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Work Pressure and Employment of Housemaids among Female Bank Workers in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

The employment of housemaids to reduce domestic and official work pressure is prevalent among career women in Nigeria, with implications for child socialization and domestic security. Employing the role strain theory, this study examined the coping strategies adopted by married female bankers as a way of understanding the context of work and family pressure. The data comprised 30 in-depth interviews and six Focus Group Discussions. The results indicate that the employment of housemaid was considered risky but necessary; respondents revealed that recruiting housemaid was a means of reducing pressure from role conflict arising from domestic and official work. The security and socialization of children were reported to be jeopardized as housemaids were inferior substitutes for maternal care and home-keeping. Also common among housemaids were desertion, stealing and sexual liaison with husbands. Among other recommendations, banks should device measures to enable married female staff to take adequate care of their children in close proximity to the workplace.

Keywords: housemaids, career women, child socialization, domestic security, work pressure

Introduction

The employment of housemaids to assist in performing the traditional roles of women which are evident in domestic activities such as washing, cleaning and childcare, is a common phenomenon in Nigeria. As more and more Nigerian women attain high levels of education and secure employment in the formal sector, they face the problem of combining official and domestic roles, with one receiving more attention than the other. Erinsho (2005) observed that a woman who takes up jobs outside the home may also be seen to be denying her home and husband the attention needed. This denial may in the long run result into family disorganization with consequences such as domestic violence, especially battery, juvenile delinquency, sexual abuse and divorce (Allen, Hurst, Burck and Sutton, 2000)

In several settings, domestic roles are primarily assigned to females in line with gender stratification in relevant contexts (Allen and Walker, 2000). These

household responsibilities include, but not exclusive to, childbearing, child nurturing, household chores, cooking, providing care to husbands, and so on. Childbearing and socialization are both biologically and socially ascribed to the womenfolk. These give credence to the aphorism, "a woman's place is in the kitchen." Unfortunately, this cannot always be the case especially when both husband and wife are involved in the formal work sector and the woman lacks the time to attend to domestic needs (Blank and Lloyd, 1994). Sometimes, depending on the kind of career, husbands are seen to bridge the gap in performing some of these roles (Winsor and Ensher, 2000).

With economic and socio-political changes, many women now have the privilege of working outside the home (Blau, 1975; Bose, 1987; Finch, 1989). However, Sokoloff (1980) has noted that women's careers include both homemaking and working in the labour market. Hence, any attempt to analyze women's occupational attainment without considering their familial tasks would translate to an incomplete view of their social reality (Rosser and Haris, 1965; Roberts, 1984). It is, therefore, important to see women's roles from these two spheres, which Pleck (1985) described as "role overload," which sometimes results in role conflict or role strain. Indeed, diligence at formal work often implies dereliction of domestic roles which are socially constructed as the primary responsibility of women (Pleck, 1985; Shittu and Olawale, 2004).

Working in a financial institution such as banks in Nigeria may be highly challenging for women, considering the characteristic early arrival and late closure from office common among bank workers in Nigeria. One wonders how the married female bankers are able to cope with housework and the task of the office. Since employment exposes women to non-traditional roles and strains, the allocation of time to employment is seen as drawing women away from home and children (Blake, 1965). Similarly, Rosen (1987) added that care-giving, nurturing and mothering roles of women as wives and mothers are often neglected due to huge responsibilities at the workplace. The physical separation of the household and workplace puts tremendous pressure and challenges on married females; women whose roles are primarily in childcare and household work spend a lot of time outside the home (Mintz, 1992).

The work pressure faced by women in performing both domestic and official work necessitates the recruiting housemaids to perform the role of caring for children forgone by women who have to work outside the home. There are many ways and sources of recruiting housemaids in urban areas of Nigeria. Perhaps most common, they are usually recruited from agents or matrons who specialize in bringing rural children to urban areas and place them in homes for monthly fees, which they collect on behalf of their wards. Despite the security implications of this practice, contemporary female bankers in Nigeria have no option than to adopt it. To date, studies in Nigeria have not fully explored the variables influencing work pressures among women in formal jobs and the inevitability of for housemaids, as well as its implications for family stability and security. This paper therefore examines the influence of

involvement with both domestic work and office duties, identifying the factors that predispose women to join the labour force, and document perceived implications of recruiting housemaids on child socialization and security.

