

The impact of COVID-19 on the work–life balance of working mothers: evidence from Nigerian academics

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

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

Abstract

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

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

Findings – Our findings reveal that the confinement policies enforced due to the need to combat the spread of COVID-19 and patriarchal norms deeply embedded in the Nigerian culture have exacerbated stress among women, who have needed to perform significantly more housework and childcare demands alongside working remotely than they did prior to the pandemic. The thematic analysis showed a loss of personal resources (e.g. time, energy, and income) resulting in career stagnation, health concerns, and increased male chauvinism due to the abrupt and drastic changes shaping the ‘new normal’ lifestyle.

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

Originality/value – The article provides valuable insights on how the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected professional working mothers in the Sub-Saharan African context, where literature is scarce.

Introduction

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

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3 For university academics, the compulsory ‘stay-at-home’ policies enforced by many nations
4 have resulted in a drastic change from working in an office to working from home, leading to
5 an unprecedented transition from the traditional face-to-face classroom learning to online
6 education (Bao, 2020). Thus, Nash and Churchill (2020) reported emerging evidence from
7 global media suggesting that female academics with care responsibilities have been severely
8 affected, as they are struggling to work remotely and fulfil their mandatory role as the
9 primary caregivers in their homes. In Nigeria, the escalating number of deaths due to the
10 spike of COVID-19 also forced the closure of all higher education institutions and a switch in
11 focus to online teaching. While Nigerian university lecturers are grappling with a serious
12 economic recession due to the spread of COVID-19, it is worth exploring how working
13 mothers in academia are being disproportionately affected as a result of the masculine
14 hegemony that shapes gender roles in Nigeria, which is an area on which literature is scarce
15 (Akanji *et al.*, 2020). According to Adisa and Isaika (2019, p. 21), patriarchy is a social and
16 ideological construct that considers men as superior to women in all spheres of life and
17 perpetuates gender inequality, sexism, and the subordination of women. This situation
18 perpetuates extreme role overload particularly for working mothers in white collar
19 professions, specifically in the global south (Mordi *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, gender
20 stereotypes resulting from long-standing patriarchal values from Asian contexts such as Japan
21 is exacerbated by their Confucian culture which propagates adherence of women to familial
22 roles and structures irrespective of their active labour involvement in the knowledge-based
23 economy (Akazawa, 2011). Furthermore, Chaudhuri *et al.*, (2019) found most Korean
24 professional women, on a daily basis combating with the overwhelming glass ceiling
25 philosophies that forces them to constantly re-evaluate their life choices of either pursuing a
26 career path or raising a family.

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28 For female academics who are mothers, it has become a herculean task trying to make it
29 through daily work and family life during COVID-19, especially in Nigeria, which has a less
30 egalitarian, collectivistic tradition (Mushiqur *et al.*, 2018). With a population of almost 200
31 million spread across over 250 ethnic groups (Worldometrics, 2020), the Nigerian society is a
32 sociocultural system that accepts high power distance (Hofstede, 1980), idealising
33 expectations of unquestionable obedience and submission towards superiors (especially men)
34 with acclaimed status and authority (Adisa *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the existence of gender
35 stereotypes and the marginalisation of female voices based on age-long glass-ceiling
36 ideologies is a major hindrance to the career development and WLB of professional women
37 (Akanji *et al.*, 2019). Nash and Churchill (2020) have argued that the global pandemic has
38 posed challenges to Australian female academics struggling with baby care and the home-
39 schooling of their toddlers while simultaneously required to actively engage in research
40 publication, online teaching, and other ancillary academic functions with the same tempo and
41 rigour at home. These experiences can potentially lead to burnout, since personal resources
42 (e.g. time, energy, and emotions) are strained in the process of juggling both work and family
43 affairs. While much research has been undertaken on the WLB challenges confronting career
44 women in western countries (Beham *et al.*, 2012), similar studies in the African context
45 remains in embryonic stages. Little is known from developing countries in Sub-Saharan
46 Africa, such as Nigeria, where cultural orientations differ from more egalitarian,
47 individualistic western cultures.

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3 Therefore, this article is a rudimentary effort to fill this gap in the literature, particularly in
4 response to calls for context-specific studies focusing on Africa in order to extend knowledge
5 and broaden our understanding of patriarchal proclivities and WLB issues facing Nigerian
6 female academics working remotely and caring for their families during the COVID-19
7 pandemic. Focusing on the contemporary debates on stress, professional women, work, and
8 family experiences during the period of the lockdown, specifically using the work-home
9 resources (W-HR) theory as an explanatory model, this study hopes to answer, from a non-
10 western perspective, the following question: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the
11 work-life balance of mothers in academia who live in a patriarchal society?
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15 In order to answer this research question, this article is structured as follows: a brief
16 theoretical background on understanding WLB and the W-HR model is given. Thereafter, the
17 methodology adopted for the data collection and analysis is presented, along with the study's
18 findings and a discussion thereof. The article concludes by explaining the study's research
19 and theoretical implications and proffered some recommendations. The study's limitations
20 and areas for future research are also presented.
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23 **Understanding Work-Life Balance and the Work-Home Resources Model**

