

Full Length Research Paper

Balancing work, family and personal life: Perspectives of female staff at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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The study examined how female staff of the College of Distance Education (CoDE), University of Cape Coast (UCC) balance work, family and personal life roles, amidst their busy work schedules. A 21-item well-structured questionnaire was developed to collect primary data. Using the convenient sampling technique, 32 female staff was selected for the sample. Statistical tools such as percentages, mean, standard deviation as well as regression analysis were used to examine the relationship between organizational, family and personal life roles of the respondents. The findings of the study revealed that female staff of CoDE is not able to balance work, family and personal due to situational roles and their busy work schedules. The study also show that the university does not support female staff with policies and programmes that would assist them in this regard. The urgent need for the university to enact institutional policies and to show commitment in establishing a work- family friendly environment was recommended. This is important since the female staff at CoDE work 15 h on the average daily, which far exceed their contractual working period of 8 h.

Key words: Balance, work, family, personal life, perspectives, staff.

INTRODUCTION

Balance in work, family and personal life roles is an emerging challenge for both employers and employees. Experts say there is no single definition for work- family and personal balance. Allen (2002) for example defines the construct as the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work- family roles are compatible with the individual's life role priorities at a given point in time. A balance in work, family and personal life is expected when there is a proper functioning at work, home and at personal levels with minimum role

conflict. The incompatibility between the demands from work and non-work domain result in conflict and consequently, employees experience a lack of work balance. Research shows that employees who believe they do not have time for personal life are always drained and distracted at work. In addition, the spillover of the negative aspect of work into an employee's personal life could lead to job exhaustion, disruption of relationships with family and friends, loss of enjoyment and increased stress. Work, family and personal life balance is about

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creating and maintaining supportive and healthy work environments that enable employees to have balance between work, family and personal responsibilities and thus strengthen loyalty and productivity.

A common dilemma for many employees is how to manage all the competing demands of work and non-work roles to avoid any negative effects of spill over into their personal lives. According to the 2007 study by Duxbury and Higgins (2015), 1 in 4 Canadian employees report that their work responsibilities interfere with their ability to fulfil their responsibilities at home. The authors maintained that, women are more likely than men to report high levels of role overload and caregiver strain. This is because women devote more time per a week than men to non-work activities such as childcare, elder care and are more likely to have primary responsibility for unpaid domestic chores.

Statement of problem

The college of distance education at the University of Cape Coast has a unique pattern of work as against the work pattern of the conventional campus-based environment. This is due to the peculiar needs of the distance learners that serve as their clientele. As a result, staff of the College work seven days in a week, rarely, go on leave with the view to providing proactive support to distance learners for their success. The unique pattern of work at CoDE affects all staff. However, many stakeholders of education wonder how the female staff of CoDE can balance work, family and personal roles amidst their heavy work schedules for a productive work engagement. Many research studies, two meta-analyses (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Allen et al., 2000) as well as two recent reviews of literature on the same subject (Canadian Council on Social Development, March, 1999) affirm that women are prone to role overload, resulting from multiple conflicting expectations from other roles. The authors further argue that work, family and personal life roles appear to be the most difficult challenging issues career women face in contemporary society. Clearly, it is essential to recognize and address the need for institutional policies and the commitment that support female staff at CoDE at UCC before the institution can fully benefit from their engagements. Moreover, it appears there has not been any form of related research in area to serve as a springboard for the university in this regard hence, the motivation for this study. The purpose of this study therefore is to illicit the perspectives of the female staff at CoDE, UCC on how they can balance work, family and personal life for productive work engagement. This is a research gap that needs bridging.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The increased participation of women in the workforce

globally, has been a key historic economic development issue in contemporary society. As women participate massively in the workforce, there have been several changes in the family dynamics especially the roles that women play in the family systems both nuclear and extended forms. In the family systems in contemporary society, women do not only play the role as housekeepers but have also become bread winners providing income to support the family. Despite these changes, it appears, there are no gender advocacies to advance the formulation of state legislature on gender roles and equality in society, especially at the workplace.

