

## **The Link between Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement: A Case Study of the Nigerian Armed Forces**

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# **The link between Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement: A Case Study of the Nigerian Armed Forces**

## **Abstract**

Work-life balance remains a debated discourse across many professions. Yet, little is given known about the work-life balance of military officers, particularly those in developing countries, including how their work-life experiences affect their work engagement. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between military officers' work-life balance and engagement, using the Nigerian armed forces as a research focus. We adopted the qualitative research method, using semi-structured interviews of 27 military officers in Nigeria. Our findings reveal that the nature of military work, its service exigency, and the leadership proactiveness to employee's wellbeing have serious implications for officers' work-life balance and employee engagement. We discuss the implications for policy.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, employee engagement, Nigerian armed forces, military officers

## **Introduction**

Work-life balance (WLB) is a buzz topic in the contemporary social and business environments due to its impacts on employee wellbeing and productivity (Kanlis, 2016). Consequently, research into how an employee with a good WLB can be more efficient has brought about vast changes in many business and organisational policies (Vuga and Juvan, 2013). The military is an organisation with its own rules and a unique work environment. Although military personnel are trained to handle work pressure that comes with the profession and its job description, the plights of Nigerian military personnel are underrated (Adekoya et al., 2019).

While the WLB concept is not new, it is still emerging in Nigeria. Adisa et al. (2021) suggest that more research is required in Nigeria to uncover the reality of WLB among different employees and sectors of the Nigeria economy. They argue that a stereotypical and homogeneous classification of WLB as same or similar across the world is erroneous. This study, thus, answers this call by examining the WLB of military personnel in Nigeria. Existing research on WLB within the Nigerian context is mainly within the banking (Mordi et al., 2013) and health sectors (Adisa, 2015). Therefore, this study is timely and needed.

WLB is crucial for employee engagement and retention (Parkes and Langford, 2008). For example, Wasay (2013) finds a strong positive relationship between employee engagement and WLB. Employers are making more efforts to develop ideal WLB policies and practices for their employees. In an integrative review of 37 articles, Wood et al. (2020) found antecedents (such as charismatic leadership, peer support, and self-esteem) that encourage work engagement and then a variety of mediating factors (such as burnout and work-family facilitation/conflict) and moderating factors (such as gender and intrinsic motivation) to have impact on WLB.

Furthermore, increasing terrorism, demographic changes, and advancement in technology has brought about changes to the content and organisation of work, resulting in increased pressure leading to work-life imbalances (Maruyama, Hopkinson, and James, 2009). The Nigerian Armed Forces are not exempted from this trend. Against this backdrop, this study specifically investigates the nexus between the quality of WLB and officers' engagement in the Nigerian Armed Forces. This leads us to evaluate how they are able to deal with the pressure from their work and non-work responsibilities, particularly considering the nature of military service or what could be termed 'life in the military service'.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss the concept of WLB and review extant literature on employee engagement and WLB. This is followed by an overview of the study context – the Nigerian Armed Forces. Thereafter, we describe our methodology and present the findings and discussion. We conclude by highlighting the implications of our research and areas for further studies.

### **Work-Life Balance in Brief**

The concept of WLB is still regarded as a contested term as a result of its subjective nature, but it could be described as a multi-disciplinary because it cuts across many subject areas and disciplines (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Adisa et al., 2017). As a subject, its meaning can vary according to the age, interest, value, personal circumstance, and personality of individuals (Torrington et al., 2011). WLB does not mean allotting an equal amount of energy and time to both work and non-work responsibilities (Osoian, Lazar and Ratiu, 2011) but rather implies “allowing employees some degree of flexibility over when, where and how they do their work” (Kesting and Harris, 2009). In an attempt to define WLB, two viewpoints would be considered: the employee's and employer's perspectives. From the employee's viewpoint, WLB refers to the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal life responsibilities. To the employer,

on the other hand, WLB is creating a supportive company and culture where employees can focus on their jobs (Groysberg and Abrahams, 2014; Kelliher et al., 2019). A look into a few definitions of WLB would advance the knowledge of the subject and make academic sense.