Factors Responsible for Women's Participation in the Labour Force

Despite changes taking place in African societies, women still undertake the major responsibility for childcare and up-bringing. The absence of adequate childcare facilities makes it difficult for many of them to work on a full time basis (Ritzer and Walczak, 1986; Kottack, 2000). It is also observed that despite this, the participation rate for married women with children has increased substantially. There are different factors that can explain this rise in participation, particularly increased demand for female workers (Ritzer and Walczak, 1986; Lewis and Copper, 1999). Such rise in the demand for female employees is also due to the fact that certain works are typically thought to be within women's domain. Such work includes secretarial duties, white-collar clerical services, legal aids, computer operators, and receptionist (Miralow, 1991; Sanchez, 1993; Rismen, 1998).

Another significant factor that could also explain the increase in female participation in formal work is changing societal norms and values regarding women working outside the home. Traditionally, the place of women was the home where they were saddled with the responsibility of caring for the children and their husbands among other functions. There was resistance against allowing women to work outside the home (Ulrich, 1982; Silver, 1998). With social change came a shift in societal norms regarding women's employment. Husbands or fathers are increasingly shifting grounds and now appraise the supportive economic roles of mothers or women (Kiger, 1984; Gentry, Commuri & Jun, 2003; Cinnamon & Rich, 2002a; 2002b).

Economic necessity was also elucidated as a salient reason for increased participation of women in the labour force (Ritzer and Walczak, 1986). The need for the financial support of women in household maintenance is critical especially in developing world where poverty is a major impediment in most families. Thus, women also needed to alleviate the household problem through meaningful economic contribution. Nowadays, increasing number of families or married couples have realized that they could only survive with two breadwinners – the man and the woman (Cinnamon and Rich, 2002b).

Increasing educational attainment on the part of both men and women has influenced qualification for employment and involvement in formal organizational settings especially among females. Improved literacy level among men indirectly influence women participation in labour force because most men are now enlightened and exposed to the realities of home management (Kliengebiel, 2002). Thus, an increasing number of women now have the credentials to qualify for more and better jobs like bank work, and other

professional positions; women now compete favourably with men in different professions.

The rising incidence of divorce in the society may have also accounted for further increase in women labour participation. In cases of divorce, separation or death of the husband, the affected women need to sustain the family most of the time by entering into the labour force (Haviland, 2002). The rise of female-headed family is significant in this respect. Cutrufelli (1983) observed that political independence increased the number of women workers in West Africa; more women work for a wage or salary than before independence. It is, however, observed that this increase is exclusive to big towns and, therefore, limited in spread (Leung, Conley and Schell 1994; Gerson, 1985; Gilbert, 1993).

The Role Conflict between Housework on formal Work

Industrialization brought significant changes in the roles of women. As a result women now occupy important position in the 'world of work'. Patriarchy declined as societies got industrialized, which could be called revolution in domestic life (Mintz, 1992). The physical separation of the household and the workplace also contributed to a new conception of the family and women's roles within the family, as mothers have to go out for formal duties. Within the socio-cultural context, despite this "revolution", women's roles are still rooted in children and household work. Employers may therefore view women's families as potential distraction from work. The employer is also likely to be worried by the burden of pregnancy, which may make some women inactive or result to bed rest or time loss in caring for sick children. There is increasing concern that female workers' attachment to their families may be detrimental to work and productivity (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

In effect, working women hold dual responsibilities and strive to fill both appropriately. Winsor and Ensher, (2000) assert that female entrepreneurs often choose their careers to accommodate the amount of time they have to donate to their families. Hence most women bring in outside help to assist with the workload at the domestics sphere (Affholder & Box, 2004). While most men are focussed on working outside the home to provide economic means of survival, women have to juggle between work and family. It has been noted that marriage and family restrict most women from getting to the peak of their careers (Aina, 2012). The assertion is that the family may affect worker's performance on their jobs; for women, combining both work and family may generate role conflicts.

