

SOCIAL ROLES AND ROLE CONFLICT: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN THREE PROFESSIONS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA.

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***Abstract:** The study examines the effect of different professions and multiplicity of social roles on the role conflict amongst working women. The present social structure reflects the changes that have come through changing frame of time. A major breakthrough being the growing education and economic independence among women. The economic pressures of inflation, influence of the women's movement and the psychological need to develop one's self identity" are encouraging the women to take a more active role outside the home to pursue full time careers. This shift from private to public domain gives an impression that women have finally liberated from shackles of patriarchal norms. However, a closer look at the scenario makes us realize that working women face new sets of problems involving both family and profession. Factor analysis which is an interdependent technique was use to deconstructs the rating (raw score) into its various components and reconstructs the partial scores into underlying factor score. Results revealed that role conflict increase with the increase in number of roles; more role conflict in married professionals derives from the contradictory values underlying their roles. The study recommends flexi-time, flexi-place and job sharing as adequate panacea to role conflict.*

**Keywords:** Social Roles, Role Conflict, Profession, Women, Factor Analysis, Port Harcourt.

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### Background to the Study

Although, women in western countries have been a major part of the labour force, in Nigeria, it is only recently that such a massive influx of women population has plunged into gainful employment. Historically, the functionalists were of the view that needs of work and family necessitate an allocation of incompatible roles such that one family member specializes in handling the instrumental world of work and the other expressive needs of the family, a role for which women are specialized. Therefore, from time immemorial, men were meant for work while females were taught to regard marriage as the only thing needful. Their working outside was considered derogatory. But now this phase has given way to the period of liberation, feminization of employment being the

highlight of this phase. Economic conditions of inflation, desire to maintain high standard of living, or develop "one's identity" are contributing to the economic push of women into the workforce. As women increasingly gain occupational mobility, they are not only exposed to the same physical hazards to work environment as men but also exposed to the pressures created by multiple role demands and conflicting expectations. By fulfilling their economic needs, employment has no doubt made women independent with an identifiable social status but it has also made them to juggle into two main domains of life - work and family. They have stepped into work place but the role and responsibilities of women still remain. In many cases, a woman may be a top executive and still remain a care giver at home as "care giving roles" are considered much a part of feminine roles. Schieman *et al*, (2008) stated that women who choose to combine marriage with career face almost a situation of normlessness and they hardly know how to apportion time and resources between these two major responsibilities. This makes them experience great conflict, tension and strain. Grazwacz *et al*, (2007) confirmed that the job taken by women created more conflicting situations for them due to the dual social roles they play. Similarly, Milkie *et al* (2010) also reported that women who assumed home roles (e.g. wife, mother and home maker) and non-home roles (e.g. employee) frequently experienced conflict between competing role demands. Conflict were considered likely when women perceived their home and career roles as highly desirable but mutually exclusive. Mesmer-Magnus *et al*, (2005) found that the inter-role conflict is likely to increase as the demands of either the work role or family role increases. Similarly, inter-role or family role can increase as one's obligations to the family expand through marriage and the arrival of children.

However, Bamett and Baruch (1985) found that role conflict and levels of overload were significantly associated with occupying the role of mother, occupying the role of paid worker or wife. In the opinion of Frone *et al* (1992) combination of career and family roles are often associated with conflict, overload and stress. Pareck and Meththa in their study compared three groups of working women i.e. gazette officers, bank-employees and school teachers on the types of role stresses they experienced. The results showed school teachers to be lower on all kinds of role stress in comparison to gazette officers and bank employees. Aminah, (2002) however concluded that one could be married and play the role of wife, mother, householder and executive effectively and yet experience not more role stress than their single counterparts. Since the problems and difficulties of women are multidimensional as evident from the literature reviewed, therefore, they require further probing.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The following concepts should be understood within the context of this paper thus: concepts of domain boundaries and role blurring, the boundaries between work and family are viewed on a continuum ranging from segmentation to integration. High segmentation means that, the boundary between employee's work and family roles is impermeable, that is work and family exists as two distinct spheres. By contrast, High