**Table 1:** Some selected definitions of work-life balance

<b>Author (s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Cascio	2000	Any employer sponsored benefits or working conditions that helps employees to balance work and non-work demands.
Pillinger	2002	WLB involves fine-tuning employee's work schedules so that regardless of their age, gender, or race, can find a balance that will help them combine work, other responsibilities, and aspirations without rancor.
Work Foundation	2003	WLB is "about workers achieving a satisfactory equilibrium between their work and non-work life activities, which includes parental responsibilities, caring duties, and other activities and interests".
Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw	2003	WLB is the extent to which an individual engages in and is equally satisfied with his or her work and family roles.
Noon and Blyton	2007	The individual's ability to pursue their work and non-work lives successfully, without undue pressures from one undermining the satisfactory experience of the other.
Dean	2007	WLB can only be defined as regards the social, economic, and legislative environment of the country in which the worker is resident.
Parkes and Langford	2008	WLB is all inclusive of employee's other responsibilities and activities aside from family commitments; the desire of employees to find a healthier rhythm and satisfying balance between their roles and responsibilities, irrespective of their parental or marital status.
Gregory and Milner	2009	Practices which allow employees some flexibility and autonomy to negotiate their time and presence in the workplace.
Clark	2009	Contentment and good functioning at work and at home with negligible role conflicts.
Caven and Raiden	2010	The individual's ability to maintain a satisfactory equilibrium between work and non-work life obligations.
Simons	2012	A means of bringing work, whether done on the job or at home, and leisure time into balance to live life to its fullest.
Wheatly	2012	The ability of individuals, regardless of age or gender, to combine work and household responsibilities successfully.
Yuile et.al.	2012	A state in which a range of needs are met by allocating time to both work and life roles according to a combination of individual priorities and the demands of work and life.

From the above table, researchers have established that there is no one-size-fits-all definition for WLB. Hence, Pratten and O’Leary’s (2007) definition WLB as employees’ ability to juggle work and life roles, such as family and leisure, is adopted for this study. The definition is adopted because it is all-encompassing and addresses that WLB is achieved when an individual can attend to personal, and work demands.

However, academics have questioned the notion of WLB in terms of what constitutes work, life, and balance. How the three components of WLB integrate and the diverse perspectives on how employees or employers understand them remain contentious (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Kelliher et al., 2019). The need to discuss the relationship between work, life, and balance is particularly important now that the interconnectivity between working adults that have care duties and dual careers is increasing. According to Wheatley (2012), the term ‘work’ in the context of WLB connotes paid employment and unpaid work carried out for an employer. ‘Life’ mentioned in the same context, on the other hand, describes “free time spent in leisure activities, and family time” (Lowry and Moskos, 2008). Clutterbuck (2003), however, explains the word ‘work’ to mean “the time and energy an employee contracted to expend in return for a reward, usually financial” while ‘life’ is “the antithesis of work”. Guest (2001) argues that ‘life’ means “the rest of life after work”. For Parris, Vickers and Wilkes (2008), the customary use of the word ‘balance’ means “giving equal weight to work and non-work activities”. Thus, Clark (2000) defines WLB as satisfaction and healthy functioning at work and home with minimum conflict of roles. Similarly, Clarke, Koch and Hill (2004) sought to clarify by arguing that the word ‘balance’ in the term WLB is not seen as creating equal time and energy to paid work and non-paid roles but rather a satisfactory equilibrium between work and non-work roles.

Among other developments in the world of work, advancement in technology has changed the content and organisation of work (Tennakoon, Da Silveira and Taras, 2013), and the pressure

of work with sophisticated technology has intensified (Adekoya et al., 2022). The lines separating work and life are becoming porous as daily job activities and procedures are no longer restricted to a specific location or period of time (Duxbury and Smart, 2011). The nature of work has changed (Wheatley, Hardill, and Green, 2008), and the relationship between work and life is now interwoven as work has crept into life and life into work, thereby requiring a balance (Adisa et al., 2022).

