

## Ethnicity and self-esteem as predictors of work-family conflict among Nigerian workers

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### Abstract

This study investigated the impact of ethnicity and self-esteem on work-family conflict of Nigerian employees. Five hundred and three volunteered workers (202 Hausa ethnic group workers and 301 Igbo ethnic group workers) drawn from four Federal institutions in Nigeria participated in the study. A multiple regression analysis showed that ethnicity significantly predicted work-family conflict of Nigerian employees. The result further revealed that self-esteem significantly predicted work-family conflict. It was concluded that shared values and beliefs about work and family, as well as immediate socio-contextual circumstances, shape the potential for individuals to experience work-family conflict.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, self-esteem, work-family conflict and Nigerian workers.

### 1.0 Introduction

The majority of research in work-family conflict (WFC) has been conducted in the Western industrialized countries. The extant literature arising from this research has revealed a growing awareness of people's need to balance their work and family lives and a corresponding effort by organizations to acknowledge this need and adopt measures to satisfy it to a greater extent (Epie, 2010). Work family issues are only beginning to gain attention in developing societies such as Nigeria. A few studies have attempted to examine the antecedents and the consequences of WFC in Nigeria (e.g. Adekola, 2010).

Nigeria is a diverse society with over 250 ethnic groups with different languages and cultural dispositions (Brandt, 2009). The largest ethnic groups are the Hausa/Fulani, which adhere to Islam and the Yoruba and Igbo, which adhere to Christianity. Traditional religious beliefs often mix within the two big religious groups (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2000). Estimates for 2009 place the population at 149.23million and the work force at 47.33million (CIA, 2010 cited in Epie, 2010) of which an estimated 35% were women in 2004.

In the last two decades, there have been a substantial socio-demographic changes and a rapid economic development in Nigeria which resulted in an increase in the number of women who have joined the Nigerian workforce especially in the urban areas. This increase has also increased the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities among Nigerian workers. In addition, changes in work environments and technological innovation in the communication and information processing (Oginni, Afolabi, & Erigbe, 2013) have presented similar scenarios as in the Western countries.

Work demands appear to have intruded into other domains of the life of Nigerian workers. More so, the widespread use of computers at work as well as households has blurred the boundaries between work and personal or family life as people are taking their work home and personal and/ or family errands can be run on computers in the offices through internet. Nigeria has also been characterized by a marked sexual division of labour both inside and outside the family (Adekola, 2006 as cited in Adekola, 2010). This may be why Adekola (2010) suggested that Nigeria represents an interesting case to examine the issue of work-family conflict because of the rapid economic development in the past few decades. More so, the socio-cultural characteristics of Nigeria may provide a different background to understand work-family conflict. This study therefore, was aimed at examining the relationship between ethnicity, self-esteem and the experience of work-family conflict of Nigerian employees.

Work-family conflict (WFC) generally refers to the extent to which work-family related responsibilities interfere with each other. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-family conflict is defined as the extent to which interrole conflict occurs between employees' work and family roles, such that the demands of their work roles interfere with the fulfillment of their family roles. Research over the past several decades has convincingly demonstrated that work and family lives are often interdependent, sometimes positively and

sometimes negatively and that these interdependencies flow in both directions from work to family, work interfering with family and from family to work, family interfering with work (Frone, 2003).

According to Frone, Yardley and Markel (1997), work interfering with family occurs when demands and obligation of work are deleterious to family life. Family interfering with work, on the other hand, arises when family obligation disturbs one's work. Researchers have demonstrated that work-to-family conflict or work interfering with family and family-to-work conflict or family interfering with work is positively correlated with each other (Beutell & Witting-Berman, 1999).

Researchers have further demonstrated that the experience of WFC is stressful for many employees and is associated with emotional responses such as anxiety, tension, discontentment, confusion and frustration (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; Kinman & Jones, 2005). In addition, the experience of WFC, for many employees, has also been shown to result in increases in role strain, absenteeism, and turnover, and decrease in health, psychological well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Amazue & Uzoka, 2009; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Baedeaux, & Brinley, 2005).

