, 2009).

More specifically, EU defines gender equality as “an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life... [this] is not synonymous with sameness, with establishing men, their lifestyle and conditions as the norm ... [this] means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the diverse roles they play in society”. (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 7-8). Therefore, the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure in western contexts conforms to the right to live void of gender discrimination which is perpetuated by patriarchy deeply ingrained in the Nigerian society.

Conclusion

In summary, this study provides qualitative evidence on the impact of the coronavirus on Nigerian female academics working remotely and negotiating caring responsibilities within a patriarchal context. Overall, our findings suggest that academic women with children are facing significant challenges in negotiating work demands with childcare. Situated in a national context (Nigeria) that has been neglected in favour of extensive media reports on the negative impact of the pandemic in western regions, the present study specifically focuses on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on WLB of academic mothers living in a less egalitarian society. Thus, the current pandemic has affected in unique gender-specific ways particularly their traditional status as care givers and home managers (Akanji et al., 2020). Our findings unveils how the COVID-19 lockdown has intensified the workload of Nigerian mothers in academics and has, thus, caused unbridled role conflicts and health problems which is further exacerbated by the ingrained sociocultural pressures of patriarchy and high power distance values. As such, our study has made important research and theoretical contributions.

Research and theoretical implications

In terms of research implications, our findings show that the definition of WLB by female academics generally conform to existing conceptualisations that perceive WLB, in its broadest sense, to mean satisfactory level of involvement and devoting adequate time to paid work, family and other personal social matters (MacDonald et al., 2013). Our data points to a wide range of activities that are seen to comprise of non-work domains, including caring for the elderly, leisure, socialising and creating time to deal with health matters apart from the well-established devotion to childcare responsibilities. Accordingly, this findings adopts a more inclusive conception of non-work domain to largely include diverse life demands – whether preferred or required that people often deploy reasonable amount of resources (e.g. time, effort, money) to achieve subject to situational or cultural dictates (Kelliher et al., 2018). As such, we build on earlier critiques by scholars who argue for greater inclusivity of multiple activities of life in non-work categorisations despite the fact that the original focus of WLB research emerged from the increase of female participation in the labour market and struggles working mothers encounter in predominantly combining work and childcare (Ozbilgin et al., 2011).

Given the far-reaching devastating impact of COVID-19 on lives and livelihood around the world, study participants’ highlights critical challenges in managing their WLB due to the lockdown, with deleterious effects on career and health while broader cultural inclinations of patriarchy underscoring issues of feminine subordination exacerbating stress. More specifically, our findings provided valuable insights into specificities and contextual meaning attached to career success in Nigeria. Also, our data foregrounds economic stressors arising from reduced earnings as well as other negative career outcomes increasing difficulties for

female academics to reconcile work and family demands during the lockdown. Besides, patriarchy as a social system in Nigeria highlights an extreme gendered-based division of labour which is a huge obstacle precluding professional women from achieving satisfactory WLB since a considerable amount of personal resources (e.g. time, emotions, finances) are expected to be deployed to home and childcare management even at the expense of career pursuits. Therefore, work-life research needs to capture and address the effects of this wider macro-context specificity (i.e. patriarchal propensities) challenging the WLB of professional women and the counterproductive outcomes on work behaviours especially during this period of the pandemic when millions of workers have transitioned into working from home (Sinclair et al., 2020).

Concerning the study's theoretical implications, our findings highlights how the (W-HR) model is integral to understanding WLB with emphasis on work-family imbalances and stress experiences confronting working mothers during the pandemic. As such, it is found that this negative experiences is triggering backlash attitudes, detrimental to their universities and career outcomes, in the form of demotivation, loss of commitment, stress and low morale. Through the lens of the (W-HR) framework, we show how the debilitating effects of the COVID-19 crisis necessitating families to self-isolate at home is straining personal resource allocation (e.g. time, energy, emotions, finances) of female academics as they face daily struggles in combining parenthood with career goals in a national context that highly patriarchal. With these in mind, our findings re-focusses discourse surrounding WLB which often highlights the need for office flexibility to mitigate role conflict experiences to how COVID-19 has brought unprecedented disruption to how people (particularly working mothers) are able to allocate their time and energy in ways that can optimally align with their preferences as work and non-work domains are becoming increasingly blurred like never before during the pandemic (Nash and Churchill, 2020).