According to Munn (2013), WLB (individual approach) is only a piece of the work-life system – a system that includes work-life initiatives (organisation approach) and work-life policies (government approach). The integration of the work and life domains often leads to conflict, which has had various effects on employees, including poor job performance and low job satisfaction (Ninaus et al., 2021). According to Poelmans et al. (2005), this integration will inevitably result in conflict, and the imbalance that results will significantly impact both work and life. As a result, Rapoport et al. (2002) proposed that establishing a connection between work and life is a tool for organisational development and improvement. Achieving excellence at work and in people's lives would improve organisational effectiveness (Poelmans et.al., 2008).

### **Employee Engagement and Work-Life Balance**

Employee engagement is often seen as a key factor in staff morale and performance and is unquestionably a positive outcome because managers prefer to have engaged employees over those who are disengaged (Guest, 2013). In business, the word “engagement” is frequently used in favour of terms like “work satisfaction”, “motivation”, and “commitment” because of its stronger descriptive power and face validity (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Employee engagement constitutes the mechanism through which HRM practitioners impact organisational and individual performance (Truss et al., 2013). Schaufeli, Gonzalez-Roma and

Bakker (2002, p.74) provide the most prevalent definition of engagement, stating that employee engagement “is a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption”. According to this perspective, employee engagement refers to the positive psychological experiences that an employee has while performing their job duties. It also refers to the feeling of vigour (e.g., energy), dedication (e.g., enthusiasm), and absorption (e.g., feeling immersed). Therefore, engagement is deemed to have occurred when employees are dedicated to their jobs, the organisation, and are motivated to achieve high-performance levels.

The ability of employees to achieve a balance between their work and non-work lives has emerged as a major concern in recent years. As a result, organisations are working cooperatively to reduce the workload of employees. According to the CIPD (2018) report, employer-provided WLB supports, often known as family-friendly policies or flexible work schedules, are frequently believed to help employees to achieve WLB, enhance engagement and may lower job expectations. Therefore, following the conclusions from several studies (e.g. Parkes and Langford, 2008; Wasay, 2013), it is expected that employees who can achieve WLB respond proactively to work demands, thereby mirroring the required engagement that contemporary organisations desire. This is explained using the ‘Social Exchange Theory’ (Blau, 1964) whereby organisations offer employees what benefits them, and employees reciprocate by exhibiting a high organisational citizenship behaviour (Asiedu-Appiah and Zoogah, 2019; Talukder, 2019). In confirmation, research has suggested that employee engagement is often developed through a process of exchange (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In other words, employee engagement develops when employers provide employees with their desired outcomes. According to a survey by the Federal Executive Board (2006) representing 80% of Fortune 500 companies, the extra effort put in by employees is the definition of discretionary effort arising from employee engagement.



In a meta-study on the link between WLB and organisational performance, Beauregard and Henry (2009), using the provision of WLB practices as an indicator of favourable treatment, discovered that employees would reciprocate with behaviours favourable to organisation. These behaviours, such as commitment and organisational citizenship behaviours, they argued, are straight from the handbook of employee engagement. Prior studies (e.g. Shankar and Bhatnagar, 2010; Cahill et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2020) also discovered a positive correlation between WLB and employee engagement, with WLB playing a vital role towards employee engagement. On this premise, scholars have suggested that providing access to WLB initiatives in the work environment would enhance the development of employee engagement. In these studies, they found a positive and direct correlation between WLB and employee engagement.

### **Study Context: The Nigerian Armed Forces**

The ministry of defense oversees the Nigerian Armed Forces, which are made up of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy, and the Nigerian Airforce (Ministry of Defence, 2019). With a total of 124,000 active officers and 57,000 reserves, it ranks fourth in Africa and forty-fourth in the world in terms of military strength (Association for Free Research and International Cooperation, 2019). This makes Nigeria and its armed forces a unique research context. This study primarily focuses on this case study because they are the pillars and the base of the nation's national security and have a demanding responsibility to prevent threats to peace and safety in the nation.

