
Introducing the Human Library Concept as a Tool to Mitigate Work and Household Stress among Working Mothers at UENR

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ABSTRACT

Most women experience some form of stress at some point in their lives. However, these stress levels are exacerbated when the woman becomes both a mother and a career woman. The study explored how the human library concept can be used as a tool to mitigate work and household stress among working mothers at the University of Energy and Natural Resources. The study adopted the qualitative research approach. 15 out of 92 mothers of the Senior Staff of Universities of Ghana (SSAUoG) at UENR were purposively sampled. The findings revealed that majority of the working mothers feel stressed in combining work roles and domestic roles. To help mitigate the stress levels, the mothers saw a solution in interacting with each other and sharing their knowledge and experiences which is what the human library stands for. Hence, employers who expect mothers to deliver excellently at their assigned duties must employ the human library concept as a tool to mitigate stress among its working mothers.

1. Introduction

Most women experience some form of stress at some point in their lives. However, these stress levels are exacerbated when the woman becomes both a mother and a career woman (also known as a working mother). According to Gridiron (2018), most working mothers, in addition to their duties at work, have domestic roles to perform. These roles at home become very hectic especially when these working mothers are forced to combine childcare (especially when the children are very young, demanding and clingy) with housework (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). The United Nations Women posits that, there is the unequal distribution of domestic and care responsibilities inside the home which puts excessive pressures on working mothers (UN Women, 2022). In addition to this, the working mother is expected by the employer to deliver excellently at the workplace. Thus, these women have the burden of satisfying the demands placed on them by their families

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and employers. To the working mother, although there is a disparity between these two important associations (which is the family and the workplace), both are expected to flourish, but not at the expense of each other (Chen et al., 2022), even if it means “fighting tooth and nail”. As a result, the working mother becomes exposed to numerous challenges in performing both roles, which become the number one source of stress (Swathi & Reddy, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016), since this herculean task drains her energy, resources and time (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020). Unfortunately, in Africa, majority of working mothers do not employ any stress adjustment patterns to help them cope with stress (Akuezulo & Ebenebe, 2019). Those who are conscious of the importance of stress coping mechanisms do not know how to go about it. Since stress is an unavoidable occurrence in life (Akuezulo & Ebenebe, 2019), it is imperative that all new forms of stress adjustment procedures are exploited to help mitigate the negative consequences of stress. Hence the adoption of the human library idea to help women attain a balance in managing their homes and the careers.

Dobreski and Huang (2016) postulates that the human library is a programme organised with the aim of engaging people to share and learn from people’s experiences. It is important to note that, the human library functions just like the traditional library system except that humans are used in place of books (Wentz, 2013). The human library takes the form of a dialogue between the human books and the readers (listeners) based on the readers interest, unlike other large scale presentations (The Human Library Organization, n.d). According to Asfour et al. (2017) working mothers are confronted with myriad of challenges especially in combining their house roles and career. Therefore, when working mothers come together to share their experiences, learning takes place. That is, there are women who have gained adequate knowledge and experience careerwise and in motherhood over the years. So bringing both the experienced and the inexperienced working mothers together would equip those with less experience with knowledge on how to strike a balance in their homes and at work.

There are numerous studies on stress coping mechanism among working mothers (Valizadeh et al., 2018; Singh & Kaur, 2021; Rajgariaha et al., 2021) on one hand and human libraries (Oder, 2008; Pan, 2011; Watkins, 2014; Plockey, 2018; Boboňová et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Amanquah et al., 2022) on the other hand. However, none of these studies investigated the intersection between human library and stress management among working mothers. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to fill this gap in literature. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to explore the human library concept as a tool to mitigate work and household stress among working mothers at the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To examine the familylife of working mothers at UENR
 - b. To examine the worklife of working mothers at UENR
 - c. To explore the human library concept as a tool to mitigate work and household stress among working mothers at UENR
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- d. To identify the challenges working mothers at UENR encounter in balancing family life and worklife
- e. To identify the coping strategies working mothers at UENR employ to deal with the challenges encountered

