

Evaluating the Relationship between Work-Family Conflict and Organisational Commitment among Rural Women Health Workers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Emmanuel Agwu ARISI-NWUGBALLA

¹*Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria
E-mail: nwugballa@gmail.com*

Abstract *The purpose of this paper was to investigate the relationship between work-family conflict and organisational commitment among rural women health workers in Ebonyi State. In doing this, a field survey of 345 working women in 87 government-owned health centres and health posts was conducted. Quantitative data was collected via questionnaire, and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results revealed statistically significant negative correlation between time-based family-to-work conflict and organisational commitment, and between strain-based family-to-work conflict and organisational commitment. The results also showed insignificant negative correlation between behaviour-based family-to-work conflict and organisational commitment. The implication of these results is that working women's organisational commitment does not depend on work-related issues only but also on their family experiences; requiring organisations to introduce more environment-relevant family-friendly policies, and for their spouses to concede greater support (involvement) in women's domestic obligations. These measures would alleviate working women's family-to-work conflict and improve their commitment and performances at work.*

Key words Work-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, organisational commitment, Igbo culture, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Prior to the advent of Western education and values, the Igbo society was rural, agrarian, and traditional, as reflected in the novel: *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1994). Individual and collective behaviours were heavily defined and regulated by the customs and traditional norms of the community, which in turn, marked its identity as a people. Deviations from the culturally accepted standards of behaviour were sanctioned in specific ways, in order to enhance compliance.

In the same vein, gender roles were defined by customs and traditions. Responsibilities at work, family, and community activities were along gender lines, which probably reflected Igbo cultural attribution of strength and weakness to masculinity and femininity, respectively. In the family, men were obligated to provide money for their families' up-keep; construct, repair, and maintain family infrastructures including houses, fences, barns etc.; and to maintain the peace and security of their families, etc. Men were traditionally not obligated to engage in core domestic activities such as childcare, cooking and serving food, etc. It may even be considered 'unmanly' for men to engage in such domestic activities, except in exceptional circumstances such as ill-health and other emergencies.

Women, on their part, bore children and managed the home. These responsibilities involved child and elderly care, cooking and serving food, washing clothes, and sundry domestic chores; often assisted by their children, house-helpers, and/or relatives. Traditionally, few women engaged in paid-employment, probably because it was not their role to earn income for their families and/or because involvement in paid-employment encroached on the time, energy, and other resources women needed to carry out their family responsibilities, which were society's expectations of women. Women who routinely engaged in paid

employment (in addition to their family responsibilities), often did so due to their husbands' inability to sufficiently provide for their families or because they were heads of families, e.g. widows and single mothers.

The family was an important domain to women because marriage and children were central to their individual social identity. Consequently, most women tended to lean toward their family responsibilities than to paid-work. Family apparently justified work because income without family may not make much sense to an average Igbo woman. It appears that, to many women, work did not compete with family; work rather complemented family. Igbo culture apparently encouraged women to be family-centred and men to be work-centred.

Even at the early stages of the advent of Western education and formal work arrangements in Nigeria, men heavily dominated the workforce because men were mostly the early beneficiaries of Western education and, consistent with the traditional family gender role, men were the breadwinners. Incidentally, the economic conditions that prevailed at the time were amenable to families having sole breadwinners; a factor which encouraged the practice of traditional family gender roles of working (income-earning) men and family (care-taking) women. The employment of men in the formal sector usually meant that their (often uneducated or poorly educated) wives either focused entirely on family responsibilities (the so-called housewives) or combined it with petty income generating activities.

Traditional societies were essentially rudimentary; family needs were relatively few, and men were the income-earners. Women (and children) helped the men to grow food for their families, some even engaged in paid-employment; but their primary obligations were at home. Incidentally, the nature of men's domestic obligations afforded them some relaxation at home because Igbo culture did not encourage them to assist their wives with their heavy domestic duties. So, whether a woman worked in paid-employment or not, she was still obligated to meet her domestic responsibilities. In the same vein, whether a man was in paid-employment or not, it did not abate his wife's domestic work burden because the Igbo culture apparently exempted him from engaging in such activities.