The recent security and terrorism concerns that have plagued the nation due to incidents like kidnapping, Boko Haram, Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) - West Africa, herdsmen insurgency, and Niger-Delta militants have prompted numerous national and international debates about the need to enlist more personnel to combat these problems (Ike, 2018). According to Egbegi et al. (2018), a lack of military personnel is one of the reasons why

Nigeria's armed forces cannot successfully combat terrorism, which puts the protection of people's lives and property in the nation at serious risk. Terrorism's role in the death toll could help to explain the nation's death rate of 9.6 per 1000 people (Central Intelligence World Factbook, 2019). The lack of military manpower also causes issues for Nigeria, particularly for the Nigerian army, since it increases workload, which leads to longer working hours and work-life conflict (Adekoya et al., 2019). Consequently, they are faced with having to juggle the enormous demands and expectations from both work and outside work.

More so, Adekoya et al.'s (2019) findings show that long work hours, the need to be physically present at work, deployment, and relocation negatively impacted the actualisation of WLB, whereas an unsupportive organisational culture caused work-life conflict among military personnel. Workplace inflexibility and working longer hours were both shown to be common organisational cultures. Therefore, it is imperative to gain a purposeful insight into how Nigerian military officers combine the obligations of their work and non-work lives, as well as the challenges that come with it, including how they manage to remain engaged.

## **Methods**

This study examines the nexus between the quality of WLB and military officers' engagement in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Given the unique nature of military service, particularly in Nigeria, where terrorism and crime rates continue to threaten national security (Central Intelligence World Factbook, 2019), it becomes important to investigate the phenomenon in-depth. In order to grasp representative features within a broad contextual framework, we employed a qualitative approach to get in-depth insights into the study and initiate an integration between literature and evidence (Creswell and Creswell, 2019). Although the qualitative approach lacks strong generalisability compared to the quantitative approach, it favours a more human-centred approach which seeks an understanding of how individuals

make sense of the world around them by asking people directly what they think is important about the understudied topic or issue (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, we adopted the interpretivist philosophy, which encourages ideas that embrace a view of reality as socially constructed or given meaning by actors' interpretations of events (Bryman, 2016). Essentially, interpretivism allows us to understand how officers in the Nigerian armed forces construct meanings from their subjective experiences of managing work and non-work responsibilities, including how they interpret the effect on their engagement in the military service.

Given the challenge of reaching this demographic of participants due to the nature (i.e. intensity and sensitivity) of their work, we used snowball sampling to recruit our participants by first depending on our contacts within the Nigerian military service, who then helped us to identify other potential participants based on referral. The sample consisted of 27 military officers (10 females and 17 males) across several military establishments in Nigeria – Lagos, Delta, Kaduna and Abuja – cutting across the major geopolitical regions in Nigeria (see Table 1 for detailed participants' profile). In line with the qualitative approach, we collected data by using semi-structured interviews, allowing the interactions with the participants to begin with themes and clear paths that pointed their minds in the direction of the research topics rather than constraining them to only a set of predetermined questions (Saunders et al., 2019). The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and were performed using virtual platforms (Zoom video conferencing and WhatsApp video), which was a cheaper option and allowed us to reach the participants easily, particularly given their different geographical locations in Nigeria and the fact that the researchers are all abroad. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, with interviewees accorded pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants**

<b>Ranks</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Geographical Location</b>
Commodore	3	Female (1) Male (2)	Lagos Lagos and Kaduna
Captain	3	Male (3)	Kaduna, Delta (2)
Commander	4	Female (2) Male (2)	Kaduna, Lagos Kaduna, Delta
Air Commodore	2	Female (1) Male (1)	Kaduna Kaduna
Wing Commander	1	Female (1)	Delta
Major	5	Female (2) Male (3)	Lagos (2) Kaduna (2), Lagos
Lieutenant	9	Female (3) Male (6)	Lagos (2), Kaduna Delta (2), Kaduna (3), Lagos