Reddy (2015) in support of this argument opined that generally, efforts by all stakeholders aimed at promoting healthy balance of work, family and personal life roles, especially for career women, have been quiet low in many countries. Ghana is no exception. Although the issue appears to be a challenge for most people in the working class in contemporary society, women are the most vulnerable. This is happening as a result of gender stereotyping, some cultural norms and values in some societies of the world especially in Africa. Role imbalance appears to be the most challenging issue of most career women in the world of work today. Traditionally, work, family and personal life balance involve the ability of an individual to give equal amount of time to work and non-work roles. However, this is not feasible for most career women in the world of work today. The challenge appears to be critical for most carrier women, as society still expects men to focus on their careers ambitions for women to take care of the family (Reddy, 2015).

Not many decades ago, it was pretty much expected that women, once married, would dedicate their lives to raising children and managing the home. The roles of women in society today have changed tremendously. The home-based mother concept has been relegated to the background. Urbanization, industrialization, migration, liberation of women's rights, awareness of the rights, influence of the media, westernization and the expansion of access to education to some extent, have provided new opportunities for women to participate fully in the work force (Glinskayai, Lokshin et al., 2000). In the 21st century society, women appear to be doing the same work which was once considered exclusively for men (Smith and Apicelli, 1982). For instance, women have gone to space, joined guerrilla groups and armies, headed the administration of countries, participated in sport and games and fought at the battle fields (Ardayio-Schandorf, 1991). Women are now very active in politics and wars. For instance, in Vietnam, legend has it that some years ago, two princesses overthrew a Chinese oppressive government for the first time in the history of the world (United Nations, 1997).

In most societies today, women take up the responsibilities of males and head households irrespective of the status of their spouses. Many women have assumed the bread winner's role in addition to their domestic roles. Everywhere in the world in modern

societies, women now have two jobs; one in the home and one outside the home. Women are important economic actors providing for themselves, husbands, children and other members of the family and advance on their careers and personal lives. The economic and socio-cultural changes of the lives of women in contemporary society have created role imbalances in their daily routines, many women are no longer able to reconcile the realities of family, work and personal life demands. The lack of harmony between life roles for most career women has a significant impact on the individual and all social actors (health, social and economic) (Kofodimos, 1993). As women aspire to take on management positions in the Labour market, many of them are becoming career-oriented, with high educational aspirations and greater extrinsic ambitions and at the same time maintaining societal traditional values of family nurturing. Ideally, it is expected that in a family where both parents work at outside the home, responsibilities should be shared; this is always not the case.

Kofodimos (1993) explains balancing of life roles as “a satisfying, healthy and productive life of an individual that includes work, play and love for the family in an equilibrium, devoid of role conflict and overload. The author further argues that work, family and personal life balance is generally thought to promote well-being. The imbalance of which results in high levels of stress, detraction of family cohesion, quality of personal life and ultimately, the reduction in the individuals’ effectiveness at work. (Greenhaus et al., 2003) believe that balanced individuals are primed to seize the moment when confronted with a role demand, because no role is seen as less worthy of one’s alertness than any other. By this reasoning, balanced individuals experience low levels of stress when enacting roles, presumably because they are participating in role activities that are salient to them. The authors argue that balanced individuals experience less role overload, greater role ease, and less depression than their imbalanced counterparts. Moreover, a balanced involvement in work, family and personal roles may also reduce frequent work, family and personal life conflict. This is because balanced individuals are fully engaged in all roles, they do not allow “situational emergencies” to hinder role performance chronically. Instead, they develop routines that enable them to meet the long term demands of all roles, probably avoiding extensive work, family and personal life conflicts.