However, a lot have changed over the years. The Igbo society is increasingly less rural, agrarian, and traditional. Family needs have become more complex and expensive to satisfy. Unemployment has increased from 13.1% in 2000 to 23.9% in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics 2012). High levels of inflation have emasculated the naira; averaging 12.11% between 1996 and 2016, with a record high of 47.56% in January, 1996 (www.tradingeconomics.com 2016). Poverty is widespread and increasing, escalating from 28.1% in 1980 to 69% in 2010 (British Council 2012). Interestingly, rural poverty rate was consistently higher than urban poverty rate throughout the period. For instance, in 2010 rural poverty rate stood at 73.2%, while urban poverty was 61.8% (British Council 2012). Many families, even rural families, are no longer self-sufficient in food production. The struggle for survival has heightened. Traditional family gender roles have become increasingly unsustainable because the underlying assumptions have either been weakened or eroded. The huge financial requirements of modern lifestyle have pushed the satisfaction of an average family's needs beyond the competence of most sole breadwinners (traditionally men).

It, therefore, became necessary that women should work, in order to earn incomes to support their families. United Nations (2012) indicates that working women constitute 40% of Nigeria's labour force. Women's involvement in the workforce was made easier by improvements in girl-child education. Nationally, the Gender Gap Index (UNESCO 2011) reported female literacy rate of 50%. In Ebonyi State, annual female basic education enrolment grew from 125,696 in 1999 to 271,195 (115.8% increase) in 2009 before it dropped to 198,368 (57.8% increase) in 2013 (Ebonyi State Universal Basic Education Board 2014). The boost in women's access to formal education enhanced their employability, helped to improve their perceived self-worth, and motivated them to pursue equal gender rights, which includes increased participation in the labour-force.

However, Igbo cultural insistence that women, whether they work or not, must not renege on their subsisting domestic obligations obviously exerts greater pressures on working women. The Igbo society recognizes the need for women to engage in paid-employment, which hitherto was outside their traditional family gender role, but is slow in making concessions to them in respect of their subsisting family obligations. Most men insist on not taking part in core domestic chores that were traditionally assigned to women. This proclivity is prevalent in Ebonyi State; one of the Igbo-speaking States in South-East Nigeria. Rural communities, such as Ebonyi State, are repositories of age-long cultural beliefs, values and norms that

support traditional gender roles. Therefore, rural men have greater inclination, than their urban counterparts, to insist on not assuming any of their working wives' domestic obligations, which reduces spousal support for the women. Furthermore, most rural working women bear an increasing financial burden of their families' upkeep and children's education: responsibilities abdicated by many of their relatively poor husbands. As a result, rural working women in Ebonyi State continue to engage in farming and/or other income generating activities in order to complement their salary incomes, in the bid to meet up with increased family obligations. These issues tend to increase the level of rural working women's overall family engagement.

Organisations, on their part, are under pressure to achieve and sustain greater operational effectiveness and efficiencies that will afford them greater leverage for success. As a result, both private and public sector organisations are increasingly demanding superior skills, higher productivity, greater commitment, and better work-related attitudes and behaviours from their workers. These demands translate to intensification of work for employees who, on their part, demand improved welfare and better conditions of service from their employers. Even public sector organisations, with a long history of tolerance for questionable work ethics and counterproductive behaviours, seem to be making efforts at transforming towards greater operational effectiveness and efficiency.

An important implication of working women's increased role demands and expectations in the family and at work, relates to increased demands on their limited physical, psychological, and temporal resources in two critical domains. This situation ultimately exposes them to the difficulties and challenges of juggling work and family roles (Williams and Alliger, 1994). These difficulties and challenges are conceptualized as work-family conflict. This research stands on the assumption that the extent of employees' experience of work-family conflict will significantly relate to their organisational commitment.

2. Literature Review

Work-family conflict has been described as "a form of friction in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects", resulting in difficulties or inability to satisfactorily perform affected role (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Rooted in role theory (Frone 2003), work-family conflict is predicated on the theory of scarcity of time, human energy (and other personal resources), and has become a dominant approach to studying the consequences of active engagement in work and family roles (Demerout *et al.*, 2013). It is argued that those who engage in multiple roles (e.g. work and family roles) ultimately experience conflict and stress because individuals are subject to time constraints and exhaustible human energy (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Resource constraint limits the capability of individuals to engage in many roles and still find enough psychological, physical, and temporal resources to cope with the demands and expectations of all the roles they actively engage in, resulting in role strain and conflict (Goode 1960). In other words, the roles compete for the resources of the individual involved, implying that increase in the allocation of resources to a particular role (say work role) implies reduction in the allocation of resources to other roles (say family role). This is especially the case when the boundary between work and family roles is less permeable.