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25 The majority of academic research and policy debates on WLB has, in the main, focused on
26 the imperative need for the working class (especially women) to improve the quality of their
27 work-life aspirations and how employers might implement family-friendly policies to foster
28 such achievement (Kelliher *et al.*, 2018). More importantly, organisational interventions such
29 as flexible work arrangements are proffered as incentives to engender work-life enrichment,
30 facilitation, and positive integration (Haar, 2013). Greenhaus *et al.* (2003, p. 513) argued that
31 achieving WLB is 'the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally
32 satisfied with – his or her work role and family role'. Although WLB is widely assumed to be
33 a matter of individual choice and circumstances, the realities of work-life intensity today are
34 making employees strenuously try to juggle their work, family, and personal lives suitably
35 (Morris *et al.*, 2011). Stress and work-life conflicts are attendant consequences when this
36 occurs. Often, work-life and occupational stress researchers have heavily relied on role theory
37 (Kahn *et al.*, 1964) to elucidate how role conflicts results in undesirable situations. Greenhaus
38 and Beutell (1985) asserted that the struggles to attain a balance may result in a form of inter-
39 role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are incompatible.
40 Organisational research have predominantly focused on how employees must comply with
41 standard working hours and appear physically at work which is always making adequate
42 involvement in home affairs difficult (Eikhof *et al.*, 2007; Ozbligin *et al.*, 2011). This is
43 because organisations now push for almost round-the-clock working hours resulting in role
44 overload (MacDonald *et al.*, 2013)
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50 From this perspective, occupational stress and work-life scholars have given considerable
51 attention to scrutinising work stressors (e.g. role ambiguity, role conflict, roles involving
52 working long hours) – aspects of the work environment that can potentially harm the job
53 attitude (e.g. work commitment) and overall life satisfaction of employees (Bowling *et al.*,
54 2017). Given this context, however, we argue that role theory, regardless of its importance,
55 has primarily adopted a restricted focus on office and workplace experiences, with limited
56 attention given to recent development in the changing mode of employment locations and
57 non-work spaces (Kelliher *et al.*, 2018). This argument is particularly relevant during this
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3 period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has blurred the work and non-work domains in a
4 way that they never have been before, as millions of working adults have compulsorily
5 transitioned to working from home in compliance with confinement policies (Corbera *et al.*,
6 2020). Sinclair *et al.* (2020, p. 3) argued that harmonising work and family roles is now
7 extremely problematic. This is because employee work roles commonly enacted at
8 organisational locations at specific office hours (Monday-Friday) and family responsibilities
9 expected to physically occur at home during evenings and weekends are fast disappearing as
10 the pandemic is now making people to work from their kitchen tables, sitting rooms and other
11 altered home-office spaces.
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15 In re-evaluating WLB research, critics have argued that WLB often re-echoes narratives on
16 how the nature of work times and environments are adversely affecting workers' personal
17 and care needs at home (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2010). This conception is, however, becoming
18 irrelevant, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as the world is grappling with the 'new
19 normal' lifestyle – work has become home, and home has become work (Hochschild, 1997),
20 with a heavy reliance on ICT. In order to keep WLB research more aligned with
21 contemporary social trends before the pandemic, Grawitch and Barber (2010), using the
22 conservation-of-resources (COR) framework, re-conceptualised WLB to focus on ways
23 people try to manage diverse personal pursuits and expend their finite personal resources (e.g.
24 time, money, emotions, and energy) in reconciling the increasing multiplicity of life's
25 demands, whether the demand is required (e.g. work) or other preferred private life affairs.
26 The COR, a prominent stress theory conceptualised by Hobfoll (1989), thus explains how
27 people attempt to acquire, retain, and conserve resources – regardless of their environment.
28 On the contrary, stress may occur and there may be a consequent risk of loss or an actual loss
29 of such resources (Hobfoll, 2001). This is because people bring considerable number of
30 resources into their daily lives and seek to achieve multiple gains, through the desire for
31 resources to positively accumulate. However, people often experience repeated demands on
32 these resources as they choose when, where, and how to allocate them due to their definable
33 limits (Hobfoll, 2011). Despite the deep conceptual insights into the general loss-gain
34 dynamics described by the COR theory, ten Brummehuis and Bakker (2012) provided a
35 richer concept – the W-HR model – that builds on COR theory to explain the interplay
36 between the demands and resources experienced in peoples' work and private life domains.
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43 At the heart of the W-HR model lies the assumption that conflict becomes inevitable when
44 contextual demands, either from a person's work or family, deplete the person's contextual
45 and/or personal resources, which then results in diminished outcomes in either or both
46 domains (ten Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012). The major highlights of the W-HR model are
47 illustrated in Table 1 below.
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50 **Insert Table 1 here**

51 From the constructs in the tabular content, contextual demands either from the work or family
52 domain range from quantitative demands (i.e. overload) to cognitive demands with specific
53 examples of each subtype. On the contrary, contextual resources (see subtypes) are
54 conventionally located outside oneself and may be found within the social context of the
55 individual to serve as buffers against the exacerbating effects of contextual demands (see
56 examples). In addition, personal resources are those illustrated in the subtypes, with some
57 examples therein. According to the W-HR model, these personal resources are often desirable
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3 and functional in achieving work goals and family demands. In sum, the adverse or enriching
4 consequences of combining these dual roles have been demonstrated to lead to certain
5 outcomes that are also exemplified in Table 1. ten Brummehuis and Bakker (2012) have
6 further argued that macro resources identified with the context in which one lives, such as the
7 cultural values, social equity and economic prosperity of a country can potentially influence
8 the intensity of work-life conflict or enrichment that may likely occur. For instance,
9 Mushfiqur *et al.* (2018) found that professional women (such as female medical doctors)
10 experiencing excessive working hours, inflexible shifts, and the limiting conditions of gender
11 role expectations – especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroun,
12 where there are high unemployment rates and a pronounced culture of masculine hegemony –
13 often experience stressful outcomes as a result of the loss of personal resources (Table 1) due
14 to the process of trying to integrate the work and family domains. A typical patriarchal
15 society, such as Nigeria, tends to idealise a high power distance index, which is a cultural
16 dimension that endorses an uneven distribution of power, authority, and status symbols
17 among society members (Hofstede, 1980).

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22 The history of patriarchy and its challenging impact on feminism is also dominant in some
23 Asian countries, like Hong Kong, Qatar, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and China, where
24 professional women – regardless of their knowledge-based economy careers, such as
25 academia, medicine, ICT, and engineering – are culturally mandated to prioritise caregiving
26 responsibilities (Abalkhail, 2017; Matsui *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon is found to be in
27 conformity with the high power distance values that set the man (i.e. husband) as the head of
28 the home, who holds absolute authority over women, children, and property in these nations
29 (Salem and Yount, 2019). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, resource
30 depletion (e.g. time and energy) may have affected working mothers more than fathers, as an
31 extensive body of research has consistently portrayed women as primary caregivers who
32 spend more time on familial responsibilities than work, regardless of their occupational
33 demands (Shockley and Shen, 2016). These caregiving duties are more pronounced in
34 developing countries, such as Nigeria, where employment relations are organised based on
35 gender role norms (Adisa *et al.*, 2019). While the depletion of psychological and physical
36 resources (see Table 1) arising from tensions between both domains (which are competing for
37 attention) appears universal, the cultural context plays an integral role in understanding the
38 nature of the work-life imbalance confronting women. As discussed above, patriarchy is a
39 value system that imposes male dominance over women and subjects them to all unpaid care
40 duties. Therefore, patriarchal norms, which are prevalent in Africa and specifically Nigeria,
41 have implications on the WLB of working mothers. To the best of the researchers’
42 knowledge, there remains a paucity of research on the effects of patriarchy on the WLB of
43 Nigerian female academics as the fear and threats of the COVID-19 pandemic soars. The aim
44 of this article is to fill this research gap using the W-HR model as a theoretical framework to
45 explain our findings.