However, the beneficial effects of balancing role performance are assumed to be of a positive balance. Empirical research study by Reddy (2015) suggests that with positive balance, an equal high investment of time and involvement in work, family and personal life is exhibited. By contrast, individuals who devote only a limited amount of time to combined work, family and personal roles, distribute the limited time equally between roles, exhibit negative involvement balance. Individuals benefit as well as institutions, organizations and

governments, as a balance between work, family and personal life increases productivity and the well-being of individuals.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conciliation: A gender problem

This study was underpinned by the theory of conciliation as a gender problem. Conciliation is the attempt to harmonize, seeking conciliate between the demands of work family and personal life. It is a challenge that goes beyond the private sphere which is becoming a public issue for governments and many labour organizations in most countries. Seagal (2014) defines conciliation as a set of social, institutional and entrepreneurial actions with the purpose of developing a more egalitarian and fair society. It is a way of organizing the work environment that facilitates men and women to carry out their job, personal and family responsibilities in harmony. Conciliation does not mean working less to compensate any social role. As the traditional roles of women change, the major challenge most women encounter as they join the work force, is how to balance work, family and personal life thus making it difficult for women to conciliate their roles at the different aspects of life cycle. Historically, gender stereotyping has become part of the social and economic development of society. The roles of women have always been linked to reproduction, nurturing of children, provision of physical and psychological support in the domestic environment privately. On the other hand, men have been associated with the provision of food and other basic needs of the family usually done in the public domain. However, several events of the world in contemporary society such as technological advancement, women empowerment and the related consequential mass incorporation of women in the job market is changing the state of gender stereotyping in many cultures of the world today. Although work, family and personal life are areas always linked, the changes in the workforce in contemporary society, pressure at workplaces, globalized economy and the real extension of the working day have intensified the interdependency. This situation makes it more difficult for career women to strike the balance between these competing roles in their daily routines. However, it is important for career women to discern the balance between family, work and personal life in their work environment to enable them works in a stress/conflict free environment for optimal productivity.

Faisal (2011) mentions that institutions, groups and people committed to present new ideas around the gender issues have a second wind. The author further opined that studies on conciliation between work, family and personal life in many countries are still in its early stages, despite the interest of government initiatives to

promote equality between men and women in the work environment. However, such effort shows an evident change in the structure and dynamics of the family and women's involvement in the world of work in contemporary society. Although not the same in all cultures, there is the need to transform the social policies of today on conciliation, in order to guarantee the equal participation of men and women in domestic and non-domestic activities-either paid or unpaid and to ensure fair labour conditions that allow women to develop in full. Such efforts can be achieved through policies that promote harmonization. It is therefore important to promote balance between work, family and personal life of every individual.

Duxbury and Higgins (2015) affirm that Canadian research experts on conciliation proved that an adequate balance is related to more commitment of workers to remain on jobs, less stress, lower absenteeism, and more job satisfaction for individual workers as well as the company or organization. At the family level, effective conciliation promotes family cohesion and adaptation, positive parenthood and satisfied family life. At the personal level it means lower stress, less depressive mood, less tiredness and more satisfied health status and life in general. Socially, it means less demand on healthcare for the benefits of individual workers and organizations because of a balance between work, family and personal life.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines how female staff of CoDE at UCC conciliates work, family and personal life amidst their busy work schedules. The quantitative method of research was used to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives on balancing work, family and personal life. Data was collected by a survey using a 21-item questionnaire developed by the researcher. A mean value of less than 2.5 for an item to be within an acceptable level was imposed. The developed questionnaire was sent to experts for validations. Participants were full-time female staff of CoDE. The study assumed that these women are exposed to strong pressures at the workplace that demand greater amount of time than the established eight hours official job time.

Criteria for the selection of participants

1. To be a full-time female staff working at the CoDE for more than 8 h or more which makes it difficult but not impossible, working independently every day to provide proactive support for distance learners' success.
2. To be working in a Unit in CoDE with specific administrative responsibilities which give the participants certain degree or status within the College/University and increases the level commitment and heavier workload.

The quantitative method of research was used. Using a convenient sample and Convenience sampling technique, 32 female staffs were selected due to time and resources available to the researcher.