The present study is anchored on the emerging models that highlight the influence of cultural characteristics on individuals' experiences of work-family conflicts and its consequences (Korabik, Lero, & Ayman, 2003; Joplin, Shaffer, Francesso, & Lau, 2003). The basic premise of these models is that shared values and beliefs about work and family, as well as immediate socio-contextual circumstances, shape the potential for individuals to experience work-family conflict as well as individuals' interpretations of WFC (Grzwacz, Arcury, Marin, Carrillo, Burke, Coates, & Quandt, 2007).

Much as these models have helped to explain differences among cultures under the assumption that people in the same culture are largely homogenous, some gaps or limitations exist (Aziz & Chang, 2013). Although researchers have drawn on the differences in cultural value as an underlying rationale for the importance of work-family research outside the Western context, past studies mainly focused on cross-country comparison, which has resulted in cultural differences being equated to national differences (Aziz, & Chang, 2013). For instance, Hofstede (1984) used the concept of individualism and collectivism to demarcate countries of the world into two distinct poles. The individualism and collectivism construct or the degree, to which personal value is placed on individuals as opposed to group interest, has been widely used as one cultural characteristics posited to shape work-family conflict (Grzywacz, et al., 2007; Korabik et al., 2003). These cultural dimensions assume that people in the same cultural nationality are largely homogenous.

However, recent studies (e.g. Aziz, & Chang, 2013; Dutta-Bergman & Wells, 2002), have made a case for within cultural differences and have shown that people within cultures/nationalities can differ on different behavioural indicators. It is therefore believed that the approach of equating culture with countries is inappropriate for those countries that comprised of diverse ethnic groups (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 2005). Aziz and Chang (2013) argued that equating culture with country leads to all being combined in one group. Hence, they suggested that it is necessary to extend the existing literature beyond the country boundary by connecting culture with ethnicity.

The term ethnicity is derived from the Greek words 'ethnos' describing the people of a nation or a tribe and 'ethnikos' which stands for national (Betancourt, & Lopez, 1993). These two Greek words defined ethnicity as a national or group who share one or all of the following: a common nationality, culture, language, race, religion and common descent (Venkatesh, 1995). Ijere, Babagana and Monguno (2000) provided a broader definition which view ethnicity as a group or category of person who have common ancestral origin, the same cultural traits and common characteristics that distinguish them from people of the same society. Ethnicity has been found to be a powerful instrument which binds or divides people. It is a means of interpersonal communication and expression of cultural identity of a people (Ebiai, & Akpomuvie, 2005). Hence, it is believed that the strength of ethnic identity has some relationships with a person's coping with the harmful effects of life and stress (Smith, Wadsworth, & Shaw, 2005).

While the empirical evidence of this is limited (Abu-Bader, 2005; Aziz & Chang, 2013; Grzywacz, et al; 2007), it is argued that strong ethnic identity will predict the experiences of WFC. One theory that tried to explain the relationship between ethnic identity and the effects on life and stress is the social identity theory. Social identity theory, according to Tajfel (1982), explains the relationship between social structures and individual identity through the meanings people attach to their membership in identity groups such as ethnic groups. These meanings characterize the way individuals interact with others from their own identity or from other groups (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity theory posits that an individual's identification with a group is linked to some behavioural indicators and attitude at work, such as job satisfaction, performance and employee turnover (Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006; Slattery, & Selvarajan, 2005). Thus, due to the influence of interactions shaped by social identity, individuals from diverse ethnic background are expected to express different levels of WFC.

A little background on the socio-political structure and the religious belief systems of Nigerian Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups may provide some basis for the expected differences in their experience of WFC.

Research (e.g. Levine, 1966; Kalgo & Ishaku, 1993; Okpara, 2004) have observed variations in the socio-political structure and the religious belief systems of these two ethnic groups. The emphasis on these cultural variations have been placed on the processes of socialization, enculturation and learning which are viewed as the processes through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another. In general, the family functions both as a political unit and as an institution for the care and training of the young. Through the socialization process, individuals are socialized into the authority structure of the family which is adaptive in the socio-political units above the family level.