Role Strain Theory

Goode (1963) defined "Role Strain" as the felt difficulty in fulfilling the demands of one's role or obligations. He noted that the continuity of social system is mainly a function of two variables, that is the normative consensual commitment of the individual in society and the integration among the norms

held by those individuals accepting discussion, non-conformity and conflict among norms and roles as the usual state of affairs.

Goode developed the idea that the total role system of the individual is unique and over demanding, and stipulated that the individual cannot satisfy fully all demands but must through continuous sequence of role decisions and bargain, attempt to adjust to them. He added that the choices in the execution of the decisions are made somewhat easier by the existence of mechanisms which the individual uses in organizing his role systems and obtain a better bargain in a role. The theory gives insight to the explanation of the stress experienced by women who combine official work with domestic duties, one of which sometimes suffers for the other to be adequately carried out.

Usually within the context of this explanation, the family suffers from lack of motherly attention to children especially with reference to the socialization roles and home up-keep, while the spouse sometimes suffers from lack of adequate care and attention from the wife who holds an office job. The obvious work pressure results in role strain generally among women who are involved in formal employment, especially those who are involved in time-demanding and tasking jobs as in the banking sector. Women who join the labour force do so in the bid to contribute to household needs, and to become economically empowered and financially independent, and reduce the challenges of becoming incapacitated in terms of making meaningful contribution to household decisions.

However, the new trend of being an office worker who contributes to meeting household needs most often than not does not reduce or erode the huge expectations of meeting up with the domestic duties of being a wife, a mother and house-keeper. The stress experienced in the attempts to meet the numerous expectations both at the work-place and home leaves women with little or no choice than to recruit housemaids in the bid to avert the threat of experiencing family disorganization. That choice in a contemporary society, where the banking job is viewed as an attractive one, makes the hiring of housemaid imperative, despite the security implication making such a choice in a country that is faced with the menace of insecurity.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ibadan, Oyo State. The study population comprised married female bankers between ages 21 and 50 years who have children. The method of data collection was qualitative, comprising In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The IDIs involved 30 female bankers selected from ten banks in Ibadan. The ten selected banks included both old and new generation banks with a large population of married females and several branches in Ibadan. Three respondents were selected from each of the chosen banks. The participants were purposively chosen and must have worked in the bank for over five years, married with kids, and have

employed housemaids either currently or the past. Six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), which included an average of seven women each, were conducted with married female bankers. The entire data were subjected to content analysis.

Results

Reasons for joining the banking sector

The most important reasons why respondents joined the banking sector were to contribute to the household needs, to reduce dependency, to reduce poverty, long period of unemployment, and to provide for the children. A respondent stated:

No matter the sacrifice it will take, people do any lucrative job such as the banking job because it is a rare privilege that one must grab with the two hands because of poverty and unemployment situation in the country. (36 years/IDI/16/6/12)

An FGD participant stated:

Women join the labour force to be able to support the family, escape the pangs of poverty and unemployment and become financially empowered and avoid being a liability to the husband. It can be embarrassing when a woman asks the husband for money to buy the smallest things in the home such as maggi and salt or even her personal underwear. (woman/FGD/21/6/12)

The need for women to be empowered in the Nigerian society so that they can assist their spouses, train their children, and stand on their own when their spouses are no longer available either through death or divorce was further emphasized in the focus group discussions.

Influence of domestic work on office duties and vice versa

The influence of domestic work on office work was revealed to be enormous among the respondents in this study. A lot of them stated that it was difficult for them to cope when they started having children; both getting to work early and getting back home posed enormous challenges. They mentioned the negative influences of domestic duties on office work to include: lack of concentration at work, piling up back log or arrears of work, late coming to work, persistently seeking permission to check on children, and inefficiency and errors at work, often leading to queries from their boss. A respondent in one of the Focus Group Discussions noted:

House chores affect productivity at work especially when proper planning is not done. Sometimes you are distracted when you suddenly remember what you ought to have done that you did not do at home, picking kids from school, etc. As a consequence of this work piles up on one's table; there is general inefficiency

*that could make one lose her job due the domestic distractions.
(Woman/FGD/18/6/12)*