52 53 **Methodology**

54
55 This study employs a qualitative method of enquiry, drawing on social constructionism,
56 which epistemologically emphasises the discovery of rich contextual data obtained from
57 people’s lived experiences (Cresswell, 2013). This methodology was deemed appropriate
58 because it provides a framework for developing an in-depth understanding of the research
59 phenomenon under study and can lead to the discovery of taken-for-granted assumptions
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3 from detailed narratives (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Drawing on this naturalistic paradigm,
4 telephone interviews were conducted with 28 female lecturers working in Nigerian
5 universities. All participants preferred this method since majority claimed to enjoy using
6 hands-free devices during conversation. Qualitative interviews are traditionally better when
7 conducted on a face-to-face basis, which is often seen as necessary for strong rapport
8 building and imperative for gathering rich qualitative data (Farooq and De Villiers, 2017).
9 However, the lockdown policies enforced by the Nigerian government made it difficult to
10 conduct one-to-one interviews. There are reported biases against telephone interviews,
11 including the lack of ability to observe facial expressions, body language, and nonverbal
12 cues, which are considered integral parts of the communication process during face-to-face
13 interviews (Irvine *et al.*, 2012). However, the researchers could discern that the telephone
14 interview method made the participants feel relaxed and comfortable enough to disclose
15 sensitive information with full knowledge that the lockdown policies required this
16 conversation style. Moreover, the method allowed us to reach participants in a wider range of
17 geographical locations (Novick, 2008). Nonetheless, all the participants were from
18 commercial cities in the south-west region of Nigeria (Ogun, Oyo, Lagos, and Osun States)
19 with a similar cultural heritage – they all identified with the Yoruba tribe. Their universities
20 were also located in these metropolitan cities while the participants shared similar work-
21 family experiences during the pandemic based on the prevailing gender role differentials in
22 Nigeria (Akanji *et al.*, 2020).
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29 Purposive sampling was undertaken due to the assumption that researchers of qualitative
30 studies should have reasonable knowledge of the sample size to be used and should target the
31 desired samples (Patton, 2015). Thus, key participants were solicited through the researchers'
32 personal contacts and referrals, using a snowballing approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).
33 Furthermore, each participant's eligibility was based on the length of time they have worked
34 with their current employers (a minimum of three years), their age (between 25 and 65 years
35 old), and their marital status (married with dependent children). Other demographic features
36 included the participants' religion, their university type, and their employment status (tenure
37 track, i.e. full-time employment, or non-tenure track, a renewable yearly contract of
38 employment). In order to fulfil our promise of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to
39 represent the interviewees, who were labelled 'Participant [number from 1–28]' for the
40 purposes of this study (see Table 2).
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45 **Insert Table 2 here**

46 Before the main interviews, pre-interview phone calls were held to briefly build rapport,
47 create interest, and negotiate a convenient time for call-backs. Subsequently, each semi-
48 structured telephone interview lasted for 30–40 minutes. During dialogue with one of the
49 researchers, who was solely responsible for the data collection process, the background noise
50 of children crying, screaming, playing, and distracting their mothers was heard, which
51 confirmed the challenges confronting female academics before we even questioned them.
52 However, the participants were determined to forge ahead with the interviews, despite the
53 disturbances. The interview style, based on open-ended questions, allowed for flexibility in
54 the discussions and exploration of individual perceptions of patriarchy and WLB experiences
55 during the pandemic. Representative of the questions asked are: 1. In your personal
56 experience, what do you understand as 'work-life balance'? 2. Are you currently
57 experiencing work-life balance as a female academic as the pandemic soars? 3. If you're not
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3 experiencing work-life balance, can you tell me why in more detail? 4. Could you please
4 briefly share your experiences about the impact of patriarchy on your daily life, especially
5 during this period of the COVID-19 lockdown? The entire telephone interviews were
6 recorded, with the participants' consent. Notes were also taken during the process. After 23
7 interviews, it was felt that the 'saturation point' had been reached, because no further
8 information was added that enhanced the findings of the study (Bowen, 2008). To confirm
9 this position, five more interviews were undertaken, but they merely corroborated the existing
10 themes.
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13 **Data Analysis**

14
15 Following the completion of all material data collection, the digital recordings were
16 electronically distributed to the researchers for thorough transcription. Thereafter, thematic
17 analysis procedure (TAP) was applied in order to analyse the transcribed recordings. TAP is a
18 qualitative design that is employed in research to identify, analyse, and report patterns
19 (themes) within datasets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage, the researchers collectively
20 started a meticulous data reduction process through open coding, which involved identifying
21 key points in the transcribed interviews that are relevant to the research inquiry and thereby
22 creating a word or phrase that significantly assigns a salient, summative, and essence-
23 capturing feature that directly addresses our research question (Cresswell, 2013). Thereafter,
24 cognate codes were identified and appropriately amalgamated to create conceptual categories,
25 which made the first-order codes more compact and representational of similar underlying
26 ideas. We did not impose codes a priori but rather remained open minded to emerging
27 categories (Patton, 2015). Finally, the main categories were refined and further consolidated
28 in a bid to generate theoretical explanations of the phenomenon under study. In so doing, we
29 continued cross-comparisons of all material codes and intense interrogation of our conceptual
30 categories during our debriefing sessions until we reached a compromise on what should
31 constitute the main theoretical claims (i.e. themes) grounded in the data (Miles *et al.*, 2014)
32 concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the WLB of female academics living in a patriarchal
33 society. In a nutshell, Table 3 highlights the main themes, number of responses as well as the
34 approximated percentages of participants' responses falling under each theme.
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41 **Insert Table 3 here**

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43 The Table is further organised along the type of resources in the (W-HR) model drawn from
44 data set and gives a more nuanced description of work-family conflict as a process whereby
45 demands in one domain depletes personal resources and hinders satisfactory performance in
46 the other domain (ten Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012).
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49 **Findings and Discussion**

50 In more detail, an in-depth analysis of the main themes that emerged as responses to the
51 research question are as follows:
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54 **Career Stagnation**

55 There were strong beliefs among thirteen participants that the pervasive nature of the
56 COVID-19 pandemic is making academic jobs more demanding in terms of the time and
57 effort being dedicated to both remote working and care obligations happening simultaneously
58 at home (see Table 13). Although all participants generally considered WLB as the ability to
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3 balance work with family commitments, many grumbled about how the curfews have
4 resulted in reduced accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes. Concerning how
5 WLB is defined, the following quotations typify the participants' shared views:
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8 For me, WLB means the ability to have sufficient time to meet my work demands as a lecturer and
9 enough time for parenthood and leisure. However, mothering and at the same time working long hours
10 from home has not been easy for me during the pandemic (Participant 1).

11
12 My understanding of WLB is the achievement of desirable involvement and commitment to my work
13 as an academic as well as other private life matters, such as my role as a wife, mother, and carer to my
14 husband's elderly mother (who is living with us) – but I'm struggling with working from home
15 (Participant 2).