In the Hausa ethnic culture, for example, the dominant value is based on the teaching of Islam (Okpara, 2004). Their behavioural dispositions depend on the acceptance of the Islamic injunction of absolute and unqualified obedience to authority. In other words, Hausa culture is characterized by insistence on adherence to authority both in society and in the family by the use of strict or even harsh socialization practices to enforce conformity. Kalgo and Isyaku (1993) suggest that such cultural characteristics or practices could make individuals more susceptible to societal pressures and less analytical in their functions and self-concept

On the other hand, Igbo ethnic group has a political system that is based on conciliation and competitive leadership which is democratic in character (Okpara, 2004). According to Iro (1985), the ethos of the Igbo people rest on morality, industry, and discipline. These values have always been noticed both at the level of the primary family unit in their child-rearing practices within the nuclear and extended family systems, and at the group level. The Igbo ethnic culture in Nigeria has great value placed on group achievement and their motivational behavior is more diverse towards group needs than individual needs (Blunt, 1983). However, beyond their beliefs in group achievement, the underlying drive in the Igbo social organization is the individualistic principle. It is expected that these differences in the socio-political structure and the religious belief systems between Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria will predict their experience of WFC.

Few studies have examined ethnic differences in work stress and WFC (Grzywacz, et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004; Smith, et al., 2005). Smith et al. (2004) reported ethnic differences among ethnic minorities and white workers. In their study to determine whether ethnic groups report similar levels of work stress, Smith and colleagues (2005) found an association between ethnicity and work stress. They further suggested that consideration should be given to how ethnicity affects workers and that a greater responsibility for its management should be promoted. In Nigeria, Eze (1978) investigated the effects of the ethnic affiliation on the motivation and satisfaction level of Nigerian managers and found that ethnic background and not nationality had differential effects on workers motivation. Fagbemi (1981) conducted a similar study in Nigeria using management personnel of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba origin. His finding supported Eze (1978) findings.

Recent researchers have made a call for better understanding of the relationship between personality characteristics and WFC (Greenhaus, 2008; Mitchelson, 2009; Zhang & Liu, 2011). One personality trait that has been linked to WFC is self-esteem. Self-esteem is a person's subjective appraisal of himself or herself as intrinsically positive or negative (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). According to Kreiter and Kinicki (2002), self-esteem is a belief about one's self-worth which is based on an overall self evaluation. It is believed to influence the way people experience their world, as well as their aspirations and decisions to be made during important life moments such as the choice of functioning in the workplace as well as decision to take certain risks to protect themselves against unnecessary threats (Vanzyl, Cronje & Payze, 2006).

Peoples' self-esteem can affect their personality, making them not able to cope with life factors such as stress. According Hobfoll (1989) individual differences as found in self-esteem are treated as a resource that may mitigate work-family conflict and stress. Thus, the differences in levels of resources may affect how individuals react to stress. For example, those who have high self-esteem may have a "reserve" of self-worth and confidence upon which they can draw in problematic situations (Hobfoll, 1989). In other words, people with high self-esteem may not be as bothered by potential loss of time and energy because they know they can cope with such loss.

The extant literature suggests that there is minimal information on the relationship between self-esteem and WFC. However, the existing studies suggest that general self-esteem mitigates role stress. For instance, Mossholder, Bedeian, and Armenakis (1981) reported that when nurses experience role conflict, those low in self-esteem exhibited lower job performance than those high in self-esteem. These authors further reported that nurses experiencing role ambiguity reported less job satisfaction if they were lower in self-esteem. Granster and Schaubroeck (1991) reported that low self-esteem fire fighters who experienced role conflict had higher levels of somatic symptoms. Similarly, Grandy and Cropanzano (1999) tested the effects of self-esteem on WFC and found that self-esteem is an important variable to consider in the work environment. According to Grandy and Cropanzano (1999) self-esteem is related directly to all work and life outcomes.