An IDI respondent also buttressed this point by stating that:

Domestic duties influence office work in several ways. You cannot concentrate fully at work, you make lots of errors such as over paying people most of the time and bearing the brunt of that, you come late to work, pile up your work most times, I remember I was always taking permission to check on my child or pick up my child from school. I made several mistakes during that time that earned me several queries from my boss before I decided to find solutions to those domestic distortions. (34 years /IDI/GTB/June, 2012)

The above reveals that domestic duties affect office work in diverse ways especially at the initial stages of child bearing. Obviously, the first child is likely to receive enough attention from the mother. However, afterwards the bankers look for measures for handling such issues in order to ensure that they protect their jobs or retain them due to the increased job insecurity experienced in the banking sector. The responses from the focus group discussions were highly similar with those of the in-depth interviews. Although women reported that it was not easy to sacrifice the attention they ought to give to their family, especially their children, in order to perform better in their work place, they had to make that decision in order to secure their jobs.

Among the numerous influences of office work on domestic chores, most were directed towards the ability to provide the basic needs in the home as stated by the respondent.

There are so many influences that may be negative on the family which is the domain of domestic duties such as lack of adequate attention for spouse and children, lateness to the home and early departure from the house. However, the office work has also helped and supported the family in the sense that through this bank job, many needs have been met, school fees, food, electronics, washing machines, even house rent. These are very necessary though and since we cannot "eat our cake and have it", we may have to sacrifice attention for husband and children and make money for the family. (42 years /IDI/Zenith/8/6/12)

Again, the challenges of unemployment and job insecurity were mentioned as other reasons why the family has to suffer some lack of attention, to enable women in banking jobs secured their positions and advance in their careers.

Child socialization and security implications of recruiting housemaids

In addressing this issue, women were asked their perception of the role of housemaids. Many responded that recruiting of housemaid was necessary in order to cope with the challenges of combining office and domestic work. However, many also added that it was risky and far from ideal especially if one did not have an idea of the background of the housemaid as well as her personality trait. Some stated that they would rather recruit male helpers if all their kids were boys in order to protect their marriage. There was the belief that bringing in a housemaid could lead to husbands' infidelity, especially given that the women were away from home all day. Furthermore, several security threat common among housemaids were mentioned such as: stealing money and material things, child abuse/maltreatment and inadequate child socialization, lack of adequate care for children, lack of commitment to the family, external distractions and a host of others.

A discussant stated:

It is necessary to employ a maid if you are a banker because of the stress at home and office, but that does not mean that it is an ideal thing to do especially because of the risk involved if you do not know her kind of person and the background that she is coming from before she comes into your family.
(Woman/FGD//25/6/2012)

A respondent during one of the interviews noted:

I think the idea of recruiting a housemaid is necessary to help with house chores when one is at work or too tired to do something. However, this depends on the means through which one gets such a housemaid. It will not be ideal to get a total stranger to come and stay with you because so many things could go wrong.

On the security implications of employing a house maid, a respondent added:

I have been a victim before. A housemaid stole about N250, 000 which I was supposed to pay into my bank on behalf of a client. I had been condoning the little stealing she was doing before that time. I have not seen her since that day. It is better you get a relative or family friend bring you a poor village girl whom you will take care of either in school, trade or vocation. Even the child right law now does not subscribe doing otherwise, else one will be considered involved in child trafficking or child abuse.
(Woman/FGD//23/6/2012)

The security threats of hiring housemaids were buttresses by many women who have had some experiences. In particular, loosing cash and other material things to housemaid was believed to be a grand plan between housemaids and the matrons/patrons through whom they were hired.

A respondent buttressed this view further:

Some of these housemaids you employ on contract basis say six months or one year are taught to be thieves and kidnappers who will never be committed to you or feel being part of your family, no matter how hard you try. Some of them swear to oath that they will forever be loyal to their madams or whoever serves as their link; and so if they are asked to steal some money and run away at a particular period, they will do so without hesitation. Nowadays, they operate like a syndicate. (Woman/FGD-123/6/2011)

A respondent raised the security implications for child socialization and sexual abuse.