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

22
23 The preceding excerpts suggest WLB means giving time, involvement, and satisfactory
24 attention to work, parenting, leisure, and in-person socialisation. The findings underline the
25 importance of family relations in Nigeria. In this context, a significant part of the social fabric
26 of Nigeria is its collectivist culture, which emphasises the primacy of family institutions and
27 communal living, firmly embedded in the country's collective identity (Ituma *et al.*, 2011).
28 Within the household setting, Nigerians (particularly women) develop social bonds by
29 mandatorily growing a family support system, regardless of their career pursuits (Mordi *et al.*
30 2013). WLB is interpreted as embracing motherhood as a compulsory obligation that takes
31 place within the confines of the home in conjunction with paid work. However, our study
32 findings show women are struggling to balance motherhood and office work within a specific
33 location (i.e. the home) due to the pandemic lockdown. Drawing on the (W-HR) model, it is
34 evident from our findings that work-family conflict reflects a process that makes demands in
35 one domain drain personal resources, amounting to diminished outcomes in the other domain
36 (ten Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012) as a result of the pandemic. This drastic change has
37 shaped the 'new normal' lifestyle, and this tells us about the difficulties facing women who
38 are living and working simultaneously within a primary location that is predominantly meant
39 for home affairs (Dillaway and Pare, 2008). The challenges confronting these professional
40 women are further exacerbated by the Nigerian culture that is notorious for its extreme
41 attitudes of well-defined domesticated expectations from mothers (Nwagbara, 2021). Despite
42 the prevailing gender role expectations of homemaking, further evidence showed that about
43 45% of participants were unhappy with the unlimited hours devoted to academic work, which
44 they claim is no longer commensurate with their salaries as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
45 Here, the thirteen participants defined their career success in terms of financial stability, with
46 a particular interest in receiving a steady income and being seen as economically viable in
47 supporting family needs.
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54 I have been experiencing career and family difficulties since the spread of the deadly coronavirus,
55 which is now hitting many Nigerian private universities hard due to the lockdown. For instance, we had
56 no choice but to accept pay cuts, despite being mandated to continue lectures and teaching online at
57 home. I'm stressed, lack motivation, and feel my career prospects are plummeting because being
58 financially capable is the ideal in Nigeria. Making enough money from academia to cater for my family
59 and having some to save for a rainy day is what I call success, but this is not the case today – despite
60 working tirelessly from home during this global pandemic (Participant 4).

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3 WLB for me is problematic as the infectious virus is destroying lives and livelihood. After all the hard
4 work and spending long hours teaching online, our efforts as lecturers aren't receiving the right credit. I
5 now only get paid my basic salary because my university can't afford to pay other bonuses and
6 allowances, which is a career decline for me. This is more strenuous than it was before the lockdown,
7 because I'm also expected to supervise my children's classwork since we are all at home due to the
8 lockdown. I'm no longer enjoying gainful employment and finding it challenging to financially support
9 my immediate and extended families (Participant 11).
10

11 Central to the above statements is the monetary measurement of career success and the
12 difficulty in achieving career success and financial prosperity during the COVID-19
13 lockdown. With a clear relevance to the W-HR framework, the desire for sufficient financial
14 resources ranks as very important in Nigeria. The current findings are in line with those of
15 prior studies (Ituma *et al.*, 2011; Aluko *et al.*, 2017) that have shown career-driven
16 individuals in Nigeria prioritise wealth and gain admiration due to the ability to support their
17 families financially. Nigerians are often willing to subject their career goals and aspirations to
18 this sociocultural obligation. As such, a lack of capital resources is associated with career
19 stagnation. From this perspective, financial resources (e.g. salaries, raises, and bonuses) are
20 considered insufficient, and this results in stress. According to the (W-HR) model, capital
21 resources adjudged as instrumental to facilitating performance is poor and a source of major
22 concern from our findings.
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26 Apart from the problems in achieving career success in terms of financial prosperity during
27 the curfew (see Table 3), additional evidence from about 40% of the participants (n=11)
28 shows perceived negative career outcomes in other domains.
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31 My WLB is far from ideal. I experience mental chaos coming from anger and frustration at the way my
32 publication track record is suffering because I'm overburdened with my children screaming, playing,
33 and always disturbing me. I feel so tired and stressed every day. The COVID-19 lockdown is adversely
34 affecting everything (Participant 19).
35

36 I am currently not enjoying a balance since the period of the compulsory lockdown. Unfortunately, I
37 don't have any quiet space in my house that I can use as an office or a hiding place from my children. I
38 literally carry my laptop with me everywhere in my house, with my four-year-old son always crying
39 behind me for unnecessary attention. Given that my home is not conducive for work, I'm very worried
40 about my career progression (promotion) this year (Participant 7).
41

42 The hardship imposed by the pandemic is making it hard to say I'm experiencing WLB, because the
43 lockdown is sapping my positive energy, sense of accomplishment, and intrinsic satisfaction I derived
44 from attending academic conferences, workshops, and being appointed as a visiting professor. I am not
45 used to sitting down at home for this long. The sudden change in lifestyle due to the COVID-19 crisis
46 is one of the most stressful periods of my life, but what can I – or anyone – do? (Participant 14).
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48 As a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, the participants in this category expressed anger,
49 frustration, worry, and emotional stress as a result of the struggles they have been
50 experiencing due to their lack of ability to meaningfully engage with academic research; the
51 unsuitability of their home for work; and their inability to attend academic conferences,
52 workshops, and other career advancement agendas in person. Conceptually, these responses
53 highlight how the COVID-19 lockdown has threatened, taxed, and/or exceeded personal
54 resources contextualised as psychological conditions (positive emotions), career advancement
55 (producing research publications), quality of life (work-life balance), physical environment (a
56 good home office space), and personal characteristics (achieving personal career fulfilment).
57 Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that the primacy of the foregoing resource
58 losses, without the prospect of gaining them while the pandemic persists, confirms that it is
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3 psychologically harmful for these women to lose resources as contextual demands, referring
4 to the physical, emotional and social contexts of working from home is having a profound
5 negative impact on career prospects (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).
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8 Following the unpleasant effects of COVID-19 on the world of work, our findings further
9 suggest the depletion of energy perceived as insufficient physical, mental, and emotional
10 resources for responding to childcare pressures (e.g. 'I'm overburdened with my children
11 screaming, playing, and always disturbing me') as well as academic work demands arising
12 almost simultaneously. Drawing on the W-HR model, people are presumably motivated to
13 spend energy on personal pursuits they find meaningful and rewarding (Grawitch *et al.*,
14 2010). However, the confinement policies forcing a compulsory switch to working from
15 home is claiming to adversely affect career success conceptualised in terms of personal
16 fulfilment derived from finding satisfaction and excitement when participating in scholarly
17 activities, as illustrated in one of the sampled excerpts ('...the lockdown is sapping my
18 positive energy, sense of accomplishment, and intrinsic satisfaction...'). Furthermore,
19 literature on work-family conflict spillover (Sok *et al.*, 2014; 2010; Du *et al.*, 2018) suggests
20 that some experiences occurring in one domain can be carried into the other (whether it is
21 work-to-home negative spillover or the reverse). This argument is particularly relevant as
22 boundaries between work and family affairs are becoming increasingly blurred due to the
23 COVID-19 lockdown. Given the finite nature of resources (mood, feelings, and energy, for
24 example), the repeated demands in one sphere drain the availability of these resources and
25 thereby limit what is left for optimal functioning in other domains, which is evident in the
26 concerns raised by some participants.
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32 **Health Concerns**

