

A Sociological Appraisal of Problems Encountered by Female Academics in Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Ojo, Sunday Stephen

Department of Sociology, Federal University Gashua, P.M.B. 1005, Gashua, Yobe State, Nigeria
Email: drstephenajo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Female employees suffer in their career development when social policy is based on myths of motherhood instead of the realities of contemporary life in developing societies of Africa. Today, most women in academics are limited in their careers after having children. This study investigated problems encountered by female academics in tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State. Using survey design, the population of the study comprised all female academics from selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State. Employing a purposive sampling procedure, a total of 305 respondents were sampled for the study and the instrument of data collection used was questionnaire. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Findings revealed that female academics are disadvantaged as regards opportunities for career growth in the academics in Nasarawa State because of family responsibilities, social policies and the demands of motherhood. Women's roles and career advancement are greatly influenced by discriminating practices in the institutions, and the cultural environment in which they find themselves. The study concludes that several problems regarding career development were seen to be made worse by challenges and difficulties female academics faced. The study, therefore, recommended that the institutions and authorities should review their social policies and create a favourable working environment that would help female academics deal with professional and family responsibilities as well as make it more attractive for women to fulfil their professional and family duties.

Keywords: sociological, appraisal, problems, female academics, tertiary institutions, career development.

INTRODUCTION

In African society, the changing roles of women are coming gradually with increased western education, modernization, and urbanization. In recent times, especially with the expansion of educational opportunities for them, women are getting more represented in the nation's labour force. For instance, more women have taken up professional occupations like medicine, accounting, and academics.

The labour world of work presents women with many problems. They want decent wages and benefits; they want affordable childcare; they want training and education for advancement in their jobs; and, they want decent and dignified working conditions. Rather than viewing

women as unique, their problems are similar to problems faced by other disadvantaged groups such as racial and ethnic minorities. Legislation for equal opportunity and affirmative action are route to change. However, affirmative action is currently undermined and eliminated [1]. According to the structural approach, equal opportunity leads to equal performance.

Moreover, academic work has some features which affect the childrearing lifestyle. Indeed, life in academia is not always easy for women [2]. The situation on ground implies that tertiary institutions introduce more courses to be taught by faculty and at the same time maintain active participation in research

activities. Besides, being capable of obtaining grants while mentoring students characterized academic career. Put succinctly, the career involves research, teaching and community services. In reality, it is time-consuming which often coincide with time women need to keep up their homes and raise their families. Regardless of whether they hold a career or not, women shoulder more responsibilities of managing the home determined by their family size than men do. The more an individual is involved with the family, the more he/she is likely to experience work-family conflict [3].

Besides, depending on the discipline and work environment, the profession involves long travels for conferences, continuous investment in skills and capacity development, while networking at the national and the international level indeed; it is a path of endless qualification, publication pressure, and time-consuming research [4].

This study sets out to identify and assess the impact of the various problems encountered by female academics especially working mothers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education) in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In comparison to men who averagely spend 40 hours at work for a week, women spend between 50 and 80 hours averagely per week. Such other tasks that women engage in include childbearing, child caring, husband-caring, and other household works with other demands.

These developments have brought enormous challenges to working women especially female academics. The size of the family determines the volume of work since housework and childcare remain largely the responsibilities of women [5]. Female academics suffer in their career development when social policy is based on myths of motherhood instead of the realities of contemporary life in Nigeria [6]; [7].

LITERATURE REVIEW

To reconcile a successful career with parenthood can be challenging

The female academics are confronted with conflicting choices. For instance, if they plan to have children, they will have to apply for leave of absence which is depending on the institution's calendar. On returning, she may be lagging behind in academic activities that determine her promotion. In addition, women's career and family choices do not always follow a straight path like their male counterparts. This often describe female academic career as inconsistent.

Research question

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by female academics in tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State?
2. Does childcare hamper the career success of female academics?
3. Do family responsibilities of female academics affect career development particularly in Nasarawa State?
4. To what extent do cultural factors affect female academics career development?