integration is when "no distinction exists between what belongs to the "home" or "work" and where they are engaged. Work-family role blurring is a subjective, cognitive phenomenon involving perceived integration of work-life and home-life that is situated in a highly interdependent work-family context such as the simultaneous work and family demands that can be present when people bring their paid work into the home (Desrochers *et al*/ 2005). However, role ambiguity is the situation where both the manager and the subordinate of employees are uncertain as to what his or her role is, at any given time. Social roles can be differentiated into incompatibility, conflict and overload. Role incompatibility results when people or members in the same role have different interests, members are likely to experience stress, while role conflict is the situation where the person will have to carry out roles that are contradicting and not supposed to be done at the same time, period or by the same person. Finally, role overload is the situation where the worker carries out more roles than he can actually accommodate either voluntarily or imposed on him by his supervisor. Role conflict takes the form of Bidirectionality when the traveling of negative spillover in time directions from family to work are from work to family (FTW and WTF). Dimensionality of conflict refers to the nature of the source of the conflict, such as whether the conflict stems from time-based stressors or from behaviour based stressors (Nkpah, 2014). Work – family fit could be seen as defined in Voydanoff (2005) in terms of demands and resource, arguing that the extent to which people feel there is a "fit" between their work and family domains. That is whether there is a fit between work demands and family resources and between family demands and work resources.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to examine the contradiction between new roles and profession situating how allotment of time, behaviour and stress influence performance of women in the Nursing, Doctors and Teaching Professions. Specific objectives include:

- i. To show how women in professions with low level of perceived social recognition would experience more role conflict.
- ii. To examine the number of social roles and role conflict in working women.
- iii. To determine the nature of interactive effect and the level of social roles on role conflict.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do women in professions with low level of perceived social recognition experience more role conflict?
2. What factors determine the number of social roles and role conflict in working women?
3. What determine the nature of interactive effect and the level of social roles on role conflict?

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to help guide the research design.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Women in professions with low level of perceived social recognition would experience more role conflict than those in professions with high level of perceived social recognition.
- H<sub>2</sub>: the higher the social roles, the higher would be the role conflict in working women.
- H<sub>3</sub>: there would be a significant interactive effect of different professions (in terms of their perceived social recognition) and the level of social roles on the role conflict.

## Theoretical Foundation

The structural functionalist theory as espoused by Talcott Parsons is used for the study. The theory buttresses the role assumption regarding a biologically-based proclivity of men towards an instrumental role in the workplace and women towards an expressive role in the family (Parsons, 1954). Using this theory, conflict at the work-family interface has been implicated in a variety of deleterious consequences such as depression (Frone *et al*, 1997, Higgins *et al*, 1992), alcohol abuse (Grzywacz *et al*, 2000) and marital tension (Marshall *et al*, 1991). In Nigeria, the role strain is captured by Akanbi and Agbo (2012) when they noted that:

*A bank executive was alleged to have advised his female staff to assist their husband to look for alternative sex partners since they may not have the time to play their matrimonial roles.*

This shows that inter-role family conflict occurs when the cumulative demands of multiple roles at home and at work become too great to manage comfortably. Furthermore, Burke (1998) proposed three hypotheses to explain the work-family relationship. The first is spillover where the events of one environment affect the other; the second is compensation, where the individuals attempt to compensate in one environment for what is lacking in the other and the third is where the environment can be described as independent. In our present study, due to the patriarchal nature of the society, female gender are regarded as perpetual home keeper and shouldered with almost all family responsibilities, and this amounts to gender stereotypes.

## Research Methodology

An exploratory factor analysis was undertaken to examine the construct validities of 20 work-family balance scale items. The exploratory factor analysis procedure employed principle components method for extraction; with the varimax option which conveyed in six relational factors with Eigen values greater than one were retained (Hair *et al*, 1998). Once the dimensionalities of the instrument were verified, the internal consistency of the scales were checked with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy which stands at 0.507. This implies the sampling adequacy is satisfactory. Factor A (professions) was classified into 3 categories namely doctors, Nurses, lecturers and

teachers. These professions were selected on the basis of responses taken on a checklist comprising of different professions in which women are more likely to be involved. This checklist was rated on three point scale (low, moderate, high) by general population in terms of their perceived social recognition of different professions. Majority of the respondent rated doctors high, teachers/lecturers in moderate and nurses in low categories. Regarding factor B (number of social familial roles), subjects were assigned role level depending on their number of roles in family. Each role level consisted of only one specific role or set of roles. The three role levels were working, unmarried (level 1), working, married (level 2), working, married and mother (level 3).