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stress and working mothers

Stress is described as the pressures and tensions that individuals encounter when faced with certain challenges in life which ultimately put strain on their emotions, thought patterns and physical being, thereby threatening one's ability to cope with their environment (Akuezuilo & Ebenebe, 2019). According Valizadeh et al. (2018) one of the areas in life that could be associated with high stress level is the home. This is due to the heavy workload associated with home management such as parenting, preparing of food, washing, cleaning and many others. Therefore, mothers, who are mostly in charge of managing the home have a higher tendency of experiencing higher levels of stress (Akuezuilo & Ebenebe, 2019). Rajgariaha et al. (2021) postulates that stress levels are increased when a mother begins working or is employed, even if there is a flexible work structure that allows her to work from home (Singh & Kaur, 2021). This is because, in addition to her domestic roles, the mother also has her job roles to perform, all of which are expected to be successful (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2013). For Valizadeh et al. (2018), performing either domestic roles or work roles is quite challenging and can cause stress. However, the working mother is expected to manage, perform and balance these two major conflicting roles (Ugwu et al., 2018) to the satisfaction of all their benefactors (that is, the family and employer) which in the views of some researchers (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Chen et al., 2022) normally lead to poor mental and physical health. Between career and domestic roles, it has been observed that mothers regard their maternal or domestic roles as the most important role among the two (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2013) even though their career roles provide them opportunity to earn a living, support their families and live independently (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). This could be due to the expectations by society for mothers to concentrate primarily on their families rather than their careers which is termed as the 'motherhood mandate' (Russo, 1976). Researchers (such as Bridges & Orza, 1993; Marcus-Newhall, 2007; Russo, 2010; Fatima et al., 2023) mention that the motherhood mandate presents motherhood as the ultimate form of femininity, which should be the pivot of every woman's identity, with career aspirations being secondary. Thus, the mandate associates 'best mothers' to mothers who are always available for their children and happily sacrifice their own needs (including their career aspirations) to meet the needs of their families. For this reason, Rajgariaha et al. (2021) discovered that most mothers tend to suppress any activity that competes with their maternal (or domestic) roles. Thus, the execution of these domestic roles (whether intentionally or unintentionally) by working mothers tend to negatively affect the way they perform their work roles (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2013) to the extent that these women willingly make career sacrifices (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Jones et al., 2023) to avoid

conflict between the two roles.

2.2 The human library concept and stress management

Stress management involves the use of three major strategies which include psychological, emotional and socio-economic support from families and the society (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016) in which the individual who is stressed finds himself. These strategies fit into using the human library concept to manage stress among working mothers. The human library concept refers to the transfer of knowledge from one person to another through dialogue (Silvar et al., 2017). Jambor (2015) mentions that, the major mission of the human library concept is to bring together individuals of diverse social and ethnic groups in society, to challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes in society, and to educate, learn and change attitudes. Through these interactions, an enabling environment is created which allows the living books to connect with their readers and also reflect and assess on their past experiences (Gamtso et al., 2017). Here, knowledge that would not have ordinarily been shared, and hidden in the minds of individuals are unveiled and willingly shared (Amanquah et al., 2022) with others. Therefore the implementation of the human library concept brings different people together through informal interactions and discussions, where their psychological, socio-economic, and emotional needs are met. As a result of the information sharing, the individuals involved in such interactions become inspired and motivated in their respective pursuits, leading to increased encouragement and innovations (Amanquah et al., 2022).

Since stress is associated with increased absenteeism, employee turnover and decreases productivity (Massoud et al., 2020), organizations which expect their employees to excel at their assigned duties must utilise all forms of interventions such as the human library concept to ensure that stress among its employees are well managed, if not totally done away with.

3. Methodology

The study is aimed at exploring the human library concept as a tool to mitigate work and household stress among working mothers at the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR). This study aligns with the interpretivist research paradigm. This is because it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of human experiences, behaviors, and the meanings they attach to their experiences. Thus, through the subjective experiences of the working mothers at UENR, the benefits and challenges of this stress management tool (which is the human library concept) can be unearthed. Ugwu et al. (2021) postulate that, the interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand individuals and how they perceive the world around them, hence, appropriate for the study.