Little is known about ethnicity, self-esteem and WFC (Grzywacz et al., 2007). Thus, the goal of the present study was to extend the understanding of how ethnicity as culture contributes to the experience of WFC. To achieve this, the researcher investigated whether or not the differences in the ethnic socio-political structure and the religious belief systems of the Hausa and Igbo Nigerian employees will be related to their experience of

WFC. In addition, the researcher looked at whether individual differences as is reflected in self-esteem will be related to the experience of WFC of Nigerian employees. The present study specifically investigated the following questions: Will ethnicity predict the experience of WFC of Hausa and Igbo Nigerian employees? Will self-esteem significantly predict the experience of WFC of Nigerian employees? It was hypothesized as follows: Ethnicity will significantly predict the experience of work-family conflict among Hausa and Igbo employees. Self-esteem will significantly predict the experience of work-family conflict among Nigerian employees.

## 2.0 Method

### 2.1 Participants

Five hundred and three working mothers and fathers participated in this study. Participants were volunteers. They consisted of married members of the two ethnic groups of interest (Hausa and Igbo) drawn from four Federal Universities across Northern and Southeastern Nigeria. The age of the participants ranged from 32 to 55 years with a mean age of 43.5 years. The participants were identified as Hausa and Igbo ethnic group members on the basis of their ethnic affiliations as were indicated by individual participant's demographic data. Participants' minimum educational qualification was Ordinary National Certificate of Education (OND).

### 2.2 Instruments

**Work-Family Conflict Scale (Carlson, Kacmar & Williams, 2000).** This scale consists of 18 items with six subscales (3 items each in the two directions of WFC, namely; work interfering with family and family interfering with work. Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) scale uses a 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores on each scale indicate higher levels of WFC. Sample item is "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like". This scale was developed using rigorous psychometric procedure (Herst & Brannick, 2004). For the purpose of the present study, the researcher revalidated the WFC scale using Nigerian samples. This became necessary because previous validations of the instrument were done with Western samples and none was done in Nigeria. The result of the item analysis revealed that the items have an internal consistency of alpha .87 and a Spearman corrected split-half reliability index of .56.

**Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) (Hudson, 1982):** This scale consists of 25 items, which contain statements that indicate how people see or feel about themselves. The 25 items were responded to on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1= rarely or none of the time to 5= most or all of the time. Sample items include: "I feel that people would not like me if they really know me well" and "I feel that I need more self-confidence". There were direct scoring and reverse scoring of the items. To ascertain the overall score of a respondent, the products of the direct and the reverse score items are added together and 25 subtracted from the overall score to obtain the participant's ISE score. The ISE is scored in the direction of low self-esteem. The lower a score below the norm, the higher the respondent's self-esteem. This instrument was further validated with Nigerian sample by the present researcher. An item analysis of the scores on the items yielded a co-efficient alpha of .92 and an inter item correlation ranging from .32 to .74.

### 2.3 Procedure

A total of 700 copies of each of the two scales were distributed to the four selected Federal institutions in Nigeria. The scales tapped information on the variables of interest namely; self-esteem, and WFC. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Each of the scale has specific instructions on how to respond to the items. In all, out of 700 copies of the scales distributed 548 copies were returned representing a return rate of 78.29%. Out of the 548 copies returned, 45 copies were discarded, leaving a total of 503 that were used for the data analyses.

### 2.4 Design/Statistics

The design of the study was a cross-sectional survey and a multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data.

## 3.0 Results

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and the result of the inter correlation of the predictor variables (Ethnicity and self-esteem) on criterion variable (WFC).

Variables	Means	SD	1	2	3
1 WFC	45.71	12.55	1		
2 Ethnicity	1.63	.49	-.089*	1.000	-.034*
3 Self-esteem	1.60	.49	.211***		1.00

A total of 503 Nigerian Federal university employees completed the scales, WFC 1, ethnicity 2, (1=Hausa, 2=Igbo) self-esteem 3, (1=high self-esteem, 2=low self-esteem) were examined in the study. \*= P<.05, \*\*\*=P<.001.

