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Work-Life Experiences of Women in the Construction Industry: A Case of Women in Lagos Mainland, Nigeria

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Abstract

The construction industry has not been able to maximize its full potentials in terms of harnessing the talents and abilities of its diverse workforce. Despite calls for a more pluralistic and inclusive workforce, the construction industry remains male-dominated, thereby limiting its growth potentials. The study examined the effects of workload on family expectations intending to support initiatives on gender equality and equity that will improve working conditions in the industry and eventually increase its performance and competitiveness. The study used questionnaires to achieve the research purpose. The survey was based on a purposive sampling of female construction professionals from different companies in Lagos Mainland, Nigeria. Descriptive statistics and linear regression were used for analysing the data. From the linear regression model, it was revealed that workload affects family responsibility at 73.20%. The significant family responsibilities affected by workload included: making alternative arrangements for children's school transportation, spending time with spouse, spending time with children, taking care of household chores, and going shopping for the family. The study focused only on female construction professionals working in the Mainland area of Lagos, Nigeria. More empirical evidence of the effects of workload on family responsibilities can be obtained by considering female professionals in other regions of Nigeria. These findings have serious implications on job fulfilment, organizational loyalty, employee retention, and organizational performance. The study recommends flexible working hours and other gender-friendly policies to attain the much desired inclusive, profitable and sustainable construction industry.

Keywords: organisational performance, sustainable development, work-life balance, work-life conflict, work stress

1. Introduction

Construction is a vibrant sector in many countries. It enhances socio and economic development due to its huge demand and supply capabilities. However, the industry has not been able to maximize its full potentials in terms of harnessing the talents and abilities of its diverse workforce. Despite calls for a more pluralistic and inclusive workforce, the construction industry remains male-dominated. This situation limits the competitiveness, growth potentials and performance of the industry [1,2,3].

Career women, particularly those in the construction industry remain one of the largest unexploited assets for national development [4,5]. With the challenges of skill shortage and the aging male-dominated workforce, women can be relied upon to bridge the gap [6]. Moreover, women



possess unique abilities to solve problems and manage situations which are desirable attributes for a complex industry such as construction.

However, the number of women in the construction industry remains low as is the case in other male-dominated professions. The under-representation of women in the construction industry appears worse than other sectors because of the uniqueness of the industry. The temporary nature of work, the large number of fragmented organisations and the over-dependence of contract staff in the industry make organisational boundaries unclear, which leads to employee exploitation. Over time this situation has become a norm in the industry whereby the wellbeing of operatives is viewed as less significant. This condition has more effects on women than men because they have to contend with unsatisfactory working conditions and family responsibilities at the same time.

This has negative implications for the wellbeing of women, their families, and organizational performance. For instance, work pressure can cause physical and mental breakdown in the health of women [7] leading to absenteeism and poor organizational performance. It could also result in damaging family relationships [8] particularly in situations where married women are unable to manage their domestic roles such as child care, spouse care, care for parents and in-laws, and inability to meet other social engagements. Moreover, Mainiero and Sullivan [9] reported that work pressure is one of the major reasons for high employee turnover among women construction professionals between the age of 35 and 45 years. There is also the problem of job dissatisfaction [10] which affects employee loyalty and commitment.

This paper presents additional empirical evidence on the work and family responsibilities of women in construction. The study determines the effects of workload on family expectations with a view of supporting initiatives on gender equality and equity that will improve working conditions in the industry and eventually increase its performance and competitiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Issues and the Uniqueness of the Construction Industry

There have been a lot of improvements in the gender ratios in the world of work. Gurjao [11] noted that many women are now entering professional fields such as banking, retail trade, insurance, and education. But, the number of women in science, engineering, and construction are still comparatively low [6]. Even so, gender ratios in science reveal that there are more women in science disciplines than there are in construction and engineering. For instance, Jefferson, Bloor, and Maynard [12] affirmed that women in the United Kingdom (UK) now outnumber men in medical practice, while only 18% of the professionals in the UK construction industry are women [13]. The fact that women in the construction industry are outnumbered by men places them at a disadvantage, particularly when it comes to the design and implementation of pro-women policies.

The construction industry also has one of the highest rates of women attrition. Moncaster and Dillon, [13] noted that women are leaving the construction industry as much as they are entering. Women leave the industry for several reasons including discrimination [14], poor work-life conflict [15] and by personal choice [16]. Furthermore, the construction industry by nature is characterized by masculine tendencies such as aggression, forcefulness, disputes, and competitiveness. These characteristics describe men more than women [17], and discourage cultural stereotypes from remaining in the industry. However, dissatisfaction with pay and work conditions is one of the most significant reasons why women leave the industry [10]. According to [13] women, engineers and architects are already been paid less than their male colleagues a few years after graduation.