Work-family conflict was earlier thought of as a unidirectional concept until Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) pointed to its bi-directionality, which was later tested and confirmed by Frone *et al.* (1997). Work-to-family (WTF) conflict (i.e. responsibilities from work role interfering with family role) and family-to-work (FTW) conflict (i.e. responsibilities from family role interfering with work role) became recognised as distinct but related concepts with separate antecedents and outcomes, which should be so studied for better understanding of the nature and implications of work-family interferences (Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2001). This study focuses on FTW conflict because, according to cross-domain approach, it is the direction of work-family conflict that predominantly affects work-related outcomes (Amstad, 2011).

Research has shown that both WTF and FTW conflicts have three forms namely; time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflicts (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Time-based FTW conflict occurs when the time spent in family role impedes an individual's participation in work role. Strain-based FTW conflict occurs when stressors from the family role inhibits an individual's ability to successfully enact work role, even though the roles may be enacted at different time periods. Behaviour-based FTW conflict occurs when behaviours required or developed at home are at variance with expected behaviours at work and an

individual is unable to switch to work-compatible behaviour, which makes it difficult for the individual to fulfill the demands of work role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Organisational commitment, on its part, has several conceptualisations and definitions. Becker (1960) views it in terms of employees' interest in side-bets. Mowday *et al.* (1979) view it in terms of employees' emotional attachment to their employing organisation. Weiner (1982) views it in terms of employees' sense of obligation to the organisation; while Allen and Meyer (1990) view it as employees' affective, continuance, and normative disposition to their organisations (called the three component model). Allen and Meyer's affective commitment is equivalent to Mowday *et al.*'s emotional attachment; continuance commitment is equivalent to Becker's side-bets, while normative commitment is equivalent to Weiner's sense of obligation.

Allen and Meyer's three-component model appear to be popular in organisational commitment literature but has been criticized as a mixture of attitude towards a target - an organisation (as described by the affective component of the model), and an attitude towards a behaviour namely; staying or leaving an organisation (as depicted in the continuance and normative components of the model) and, therefore, both confusing and logically incorrect (Solinger *et al.*, 2008). In their view, Allen and Meyer's three-component model may be appropriate in predicting employee turnover but should not be used as a measure of organisational commitment. Solinger *et al.* (2008) urge researchers to revert to the original understanding and measurement of organisational commitment as an attitude towards a target, that is, the organisation. This view appears to be corroborated by the observation that 'most of the studies trying to establish the relationship between work-family conflict and organisational commitment viewed commitment as an affective relationship between employees and organisation' (Obradovic and Cudina-Obradovic 2009).

In apparent response to Solinger *et al.*'s (2008) call on researchers to revert to the original understanding and measurement of organisational commitment as an attitude towards an organisation, this study stands with Mowday *et al.*'s (1979) definition of organisational commitment as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation'. This approach considers organisational commitment as a single construct, which may be equivalent to the affective commitment component of Allen and Meyer's (1990) three component model.

As mentioned earlier, increased family and work demands on working women put pressure on their limited individual resources namely; temporal, psychological, and physical resources. The demands and expectations of work and family roles may, sometimes, contradict each other in respect of time, strain, or behaviour; resulting in work-family conflict. Work-family conflict induces negative consequences on workers' wellbeing and those of their families, fellow employees, organisations etc. It is logical to think that FTW conflict among working women, if unchecked, would inevitably rise to levels that would have serious negative consequences on their commitment to their organisations. Consequently, there is the need to understand its linkages, with a view to understanding how to manage it to avoid escalation to such levels, which justifies this study.

There generally appears to be lack of literature that directly explores the link between work-family conflict and organisational commitment, relative to say employees' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and other work-related outcomes. Citing Allen *et al.*'s (2000) meta-analysis of work-family conflict and outcomes, Haar (2008) noted that 'there are over six times as many studies on job satisfaction as organisational commitment (38 versus 6 studies respectively)'. While this trend justifies more studies into the linkages between work-family conflict and organisational commitment (such as this present study); it also draws attention to the relative dearth of publicly available literature on this topic.