Objective

The objective of this study is to identify problems encountered by female academics in their quest for career development in Nigeria particularly in tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study has the following objectives:

1. To identify various challenges of female academics in tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State
2. To analyse the influence of childcare on the career success of women in academics
3. To investigate the influence of family responsibilities of working mothers on career development particularly female academics in Nasarawa State of Nigeria
4. To examine the influence of cultural factors on female academics career advancement

particularly for women in academics. Coping with family responsibilities in

Nigeria and having enough time to think and create new ideas as required in the academic profession is not easy for women in tertiary institutions [8]. It should be noted that the position of women in higher education cannot be treated in isolation from the general status of women in society.

Reasons for slow career advancement among female academics include; multiple social responsibilities, high geographical mobility of the career, time-consuming nature of the work, as well as lack of female mentors [9].

Some characteristics make academic career more demanding. There are tripartite roles of teaching, research, and community service that must be fulfilled which increases the level of demand. Indeed, it is a profession with a great deal of overload [10]. Conducting a research, writing a book, running an experiment or engaging in a field study are actually time-consuming that cannot be quickly disposed.

Establishing oneself in the career creates a lot of demand as the person will have to give total priority to work at the expense of any other interests and responsibilities. The latter poses a challenge to women faculty. According to [11], it generates the greatest inequity of all, the profession is set up in such a way

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Liberal feminism sees that gender as a system of stratification produces a gendered division of labour, an organization of society into public and private spheres, and a cultural dimension of sexist ideology. The two spheres constantly interact in the lives of women (more than they do for men), and both spheres are still shaped by patriarchal ideology and sexism, which also are pervasive in contemporary mass media [16].

Women in the private sphere, are confronted by social responsibilities and

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study use descriptive research survey. This was used to ascertain the nature of the obstacles women in academics faced in career development in tertiary

that men academics routinely have families, while women, given current roles, find it much more difficult.

It should be noted however that, the nature of academic work is different from other occupations. Working hours are not limited to contracted ones, at times work can spill into free time making it difficult to identify the difference between the two [12]. According to [13], "there are always article to read, papers to grade, syllabi to update". This describes the nature of academic profession.

Again, geographical mobility is necessary for academics to engage in research, travel and participate in conferences, attend workshops, present papers as guest lecturers and for further studies. Also, it should be pointed out that, job mobility is high in the academic career which involve moving to another place, in most cases, such mobility is not easy to reconcile with a family [14].

[15] was of the opinion that women with children are stereotyped in a negative way as being less serious about their careers because having children, imposes strings on time, energy and geographical mobility of women. The issue of raising children usually affects what women give attention to, reduces expectation from their work, and makes them to develop several alternatives to adapt.

return to "a second shift" of home and childcare [17]; [18]. The ability of women to favourably compete in career and profession is obstructed by private sphere demands [19].

It is not lacking in choice or an oppressive culture which restrict women in their career development, but the lack of equal opportunities. To address these inequalities, according to [8], there should be freedom to follow their ambitions and dreams without being stifled by the dead weight of inequality that has moulded our society for too long.

institutions of Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria. Nasarawa State in the North-central of Nigeria is bordered by Plateau State on the North, Abuja (F.C.T) on the West, Benue and Taraba State

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respectively on the South and East. Nasarawa State is made up of thirteen (13) Local Government Areas which include; Akwanga, Awe, Doma, Karu, Keana, Keffi, Kokona, Lafia, Nasarawa, Nassarawa-Eggon, Obi, Toto, and Wamba. Lafia serves as state capital. The tertiary institutions in the state include Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnic and Colleges of Education.

The population under study comprise of all female academics in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State. They are Federal University, Lafia (12); Nasarawa State University, Keffi (70); Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa (89); Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia (48); College of

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Agriculture, Lafia (30); and College of Education, Akwanga (56); totalling 305. Using a purposive sampling technique, records of all female academic staff were obtained from various tertiary institutions in the state using the staff list. The sample was selected on the basis that they are relevant and available for this study. The major tool of data collection used was the questionnaire. This is because of its flexibility and capability of eliciting information on a wide range of issues.

Data collected for the study was analysed using frequency distribution and simple percentage for the research questions.

ANALYSIS

Out of 305 questionnaires distributed based on the sampled population, 277 were returned. Therefore the analyses were based on the number of returned questionnaires.