Following data collection and transcription, we began data analysis using the thematic analysis procedure (TAP), as described by Corbin and Strauss (2015). After transcribing, the researchers performed a thorough review, listening to the audio repeatedly and re-reading transcriptions to rule out potential omissions or discrepancies. Therefore, we began by creating tentative categories using first-order codes, followed by a process of data reduction through open coding to carefully identify and choose the key elements we felt were important from the data. This was achieved by analysing textual content and creating words and phrases that helped to convey the salient and essence-catching features of interview excerpts. The researchers used the colour-coding technique and worked together to determine the meanings of specific words, phrases, and clauses while carefully providing accurate interpretations. In the next stage, first-order codes that developed from the interview data in each category were combined to create theoretical categories, allowing the first-order coding to become more theoretical and abstract. The final step involved consolidating the conceptual categories to generate theoretical clarification in order for the main themes to emerge, after which the authors agreed and finalised the themes. In order to be able to recognise the key themes from the collected data, the researchers remained open to identifying any surprising fact that would provide rich

insights and nuances to the under-researched phenomenon. This led to the emergence of four main themes and three sub-themes.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **NAF Conceptual Clarification of WLB**

#### ***As the ability to pay attention to family commitments and a balance of responsibilities***

In developing countries like Nigeria, ‘collectivism’, which is the practice of maintaining close contact with extended family (Hofstede, 2001), is a common feature (Mordi and Ojo, 2011; Adisa et al., 2021). According to Fashoyin (2010), the family structure should not only care for its members financially, but it should also provide emotional support. This is recognised in some of the responses from NAF personnel:

*The Bible states that any man who cannot provide for his family is worse than an infidel. As you work, you should be able to care, cater for and be there for your family. (Captain, Male)*

*In my opinion, WLB means understanding and keeping work and the most important things in life sacred and balanced. It may differ from profession to profession; it all depends on the individual and the trust of the people he holds dear. (Commander, Female)*

*WLB is the ability to divide your time and energy between your official and private life, although it is often difficult to achieve a satisfactory result. (Commodore, Female)*

The narratives suggest that the family system is ranked as significant and should not suffer at the expense of work. The general consensus among the officers aligns with the variety of WLB definitions where family is considered an essential part of human life and should be given time and attention besides work (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Bailyn, 2011). In alignment with other African studies across developing countries, the study supports that the family is important and achieving WLB is becoming increasingly important (Asiedu-Appiah and Zoogah, 2019; Akanji et al., 2022). Moreover, the collectivist system in Nigeria necessitates that family members, in particular, are interdependent, share similar goals and act for the good of family members rather than the individual (Adisa et al., 2017). Consequently, our findings indicate that while there is

a quest for effective engagement in the workplace, individuals also need to have some level of family engagement. This is supported by previous studies (e.g. Wasay, 2013; Cahill et al., 2015) that have established a positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. The literature on work-life balance has established that often, individuals who find it difficult to segment their work from non-work obligations tend to integrate them, such that there is an increase in the level of border permeability (Clark, 2000; Adisa et al., 2022). Therefore, as our study portrays, although work engagement is usually higher and more desirable given the need for survival, individuals with a satisfactory level of work and family engagement may benefit from balancing their work and non-work domains.

#### ***As commitments outside of familial responsibilities***

The need for individuals to spend time at work and still have time for themselves or social events was important to some of the participants. This finding supports studies that show that achieving a balance between work and other non-work commitments other than family (leisure, personal development, social events) is increasingly important to employees (Annink, 2017; Kelliher et al., 2019). This is reflected in the views of the participants:

*It implies, in my perspective, making time to attend to other aspects of life. Many aspects of human life apart from work and family must be given considerable attention. For me, I like to have a nice time with my colleagues outside the cantonment. It is a time to relax, have some fun and forget the daily troubles we face in Nigeria every day. (Lieutenant, Male)*

*Literally, there should be a balance between how much time you have for work and how much time you have to exercise your body and have time to do other things you enjoy doing, but the truth is that, when we are on some operations, for example, the ECOMOG Peace Keeping Operation, you always have to be on the alert. (Lieutenant, Male)*

The above quotes are generally indicative of the sample, in which participants lamented the lack of adequate personal time, mostly due to the unstructured nature of their work that requires being always alert. This notion relates to what Adekoya et al. (2019) referred to as obeying the clarion call to work regardless of the time, necessitating members of the Nigerian Army to

work regardless of the time. Given that members of the Nigerian Armed Forces could be deployed and relocated to specific locations at any time, they often find it difficult to make plans with family and friends, especially those outside the workplace. As previously mentioned, in the case of the Nigerian Army, work engagement is valued higher given the nature of their job, such that the nature of their job (e.g. long working hours, required physical presence at work and deployment and relocation) often prevent them from engaging in other non-work activities even when they are desired.