### **Sample**

The sample included women in the age group of 25 – 45 years and serving in government institutes (hospitals and colleges) of Port Harcourt in Rivers State. These professionals (Doctors, Lecturers and Nurses) were further categorized into 3 groups on the basis of the level of their social familial roles. In this way 20 subjects were randomly selected from each of the nine categories and the total sample comprised of 378 working women (out of 400 respondents, only 378 questionnaires were properly filled and returned).

### **Material Used**

#### **Role Conflict Scale (Fisher-McCauley *et al*/2003) –**

The role conflict scale comprises of twenty statements. There are four responses categories for each statement i.e. Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The statements have been written in both positive and negative directions. The subject's total score is considered as the role conflict score. A high score (eigen values) on the scale indicates a high level of role conflict while a low score shows a low level of role conflict. Test-retest and split half reliabilities were found to be very high i.e. 0.87 and 0.79 respectively. Criterion related validity has also been determined. Role Conflict Scale (Rizzo *et al*/1970) was used as a criterion scale. The correlation co-efficient between criterion scale and present scale was found to be 0.81. The questionnaire was administered on the 400 subjects and 378 retrieved representing 94.1% retrieval rate. Scores obtained were further statistically analyzed.

### **Results and Discussion**

For the purpose of this study, Factor A is profession which includes Lecturers (LEC), Doctors (DOC) and Nurses (NUS) on one axis and factor B which includes unmarried (UNM), Married (MAR) and Mother (MOT) on the other hand.

TABLE 1: CORRELATION MATRIX

| CORRELATION    | DOC   | NUS   | LEC   | UNM   | MAR   | MOT   |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| DOC            | 1.000 | .667  | .329  | -.041 | -.076 | .367  |
| NUS            | .667  | 1.000 | .371  | -.146 | -.204 | .054  |
| LEC            | .329  | .371  | 1.00  | -.097 | .168  | .186  |
| UNM            | -.041 | -.146 | -.097 | 1.000 | .666  | .230  |
| MAR            | -.076 | -.204 | .168  | .666  | 1.00  | .403  |
| MOT            | .367  | .054  | .186  | .230  | .403  | 1.000 |
| Sig (1-tailed) |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| DOC            | -     | .001  | 0.78  | .431  | .375  | .055  |
| NUS            | .001  | -     | .054  | .269  | .195  | .410  |
| LEC            | .078  | .054  | -     | .343  | .240  | .216  |
| UNM            | .431  | .269  | .343  | -     | .001  | .165  |
| MAR            | .375  | .195  | .240  | .001  | -     | .039  |
| MOT            | .055  | .410  | .216  | .165  | 0.39  | -     |