The study adopted the qualitative research approach to gain insight into the work and household stress that mothers experience. According to Creswell (2012, p.16), qualitative research approach is aimed at providing “descriptions and themes using text analysis to interpret the larger meaning of the findings”. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for exploring an in-depth subjective experiences and perceptions of people. This study specifically used the phenomenological research

design to qualitative studies which focused on revealing the in-depth experiences participants have in common with one another and the meaning they attach to those experiences, explore those experiences and analyse the data into themes (Creswell, 2012). This helps to determine how an experience means to people in certain situations.

3.1 Selection of Participants

The population for the study was made up of all females of the Senior Staff of Universities of Ghana (SSAUoG) at UENR. They are 92 in number (UENR Human Resource Division, 2024). Out of this, only mothers who were married and have children as at the time the study was conducted were considered. Those mothers are also 43 in number. The justification for selecting married women with children is because these women as stated play two conflicting roles, that is, have obligations to their husbands and children, as well as their careers and per the nature of these roles, they are susceptible to stress. Hence their inclusion in the study. Fifteen (15) mothers were purposively sampled out of the 43 for the study. The researchers used 15 mothers for the study because UENR is a fairly new university with few staff. Out of the female staff of SSAUoG, there are women who are married without children while others have children but are unmarried. The study was however limited to women who are married and have children, hence the few sample size. Additionally, the university was on recess as at the time of data collection, hence contributed to the low response rate.

3.2 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather all necessary data for the study. This is because it allows the researcher to follow-up on the responses and reveals hidden information that may be helpful in the final analysis of the data (Gray, 2004). The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and conducted in their various offices. Each interview lasted for approximately 40-60 minutes and delved into participants' experiences, coping mechanisms on work and household stress.

3.3 Limitations of the study

The limitation of the study is the small sample size of 15 participants which limits the tendency of generalising the findings of the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data gathered through the interview were analysed thematically. This was done by listening to the recorded audio and transcribing it from audio to written text. It was then grouped into themes based on the objectives of the study. Also, for the purpose of anonymity, the mothers were represented by alphanumeric codes such as (HLM1, HLM2, HLM3..).

4. Results And Discussions

The data received from the mothers who participated in the study were analysed thematically. Findings of the data were grouped based on the study’s objectives.

4.1 Background Information of Participants

The background information of participants was based on four variables. That is, gender, marital status, educational qualification and number of years in marriage. This was because the researchers identified these four variables as the major characteristics of the females in relation to the role they played as working mothers. The table below represents the background information of the mothers used for the study.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables		Number
Ages in years	20-30	2
	31-40	11
	41-50	2
Education	Senior High School	1
	First degree	5
	Second degree	8
	Third degree	1
Year	1-5	7
	6-10	5
	10 and above	3

4.2 Family Life Style of the Working Mother

The family life of the working mothers of the study involved the number of children they had, their children’s age range, and the kind of activities the mothers perform on daily basis. Gridiron (2018) mentions that most women who are mothers in addition to their formal work have domestic roles to perform. These domestic roles are believed to have a toll on working mothers because of how hectic they are (Mclean, 2002). With regards to the activities performed by these mothers, it was revealed that they perform several activities daily at home. These include nursing children (eg. Breast feeding or feeding children), assisting children with their homework; performing household chores (such as cleaning, cooking, washing etc.) and finding time to attend to the needs of their husbands. In view of this, some mothers commented:

“When I wake up, I first of all ensure that all my children’s necessities for school are ready. I prepare breakfast for the family and tidy up the house before attending to myself” (HLM10)

This is supported by Akuezulo and Ebenebe (2019) who indicated that some of the domestic duties mothers perform include cooking, caring for children, taking children to school and caring for the husband. Such duties which is termed by O'Reilly, (2020) as domestic labour is believed by Okereke-Adagba (2023) to require full commitment and dedication. Further, the findings revealed that majority of the mothers had as many as four children to cater for, with most of the mothers having children falling between the ages of 0-6 years. This as revealed by Kadale et al. (2018) implies that the mothers had to basically do everything for their children since they were too young to be able to take care of themselves. This is clearly captured in the response below.

“hmm, I perform series of activities in a day. Since I have not weaned my child, I have to breastfeed the baby and perform some household chores. Taking care of the baby is not enough reason not to perform my household chores. In addition to this, I have to make out time to spend with my husband” (HLM 12)

It is based on this that McIntosh and McQuaid (2015) reveal that some professions resist attempts to make the profession easily accessible to women with younger children as their career progression is inhibited. This is because, the women are the primary caregivers of the home (Dizaho et al., 2016). Thus, it can be concluded from the findings that women are the primary the managers or primary caregivers of the home.