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34 About seventeen of the participants were specifically concerned with how the COVID-19
35 pandemic has taken a toll on their physical wellbeing, with claims of inability to find respite,
36 even in the solace of their homes. Approximately 60 percent of the participants (see Table 3)
37 were of the view that WLB is achievable when they are in good health, but the pandemic has
38 made it difficult to adequately deal with health-related issues. Two of the participants
39 commented as follows:
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42 WLB is feasible when a person is healthy [...] but for me, it has been a tough experience, because the
43 pandemic forced everyone to stay at home and do less in terms of social interactions and exercise. This
44 is really affecting my health. I have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, and this has been made
45 worse by my lack of physical activity during this period of lockdown, which is coupled with intense
46 family and academic responsibilities. More agonising is my pay cut, which is making it very difficult
47 for me to purchase medications on regular basis (Participant 13).
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49
50 No, I'm not enjoying WLB, as COVID-19 continues to escalate at an unprecedented scale. As an
51 academic, I'm not physically active, I have a lot of screen time, irregular sleep patterns because of my
52 children, and a poor diet, which has resulted in weight gain. Moreover, sitting for long hours on my
53 laptop has caused me backache and a stiff neck [...] The financial strain I am currently enduring as a
54 result of my slashed salary is another problem (Participant 22).
55

56 The expressions above illustrate how the unexpected shift to remote working and the
57 prolonged effects of the lockdown are having negative health outcomes on professional
58 working mothers. In addition, our findings resonate with those of prior studies (Wajeman *et*
59 *al.*, 2009; Mordi *et al.*, 2013) that suggest that WLB is sometimes defined in terms of health
60 concerns. For instance, Poms *et al.* (2016) argued that poor WLB has been shown to have an

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3 adverse effect on the cardiovascular and mental health of women. Similarly, our study reveals
4 the disruptions due to the COVID-19 lockdown made women struggle with health-related
5 stressors impeding their career, family life, and personal finances. Drawing on W-HR model
6 that is built on the conservation of resource theory, it is suggested that people usually benefit
7 psychologically and recover faster when they feel that they are financially capable of meeting
8 certain life demands, such as health challenges (Hobfoll, 2011).
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11 However, the emerging findings on the impact of COVID-19 highlight how the pandemic is
12 not only compromising the work-life integration and physical wellbeing of female academics,
13 but they also indicate concerns about jobs being disproportionately affected by pay cuts,
14 which leaves them with insufficient financial resources to attend to their personal healthcare
15 needs. According to Grawitch *et al.* (2010), lack of financial resources has been associated
16 with stress, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction, because working adults are normally
17 motivated to retain or enhance economic resources in a bid to potentially boost their
18 capabilities in solving life problems or cope with difficult realities as the need arises.
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22 Since women have taken on greater care demands at home with being active dual earners, it
23 is possible to project that the effects of the COVID-19 will result in a prolonged dip in
24 women's incomes (Nash and Churchill, 2020). Such impacts risk rolling back the already
25 fragile economic gains made in female labour force participation, limiting women's ability to
26 support themselves and their families as the pandemic persists (Nicola *et al.*, 2020). In
27 pursuing strategies aimed at mitigating financial hardships arising from slashed income,
28 further evidence from the study revealed these women claim to re-adjust their monthly
29 budgets, cutting back on discretionary spending (non-essential expenses) and temporarily
30 stopping their retirement contributions (pension scheme) in order to free up more cash needed
31 to meet family demands. For example, expressions such as 'the salary cuts made me seriously
32 downsize my monthly shopping list for the family'; '...in coping with the difficult financial
33 hardships as a result of income cuts, I only buy what I need and no longer what I want'; 'I
34 had to suspend my monthly pension funds to free up some cash for me to spend' underpin
35 some plan of actions aimed at attenuating financial losses. Drawing on the W-HR model
36 (which is built on the COR theory), our findings here justify the propositions that people
37 attempt to retain and protect personal resources (e.g. finances) by demonstrating coping
38 behaviours targeted at mitigating demanding situations appraised as stressors causing
39 conflicts between the work and family domains (Hobfoll, 2011).
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45 **Male Chauvinism**

46 An overwhelming percentage of the interviewed female academics (see Table 3) admitted
47 experiencing a high level of role overload and caregiving strain during the lockdown,
48 specifically due to the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, where a system of social and
49 gender stratification empowers men to dominate women in almost every sphere of life (Adisa
50 *et al.*, 2019). This supports previous studies (Mordi *et al.*, 2013) that found that Nigerian
51 women are viewed as traditional homemakers and are expected to deploy a considerably
52 higher level of emotional resources (affection, love, and empathy) to their care
53 responsibilities than men, who are considered as the absolute heads of their homes. Since all
54 the participants (reached by phone) were drawn from a particular region of Nigeria (the
55 south-west region of the country) – Ogun, Oyo, Lagos, and Osun States – they all gave
56 similar accounts of the extent to which patriarchal values adversely affected their WLB,
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3 especially where Yoruba women, as an ingrained tradition, are expected to respect and
4 comply to their husbands' dictates relating to family affairs (Staveren and Odebode, 2007).
5 As such, it was found that this patriarchal cultural expectation of prioritizing family needs
6 over work made resources such as time and physical energy of these women volatile (ten
7 Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012). According to the W-HR model, it means that once these
8 transient resources are utilized on familial matters, it becomes difficult to allocate similar
9 resources to meet occupational demands.
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12 Furthermore, very few of the participants acknowledged that patriarchal ideologies are more
13 severe in rural areas, particularly in some northern parts of Nigeria. Rural women are said to
14 be highly discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities; access to social
15 support; education; health status; religious background; family decisions; and much more
16 (Aderinto, 2017). Illustrative quotes that align with these findings are as follows:
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19 Since some of our husbands, particularly from the south-west of Nigeria, value education – unlike some other
20 parts of Nigeria – we see a higher number of female academics from this part of the country. However, the
21 COVID lockdown is making our WLB problematic, because we are at home with our husbands – a typical
22 Yoruba woman is expected to respect the authority of the man (Participant 23).
23

24 Masculine supremacy is so much embedded in our society, but harsher in rural (e.g. a few northern) areas of the
25 country, where female illiteracy is very high. Despite being educated, we are still mandated to prioritise home
26 affairs (Participant 24).
27