SECTION A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics

TABLE 1: Age Distribution

| Age Range | Frequency | Per cent |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 25-34 | 59 | 21.3 |
| 35-44 | 97 | 35.0 |
| 45-54 | 86 | 31.1 |
| 55-64 | 35 | 12.6 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

Above table indicates various age group of female in academic institutions of Nasarawa State, in which lecturers under the age of 35-44 was observed to have the highest frequency.

TABLE 2: Marital Status of respondents

| Marital status | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Separated/Divorce | 40 | 14.4 |
| Single Mothers | 45 | 16.3 |
| Married | 192 | 69.3 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

Therespondents' marital status showed that most female academic staff are married women, 16.3% and 14.4% are single mothers and separated, maybe through divorce or any natural means.

TABLE 3: Respondents' current position

| Options | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Professor | 1 | 0.4 |
| Associate professor | 3 | 1.1 |
| Administrator | 20 | 7.2 |
| Senior Research Fellow/Lecturer | 44 | 15.9 |
| Ph.D. student | 46 | 16.6 |
| Lecturer | 163 | 58.8 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The above table shows the female academic staff's current position in various tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State, most of the female staff are lecturers.

TABLE 4: Academic post of respondents

| Options | Frequency | Per cent |
|--------------|-----------|----------|
| Senior | 34 | 12.3 |
| Junior | 101 | 36.5 |
| Intermediate | 142 | 51.2 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

This table is showing respondents' academic posts in tertiary institutions of Nasarawa State in which most of the staff are intermediate by post with about 51 per cent and also academic posts like senior and junior with percentages 12 and 37 respectively.

TABLE 5: Respondents' Years in current position

| Options | Frequency | Per cent |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| 10years & above | 30 | 10.83 |
| < 2 years | 76 | 27.44 |
| 5-9 years | 82 | 29.60 |
| 2-4 years | 89 | 32.13 |
| Total | 277 | 100.0 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table indicates respondents' years in current positions of female academia in the various institutions of Nasarawa State in which staff with the highest years spent fall between the range of 2-4 years with about 32.13%.

TABLE 6: Respondents' Number of children

| Options | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| 9 & above | 2 | 0.7 |
| 7-8 | 8 | 2.9 |
| Not applicable | 26 | 9.4 |
| 5-6 | 65 | 23.5 |
| 3-4 | 110 | 39.7 |
| 1-2 | 66 | 23.8 |
| Total | 277 | 100.0 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

Distribution of respondents' according to their number of children, reflect that most of the female academic staff have children that fall between the range of 3-4 with about 39.7% followed by those that have children under the range of 1-2 with about 23.8%. Respondents with 5-6 children represent 23.5% while 7-8 is 2.9% and 0.7% represents those that have 9 children and above. However, 9.4% of the respondents have no children.

Table 7: Do care for the sick, elderly relatives and the disable affect your career?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| A substantial amount | 16 | 5.8 |
| Not applicable | 44 | 15.9 |
| Not at all | 77 | 27.8 |
| Somewhat | 140 | 50.5 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table reflects respondents' distribution on how to care for the sick, disabled or elderly relatives adversely affect their career. The majority of respondents representing 51% and 16%, were of the view that caring for the sick and other relatives adversely affected their career, while 28% had no negative effect, those that felt unconcerned or felt not applicable represents 16%.

TABLE 8: Reasons for having a break from academic career

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| To find a more suitable employment | 7 | 2.5 |
| To work in another sector | 22 | 8.0 |
| Change in partner's Employment | 30 | 10.8 |
| Change in family location | 38 | 13.7 |
| To take care of children | 180 | 65.0 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The above is the distribution of respondents' based on the question on reasons for having a break from academic career, in which most of the female academic staff stated that it was because they have to take care of their children which cover almost about 65 per cent of the respondents' responses in various institutions of Nasarawa State. This is followed by those that advance the reason for change in family location with about 13.7 per cent. For some, it was a result of differences in partner's employments which represent 10.8%. Some had a break to work in another sector particularly political appointment represented by 8% while 2.5% represent respondents left to find more suitable employment.