4.3 The Work Life of a Mother

Among the themes that emerged in relation to the work life of the participants were the duties of mothers at the work place, the challenges encountered and their moments of satisfaction and joy at the work place.

4.3.1 Duties of a mother at the work place

As indicated by Akuezulo and Ebenebe (2019), mothers working in universities perform different tasks including lecturing large classes, project supervision, marking of student's answer scripts after examination and administrative duties. This is evident in the findings of this study as the predominant activity working mothers perform are administrative in nature even though some performed other duties such as teaching, mentoring and janitorial duties. Some answers provided by the mothers are indicated below:

“I perform some managerial and administrative functions. I am the head of my team so I have staff working under me whom I supervise. I also attend meetings when need be” (HLM3)

“I am a junior staff (cleaner). I sweep and mop a whole block, clean the louvre blades and fetch water to the washrooms” (HLM8)

“I perform mentoring duties at work. Apart from that, I supervise the activities of my team and attend meetings, just to mention a few” (HLM6)

For Amu (2017), while most women in Ghana are seen to be involved in traditional or less capital intensive activities, others are engaged in a lot of the invisible activities in the formal sector, with only a handful of them occupying managerial positions due to their level of education. This is confirmed by Jones et al. (2023) who discovered that the representation of women, especially mothers in poor-quality jobs are higher than their representation in high quality jobs. In view of this, women (who happen to form the majority) generally have limited impact on the decision-making process but are at the receiving end of the decision-making process (Amu, 2017). That notwithstanding, working mothers irrespective of the kind of role they play in the economy (or formal sector) are financially empowered to provide for their family, eventhough the activities involved may have some negative consequences on their wellbeing (Waterhouse et al., 2017).

4.3.2 Sources of satisfaction and joy at the workplace

Although what gave satisfaction to the working mothers slightly varied, the fact that working mothers were interested in what others thought and the level of satisfaction other people found in their performance emerged repeatedly. For majority of the women, the approval of their initiatives, income earned and the impact they made in the lives of others at the workplace gave them joy and satisfaction. The comment below capture these findings.

“what actually gives me satisfaction at work is the impact I make in the lives of others. Also, when I am able to reach my goals as well as meet my timelines” (HLM4)

“The income I earn at the end of the month is a source of joy and satisfaction to me because at the end of hard work, you deserve some remuneration. That is what gives me satisfaction” (HLM1)

“When I come up with a new idea which is accepted by my superior and it becomes successful after its implementation, it really gives me joy and satisfaction. It makes me want to do more” (HLM13)

Kelley et al. (2019) in agreement with the findings indicate that, the rewards that emanate from both professional career of women and motherhood increase the overall satisfaction of working mothers. Suswanto and Soeharto (2022) argue that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and satisfaction derived from the home. This therefore can mean that mothers who are able to balance both their domestic roles and work roles are more likely to attain satisfaction with their job. For other researchers (Wiens et al., 2023), it is difficult for working mothers in academia to attain job satisfactions especially with the existence of bureaucracy and sometimes the stigma associated with maternity leave. However, this can be resolved when the mothers receive support from the employers in the form of flexibility and part-time work, as well as support from coworkers and family (Wiens et al., 2023).

4.3.3 Challenges encountered by working mothers at the work place

Although the working mothers outlined different challenges, almost all the challenges were influenced by their family life or those that impeded the ability of the mothers to combine their roles as mothers with their duties at work. Below are some of the responses the mothers mentioned:

“my major challenge is time constraints. I come to work late because of my children. Having to attend to them before coming to work makes me get to work late” (HLM5)

“my challenge is the fact that we are not allowed to bring our children to the work place while working. I for instance have younger children. I have a baby in addition to a toddler. So, it becomes challenging getting someone to take care of my baby” (HLM2)

The findings revealed that working mothers identified “time constraint” and their obligations to their children as some of the major challenges they faced. This is supported by Uddin (2021) who discovered that mothers were concerned about the lack of available time to complete their tasks at home before reporting to work as a major challenge that affects their work schedule. The issue of “time” as a challenge to working mothers can be associated to the study by Al-Asfour et al. (2017) who identified excessive workload at home on working mothers as a barrier to their career advancement. Thus, it is obvious from the findings and literature that motherhood and the activities associated with it can pose challenges for working mothers at the workplace.