28 Our findings also indicate that these women, who are full-time academics, work to support
29 the family purse. However, the 'male breadwinner' ideology implies that the men still hold
30 authority over women in terms of finances. Based on this societal perception and internalised
31 assumptions of masculine supremacy, concerns were raised by participants about the lack of
32 spousal support in helping with family care during the period of the lockdown, which
33 exacerbates WLB difficulties and stress:
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36 The dominance of patriarchal norms in our society is frustrating and stressful. My husband believes
37 that the attributes of a good wife are to carry the entire burden of cooking family meals, childcare, and
38 washing and cleaning the home – while the man is the financier of the home. During this lockdown, I
39 have been working almost around the clock as a mother – at the expense of my academic work. I have
40 to stay up late at night to record my class lessons for my students to watch online when my two-year-
41 old is asleep, and I doze off sometimes on the couch. Although having children in Nigeria is priceless,
42 and I draw strength from always having them around me, I still feel so exhausted keeping up –
43 especially now that everything happens at home, and with little or no help from my husband
44 (Participant 15).
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46 One exasperating experience for me is our societal ideology that women, regardless of their status and
47 profession, should be solely responsible for household chores and children needs, while our men
48 (husbands) hold authority over us. The extremity of the lockdown is making it difficult for me and my
49 husband to negotiate our work schedules appropriately. He always demands his schedules should be
50 prioritised as head of the home. Women are always subservient [...], exposing us to time squeeze and
51 work-family conflict (Participant 10).
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53 Ordinarily, it appears Nigerian universities traditionally organise the academic career path to fit male
54 life patterns, which is making it more problematic for women to advance their careers. The period of
55 the lockdown has worsened the situation for me, because my husband – who is also an academic –
56 believes that I should always focus on family matters than work [...] The institutional and social nature
57 of patriarchy makes it difficult to allocate time appropriately (Participant 5).
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59 The perspectives of the participants demonstrate how patriarchal proclivities embedded in
60 Nigeria's cultural and institutional structure undervalue the WLB of professional women.

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3 They particularly cited the propagation of male chauvinism during the pandemic as
4 exacerbating time-based conflicts. For instance, evidence of time-based conflict emerging
5 from the propensities of masculine hegemony is making time devoted to the home front
6 difficult to perform occupational demands (e.g. ‘During this lockdown, I have been working
7 almost around the clock as a mother at the expense of my academic work’). In this context,
8 patriarchy represents a significant hindrance to the amount of time spent working from home.
9 Although time with family is viewed as a valuable resource (e.g. ‘Although having children
10 in Nigeria is priceless, and I draw strength from always having them around me...’), this is
11 mainly driven by patriarchal expectations, which results in exhaustion and stress. This occurs
12 due to the inability to adequately allocate time to meet career obligations following the
13 investment thereof in family matters, with ‘little or no help from my husband’ (expressed by
14 Participant 15). This is because domestic duties in Nigeria are allocated according to a
15 person’s gender. Our findings on patriarchy are generalizable to some other male-dominated
16 cultures, such as countries like India, Indonesia, and Iran) and Palestinian territories (e.g.
17 Gaza), which have been connected with strong male domination as a result of the high power
18 distance orientation found in those parts of the world (Haj-Yahia, 2005). Generally, gender
19 inequality, sexism, and masculine superiority, inter alia, are characteristics of these societies,
20 where culture and religion have exclusively imposed caregiving responsibilities on women,
21 regardless of their white-collar professions (Sultana, 2011). This gender stereotypical features
22 are similar to the cultural and gender dynamics that exist in Nigeria.
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25 Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it evident that resources (e.g. time and energy) are
26 often hard to acquire and maintain desirably, and resource loss according to the W-HR model
27 is considered to be more salient and of greater impact than resource gain (Halbesleben *et al.*,
28 2014). Nash and Churchill (2020) argued that, even at the best of times, female academics
29 with care responsibilities rarely enjoy the luxury of being overwhelmed with career focus but
30 are rather immersed in domestic tasks – more so than men. Reflecting on some participants’
31 views, it is expected for women to work outside of the home. They are still perceived as
32 housewives, while their husbands are meant to be superior earners. Mushfiqur *et al.* (2018)
33 highlighted that this situation is embedded in management ethos and organisational culture,
34 which prioritises the economic resources and financial prowess of men at the expense of
35 women’s WLB needs. Thus, prior studies have found that extreme patriarchy breeds gender
36 stereotyping, which is more severe in South Asia and Africa than it is in western countries
37 (Adya, 2008). For instance, gender equality has been a well-established priority of EU
38 member nations. Significantly, gender equality is known to be an integral feature of EU
39 sustainability objectives and strategy through the implementation of policies on gender
40 mainstreaming (Grosser, 2009).
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43 More specifically, EU defines gender equality as ‘an equal visibility, empowerment and
44 participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life... [this] is not synonymous
45 with sameness, with establishing men, their lifestyle and conditions as the norm ... [this]
46 means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the
47 diverse roles they play in society’ (Council of Europe, 1998, pp. 7–8). Therefore, the deeper
48 and more resilient aspects of social structure in western contexts conform to the right to live
49 without gender discrimination, which is perpetuated in Nigeria by patriarchy deeply ingrained
50 in its society.
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52 **Conclusion**

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3 In summary, this study has provided qualitative evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on
4 Nigerian female academics working remotely and negotiating caring responsibilities within a
5 patriarchal context. Overall, our findings suggest that academic women with children are
6 facing significant challenges in combining work demands with childcare. Situated in a
7 national context (Nigeria) that has been neglected in favour of extensive media reports on the
8 negative impact of the pandemic in western regions, the present study has focused on the
9 consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the WLB of academic mothers living in an
10 unequalitarian society. Thus, the current pandemic has affected, in unique gender-specific
11 ways, their traditional status as caregivers and home managers (Akanji *et al.*, 2020). Our
12 findings have unveiled how the COVID-19 lockdown has intensified the workload of
13 Nigerian mothers/academics and has thus caused profound role conflicts and health problems,
14 which have further been exacerbated by the ingrained sociocultural pressures of patriarchy
15 and high power distance values. As such, our study has made important research and
16 theoretical contributions.
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21 **Research and Theoretical Implications**