TABLE 9: Whether having children constitute a barrier to career aspiration?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| No | 60 | 21.7 |
| Yes | 217 | 78.3 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table indicates that 78% are of the view that children constitute a barrier to career development while about 22% say it does not.

Table 10: Do family responsibilities affect your career?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| No | 65 | 23.5 |
| Yes | 212 | 76.5 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

Respondents' distribution on whether family responsibilities affect their career as a working mother indicates that most of the staff responded yes representing 76.5%, while those that responded no represents 23.5%.

Table 11: Do family responsibilities conflict with time of research?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| Not at all | 10 | 3.6 |
| Rather constrained | 30 | 10.8 |
| Fairly conflicting | 80 | 28.9 |
| A lot | 157 | 56.7 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

In table 11, those that experienced much conflict with family responsibilities represent 56.7%, while those that research time are fairly conflicting with family responsibilities represents 29%, rather constrained 10.8%. About 3.6% do not experience such conflict.

Table 12: Do meetings and seminars conflict with your family responsibilities?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Never | 90 | 32.5 |
| Somewhat | 187 | 67.5 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table shows respondents' distribution of whether meetings and seminars in their workplace conflict with family responsibilities. Most of the respondents representing 67.5% says yes, while 32.5% says they have never experience conflict. This explains why many women find it difficult to attend important meetings, seminars, and conferences that can enhance their career and promotion on the job.

Table 13: Central constraint to career development

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Personal characteristics | 8 | 2.9 |
| Change of sector | 15 | 5.4 |
| Personal circumstances | 17 | 6.1 |
| Location of employment | 21 | 7.6 |
| Career break | 40 | 14.4 |
| Working life balance | 78 | 28.2 |
| Childcare commitment | 98 | 35.4 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table reveals that 98(35.4%) agreed that childcare commitment has been a major constraint on their career, while 78(28.2%) view balancing work and family as a limitation to

their career. Others 40(7.58%) say career break, location of employment 21(7.58%), personal circumstances and characteristics 17(6.14%) 8(2.89%), change of sector 15(5.15%) respectively.

Table 14: Do cultural factors play any role in career development?

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| No | 80 | 28.9 |
| Yes | 197 | 71.1 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

Source: Researcher's survey 2018

The table indicates the distribution of whether cultural factors played any role in their career development. Most of the respondents answered yes with about 71% and those that answered no covers about 29%. It can be deduced from the table that working mothers are constrained by cultural expectations.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The study established that family size can influence the career development of female academics in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State of Nigeria.
2. Children constitute a barrier to female academics career aspirations.
3. Family responsibilities of female academics affect their career development particularly in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State of Nigeria.
4. Female academics are disadvantaged as regards opportunities for career growth in the tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.
5. Childcare serves as a potential barrier to the career success of female academics in Nasarawa State.
6. Women's roles and career advancement are greatly influenced by their cultural environments.
7. Female academics are faced with sets of incompatible expectations and demands.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that several problems regarding career development were seen to be made worse by challenges and difficulties female academics faced. Multiple factors influenced and has limited female academics career aspirations in tertiary institutions. In particular, they are associated with career breaks particularly to look after children which hamper their career development in return. Also, they lack opportunities for participating in their workplaces and having difficulties in combining work with family commitment.

The study suggests that problems of family responsibilities are more commonly experienced by women. The most important problem women face is inequality with their male counterparts at workplaces. Academic work is still structured in a way that offers little flexibility to allow women to combine raising a family with a successful career. Throughout this study, the researcher has attempted to share the concern female academics expressed in trying to balance their careers with family lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study calls for specific recommended actions corresponding to the research findings, they are discussed below.

1. The study suggests that tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State should pay closer attention to work-family balance and gender-related issues.
2. Institutions should make provision for childcare and invest in childcare facilities. This will reduce the burden of childcare on working mothers.

3. Establish linkages for staff to keep abreast with recent developments during career break.
4. Tertiary institutions in Nasarawa state should initiate policies and develop support for working mothers
5. Load reduction and tenure clock adjustment should be considered for working mothers.
6. The influences of culture on women should be reduced through reform and legislation to enhance gender equality in the workplace.

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