Participants were not excluded by age, having children or not, because the diversity of cases were considered beneficial to understand the problem of balancing work, family and personal life

from a wider perspective. The only criteria for exclusion covered National services personnel who were on part-time contract with the university. Such persons were not included.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was administered to female staff at CoDE who expressed interest to participate in the study. Participants were called on phone and appointments for the administration of the questionnaire were made at their convenience. The questionnaire was administered to participants in their offices during their break time. The purpose of the research and the key topic areas of the study were discussed, and consent were also sought to respond to the questionnaire.

RESULTS

The results are presented based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, roles of the organisation as an employer, analysis of family roles and personal life roles of the respondents as well as the relationship between family life and organizational roles (Tables 1 to 5).

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Information was collected on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Information was collected on age distribution, educational qualification, number of children as well as the number of dependents. Results are presented in Table 1. The study revealed that 37.5 and 34.4% of the respondents were between the ages of 40-50 and 31-39, respectively, while 15.6% were 51-60 years and the remaining proportion were 25-30 years. With respect to marital status of the respondents, it was observed that 84.4% were married women, and 6.3% were divorcees. Only 9.4% were single. Also, 53.1% of them were Post-Graduate Certificate holders while 34.4% have First Degree certificates. Furthermore, 6.3% of them were Diploma and others certificate holders. Similarly, 28.1% have 2 children, while 18.8% each represents those with and/or without a child. This was followed by 12.5% each for those with 3 and 4 children respectively, while 6.3 and 3.1% respectively represent those with 5 and 6 children. In the case of the women with dependents, 31.3% have 2 dependents; while 25% have a dependent. Respectively, 18.8 and 15.5% represent those with 3 and 4 children. However, only 9.4% of the women have no dependents.

Roles of the organisation as an employer

The researcher sought to find out the role of the organisation as an employer towards ensuring that its female staffs have a balanced work family and personal life which is evident in the work/life family border theory.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Demographic variable	Percentage
Age distribution (Years)	
25-30	12.5
31-39	34.4
40-50	37.5
51-60	15.6
Marital status	
Single	9.4
Married	84.4
Divorced	6.3
Educational qualification	
Diploma	6.3
Degree	34.4
Post-Graduate	53.1
Others	6.3
Number of children	
No child	18.8
One child	18.8
Two children	28.1
Three children	12.5
Four children	12.5
Five children	6.3
Six children	3.1
Number of dependents	
No Dependent	9.4
One Dependent	25.0
Two Dependents	31.3
Three Dependents	15.5
Four Dependents	18.8

Source: Field Survey (2019).

As opined by Clark (2000), the work/life family border theory helps in defining work-life balance as ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict’. The responses are presented in Table 2.

The results as presented in Table 2 show that all the employees in the sample were working on full time basis. Another 40.6% of them were supervisor whiles 12.5% were managers. About 47% (46.9%) hold other positions aside from managerial and supervisory roles. It can be concluded that majority (46.9%) of the respondents are holding other positions in the organization. Also, 50% of the HODs of the employees were females. And each employee has 8 basic hours of work every day. In addition, another 78.1% of them normally work pass the basic working hours whiles 18.8% work within the

stipulated basic working hours. This indicates that more than three-fourth of the employees work above their basic working hours every day. Similarly, it was observed that there is no allowance for flexi time as indicated by 65.6% of them whiles the remaining proportion agreed that there is allowance for flexi time. Also, there is no indication of availability of programs and policies designed to help women balance work and family life as indicated by 90.6% of them. Likewise, the organization does not have childcare facilities.

Analysis of family roles

It was of interest to examine the family roles of the respondents with respect to their work and the

Table 2. The role of the organisation as an employer.

Variable	Percentage
Status of employees	
Full time	100.0
Positions held by employees	
Supervisor	40.6
Manager	12.5
Others	46.9
Gender of HOD	
Male	50.0
Female	50.0
Working hours	
Eight hours	100.0
Working pass basic working hours	
Yes	81.2
No	18.8
Allowance for flexi time	
Yes	34.4
No	65.6
Availability of programs and policies	
Yes	9.4
No	90.6
Availability of child care facilities	
Yes	15.6
No	84.4

Source: Field Survey (2019).