4.3.4 Availability of adequate time to spend on career matters

In relation to finding time to pursue career matters, the working mothers indicated that they did not always have time to pursue their career as they would have wanted to. Hence, they admitted that consciously or carefully planning for career matters was helpful. These are highlighted in the comments below.

“in finding enough time on career issues, it happens but very minimal. I will just say sometimes” (HLM1)

“for me, I always have time when I need to do something for myself. It’s just a matter of planning ahead” (HLM9)

In this modern day and time, the career woman, although a mother is expected to excel careerwise just as her male counterparts (Sloka et al., 2015). Although most of these working mothers have the desire to progress in their career, the findings reveal that “time”, which is highly essential for this achievement has become a scarce commodity for working mothers. Dizaho et al. (2016) add that, the major factor that impedes the career progression of working mothers at the workplace is the insufficient time caused by motherhood obligations. With the assertion by most researchers

and scholars (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2013; McQuaid, 2015; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Asfour et al., 2017; Rajgariaha et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2023) that motherhood obligations greatly impact the career development of working mothers, it is imperative that organizations understand how this occurs and take the precautions and strategies necessary to ensure the career development of mothers.

4.4 Worklife Balance

With regards to the women being mothers and career women at the same time prompted the researchers to find out how the mothers were able to balance their domestic roles and work roles without conflict. In view of this, the themes that emerged from the responses included stress experienced in combining domestic and work roles, and the effect of motherhood on career/work roles.

4.4.1 Stress in combining domestic roles with work roles

It should be noted that working mothers are a group of women who are working and are mothers at the same time. As a result, they usually feel stressed. Majority of the working mothers admitted that they feel stressed in combining work roles and domestic roles. However others revealed that they did not feel stressed in combining the two roles because they are able to manage the two roles. This is revealed in the following responses.

“Combining these two roles are time demanding. When I am at work, I keep thinking about the children’s welfare although there are people taking care of them. This puts stress on me” (HLM12)

“Work demands and house chores are very stressful. This is because you have to ensure that both sides are well. In spite of this, it has been noted that, the home demands are sometimes high” (HLM2)

“Attending to a lot of things at the same time. You have limited time to do so many tasks. People usually say women are good at multitasking but it is not an easy thing to do. All these put together makes performing these roles stressful” (HLM10)

“waking up early in the morning and making preparations for my children and husband before coming to the work is stressful” (HLM14)

“Lack of support systems. I do not have people I can talk to or seek help when I am in some kind of difficult situation. That is not to say there is nobody at all. There are some available but its not anybody that I can talk to. Maybe for lack of trust in people” (HLM3)

“what gives me pressure is me combining my work schedules together with trying to meet the promotion requirements at work and gaining recognition from my employers, family and society. A lot is required from us and it is not easy for us as moms. But through it all, we are managing” (HLM5)

With reference to the responses, it can be seen the mothers at every point in time were more concerned about their domestic roles than their work roles, even if they had assigned someone to assist with some of their domestic tasks. These were clearly the primary causes of the stress they were experiencing. This finding is in tandem with Akuezulo and Ebenebe (2019) who indicated that, the demand from these dual responsibilities (that is, motherhood and career) put excessive pressure and stress on the working mothers. In a similar vein, Mkhize and Msomi (2016) and Singh and Kaur (2021) mentioned that working mothers are faced with some challenges in balancing their home roles with their work roles, even if they are allowed to work from home (Akuoku et al., 2021). In Okereke-Adagba (2023) view, working mothers who combine the roles of motherhood, career and wifely duties are faced with numerous challenges such as difficulty in locating quality and affordable childcare services, lack of flexible work options, and limited mentorship which as Swathi et al. (2016) mentions is a number one source of stress. Similarly, Akuezulo and Ebenebe (2019) assert that stress of working mothers emanate from the spillover of preoccupation, fatigue and irritability that arise from the numerous tasks associated with the women's role as mothers and workers. Dugan and Barnes-Farrell (2020) elaborate this further by emphasizing that when women combine both domestic and professional roles, it drains their energy, resources and time. Thus, the inability for working mothers to effectively balance their domestic and professional roles cause dissatisfaction from family members and employers which ultimately impact their mental and physical health negatively (Gridiron, 2018).