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23 In terms of research implications, our findings show that the definition of WLB by female
24 academics generally conforms to existing conceptualisations that perceive WLB, in its
25 broadest sense, to mean a satisfactory level of involvement in and devoting adequate time to
26 paid work, family, and other personal social matters (MacDonald *et al.*, 2013). Our data
27 points to a wide range of activities that are seen to comprise non-work domains, including
28 caring for the elderly, leisure, socialisation, and creating time to deal for health matters –
29 apart from the well-established devotion to childcare responsibilities. Accordingly, these
30 findings adopt a more inclusive conception of the non-work domain to broadly include
31 diverse life demands – whether preferred or required – to which people often deploy a
32 reasonable level of resources (e.g. time, effort, and money) to achieve, subject to situational
33 or cultural dictates (Kelliher *et al.*, 2018). As such, we build on earlier critiques by scholars
34 who argue for greater inclusivity of multiple activities of life in non-work categorisations
35 despite that the original focus of WLB research emerged from an increase of female
36 participation in the labour market and the struggles working mothers encounter in combining
37 work and childcare (Ozbilgin *et al.*, 2011).
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42 Given the far-reaching and devastating impact of COVID-19 on lives and livelihood around
43 the world, the study participants have highlighted critical challenges in their ability to manage
44 their WLB due to the lockdown, with profound adverse effects on their contextual and
45 physical resources (e.g. career and health) respectively (ten Brummehuis and Bakker, 2012),
46 while broader cultural inclinations of patriarchy (i.e. macro resource) underscore issues of
47 feminine subordination – exacerbating stress. More specifically, our findings provided
48 valuable insights into the specificities and contextual meaning attached to career success in
49 Nigeria. Our findings adds to the discourse on work-family balance challenges by
50 substantiating the foregoing evidence that work-family disharmony is dependent on the
51 incompatibility of contextual demands with the amount of contextual and personal resources
52 (see Table 1) that is the root cause of inter-role conflict. For instance, our data demonstrates
53 that the economic stressors arising from reduced earnings (i.e. money as personal resource) as
54 well as other negative career outcomes, is increasing difficulties for female academics to
55 reconcile work and family demands during the lockdown. Additionally, patriarchy as a social
56 system in Nigeria highlights an extreme gender-based division of labour, which is a huge
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3 obstacle that precludes professional women from achieving satisfactory WLB. This is
4 because a considerable number of personal resources (e.g. time, emotions, and finances) are
5 expected to be deployed to home and childcare management, even at the expense of career
6 pursuits. Therefore, work-life research needs to capture and address the effects of this wider
7 macro-context resource specificity (patriarchal propensities) challenging the WLB of
8 professional women and the counterproductive outcomes on work behaviours, especially
9 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when millions of workers transitioned into working from
10 home (Sinclair *et al.*, 2020).
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14 Concerning the study's theoretical implications, our findings highlight how the W-HR model
15 is integral to understanding WLB with an emphasis on the work-family imbalance and stress
16 confronting working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, it is argued that
17 these negative experiences are triggering backlash attitudes that may be detrimental to their
18 universities and career outcomes in the form of demotivation, lack of commitment, stress, and
19 low morale. Through the lens of the W-HR framework, we have shown how the debilitating
20 effects of the COVID-19 crisis have necessitated families to self-isolate at home, thereby
21 straining the personal resource allocation (e.g. time, energy, emotions, and finances) of
22 female academics as they face daily struggles in combining parenthood with career goals in a
23 national context that is highly patriarchal. With all of these factors in mind, our findings may
24 refocus the discourse on WLB, which often highlights the need for office flexibility to
25 mitigate role conflict experiences, to how COVID-19 has brought unprecedented disruption
26 to how people (particularly working mothers) are able to allocate their time and energy in
27 ways that can optimally align with their preferences – as work and non-work domains are
28 becoming increasingly blurred during the pandemic (Nash and Churchill, 2020).
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33 Drawing on W-HR theory, personal resources are potentially valuable to the extent to which
34 they are perceived to help a person achieve their definite goals and life aspirations
35 (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made WLB during the
36 lockdown worse for female academics in terms of their ability to conserve and maintain
37 personal resources, since working in the exceptional conditions caused by the pandemic has
38 been found to be increasingly stressful and damaging to their careers. In addition, resource
39 drain has made female academics face increased threats to their health as restrictions on
40 movement and economic losses due to pay cuts have compromised their wellbeing.
41 Furthermore, the prevalence of patriarchy has shaped women's behaviour in ways that
42 undermine the amount of time they have to respond to career and caregiving demands. This
43 differential gender role socialisation norm adversely affects the time management of female
44 academics, who are constantly subject to men's (self-perceived) superior status quo (Adisa *et*
45 *al.*, 2019). Accordingly, a primacy afforded in Nigerian culture to the family and the
46 associated normative expectations that women are responsible for more unpaid care work
47 than men contribute to time biases – it is always expected that women's non-work time
48 should mainly focus on domestic affairs, to be routinely invaded by male chauvinism.
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53 **Recommendations**

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55 From the personal accounts of our study, it is evident that the career decline, health problems,
56 and family challenges brought on by COVID-19 for female academics living in a male-
57 dominated society are key problems that cannot be ignored. Therefore, practical
58 recommendations, such as the implementation of institutional family-friendly support
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3 systems addressing patriarchal perplexities can help mitigate resource drain and address the
4 negative narratives emerging from the study. Institutional and cultural dynamics propelling
5 WLB practices that are favourable to working mothers are weak in Nigeria due to the
6 society's strong emphasis on patriarchal values. This necessitates an urgent need for
7 university management teams to implement regulatory and supervisory structures as well as
8 family-friendly policies (e.g. greater work flexibility at home) that can provide considerable
9 support for the population under study (i.e. female academics) and their families during this
10 crisis. It is recommended that the Nigerian universities in this study can deploy and/or attach
11 teaching and graduate assistants to assist female academics struggling with mothering
12 responsibilities whilst working from home. Thus, reducing the workload which can
13 potentially ease working hours, without any backlash effect on the career prospects of these
14 working mothers, could be a way out. Overall, it is difficult to find any published information
15 of what Nigerian universities are currently doing to help, in terms of policy and WLB support
16 for female academics during this period of the pandemic. Using the universities of our
17 present study as case studies, we therefore recommend that Nigerian universities should
18 begin to engage in supportive WLB measures such as allowing compressed working hours,
19 job sharing, rotational shifts, provision of free virtual learning platforms and necessary
20 palliatives as buffers against the hardships that academic women with parenting roles are
21 enduring as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

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23 In further addressing the considerable difficulties confronting women in reconciling work and
24 family affairs as a result of the pandemic, universities could educate academics with
25 parenting responsibilities that, for work-family needs to translate into supportive policies, a
26 sense of entitlement has to be developed (Santos and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). This is to say,
27 mothers in academia are allowed to voice their needs and are entitled to negotiate more
28 flexible work hours and arrangements given the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society.
29 Perceiving this as a global issue, Nash and Churchill (2020) rightly noted (in a western
30 context) how female academics with childcare responsibilities are facing significant
31 challenges in balancing their career and caregiving demands during the pandemic, with
32 evidence of little or no support from their universities.