Table 3. Mean analysis of family roles.

Statement	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
I can focus on work issues when I have pressing family responsibilities	32	2.156	1.450	1.000	5.000
My employee is empathetic to my family issues	32	2.219	1.128	1.000	5.000
I have been penalized in performance appraisal due to my family responsibilities	32	2.250	0.880	1.000	5.000
I feel I fulfill my family obligations successfully, despite pressure at work	32	3.406	1.292	1.000	5.000
Attending to family demands interferes with my work performance	32	2.256	1.125	1.000	5.000
My family responsibilities prevent me from being assigned challenging work projects	32	2.094	0.995	1.000	4.000
My spouse/partner is supportive to my work achievement	32	3.063	1.523	1.000	5.000
My spouse/partner assists with family responsibilities	32	2.906	1.489	1.000	5.000
I put off family activities due to work commitments	32	2.400	1.295	1.000	5.000
I can meet work deadlines whilst taking care of my family	32	2.094	1.573	1.000	5.000

Source: Field Survey (2019).

organisation. The responses are presented in Table 3. The table provides information on the family roles of the respondents. From the table, the mean scores are; 2.156, and 2.094 with their corresponding standard deviations,

minimum and maximum for items 1, 2, 3 to 10 respectively. The mean values of items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10 are seen to be less than the mean of 2.500 to 5.00 for acceptance level of an item. This means that the

Table 4. Mean analysis of personal life roles.

Statement	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
I can have time for church activities	32	1.969	1.092	1.000	5.000
I can have time for my leisure	32	1.844	1.051	1.000	5.000
I can attend funeral activities	32	1.719	0.851	1.000	5.000
I can have time for friends and family members who visit	32	2.031	1.062	1.000	5.000
I can attend weddings	32	1.781	0.941	1.000	5.000
I can further my education despite family responsibilities	32	3.219	1.289	1.000	5.000
I can visit the saloon every week	32	1.969	0.933	1.000	4.000

Source: Field Survey (2019).

female staff at CoDE: are unable to focus on work issues when they have pressing family responsibilities; employees are not empathetic to their family issues; have been penalized in performance appraisal due to family responsibilities; attending to family demands interferes with their work performance; family responsibilities prevent them from being assigned challenging work projects; put off family activities due to work commitments; and finally, unable to meet work deadlines whilst taking care of families. However, the female staffs feel they fulfill their family obligations successfully despite pressure at work; spouses/partners are supportive to their work achievement and assist with family responsibilities.

Analysis of personal life roles

The researcher sought to find out from the female staffs whether their works interferes with their personal life roles. The responses from the respondents are presented in Table 4.

The table provides information on the personal life roles of the respondents. From the table, the mean scores are; 1.969, 1.844, 1.719, 2.031, 1.781, 3.219 and 1.969 with their corresponding standard deviations, minimum and maximum for items 1, 2, 3 to 7 respectively. The mean values of items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 are seen to be less than the mean of 2.500 to 5.00 for acceptance level of an item. This means that the female staff at CoDE is: unable to have time for church activities; unable to have time for their leisure; unable to attend funeral activities; unable to have time for friends and family members who visit; unable to attend weddings and unable to visit the saloon every week. However, the only family life role the female workers at CoDE can achieve successfully is their ability to further their education despite family responsibilities.

Relationship between family life and organizational roles

The researcher sought to examine the relationship between the family life of the respondents and their organizational roles. The organizational roles of the respondents considered are positions held within the

organization, working pass basic working hours as well as the allowance for flexi time at the place of work. The positions held within the organization, working pass basic working hours as well as the allowance for flexi time at the place of work were regressed on the family life of the respondents to ascertain this relationship. The result is presented in Table 5.