4.4.2 Effect of motherhood on career/work roles

With the mothers showing more concern about their domestic roles than their work roles, it was discovered that this really affected their career or work roles. Thus, in their bid to perform and be excellent at their roles as mothers, the working mothers had to put their duties at work or career on hold or consciously delay performing some tasks at work. These are captured in the comments below:

“Caring for babies and toddlers makes me sometimes come to work late. Also, my two children are below the ages of 4 years and are prone to infections and often fall ill. When they are ill, I need to pay attention to them. This sometimes makes me miss work” (HLM1)

“My kids close from school before I do. So, bringing them to work after picking them up from school makes me unable to continue my duties at work since I will have to monitor them. Also, when my children are on vacation or midterms, I must automatically go on my annual leave since I sometimes do not get a babysitter” (HLM3)

“me being a mother now does not affect my work schedule. I remember when I started having kids, I really struggled hard. But now, I have gained some experience so I am ok. Although not entirely, but it is better than before” (HLM7)

“my role as a mother really affects my work. I mostly feel tired, sleepy, less active, and suffer headaches on days that house roles stress me out. I sometimes leave behind some unfinished office work for the next day because I have to go and pick my children from school” (HLM9)

“Yes, my motherhood journey affects my work role. It has become difficult for me going for further studies because my children are young and do not have anyone to cater for them in my absence. Professional development also plays an important role on the job but I am unable to do so. At times too I report to work late. It is unintentional to report late but it is because of the situation I find myself in” (HLM11)

This finding draws attention to the fact that, although the working mothers have the desire to excellently carry out the tasks required of them at work, they always feel the need to put them aside to attend to the needs of their homes. Thus, the mothers willingly neglect their duties at work (even though there may be some consequences) to see to it that the needs at home are met. This is confirmed by Okereke-Adagba (2023) who states that motherhood is a life changing experience that profoundly alters every aspect of the woman’s life, including her career development. Thus, in their bid to perform and be excellent at their domestic roles, the working mothers without any regrets were ever ready to put their career on hold or consciously delay performing some tasks at work. This decision by mothers can be associated to the expectations of the society for mothers to concentrate primarily on their families rather than their careers (Russo, 1976). For this reason, Braje and Dzambo (2021) discovered that the state of motherhood has become a major cause of discrimination of women at the workplace in terms of lower salaries, denial of promotions or being perceived as not committed employees. Furthermore, Akuezilo and Ebenebe (2019) are of the view that most mothers through their numerous duties at home become stressed and transfer it to the workplace. In the longrun, this negatively affect women’s work execution, occupation satisfaction and their general prosperity (Singh & Kaur, 2021).

4.5 Coping Strategies

Despite the challenges spelt out by the working mothers, they were still “up and doing”. Hence, the researchers sought to find out the strategies that these mothers employed or believed helped them in combining their domestic roles and work roles. It was noted that the strategies adopted by the working mothers differed. The themes that emerged are seen below.

4.5.1 Mechanisms adopted to manage domestic and work roles

Since working mothers as their name implies are obligated to successfully perform their roles as mothers and employees, it becomes necessary that they employ some mechanisms to enable them excel at both roles. Some of the mothers mentioned that, seeking help from in-laws or family members, using domestic gadgets (such as blenders and washing machine), and planning, prioritising and performing tasks that are urgent first are the means by which they cope with managing their

domestic and work roles. However, some strategies like delegating some domestic duties to elderly children and taking some time off work or applying for annual leave when overly stressed were adopted by majority of the working mothers. Some responses they mentioned are as follows:

“I stop everything and relax when I feel tired. Also, I am fortunate to have my in-laws around so I seek help from my in-laws to assist with the baby-sitting” (HLM1)

“I seek advice from other mothers on how they manage their homes. I also try to convince my boss to permit me to take some time off when need be. But most importantly, I have preconditioned my mind that I should be able to manage both since others have done same and survived” (HLM5)