### *As task-pay parity*

For some participants, the balance means receiving pay equal to the job. The expected pay should be in tandem with the risk in the job. A participant did refer to the ‘war against Boko Haram’ – an acclaimed terrorist group whose activities have contributed to high insecurity in Nigeria – and the risk the officers face. Therefore, these officers believe that the meagre earnings and non-existent benefits do not match the amount of job they do, including the risks to their life:

*I have heard of WLB, and for me, it means the pay should be equal to the work, but unfortunately, it is not. We are confronted with many insecurity issues in the country, and while we are aware that it is our obligation to keep the country and its people and property safe, the salary doesn't match the work we do (Captain, Male).*

*My own understanding of WLB is that there should be a balance between the work we do and the pay we receive. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Sometimes you are forced to do things that you ordinarily wouldn't do but with the aim of surviving and feeding your family. The government need to do something about it because we are not happy. (Air Commodore, Female)*

The quotations above reveal that officers in the Nigerian Armed Forces generally complained about a lack of commensurate pay for the amount of work they do. While military service is generally known to be a form of patriotism to one's country (Krebs and Ralston, 2022), our study's participants opine that the government must be willing to cater for their needs, particularly ensuring that they are well remunerated. Previous studies (e.g. Akanji et al., 2020;

Dousin et al., 2021) have also suggested that inadequate compensation or task-pay disparity can lead to unproductivity, disengagement, and ill-wellbeing for employees. In a sense, in line with the WLB spillover theory (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000), it transfers a negative spillover from the work to the non-work domain. That is, high occupational demands but poor reward system could lead to the inability of the officers to fulfil their family demands. Therefore, task-pay parity is expected to serve as work/personal resources that enable employees to achieve optimal functioning in their roles (Du et al., 2018; Akanji et al., 2020).

### **Perception of the Positive Impact of WLB on Work Engagement**

Most participants viewed WLB as a critical factor that enables them to enhance their engagement at work. Most of them stated that having time for activities other than work also meant that they could concentrate better while at work:

*I would like to think that WLB policies and practices greatly impact officers' engagement. That is why we now have human resources managers in our organisations, but I'm not sure how well the policy works in the military. If successful, it would significantly increase dedication and commitment to service. (Lieutenant, Female)*

*An effort is being made to create awareness and have some of these [WLB] practices, for example, the establishment of a creche in each Naval unit, even on board if possible...this would be most beneficial to nursing mothers and aid female officers' engagement. (Commodore, Male)*

Speaking in relation to WLB and engagement of 'millennials' into the military work environment, some participants mentioned:

*Military work is all about 'presence' – you have to be present, but if we can find a way to restructure it, people will enjoy the service so much, it would also help increase dedication to service, particularly amongst the millennials that we now have in the military...they want so much out of life. (Air Commodore, Male)*

*If you notice, in recent years, the number of the younger generation who joined the armed forces has reduced drastically. There are many reasons for this...however, one that I feel is quite important is that they are unwilling to be in an isolated environment. They want to feel like normal people who can interact with others in society without people seeing*



*them as monsters. They want a government and service that also cares about their wellbeing. (Major, Female)*

From another perspective, some participants, particularly the older and those in higher ranks in service, have observed that the younger generation takes WLB issues more seriously. They opined that among the several factors that discourage the younger generation from joining the military service (e.g. lack of sophisticated equipment, government's lackadaisical attitude to officers' wellbeing, the fear of losing their lives due to senior officers' negligence), WLB topped the chart. The younger generation (millennials and Generation Z) wants a healthy WLB. Compared to earlier generations, they demand and anticipate greater flexibility from their professions, and as a result, they carefully assess how what job would give them WLB. Thus, to enhance work engagement, employers must prioritise employee well-being to help prevent stress and work-life conflicts, and create positive working environments (Hamilton Skurak et al., 2021; Boccoli et al., 2022). Furthermore, the results are consistent with earlier studies that found a beneficial relationship between WLB and employee engagement, with WLB being essential to employee engagement and access to WLB programmes in the workplace enhancing the growth of employee engagement (Shankar and Bhatnagar, 2010; Alvi et al., 2014; Cahill et al., 2015).