The table presents information on the relationship between family life and organizational roles of the respondents. A negative relationship was observed between the family life of the respondents and the position they held. That is, unlike directors, supervisors, managers and other position holders’ role have negative effects on their family life. Hence, the position occupied by a person has negative effect on his/her family life. The result is the same for those who work past the basic working hours of 8, as well as those without flexi times. Thus, those who work past the basic working hours of 8 and without flexi time allowance have problems with their family lives. On a whole, organizational roles of the respondents have negative effects on their family lives, and hence that culminated in their inability to manage their family lives and roles properly. However, an r-squared of only about 23% was recorded. This indicates that about 23% of the variations in family life is caused by changes in positions held as explained in the model. As a result, it can be concluded that the positions one hold can create an imbalance in work and family life of the respondents. It also shows that about 77% of the factors influencing work and family life balance are explained outside the model. However, this only indicates that whenever we observe a variation in the family roles of the respondents, only about 23% of it is due to the model (or due to positions held, availability of flexi time, as well as working past the basic working hours) and the remaining proportion is due to error or some unexplained factors. Hence, there may be other factors that may be accounting for the imbalances in work and family life of the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was carried out with a purpose to investigate

Table 5. Relationship between family life and organizational roles.

Term	Coefficients	SE coefficients	P-Value
Constant	3.449	0.497	0.000
Supervisor	-0.601	0.434	0.178
Manager	-1.204	0.544	0.036
Other positions	-0.276	0.461	0.555
Working past basic working hours	-0.249	0.338	0.468
Allowance for flexi time	-0.167	0.283	0.560

Source: Field Survey (2019).

the balancing of work, family and personal life of female staff of the CoDE, UCC. The study concentrated on senior members, senior staff (Unit Administrators, Principal Administrative Officers), and other officers. The study revealed that majority (84.4%) of the respondents was between 25 to 50 years. Another majority (90.7%) have marital experiences, while 87.5% were Post-Graduate and First-Degree certificate holders. Also, most (81.2%) of the women have between 1 and 6 children while another 90.6% of the women have between 1 and 4 dependents. In addition, the study revealed that all the employees in the sample were working on full time basis with the UCC. Another majority (46.9%) of them hold other positions in CoDE apart from being managers and supervisors. Also, 50% of the HODs of the employees were females. And each employee has 8 basic hours of work every day. Furthermore, more than three-fourth of the employees work above their basic working hours every day. It was also observed that there is no allowance for flexi time as indicated by 65.6% of the employees. There is no indication of availability of programmes and policies designed to help women balance work and family life as indicated by 90.6% of them. Likewise, the university does not have childcare facilities.

With respect to the family life roles of the staff, the study revealed that the female staff at CoDE: are unable to focus on work issues when they have pressing family responsibilities; employees are not empathetic to their family issues; have been penalized in performance appraisal due to family responsibilities; attending to family demands interferes with their work performance; family responsibilities prevent them from being assigned challenging work projects; put off family activities due to work commitments; and finally, unable to meet work deadlines whilst taking care of families. However, the female staff feels they fulfill their family obligations successfully despite pressure at work; spouses/partners are supportive to their work achievement and assist with family responsibilities. Also, with reference to the personal life roles of the respondents, the study indicated that female staff at CoDE are: Unable to have time for church activities; unable to have time for their leisure; unable to attend funeral activities; unable to have time for friends

and family members who visit; unable to attend weddings and unable to visit the saloon every week. However, the only family life role the female workers at CoDE can achieve successfully is their ability to further their education despite family responsibilities.

Finally, it was observed that organizational roles of the respondents have negative effects on their family lives, and hence culminating into their inability to manage their family lives and family roles properly. Thus, there was exhibition of negative balance involvement of roles female employees at CoDE. The research findings indicate that a considerable attention should be given to working hours of female staff at CoDE, UCC.

Hence, it is recommended that child and elder care facilities should be introduced through proper Human Resource planning. Additional staff should be recruited to reduce the heavy workload of the female staffs and prevent role overload and unnecessary stress. Also, good relationship among employers, employee, coworkers, supervisors and subordinates should be encouraged and maintained for effective teamwork. Moreover, there should be seminars, workshops and training programmes on stress reduction and time management to help employees to achieve good work life balance. Finally, female staffs should be given some flexibility on strict deadlines and heavy workload.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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