“what I usually do is try not to take any office related work home and vice versa. I also try not to force myself to complete tasks that can be done over an extended time period. I try to prioritise my duties and perform the most relevant and urgent ones first before the others” (HLM9)

“what I do is to take my annual leave when I feel overly stressed. But apart from that, I plan ahead and share responsibilities among my elderly children” (HLM12)

“I call for help if I need it. I also employ the use of domestic gadgets such as washing machines, blenders, food processors and others to ease my work” (HLM14)

Mclean (2002) in agreement to these findings emphasized the need for working mothers to receive some form of information or advise and emotional support from their family members as these interactions increase their ability to cope with stress. However, these findings are inconsistent with that of Valizadeh et al. (2018) who discovered that having an intimate relationship with God and seeking help from him was the most effective approach used by working mothers when faced with stressful situations. Rajgariaha et al. (2021) agreeing to receiving instrumental support from family members and the adoption of religious coping strategies, further introduced one other coping strategy employed by working mothers which is the suppression of activities that compete with their role as mothers. For Valizadeh et al. (2018), seeking help from family and self-management were some of the mechanisms used by working mothers to manage and alleviate stressful conditions. In effect, ones ability to cope with stressful situations is context specific. This is because the approach that would be favourable to a particular context may be unfavourable in another context.

4.5.2 Using the human library concept as a tool to mitigate work and household stress

The working mothers emphasized the importance of consulting other working mothers which is the idea behind the human library concept to find out the strategies to adopt to successfully manage both their domestic and work roles. According to these mothers, this strategy is highly beneficial. The researchers in an attempt to know whether the mothers will encourage other working mothers to consult each other about their ability to successfully balance their domestic and worklife

in order to reduce stress. Statements made by the mothers in relation to this are seen below:

“Yes, I will advise other mothers to find out from other working mothers on how they manage their homes and work activities. Life becomes easier when we share ideas. So, I do not have to stress myself over challenges that already have working solutions. People have tried and tested certain things that have worked for them, so why not apply their solutions if I am facing the same challenge” (HLM2)

“Wisdom, they say, is not in the mind of one person so I encourage that we talk to other mothers and learn from people we encounter” (HLM6)

“Talking to other mothers gives you new ideas and solutions to complex issues about combining work and house roles. So, I will definitely encourage talking to other mothers” (HLM10)

“Some mothers are inexperienced so if we engage in interacting with other mothers, we learn from each other. This will help me balance my work roles and other domestic work” (HLM12)

In support of the findings, Boboňová1 et al. (2020) mention that, the human library concept is recognized as an innovative method and a safe space for dialogue, fostering open discussions on various topics between human books and their “readers.” Thus, when mothers engage in open discussions among themselves, they are able to open up on their challenges and fears with regards to managing the home. Even though the findings indicate that working mothers recommend the interaction with other mothers to help in coping with stress, Akuezilo and Ebenebe (2019) discovered that majority of working mothers did not employ any stress adjustment strategies to help them cope with stress. This could be due to their unfamiliarity to the availability of coping mechanisms to stress or their ability to withstand stress.

5. Conclusion

Most working mothers are faced with the task of combining both their career and domestic roles. With the evidence that both roles are multifaceted in nature, it was discovered that the working mothers had a higher tendency of being stressed. This brought to light the willingness of the mothers to sacrifice their career needs on the alter of their domestic roles in situations where there is a conflict between the two. To help curb such an occurrence, the mothers saw a solution in interacting with each other and sharing their knowledge and experiences which is what the human library stands for. Since organizations (or employers) expect mothers to deliver excellently at their assigned duties, it is imperative that they employ the human library concept as a tool to facilitate the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experiences among mothers to help them to successfully manage both their domestic and career roles in order to mitigate stress.

6. Recommendation for Future research

Future research can build on the study's findings by extending this research to other groups such as single parents who are professionals in high-stressed jobs. These people may also benefit from this stress reduction intervention. By so doing, aid in generalising the findings and adapting the human library concept for broader applications.

Also, a comparative study on the effectiveness of the human library concept with other stress reduction interventions such as mindfulness programs, relaxation techniques, diaphragmatic breathing, exercise, therapy, or support groups can be conducted. Through this, the uniqueness of the human library concept in mitigating stress would be highlighted.

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