The results of several studies show a negative relationship between work-family conflict and organisational commitment (e.g. Akintayo, 2010; Haar, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2013; Rehman and Waheed 2012; and Zulfiqar *et al.*, 2014), while the results of some other studies show positive relationship between the two variables (e.g. Balmforth and Gardner, 2006; Benligiary and Sonmez, 2012). These studies have shown mixed results regarding the linkage between work-family conflict and organisational commitment: some found significant negative relationship while others found significant positive relationship between the variables. These mixed results call for more investigations. Furthermore, the researcher is not aware of any study on the relationship between work-family conflict and the organisational commitment of an exclusively rural population, which implies that the findings of extant studies may, or may not, be applicable to a rural population as used in this study. These are the gaps that this present study seeks to fill.

This study specifically proposed and tested the following hypotheses:

H₀1: Time-based FTW conflict does not significantly relate to the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State.

H₀2: Strain-based FTW conflict does not significantly relate to the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State.

H₀3: Behaviour-based FTW conflict does not significantly relate to the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State.

3. Methodology of research

The study adopted a field survey approach to collect quantitative data from rural women health workers on the two variables of interest namely; FTW conflict and organisational commitment, through the use of questionnaire.

The study surveyed 345 rural women working in 87 publicly-owned health centres and health posts in three Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State. 307 usable copies of the questionnaire were returned, making a response rate of 88.98 per cent. To qualify for participation, a respondent must be in fulltime employment of the Health Department of any of the three Local Government Councils, is married, and have at least one child under the age of eighteen (18). All the participants voluntarily participated.

The population of the study did not include the management of the Local Government Health Departments because the study was exploratory in nature, and because issues of feelings and perceptions are better understood by those who feel or perceive it and, therefore, better harvested directly from them.

The instrument of data collection contains two parts. Part one contains items on the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, age of youngest child, etc. Part two of the instrument contains two sections.

Section A contains nine-item instrument on FTW conflict (developed by Carlson et al. 2000) measuring FTW conflict across its three forms, that is, time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based FTW conflict, on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument's internal consistency yielded Cronbach α value of 0.83, 0.81, and 0.83 for time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based FTW conflict respectively. Example of the items that measure time-based FTW conflict is: the time I spend on family responsibilities often interferes with my work responsibilities; example of the items that measure strain-based FTW conflict is: due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work; while example of items that measure behaviour-based FTW conflict is: the behaviours that work for me at home do not seem to be effective at work.

Section B contains a 9-item instrument on organisational commitment (developed by Mowday *et al.*, 1982) measuring organisational commitment as a single construct that reflects employee's affective attachment to an organisation. This instrument also uses 5-point Likert-scale, and its internal consistency yields Cronbach α value of 0.89. An example of the items that measure organisational commitment is: I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected to help this organisation be successful.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used to investigate the relationship between time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based FTW conflicts and the organisational commitment of the population. Analyses were determined at a significance level of 0.05.

4. Results

Table 1 below shows the correlation estimates of time-based, strain-based, behaviour-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment.

Time-based FTW conflict showed a significant negative correlation with the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State ($r = -0.838$, $p < 0.01$), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.70$) meant that time-based FTW conflict accounted for 70 per cent of the total variation in the organisational commitment of the population. Strain-based FTW conflict showed a significant negative correlation with the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State ($r = -0.551$, $p < 0.01$), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.30$) meant that strain-based FTW conflict accounted for 30 per cent of the total variation in the organisational commitment of the population.

Table 1. Correlation Estimates of Time-Based, Strain-Based, Behaviour-based FTW Conflict, and Organisational Commitment

	1	2	3	4
1 Time-based FTW conflict	-			
2 Stra-based FTW Conflict	0.550*** (0.000)	-		
3 Behaviour-based FTW Conflict	-0.030 (0.599)	0.000 (0.995)	-	
4 Organisational Commitment	-0.838*** (0.000)	-0.551*** (0.000)	-0.014 (0.803)	-
***<0.01, **<0.05				

Behaviour-based FTW conflict showed a statistically insignificant negative correlation with the organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State ($r = -0.014$, $p > 0.05$), resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis and rejection of the alternate hypothesis. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.0001$) showed that behaviour-based FTW conflict accounted for only 0.01 per cent of the total variation in the organisational commitment of the population.