### **Constant Conflict and Pressure Arising from the Nature of Military Operations**

Often, conflicting situations exist more than work-family enrichment. Considering "conflict is experienced when pressures arising in one role are incompatible with pressures arising in another role and participation in one role making participation in another role difficult" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). In other words, employee's experience at work, which could either be positive or negative, affects their non-work role and experience (Edwards and Rothbards, 2000). The constant pressure arising from work demands was recognised as a fundamental issue impacting military officers' WLB:

*There is constant pressure, as there is no room for failure. No excuse for not carrying out an assignment or routine work. I have to be on my toes day and night constantly. I do not see this pressure changing for the better in future because the dynamics of security is constantly changing for the worse. (Major, Male)*

*The pressure, whether decreasing or increasing, depends on the nature of the duty assigned ... pressure increases as you go up the rank ladder with more responsibilities. (Commander, Female).*

*The pressure all depends on what task is to be accomplished within a period. For my department, there is increasing pressure when a ship is to set sail because we have to equip it for all it needs. So also, when there are new entrants into the Navy. These are the times we often experience pressure, and for as long as these duties keep occurring, there will always be pressure. (Commodore, Male).*

Furthermore, participants revealed that under these work conditions, military officers are compelled to prioritise work above family. This is a situation that has often led to contemplating resigning, as seen in the quotes below:

*I experience a lot of pressure, and over time I found out I have prioritised work over family, but my family has come to accept that it is the nature of my job. It has been difficult... There are times I have offered to resign and stay home, but it is not acceptable to my wife because I need to be able to feed my family (Major, Male)*

*As a Marine Officer, there's pressure. Pressure to ensure machines and equipment on the ship are functional. The work occupies most of my time. I have less time for social life. A typical day is a ratio of 12:4:8, that is, 12hrs for work, 4 hrs for non-work activities and 8hrs for family and resting (sleeping/resting). I have not gone on leave for over 3 years now, and neither did I have much time for my children when they were growing up. Sometimes, I'm not able to focus on work because my mind is with my family who I may not have seen for many days, weeks or months (Commander, Male)*

As a result of the lack or poor application of employment rules governing working hours, WLB in the Nigerian Armed Forces has serious implications. This leads us to conclude that the Nigerian Armed Forces extended working hours hinder WLB. Moreover, given that the majority of military personnel are required to be physically present at work, deployed and relocated to different locations and often have to bear with unstructured working hours, particularly during times of high insecurities and crisis, they often experience work-life conflict.

Inadvertently, work-life conflict often led to disengagement in the workplace, as many of the participants claimed. This is supported by previous research that linked work-life conflict with increased employees' lack of psychological detachment. For instance, Skurak et al. (2021) found that work-life conflict was indirectly influenced by involvement and overtime work due to a lack of psychological detachment from the job. Work overload, working overtime, feeling highly motivated, and feeling under pressure to prioritise work over personal life were also indirectly linked to decreased wellbeing through a rise in work-life conflict. In the case of the Nigerian Army officers, the nature of their job often leads to the inability to detach fully from their work. Without a doubt, work engagement could also result in negative consequences. However, while work engagement could be increased due to working overtime and increased drive, it may be difficult for people to unwind and forget about work during their free time if they are intensely focused on and involved in their work (Rothbard, 2001).