The result presented in the correlation matrix above showed that ethnicity is negatively related to WFC ( $r = -.089, p < .05$ ). Also ethnicity was shown to be negatively related to self-esteem ( $r = -.034, p < .05$ ). The result further showed that self-esteem had a significant linear relationship with WFC ( $r = .211, p < .001$ ).

**Table 2:**

*The standardized Coefficient of the predictor variables (Ethnicity and self-esteem) on work-family conflict*

	Model	Standardized Coefficient A	T	Significant
1	Constant		15.322	.000
2	Ethnicity	-.082	-1.889	.05
3	Self-esteem	.209	4.785	.001

Dependent Variable: WFC

The results of the regression analysis revealed that ethnicity was a significant predictor of WFC ( $\beta = -.082, p < .05$ ). Ethnicity was moderately negatively related to the criterion variable. It explained 1% of the total variance in the experience of WFC of Nigerian university workers. However, the ANOVA model summary shows that the effect of ethnicity on WFC is significant. The coefficient table also showed that self-esteem was a significant predictor of WFC ( $\beta = .209, p < .001$ ). The result further showed that there is a strong positive relationship between self-esteem and WFC of Nigerian university workers. Self-esteem contributed 5% of the variations in the WFC of Nigerian university workers. Finally, the ANOVA model summary shows that the effect of self-esteem on WFC is significant.

## 5.0 Discussion

The present study looked at the relationship between ethnicity, self-esteem and WFC. The result of a multiple regression analysis revealed that ethnicity was a predictor of WFC among Nigerian workers. Based on this result, the first hypothesis was accepted. This result indicates that ethnic differences in terms of traditional cultural values and religious beliefs are related to Nigerian workers' experience of WFC. This finding provides support for the models that suggest that shared values and beliefs about work and family, as well as immediate socio-contextual circumstances, influence the potential for individuals to experience WFC (Joplin et al., 2003; Grzwacz et al., 2007). People in the same ethnic groups seem to share common cultural values which tend to influence their lives in very many ways such as work and family activities. This finding is consistent with Smith and colleagues (2005) who found an association between ethnicity and work stress. This implies that the broad cultural differences found among the ethnic groups in Nigeria predicted their experience of WFC.

Table 1 shows that ethnicity was negatively related to WFC. This suggests that Hausa employees experienced greater WFC than their Igbo counterparts. This finding may be explained from the point of the cultural differences that exist between these ethnic groups. The result suggests that the stricter and more adherent people are to the dictates of their ethnic cultural and religious values, the more likely they would experience conflict in their work and family domains. Since the Hausa workers seemed more traditional in their attitude to work and family roles, they were more likely to be guided by well defined rules and therefore have greater sense of conflict for the same situation. Hausa cultural disposition is characterized by insistence on the adherence to authority both in the society and in the family by enforcing conformity (Okpara, 2004). This cultural disposition according to Kalgo and Ishaku (1993) tend to make people more susceptible to societal pressures and less analytical in their functions and self-concepts and possibly make them more likely to experience conflict in the work and family domains. On the contrary, the Igbo ethnic culture encourages independence and self-achievement and tends to encourage self development which may involve developing individual approach for problem solving that may be more adaptive and proactive in dealing with stressful situations.

The present finding also supports the social identity theory which suggests that strong ethnic identification predict experience of WFC (Joshi, et al., 2006). Social identification with the cultural behaviour dispositions which usually occur through interaction may influence attitude to work and family. This further implicates the socialization process which ensures that cultural values and practices are transmitted from one generation to another. As were described by some authors (Okpara 2004; Bascom, 1969; Levine, 1966), children in these ethnic groups take active part in their parents' social and economic activities. These activities are opportunities to act out behaviours required in future statuses, namely, work roles and family roles. It is therefore likely that the experience of WFC and the peoples' behavioural disposition in trying to balance work and family

roles are strongly influenced by their cultural values and practices especially as it relates to family relations and attitude to work.