Drawing on (W-HR) theory, personal resources are potentially valuable to the extent to which they are perceived to help one achieve definite goals and life aspirations (Halbesleben et al., 2014). However, the COVID-19 made WLB during the lockdown worse for female academics to conserve and maintain personal resources since working under exceptional conditions caused by the pandemic is found to be increasingly stressful and career damaging. Also, resource drain is making female academics face elevated threats to health as restriction on movements and economics losses due to pay-cuts compromised their well-being exponentially. More so, the prevalence of patriarchy shapes women's behaviour in ways that undermine the amount of time they have to respond to career and caregiving demands. This differential gender role socialisation norms greatly subverts time management of female academics who are constantly exposed to men's (self-perceived) superior status quo (Adisa et al., 2019). Accordingly, a primacy afforded in Nigerian culture to the family and the associated normative expectations that women are responsible for more unpaid care work than men contribute to time biases where it is always expected that women's non-work time should mainly focus on domestic affairs, to be routinely invaded by male chauvinism.

Practical implication

From the personal accounts of our study, it is evident that career decline, health problems and family challenges brought on by COVID-19 on female academics living in a male dominated society are key barriers that cannot be ignored. Therefore, practical solutions such as the

implementation of institutional family-friendly support systems, addressing patriarchal perplexities as well as advocating for the need of personal practices such as ‘mindfulness’ can help mitigate resource drain and address the negative narratives emerging from the study. It is clear that institutional and cultural dynamics propelling WLB practices favourable to working mothers are weak in Nigeria due to strong emphasis on patriarchal values. This necessitates an urgent need for university management to put in place regulatory and supervisory structures and family-friendly policies (e.g. greater work flexibility at home) that can provide considerable support to workers (particularly women) and their families during this crisis period. In addressing the considerable difficulties confronting women in reconciling work and family affairs as a result of the pandemic, the universities can educate academics with mothering responsibilities that, for work-family needs to translate into supportive policies, a sense of entitlement has to be developed (Santos and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). This is to say, mothers in academia are allowed to voice their needs and entitled to negotiate more flexible work hours and arrangements given the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society. Perceiving this as a global issue, Nash and Churchill, (2020) rightly noted from a western context how female academics with childcare responsibilities are facing significant challenges in balancing career and caregiving demands during the pandemic with evidence of little or no support from their universities.

Therefore, Nigerian universities should identify the most pressing needs of employees (particularly female academics) and their families by carrying out meaningful, contextually relevant social dialogue which will refocus staff’s attention to how working from home can bring multiple and substantial benefits that enhances positive work-family balance. Better online communication and more timely guidance from institutions on the need for female academics to engage in personal mindfulness which can help them maintain serenity and mental balance when responding COVID-19 and remote working outcomes. For instance, self-care practices such as managing time effectively, engaging in preferred leisure activities, eating healthier can improve mental and physical well-being and reduce stress. Evidently, patriarchy sets the parameters for women inequalities and work-family challenges that invariably impinges on social sustainability outcomes for Nigerian working mothers. Thus, it is imperative for feminist citizenship discourse and advocates of gender equality in Nigeria to focus on the need to incorporate ‘ethics of care and social justice’ agendas for working women who shoulder greater part of caring and domestic responsibilities (Lister, 2003).

Limitations and directions for future research

While this paper advances knowledge about the challenges facing women academics during the COVID-19 lockdown from a non-western context, some limitations are also identified which in turn opens up opportunities for future research. First, our qualitative findings is based on only a small sample size of 28 interviews which makes it difficult to generalise results to other non-western contexts, like, for example, other countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Despite the importance of qualitative analysis which helps to interpret peoples’ perspective of social reality more accurately, future research could engage statistical approaches to test larger representative sample (Saunders et al., 2012). Second, the present study is based on sole accounts of WLB difficulties confronting professional mothers which makes our findings subjective and may portray tendencies for respondents to answer in ways that makes social desirability biases plausible (Fihser, 1993). Since the COVID-19 lockdown affected all and sundry, we hope our study opens up new research opportunities that explores

male academics who are fathers and were also negatively affected by the pandemic lockdown. It will be exciting to report views from the male gender who are rarely considered in global WLB debates. Finally, it would be interesting to engage in cross-cultural research that compares the impact of the pandemic in Nigeria with western context as we navigate different cultural perspectives to work-life research as the world grapples with the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis.

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