The temporary nature of projects is one of the major causes of inequality in the construction industry. Team members are usually co-opted from different organisations and made to form a team to attain project objectives. The situation is different in other industries where work and relationships are more stable and continuous [18]. Temporary works and relationships blur organizational boundaries, which makes responsibilities and obligations negotiable instead of being more stable [19]. In most temporary work situations the norms and standards used are different from those used outside the

project [20], and this breeds inequalities [21].

2.2 Work Experiences of Women in Construction

Work experience for most career women is challenging. Women working in the construction industry have to overcome more daunting obstacles such as segregation, sexual harassment, threats, and performance pressure to succeed in their workplaces.

The nature of the industry makes work condition for women almost unbearable. Powell [22] described the construction workplace as one with great responsibilities, demanding long working hours, and immense pressure. Construction sites are characterised by unsafe working conditions [23] and high occurrence of fatalities and injuries, making it one of the riskiest workplaces [24]. According to [25] the construction sector is labour intensive and involves long work hours. Leung et al., [26] and Fong and Kwok, [27] described the construction industry in terms of the complexity of working relationships, tasks, and delivery time. Rómel, Corona-Suárez, and García-Ibarra [28] also noted that supportive work culture and satisfactory pay are lacking in the sector.

Moreover, the industry is male-dominated and the work culture is characterized by male values such as extended work hours, rivalry, and full-time work [29; 30]. This male-dominated work culture is a major hindrance to gender equality in the industry.

Besides male-domination, many women still have to contend with discrimination. Discrimination may come from the direct supervisor, colleague, or even clients [31]. There is almost no respite for women in construction because with every project participant the women are judged by their gender and not their abilities. Some of the discriminations that women in construction face may be as a result of the notion that women are not able to separate work expectations from family responsibilities. Other areas where women are discriminated against include recruitment [32], salary [33], and other entitlements such as maternity leave.

Work in construction also offers little chance for career progression and development for women. Akpinar-Sposito [33] noted that many employers in the industry are reluctant to promote women because they think women do not perform as much as their male counterparts.

On the surface level, women may underperform their male colleagues. For instance, when it comes to traveling which is a frequent experience in construction, women would rather stay back because of family commitments, thereby losing out on promotion and other benefits [31]. However, by considering the dual roles women play in terms of family responsibilities and work demands, it will be fair to provide equal platforms for both men and women during promotions and other career growth opportunities rather than deny women promotion out rightly. Existing work models have not improved the inequality situation in the industry either.

Lingard and Francis [34] noted that it is common for employers to reward and promote workers who can forfeit other life assignments such as family responsibilities to handle larger work demands and meet tight work schedules. So to gain promotion, respect, and other benefits most women in construction work twice as hard as their male counterparts [35].

2.3. Life experiences of women in construction

Apart from career expectations, many working women also have to meet up with demanding family responsibilities. Some of the tasks that women have to perform at home include child care, domestic chores, care for parents and in-laws, and other social engagements [36].

Kabasakal [37] noted that most career women are married and have at least two children. In a survey on the work-life balance of women in male-dominated fields, Tunji-Olayeni et al. [38] discovered that most female construction professionals were married with children less than 18 years. The study also revealed that domestic chores were the most demanding family responsibility encountered by women professionals in construction.

Women in construction experience stress at work and also struggle to cope with demanding family responsibilities at home. The inability to properly manage family responsibilities and work experiences can lead to work-life conflict, which can harm the wellbeing of women and eventually lead to poor organizational performance.

Hence, the conversations on work and life experiences of women in construction should continue until the industry begins to take actions towards gender equity and equality

3. Research Methodology

The research design used in this study was quantitative. Questionnaires were used to elicit information from 50 female construction professionals through a purposive sampling technique. The study area was Lagos Mainland in Nigeria. The construction professionals comprised of Architects, Builders, Engineers, and Quantity Surveyors.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part of the questionnaire had questions on the respondents' background, the second part contained questions on workload, while the third part had questions on family responsibilities. The questions in the second and third parts of the questionnaire were established on a five-point Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the items in the survey instrument. Reliability scores of 0.70 and 0.88 were obtained for questions in the second and third sections respectively, indicating a high level of reliability [39].