The findings of this study further showed that self-esteem was positively related to WFC. Self-esteem was shown to be a strong predictor of WFC among Nigerian employees. The present result confirms the second hypothesis which predicted that self-esteem will significantly predict the experience of WFC of Nigerian university workers. This finding is consistent with few earlier studies (Granster, & Schuabroeck, 1991; Grandy, & Cropanzano, 1999) that suggested that self-esteem, as a personality factor, mitigates the experience of WFC.

Table 1 showed that self-esteem was positively related to WFC. This suggests that the higher Nigerian workers were on the self-esteem continuum the less their experience of WFC. Thus, employees with high self-esteem appeared to experience less conflict than those with low self-esteem. It is typically assumed that the task of juggling work and family roles is difficult and stressful (Steenbergen, Ellemers, Haslam & Urlings 2008). Thus, the present finding suggests that self-esteem is strongly related to the experience of WFC. This finding corroborates Hobfoll's (1989) proposition that self-esteem is a resource and that the differences in the levels of this resource may affect how individuals react to stress. The result of this study suggests that those employees with high self-esteem seem to have more resources (energies and knowledge) than those with low self-esteem. In other words, workers who have high self-esteem are more likely to adjust better in handling stressful situations. Thus, those with high self-esteem may not be bothered by potential loss of time and energy because they probably have confidence in their ability to cope with such loss (Hobfoll, 1989). This may explain the perceived differences in the experience of WFC between employees with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem.

A number of implications could be derived from the present findings. The findings of the present study suggest that ethnic differences as found between Hausa and Igbo Nigerian employees were related to their experience of WFC and that the differences in their experience of WFC may be tied to the broad cultural differences found between them. The present study has provided further evidence, with particular reference to Nigeria that differences that exist within culture/nationality as found among diverse ethnic groups could influence people's experience of work-family conflict. More specifically, the present study suggests that the ability of people to manage or juggle work and family roles is related to their broader cultural dispositions. In other words, some ethnic groups may have healthier and more adaptive approach to especially stressful situations than others.

Furthermore, the present study has provided support for the few studies (e.g. Grandy & Cropanzano, 1999) that have highlighted the importance of the impact of such personality characteristics as self-esteem in the experience of WFC. Stress has generally been described as being individually based. That is to say that the way people perceive and react to stressful situations differ from one person to another. Thus, the implication of the present finding is that self-esteem is a personality factor that is related to people's experience of WFC. Employees with high self-esteem appear to better manage the incompatible demands of work and family roles. In other words, high self-esteem is a personality attribute that assists people in managing WFC.

Consequently, since these personality characteristics may be influenced by environmental factors, it is possible that people could be trained to adopt the characteristics of high self-esteem in their perception and management of work-family roles. It therefore implies that workers in work organizations should be encouraged or even given training on how to imbibe the characteristics of high self-esteem. This has become necessary given the impact of work-family conflict on workers' well-being, job satisfaction, commitment and their concomitant negative effects on job performance and the attainment of the organizational goal.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that ethnic difference is a significant factor in the experience of WFC among Nigerian employees. It further provided support for the proposition that people within cultures/nationalities could differ on different behavioural indicators as a result of some ethnic differences (Aziz, & Chang, 2013). As noted in the introduction, Nigeria has been experiencing some rapid economic growth and development. This situation has given rise to an increased number of dual-earner families and consequently increased the challenges of balancing work and family demands. It has therefore become pertinent for Nigerian government and other employers of labour to be familiar with work and family conflict issues amid an ethnically diverse workforce. It is the responsibility of the government and employers to establish policies that will take care of the differential ethnic attitudes to work and family roles, if they want to achieve a workforce that have less work-family conflict and are highly committed. Finally, the present study has provided additional information on the relationship between self-esteem and WFC. The results suggest that self-esteem is a predictor of WFC. Nigerian workers are therefore encouraged to imbibe the attributes of high self-esteem which has been suggested to mitigate WFC.

## 6.0 References

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