### **A Link between Leadership and the Existence or Non-Existence of WLB**

When compared with other developed countries, WLB policies and practices are limited in Nigeria, mostly due to national challenges facing the country, the reluctance of public policymakers to update obsolete labour laws supporting WLB, and bad leadership (Mordi and Ojo, 2011). Similar to the findings of prior WLB studies in Africa, particularly Nigeria (e.g. Adisa et al., 2014), that most employees are unaware of WLB practices in their workplace and were surprised to learn their organisation had flexible work arrangements, officers in the NAF share similar experiences:

*Every profession has its pressure which can be aggravated or ameliorated by those in leadership. To be honest, apart from leaves, I don't know any WLB policies in military service. If they exist, then our leaders should be questioned for not publicising them. (Lieutenant, Male).*

*Come to think of it, it is sad to know that the military service can provide some policies that encourage WLB, but they fail to because of our leaders' selfish interests at times. I think we the followers are the ones that suffer the most. From time to time, you hear that*

*a senior officer has travelled for training and will even spend some time for leisure...hardly do we have such opportunities (Major, Female).*

Aside from the peculiar nature of military service, it is clear that the legislation in a country and the existing leadership have a role to play in the type of policies and practices within the country (Epie, 2011). Leadership in the military must recognise that WLB enables employees to feel in control and be more attentive and focused on their work-related duties (Syrek et al., 2013; Charoensukmongkol and Puyod, 2021). Therefore, creating, implementing, and communicating WLB initiatives is more likely to increase officers' engagement in the workplace. The extent to which WLB is accomplished depends critically on how actively the management promotes WLB among its personnel. This is due to the management's role as the final decision-maker in implementing WLB policies and ensuring that it is for the greater good of its employees and the organisation as a whole (Braun and Peus, 2018; Adekoya et al., 2019).

### **Conclusions and Research Implications for Policy**

This study investigated the nexus between the quality of WLB and officers' engagement in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Following our findings, the study first presents an understanding of the conceptualisation of WLB as conceived from the experiences of Nigerian Army officers. This includes WLB perceived as the ability to pay attention to family commitments and a balance of responsibilities, as commitments outside of familial responsibilities, and as task-pay parity. Regardless of how WLB is perceived, our findings also show that while the nature of military work necessitates employees' engagement, the desire for engagement with non-work activities (e.g. family and leisure) were deemed challenging and often unattainable. Consequently, the constant conflict and pressure arising from the nature of military operations in Nigeria continues to hamper the achievement of WLB. Given this reality, policymakers both nationally and in the Nigerian Army need to re-strategise how to reduce the negative effects this might have on Army officers wellbeing.

Despite the peculiar nature of military work, the Nigerian military can still take a cue from its foreign counterparts. For example, the Obama administration sought to improve the wellbeing of officers in the military by encouraging the retention of parents in the US army through better WLB schemes (NPR, 2016). Specifically, military officers were encouraged to use the “career intermission programme” to take time off to study, travel, or raise kids. Aside from 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, the Pentagon plans to increase the time military day-care centres operate from 12 hours a day to 14 hours (NPR, 2016). In similar vein, the Australian Government Department of Defence (DoD), in a statement, mentioned that “At defence, we care about your health and happiness. We offer a range of flexible working options to assist you with balancing your family, fitness, studies and lifestyle” (Work180, 2022).

In the UK, military officers are offered alternative working arrangements (e.g. remote working, variable start and finish times, compressed working), flexible paid/unpaid leave opportunities, unpaid breaks, part-time working, restricted separation and career intermissions (Ministry of Defence, 2021). The UK military service, in particular, acknowledges that not every profession can support a flexible working schedule, but it is crucial for commanders and line managers to collaborate with Service personnel to balance needs whenever possible. Moreover, the service acknowledges that to be successful, a customised WLB is essential, given that it promotes a better and healthier way of life, boosts output, and enables officers to be more resilient and gives them more energy in a tough work environment (Ministry of Defense, 2021).

In view of the above practices across international military services, we suggest that the Nigerian Armed Forces should borrow some of these WLB policies and practices for the Nigerian environment. We recognise that not all may fit within the Nigerian context due to the inadequacy of funds, infrastructure, and other internal and external factors that continues to hamper the wellbeing of the armed forces and the general development of the Nigerian military service.

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