The data were analysed through descriptive statistics and linear regression. The descriptive statistics provide more understanding of the background of the participants in terms of their age, professional affiliation, years of experience, household characteristics, and work location. The effect of workload on family responsibilities was analysed using linear regression.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Respondents' Profile

The profiles of the respondents are presented in table 1. The respondents can be grouped into 4 categories in terms of their ages. Out of all the women surveyed, 11 were less than 29 years of age, 32 of them were between the age of 30 and 39 while 7 of the women were between 40 and 49 years of age (Table 1). This result indicates that most of the women surveyed were between the age of 30 and 39 years of age. The women were also classified according to their professional affiliations. Table 1 shows the professional affiliations of the women surveyed.

The survey also assessed the household characteristics of women. From table 1, it can be seen that 28 women were married with children under the age of 18, 3 were married and have children who were more than 18 years of age, 1 of the women surveyed was a single parent, 5 women were married without children while 13 women were unmarried. Since most of the women surveyed were married and had children who were less than 18 years of age, it means that majority of the women had demanding roles to play at home in terms of care for their husbands and children and also other domestic chores that go with caring such as shopping, meal preparation, housekeeping, and children school arrangements.

The years of experience of the women were also examined. From table 1, we find that 19 women had work experience of fewer than 10 years while 31 women had been working in the industry for about 10 to 20 years. This suggests that the majority of the women surveyed have sufficient experience to provide reliable data for the study.

Table 1: Respondents Profile

Description	Frequency
<i>Age</i>	
Less than 29 years	11
30-39 years	32
40-49 years	7
Total of 50	
<i>Professional Affiliation</i>	
Architects	16
Builders	8
Quantity Surveyors	12
Engineers	14
Total	50
<i>Household characteristics</i>	
Women who are married with kids less than 18 years	28
Women who are married with kids more than 18 years	3
Single parents	1
Women married without children	5
Unmarried women	13
Total	50
<i>Working Experience</i>	
Less than 10 years	19
Between 10 and 20 years	31
Total	50

4.2 Work Experiences

Fig 1 shows the work experiences of the women surveyed in terms of daily working hours, weekend work, and holiday work. Fig 1 shows that 14 women worked less than 8 hours every day while 36 of them worked for more than 8 hours daily. This analysis shows that majority of the women worked for more than 8 hours a day.

Lingard and Francis [40] also found that construction workers work for an average of 62.5 hours every week which is more than 8 hours a day. Even women are not spared as they have to put in unusually long hours working on construction sites [36]. The demanding and time-bound nature of the industry may be due to the long and irregular hours of work prevalent in the industry.

These data support ILO [41] that most workers in developing countries work for more than 8 hours every day. However, lengthy and irregular working hours can be very detrimental for workers and women in particular, and it eventually affects organizational performance.

Given the fact that most of the women surveyed have demanding family responsibilities because they are married women who have children less than 18 years of age, they may be unable to cope with work pressure, thereby experiencing work and life conflict. Work conflict can lead to job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, low organizational commitment, and low productivity. Life conflict that can arise as a result of an inability to manage work and family demands includes physical and mental exhaustion, depression, and poor family relationships.

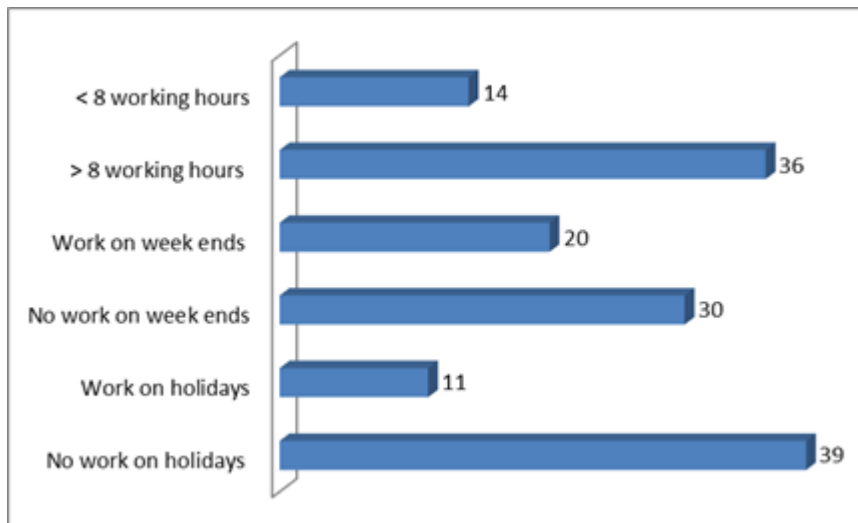


Fig 1: Hours of work, weekends and holidays

4.3 Effect of workload on family expectations

A linear regression model was used to predict the effect of workload on family expectations. Table 2 shows the model summary which indicates that the work pressure of the women surveyed affects their family expectations at 73.20%.