33
34 Therefore, Nigerian universities should identify the most pressing needs of employees
35 (particularly female academics) and their families by carrying out meaningful and
36 contextually relevant social dialogue that will refocus staff's attention on how working from
37 home can bring multiple and substantial benefits that can enhance positive work-family
38 balance. Better online communication through institutional websites on the importance of
39 discussing WLB difficulties with a superior or line manager or taking a period of leave can
40 help alleviate some of the challenges confronting female academics struggling with caring
41 roles whilst working remotely during the pandemic. In addition, research that captures
42 positive individual experiences can be utilised to inform pertinent questions on how working
43 mothers in academia are possibly managing and/or negotiating work and family affairs during
44 this time of crisis (Sinclair et al., 2020). Results therein can be used in WLB policy formation
45 that are relevant to situations of many Nigerian female academics especially where it remains
46 a deep-seated idea in the Nigerian culture and social policy that women are primary
47 caregivers. Evidently, patriarchy has set the parameters for women's inequalities and work-
48 family challenges, which invariably affect social sustainability outcomes for Nigerian
49 working mothers. Thus, it is also imperative for feminist citizenship discourse and advocates
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3 of gender equality in Nigeria to focus on the need to incorporate ‘ethics of care and social
4 justice’ agendas for working women, who shoulder the greater part of the home’s domestic
5 responsibilities (Lister, 2003).
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7 **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

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9 While this article has advanced knowledge about the challenges facing women academics
10 during the COVID-19 lockdown in a non-western context, it does have some limitations,
11 which in turn open up opportunities for future research. Firstly, our qualitative findings are
12 based on only a small sample size (28 interviews), which makes it challenging to generalise
13 the results to other non-western contexts, like, for example, other countries in the African
14 continent. Despite the importance of qualitative analysis, which helps to interpret peoples’
15 perspectives on social reality most accurately, future research could engage statistical
16 approaches to test a larger representative sample for more generalisation purposes (Saunders
17 *et al.*, 2012). Secondly, the present study is based on the sole accounts of the WLB
18 difficulties confronting professional mothers, which makes our findings subjective and may
19 portray tendencies for participants to answer in ways that make social desirability biases
20 plausible (Fisher, 1993). Since the COVID-19 lockdown has affected everyone, we hope our
21 study opens up new research opportunities that explore male academics, who are fathers and
22 were also negatively affected by the pandemic lockdown. It would be exciting to report views
23 from the perspective of men, who are rarely considered in global WLB debates. Finally, it
24 would be interesting to engage in cross-cultural research that compares the impact of the
25 pandemic in Nigeria with that in the western context, as we navigate different cultural
26 perspectives to work-life research as the world grapples with the unprecedented COVID-19
27 crisis.
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Constructs	Subtypes	Examples
Contextual demands	Overload Physical Emotional Cognitive	Working overtime, many household chores, urgent care tasks Lifting weights, childcare, elderly care Dealing with work stress, conflicts at home, disappointments Writing a report, multitasking, coordination of household
Contextual resources	Social support Autonomy Feedback Development opportunities	Managerial support, respect from friends, help from co-workers Control over work, planning leisure time, allocating home tasks Supervisor evaluation, open communication at home New work tasks, attending courses, participating in sports, hobbies
Personal resources	Physical Psychological Affective Intellectual Capital	Physical energy, health, vigour, sleep, strength Optimism, self-efficacy, mental resilience, focus Fulfilment, mood, empathy, gratitude Perspectives, skill, knowledge, experience, competence Time, money
Outcomes	Production Behavioural Attitudinal	Meeting deadlines, completing tasks, quality care tasks Absenteeism, turnover, availability at home, family protection Commitment, satisfaction, wellbeing, relationship quality

Table 1: Highlights from the (W-HR) model

Source: Adapted from ten Brummehuis and Bakker (2012)

Personnel Review

Pseudonyms	Age	Religion	Rank	Years employed	Employment status	Type of University	Number of children	Age of children
Participant 1	40	Christianity	Lecturer I	9	Full-time	Private	2	3 & 6
Participant 2	50	Islam	Senior Lecturer	12	Full-time	Private	4	10, 13, 16 & 20
Participant 3	33	Christianity	Lecturer II	6	Full-time	Private	1	5
Participant 4	55	Christianity	Lecturer I	7	Full-time	Private	3	9, 13 & 17
Participant 5	59	Christianity	Lecturer I	8	Full-time	Private	2	6 & 10
Participant 6	34	Christianity	Assistant Lecturer	4	Full-time	Private	1	3
Participant 7	28	Christianity	Lecturer I	9	Full-time	Private	3	4, 7 & 12
Participant 8	52	Islam	Senior Lecturer	15	Full-time	Private	2	11 & 16
Participant 9	42	Christianity	Lecturer II	5	Full-time	Private	Twins	8
Participant 10	60	Islam	Associate Professor	15	Full-time	Public	3	12, 15 & 19
Participant 11	47	Islam	Lecturer I	10	Full-time	Private	5	5, 8, 11 & 14
Participant 13	37	Christianity	Assistant Lecturer	4	Full-time	Private	2	8 & 10
Participant 14	64	Islam	Professor	17	Contract	Private	Twins	18
Participant 15	35	Christianity	Lecturer II	11	Full-time	Private	3	2 & 5
Participant 16	40	Islam	Senior Lecturer	9	Full-time	Private	2	9 & 12
Participant 17	25	Christianity	Assistant Lecturer	3	Full-time	Private	1	3
Participant 18	36	Christianity	Lecturer II	7	Full-time	Private	2	6 & 10
Participant 19	41	Islam	Lecturer I	6	Full-time	Private	4	2, 4, 7 & 10
Participant 20	65	Christianity	Professor	10	Full-time	Private	2	11 & 17
Participant 21	31	Islam	Lecturer I	6	Full-time	Private	1	9
Participant 22	50	Islam	Senior Lecturer	7	Full-time	Public	2	3, 6 & 11
Participant 23	58	Christianity	Lecturer I	8	Full-time	Private	3	4, 9, 11 & 16
Participant 24	49	Christianity	Lecturer II	9	Full-time	Private	1	17
Participant 25	64	Christianity	Associate Professor	14	Contract	Private	2	12 & 14
Participant 26	39	Islam	Lecturer I	8	Full-time	Private	3	4, 6 & 9
Participant 27	46	Christianity	Senior Lecturer	10	Full-time	Private	2	5 & 10
Participant 28	29	Christianity	Assistant Lecturer	3	Full-time	Private	5	4

Table 2: Demographic data of participants

Key themes (Effects of the pandemic)	Number of participant responses	Approximated percentages	Relevant theoretical dimensions of the (W-HR) model	Sampled excerpts
Career Stagnation	13	45	Imbalance between contextual demands (e.g. workload, working time, home management) and personal resources (e.g. employment gains – salaries, bonuses, pay rise, financial stability).	“The lockdown is affecting my career prospects because working from home with my children always around is very challenging while I’m also experiencing financial strain as a result of the pay cut I have to endure for now”
	11	40	Loss of contextual resources (e.g. meaningfully engaging with academic research, suitability of home workspaces, opportunities to attend career development agendas)	“My research output is suffering because writing papers at home with distractions from my children makes things difficult and stressful”
Health Concerns	17	60	Loss of personal resources (e.g. health, wellness, good sleep, physical energy)	“Unfortunately the pandemic is creating more health challenges particularly for us, working mothers who feel extremely burdened...”
Male Chauvinism	28	99.9	Unfavourable macro resources affecting work-family interface (e.g. patriarchy, masculine hegemony, gender stratification)	“The pandemic has excessively increase male-group domination at home making work-family integration impossible for professional working mothers”

Table 3: Researcher’s data analysis