I will say that recruiting a housemaid is necessary. It is however another task on its own as you will need to keep your eyes and ears to the ground in order to avoid vices such as rape, infidelity with husband who may be a business man and free to go home any time. There is also the risk of child battering or what we may call child abuse, and the fact that housemaids can disappear or decide to go any time. In fact it is better that the maid is always around you for you to keep watch over her to avoid trouble, especially with regard to how she takes care of your children or instructs them. I am talking out of experience but let me spare you the details. (35years/First bank/25/6/2011)

The major problem associated with housemaids was in connection with child safety and socialization. Most of the women reported child maltreatment, kidnapping, sexual abuse, and even rape, in the hands of housemaids. Most of the views on child care and socialization were like this:

Apart from maltreating the children, what about vices such as lying, stealing and using abusive words that these maids teach the children? A parent who abandons the care of the child solely to the maid and does not make out time to relate with the children and correct these wrong socialization traits will regret in future. I tell you sincerely. (37yrs/ Zenith bank/IDI/10/6/2011)

Another respondent reiterated the violence meted out by housemaid on the children and the implication this has for child socialization and security, thus:

It is really worrisome what our children experience when we are not there. What they learn from the maids as well as their security is another issue. I know of cases where housemaid maltreat and beat her employer's child mercilessly. Some years back a male-helper raped a family friend's child and

disappeared from the house. There was a case of a male helper who was always having oral sex with a little baby and releasing his sperm into the baby's mouth until the doctor detected that the swollen stomach of the baby was as a result of that act. We just need to make out time for our kids especially when they are still very young and defenceless. (39yrs/ Finbank/IDI/12/5/2011)

The essence of recruiting a housemaid is defeated if one has to constantly supervise, monitor, investigate them, and to continuously be around the housemaid/helpers in order to guard against these vices. Since it was lack of time and insufficient attention to the home that necessitated the recruiting of housemaids, working women are not able to provide adequate supervision of their maids. However, the need to make out time for the children, especially in the defenceless and formative ages, is a major concern emphasized by the respondents and discussants.

Another respondent buttressed the case of kidnapping as a security issue in employing housemaids:

As much as housemaids or helpers are needed at the early stage of one's marital life, especially with the arrival of children, one needs to be very careful because some of these housemaids get involved in kidnapping to extort money from their employers. A friend of mine spent over 500,000 thousand naira when her maid and son were kidnapped before the police discovered that this was arranged by the maid and the kidnappers to siphon cash from the couple. (Finbank/IDI/12/3/2012)

A discussant underscored this by stating:

There are cases when the helpers will steal money or materials things from the home or run away with their employers' kids as if they were kidnapped in order to collect ransom from their employers. Also some of the matrons/guardians of the maids collect payment from other employers and ask the maids under their care to run away from their current employer as if they were missing, only to be given out to another employer. The second scenario actually happened to me two years ago, while the first happened to a family friend; so these vices are quite common and risky. (42years/Access bank/12/7/2012)

Other views from FGDs reveal that despite the security implication, some of these women do not have a choice than to continue to fall back on the alternative of recruiting housemaids as the pressure of work was too enormous. A respondent reinforced this view by saying:

House maids have their huge challenges no doubt. These include rape, infidelity, theft, gossips, kidnapping and a host of other ills. However, do we really have a choice on this matter?

Can we do all the domestic chores as well as our official work and be there with the children all the time? All we have to do is keep trying, especially for those whose parents or in-laws and other relatives are not available to help in the up-keep of the children or have no access to individuals that could be close enough to take care of the kids. (37 years/FGD/24/6/12)

Others take solace on the fact that the necessity of housemaids is a temporary measure which happens at a certain stage of life of the average career woman. Their services cease to be important as the children grow up and start to take care of themselves. A married female banker captured it this way:

In my opinion, this will only take some time as the children will grow up later to fend for themselves and help with the household chores if they are properly brought up to learn how to do so, whether they are males or females. Until then assistance from housemaids/helpers may be risky but unavoidable if you ask me. (41 years/Skye bank/4/4/12)

The above response reiterates the need to properly socialize children to learn how to carry out domestic activities and this cannot be left for the house maids/helpers to do. This again points to the need for parents to create some time out of their busy schedule to properly educate and socialize their children, whether they are males or females, on cleaning the home, washing, cooking and even the care of younger ones. This does not only prepare the children to help around the home in the absence of their parents, but also helps to prepare them for their future roles as parents.