This indicates that the women surveyed face tremendous pressure at work that inhibits their ability to meet their family expectations. In a situation like this, three sides suffer the women, their families, and their work. The workload in the construction industry has negative impacts on workers especially women, and it continues to affect the performance and image of the industry.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.856 ^a	.732	.614	.615

Table 2: Model Summary

From the ANOVA table (table 3), the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. This shows that the data provides sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a good relationship between the variables in the model.

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.133	15	2.342	6.189	.000 ^b
	Residual	12.867	34	.378		
	Total	48.000	49			

Table 3: ANOVA Table

Table 4 gives the significant family expectations that are affected by workload. Thirteen family expectations are highlighted. They are: taking children to and fro school, making alternative arrangements for children's school transportation, attending children's school events, staying at home with a sick child, taking children for medical checks, spending time with spouse, spending time with children, visiting neighbours and friends, participating in community activities, arranging for

children's summer holidays, adjusting work hours to meet family emergencies, taking care of household chores and going for shopping for the family.

Out of the 13 family expectations only 5 were significantly affected by workload. They include: making alternative arrangements for children's school transportation (0.030), spending time with spouse (0.002), spending time with children (0.039), taking care of household chores (0.000), and going for shopping for family (0.000). Jang and Zippay [42] noted that women take on several tasks as wives, mothers, and housekeepers. However, the results show that work pressure is significantly affecting women's ability to meet their family responsibilities. In cases like this, women struggle to balance their work responsibilities and family expectations.

As noted earlier, this situation has a negative implication for the wellbeing of women [43]. Some of the health-related challenges that may arise due to the inability to balance work and family include burnout, body pains, insomnia, loss of appetite, and overindulgence [44]. Work-life conflict also leads to occupational stress which eventually affects job productivity [45].

Table 4 Effects of workload on family expectations

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.176	1.164		1.869	.070
Taking children to and fro school	-1.705	1.013	-3.424	-1.683	.102
Making alternative arrangements for children's school transportation	2.131	.943	4.240	2.260	.030
Attending children's school events	.057	.255	.077	.224	.824
Staying at home with a sick child	-.429	.580	-.607	-.740	.464
Taking children for medical check	.243	.434	.355	.560	.579
Spending time with spouse	-.559	.164	-.651	-3.403	.002
Spending time with children	-.261	.122	-.345	-2.145	.039
Visiting neighbors and friend	-.136	.301	-.176	-.452	.654
Participating in community activities	.149	.157	.201	.954	.347
Arranging for children's summer holiday	-.032	.363	-.050	-.089	.930
Adjusting work hours to meet family emergencies	-.136	.301	-.176	-.452	.654
Taking care of household chores	1.155	.229	.711	5.037	.000
Going shopping for family	-.460	.107	-.539	-4.288	.000

5. CONCLUSION

The work and life experiences of women in the field of construction were assessed. It was observed that the work-load of women affects their ability to meet their family expectations.

The most significant family expectations affected by work-load were: making alternative arrangements for children's school transportation, spending time with spouse, spending time with children, taking care of household chores, and going shopping for the family.

This situation prevents women from meeting their family responsibilities thereby causing a conflict between work and family life. The findings from this research provide additional empirical evidence of the effect of work on the family life of women in the construction industry.

Stakeholders in the construction sector have to move beyond lip service to practically taking steps that will ameliorate the conditions of women in the industry.

The industry will gain a lot by improving the conditions of women. Firstly, it will improve its image from being male-dominated to one that is gender inclusive and pluralistic. Secondly, the industry will be able to attract and retain more women thereby meeting the skills shortages in the industry and tapping the potentials of women. Lastly, the performance and competitiveness of the industry will be greatly enhanced as a result of improved job satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment.

5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided:

- i. The construction industry should deliberately design policies that will improve the working conditions of women so they can be able to cope effectively with their family responsibilities. Such policies may include task sharing, policies on maternity and child care, flexible work schemes, and career breaks.
- ii. The government has to support the idea of gender equality otherwise it may be difficult to improve outcomes of working women particularly for those in the construction industry. The government can show its support by creating agencies or empowering existing agencies to monitor the implementation of women-friendly policies.
- iii. Women should also reach out for help within their families and communities so that they do not get overwhelmed with family responsibilities. Women who can afford house help should also seek their assistance to reduce the demands of house chores and child care.

6.0 Area of further study

A future study will be to explore the effect of multiple roles on the psychological well-being, financial security, and life satisfaction of women in construction with a view of highlighting the benefits of decent work for women.

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