Table 1 Determinant = 136

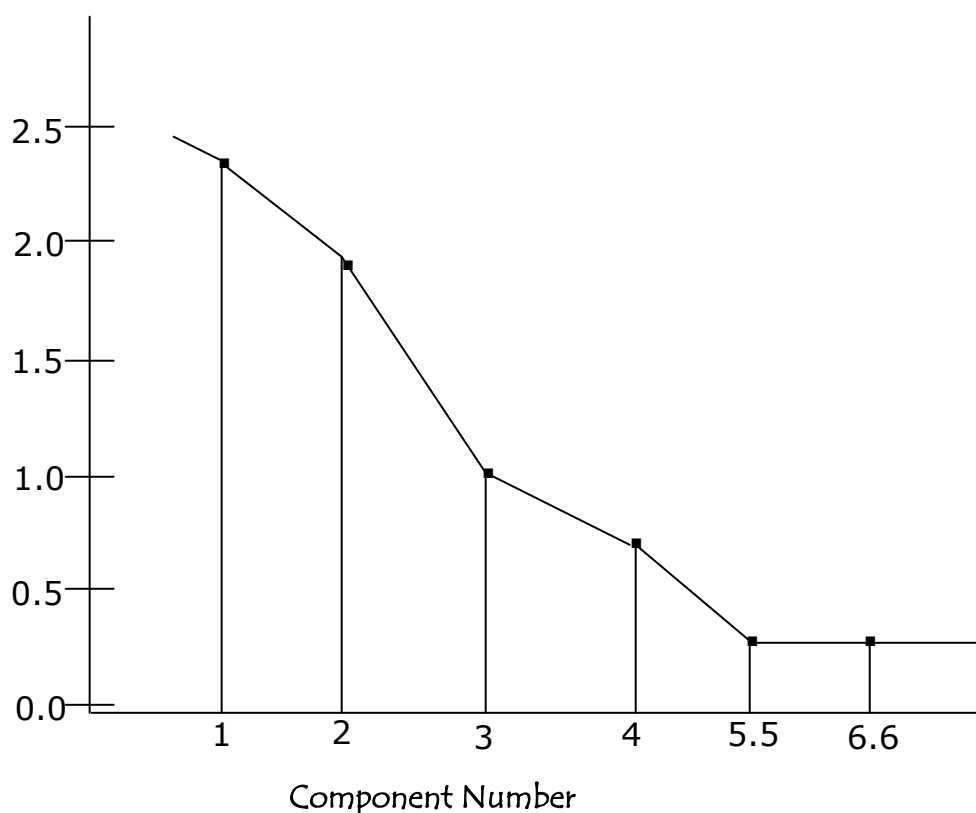
Table 1 shows the array of numbers which explain the correlation co-efficient between profession and number of social familial roles. The Table shows that in all three levels of social roles, the role conflict was maximum in nurses. Lecturers showed least role conflict at level 1 (unmarried) and level 2 (married) while at level 3 (married and mother) doctors had minimum role conflict. Hence the first hypothesis that women in professions with low level of perceived social recognition would experience more role conflict than those in professions with high level of perceived recognition is supported by the present findings. The present findings are in line with Haworth *et al* (1997) who reported value position in work to have important association with positive psychological states. Earlier, Coser (1974; Nkpah, 2014) also reported nurses and bank workers respectively to be particularly more vulnerable to inter-role conflict, since both their marital and occupational roles are demanding in terms of time, energy and commitment. Interpreting the simple effects of factor B, it has been observed that for lecturers and nurses the role conflict significantly increased with the number of social roles whereas it was not true for doctors. The differences among the simple effects of treatment means the interpretation of the Cartell Scree plot will be used as well as total variance explained.

TABLE 2: PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS

| COMPONENT | INITIAL EIGEN VALUES |               |             | ROTATION SUMS OF SQUARED LOADINGS |               |             |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
|           | TOTAL                | % OF VARIANCE | CUMMULATIVE | TOTAL                             | % OF VARIANCE | CUMMULATIVE |
| 1.        | 2.057                | 34.283        | 34.283      | 2.057                             | 34.277        | 34.279      |
| 2.        | 1.938                | 32.305        | 66.588      | 1.939                             | 32.309        | 66.588      |
| 3.        | .799                 | 13.310        | 79.893      |                                   |               |             |
| 4.        | .717                 | 11.958        | 91.856      |                                   |               |             |
| 5.        | .262                 | 4.368         | 96.223      |                                   |               |             |
| 6.        | .227                 | 3.777         | 100.00      |                                   |               |             |

Table 2 above shows all the extractable factors for analysis along with their eigenvalues. The percentage of variance attributed to each variable is Mot (34.283%), NUS (32.305%) MAR (13.310%), DOC (11.958%), LEC (4.368%) and UNM (3.777%). This means that Mot, NUS, Mar which are the first three factor account for 79.98% of the total variance.

FIGURE 1: GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF COMPONENT NUMBERS



The above graph explains eigen values against all component number (MOT = 1, NUS = 2, MAR = 3, DOC = 4, LEC = 5 and UNM = 6). The curve begins to flatten between 3 has an eigenvalue less than 1, so only two components have been retained. Hence, the second hypothesis stating that there would be an increase in the role conflict with the increasing number of social roles is hereby partially supported by the present findings. These results are consistent with Frone (2003) who reported that disproportionate share of household and child care responsibilities in working mothers resulted in home and work responsibilities being placed in opposition to one another and hence leading to role conflict. Moreover, significant interactive effect of professions and social roles on the role conflict was observed in the present study hence supporting the third hypothesis.