The significant negative relationship between time-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment and between strain-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment found in this study is generally consistent with the findings of Li et al. (2013), Rehman and Waheed (2012), Watai et al. (2008), and Zulfiqar et al. (2014) etc. Zulfiqar et al. (2014) is particularly relevant and supportive of our finding because they study the relationship between each of the three forms of work-family conflict and (affective) organisational commitment, finding a significant negative relationship between time-based work-family conflict and organisational commitment, and between strain-based work-family conflict and organisational commitment.

The insignificant negative relationship between behaviour-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment found in this study is consistent with the findings of Balmforth and Gardner (2006) and Nart and Batur (2013). Each of these studies finds insignificant negative relationship between work-family conflict and (affective) organisational commitment. However, this finding is inconsistent with the findings of Zulfiqar et al. (2014), Li et al. (2013), and Rahman and Waheed (2012) etc., which find a significant negative relationship between behaviour-based work-family conflict and organisational commitment. Its insignificance in this study may be due to cultural factors that mitigate workers' family and work behavioural disparities. These rural women health workers inherited communal cultural values and predominantly work within their communities and amongst their people.

5. Conclusions

This study found a significant negative relationship between time-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment, and between strain-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment of rural women health workers in Ebonyi State. The study also found a statistically insignificant negative relationship between behaviour-based FTW conflict and organisational commitment of the population.

A major implication of the findings of this study is that time- and strain-based forms of FTW conflict are important variables in the management of employees towards commitment to the organisation. Low organisational commitment has been found to relate to reduced job satisfaction (Perrewe et al., 1999), low performance (Li et al., 2013), increased tardiness, absenteeism (Kirchmeyer and Cohen, 1999), high turnover and low citizenship behaviour etc. It, therefore, behoves organisations to evolve policies and practices that would help cultivate improved organisational commitment among its employees in order to avoid, reduce, or reverse these consequences of low organisational commitment. In this direction, the results of this study corroborates the results of similar studies in identifying time-based FTW conflict and strain-based FTW conflict as having significant relationships with organisational commitment.

Another implication of the findings of this study is that organisations should pay greater attention to the family welfare of their employees, not just their welfare at work. This study shows that the cross-domain effects of employees' experiences in their family roles may engender attitudes and behaviours at work, which

may negatively affect their commitment to their workplaces. It, again, behoves the organisation to implement environment-specific family-friendly policies that would help to reduce employees' experience of FTW conflict; to prevent it from rising to levels that would negatively impact employees' commitment to the organisation and organisational outcomes. Such policies may include child-care support, flexible work arrangements, and financial assistance, *inter alia*.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that there is the need for the Igbo culture to concede greater spousal support for working women in respect of their domestic obligations in order to reduce their family role load. Spousal support is especially necessary because (i) increased access to formal education has meant drastic reduction in the number of people available to offer house-help services, (ii) the Igbo culture is understandably becoming less communal because of Western influence, meaning that relatives and neighbours are increasingly unavailable to offer unpaid domestic support, and (iii) economic conditions in Nigeria are increasingly weakening the purchasing power of the domestic currency (naira), which means that an increasing number of working women are unable to afford the services of available house-helpers. Adjustments to the Igbo traditional gender role that would encourage men to assist with working women's domestic activities would reduce their FTW conflict and, *ipso facto*, increase their commitment, performance, and productivity at work.

However, this study is limited by the inherent weaknesses in the use of questionnaire as instrument of data collection. Besides, the use of only quantitative data (excluding qualitative data) in the study of human behaviour has the limitation of not providing 'the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them' (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998) that qualitative data would provide. It would, therefore, be useful to encourage studies that will make use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Finally, this study surveyed three Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State, out of thirteen; which may limit the generalisability of its results. Though the generalisability of the results is fundamentally supported by the strong cultural affinity amongst the different parts (Local Government Areas) of Ebonyi State in particular, and Igbo tribe in general, it would, nonetheless, be useful to encourage further studies that will survey more Local Government Areas of the State.

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