In proffering solutions to these challenges, many suggested that women should plan their time and schedule properly to be able to combine domestic and office duties in order to reduce role strain and work pressures. Many women stated that the government should take charge and ensure that orphans and vulnerable should be sheltered in orphanages or homes where people could sign up for children as house-helpers and in return send them to schools or train them in vocational skills. A respondent buttressed these views by stating:

Government has a lot to do on this matter. All these orphans and beggars on the street can be swept off the street by the government into homes where people can come and recruit them to take care of them or train them in school, while they assist with domestic duties in return. That way they will be committed and feel like they are part of a family instead of roaming about the street and constituting a nuisance to the society. (38yrs/Keystone bank/14/3/12)

Another respondent averred that government should deal with the individuals or syndicates who traffic on children in the bid to create employment as housemaids for them. She submitted:

Government through the Nigerian Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) should arrest and deal with all these syndicates who are duping people up and down and destroying the lives of innocent children all in the name of creating a job for them. (37yrs/Ecobank/2/3/2011)

From the above response, the need to intensify efforts against trafficking in persons through the agency saddled with such responsibility becomes very crucial in the face prevailing levels of insecurity in the country.

Discussion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that as long as the challenges of poverty and unemployment persist, women will continue to seek for jobs outside the home even when it is tasking and inconveniencing for them. This is more so because women always feel the need to support or take care of the family financially. However, their entry into formal work and career pursuit does not necessarily insulate them from their traditional roles in the home. Hence, the enormous work pressure, roles strain and role conflict faced by women will never cease to occur. In order to cope with these pressures, some alternatives arrangements become imperative. This gives credence to the necessity of employing housemaids to assist with the domestic duties and reduce the work pressures despite the risks involved in employing them.

The increased time demand in the banking sector has constrained many female bankers to resort to the use of housemaids. This has adversely affected the security and socialization of children of the employers of housemaids. Career women see the need to be available as mothers to watch over their children and socialize them appropriately but are unable to achieve this. This has consequences in the future; children raised by housemaids rather than their mothers may be maladjusted in their future homes as wives, as well as the possible influence such will have on their interaction with individuals and the society at large. Apart from various problems and vices associated with the use of housemaids, their being an inferior substitute for the mother's role in childrearing and up-bringing has a longer time implications for the future of the contemporary child and family cohesion in general.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The pressure experienced by women arising from the combination of domestic and official roles has necessitated the recruitment of housemaids and helpers. However, the implications for child socialization and security need not be taken for granted considering the psychological and social state of the children who are the leaders of tomorrow. Thus while recruitment of housemaids cannot be ruled out as a means of coping with the stress at home, several other issues

need to be taken cognizance of in other to ensure stability both in the family and the society.

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommends are proffered:

- Recruitment of housemaids should involve a thorough investigation into the background and personality of the housemaid before bringing them into the family.
- Women should properly plan their household and official duties so as to provide quality time for their children in order to ensure a proper socialization and avoid negative behaviours, while taking into cognizance the economic, social and psychological needs of the child.
- Parents who have house helps should also socialize their children, males and females alike, to perform domestic chores so as to enable them fill the gap and take care of the domestic activities even in the absence of their housemaids .
- Housemaids/helpers should be properly trained and socialized on how to carry out the domestic duties and child care and appropriately monitored or supervised if possible.
- Government should support entrepreneurship among women who have very young kids so that they can care and support their children until they grow up. Through this they are able to take care of themselves and their children before they get involved in jobs that will not give them the time and opportunity to do so.
- Banks and other establishments should establish day care centres in the vicinity of the workplace to enable women with young children to monitors their children while at work. Working women should also be allowed sufficient time to nurse their children after a childbirth before returning to work.
- Efforts should be intensified at apprehending those who are involved in child trafficking and ensure that syndicates that deal on housemaids are properly sanctioned.

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