**TABLE 3: ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX**

|     | COMPONENT |       |
|-----|-----------|-------|
|     | 1         | 2     |
| MOT | .875      | .018  |
| NUS | .828      | -.224 |
| MAR | .642      | .121  |
| DOC | -.145     | .818  |
| LEC | -.051     | .911  |
| UNM | .412      | .612  |

Extraction Method:  
Principal Component Analysis  
Rotation Method  
Varimax with Kaiser  
Normalization  
Rotation Converged in 3 Iterations

The above Table, shows the rotated factor loadings, it represents how the variables are weighted for each component. From the above Table the variable MOT has a weighted value of 0.875 and 0.018 from component 1 and component 2 respectively, whereas UNM has a weighted value of 0.412 and 0.612 from component 1 and component 2.

**TABLE 4: COMPONENT TRANSFORMATION MATRIX**

| Component | 1    | 2     |
|-----------|------|-------|
| 1         | .999 | -.045 |
| 2         | .045 | .999  |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation method:  
Varimax with



Table 4 shows the loading of the six variables on the two components extracted. The more the component contributes to the variables. Component 1 has larger contribution to, while component 2 has the highest contribution to MOT. The third hypothesis shows how Nurses have a potentially interactive effect on married mothers. The present findings highlight the importance of quality of job. The profession of doctors and lecturers provide more variety autonomy i.e. the freedom to make choices on the job, more control as compared to nurses whose job is more monotonous, and who are also expected to follow and act according to the guidelines of the doctor with little control over the situation. The stressfulness of task depends on the degree to which it can be controlled. The work-role that combines highly psychological demanding tasks with low level of control over the tasks exerts a major toll by simultaneously creating arousal and frustration. Therefore, although both – a Surgeon and a nurse are health care professionals and may face similar levels of demands, still they differ greatly in their power to control how to deal with these. Minimum level of role conflict among lecturers can also be explained in light of nature of job. Nkpah *et al* (2012) reported that women working irregular hours have more problems than those working regular hours. In both nurses and doctors, the timings of duties are too erratic since they require them to do night shifts along with call duties whereas the job of a lecturer requires a fixed time schedule. Therefore little overload allows them comparatively more quality time to be spent in household duties. High segmentation for lecturers and high integration for nurses and doctors further explains the impermeability of roles. Again, they could as well suffer role ambiguity.

In general, role conflict was found to increase with the increase in number of roles. More roles conflict in married professional women in this study derives from the contradictory values underlying their roles. As professional women they are expected to be committed to their work “just like men” at the same time as they are normatively required to give priority to their family. Further, the position seems to complicate when the woman attains motherhood. It is known that as the roles increase, so do the responsibilities. High demands sometimes results in less ability to satisfy any responsibility fully and thus the feeling that life is out of control. Pleck’s (1977) often cited notion of “asymmetrical permeable boundaries” may function as a partial explanation of these findings i.e. demands of the family roles are permitted to intrude into the work setting of women as primary caretakers of the family may conflict with the job norms. The study revealed that the direction of the conflict is bi-directional. That is, it follows from both family-to-work (FTW) and work-to-family (WTF). The dimensionality of conflict is on three variables – (a) time-based stressors (b) stress (c) behaviour-based stressor. From our present study, conflict with the job norm covers time, stress and behaviour. The limitation of this study is basically with the sample size. Though this was the resultant effect of funds, yet it would be worthy to have a more robust sample size in future studies covering women in offshore employment and perhaps the military.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made from the findings of the study.

- At organizational level, approaches may be aimed at improving the work schedule and providing social support while at personal level a change in attitude of people towards women is required.
- Work should not be fixed-time schedule but rather flex-time, flexi-place, tele-communicate and job sharing should be encouraged.
- Role blurring should be encouraged for mothers noting the importance of child socialization and up keep.
- The present research underlies need to sensitize family members and employers of women's job.
- Couples as unit should negotiate an optimal allocation of roles in order to reduce the pressure endemic to their situation. In this way, the proper sharing of household and child rearing responsibilities and sturdy support may enable these professionals to contribute fruitfully and more effectively at home as well as workplace.

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