



Different Coping Strategies Adopted by Working Mothers Concerning Childcare Challenges in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State

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Abstract

The study examines the different coping strategies adopted by working mothers concerning childcare challenges in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State. In order to achieve the objective of the study, five specific objectives were raised which included, determine the source of stress among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. In line with these objectives, research questions were formulated which included; what is the source of stress experience among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. Review of related literature was presented under relevant headings. Survey research designed was used for the study. A total of four hundred (400) working mothers sampled were used for the study. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentages frequencies. The findings shows that societal stress, organizational stress, role - related stress, extra - organizational stress, emotional stress is available source of stress among working mother and that the strategies adopted by working mothers in coping stress were engaging the assistance of ray family relative in stress coping strategies. Help from friends and colleagues around my neighbourhood aid my stress coping strategies, engaging the services of Paid care (nanny) in handling my children in other to reduce my stress, enrolment of their children in private child care center around their neighbourhood, enrolment of their children in established government child care center in their area of resident and use of labour-saving devices or equipment (blenders and vacuum cleaners).

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that working mothers suffer from stress, which originates from different sources. This stress affects their job/tasks performance and the management of their homes. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the study recommends that there is need for the Federal Government to amend national policy on the minimum working conditions of service in favour of women (review of closing time, increase in maternity leave and others) because of the multiple role women play in the society.

Keywords: coping strategies, adopted, working mothers, childcare, challenges

Introduction

The idea that mothers are the "natural caregiver" of their children is rooted in the cultures of most of the present and past societies where an increasing number of mothers in paid employment whose demands at work places is increasingly harming the wellbeing of their children [1]. One of the more easily understood conceptions of stress is the one which defines it as a state of discomfort, tension or emotional pain which arises when an individual is faced with a situation which presents a demand that is important for the individuals to meet but for which his capacities and resources are inadequate [2].

Stress is an action or situation that places special psychological demands upon a person or anything that can unbalance his/her individual equilibrium [3]. Indeed, stress can be conceived as a problematic situation for which the individual has no solution at

all. It arises when ones' coping skills are inadequate for meeting particular problems in life [4].

Stress arises from different places and the places where stress is generated from are called sources of stress. In Nigeria today, people are virtually operating in a tense environment. People under stress are ignorant of its sources and the consequences. The four major sources where one can encounter stress in daily living. They are; societal, environmental, work place and the home. Stress management as the ways that allow for escape, avoidance, reduction or the resolution of a stress problem. Women are saddled with more responsibility for homemaking and child raising which suggests greater stress on women. It is reiterated that women with children and full-time jobs show more instances of ill health than those without children.

The place of women in society has changed and continues to change. Their space is no longer restricted to the home. Today women have the opportunity to explore the labour market and live challenging lives as formal sector workers because of formal education. Women presence in the world of work increased in recent times and many have achieved professional recognition and success. With these glimpses of achievements, others find it more difficult to reconcile the multiple roles, commitments and career interruptions. The quandary that these mothers face is combining employment with motherhood. Educated women with family responsibilities often face challenges [5].

Women's representation in the workforce has increased dramatically over the past 30 years, yet, women still take a greater responsibility for the family especially the care for children

Women, particularly mothers with infants in both the developed and developing countries have greatly increased their participation in the labour market to contribute financially to their household income without relenting their primary roles as mothers, wives and daughters. As a result, they are faced with the daily challenges of combining multiple roles of paid work and family responsibilities (Lewis, 2019). The complexities associated with juggling work with other family responsibilities is not isolated to a specific country but affects people from all walks of life in developed and developing nations. These complexities can be attributed to organisational culture, such as, long working hours, increased workloads and pressures on employees which exist within many organisations [6]. This usually has a detrimental effect on the employees, which often results in a higher turnover rate in most of these organisations.

Paid work and family responsibilities are fundamental parts of human life, but it has become increasingly difficult to successfully manage a job alongside care for young children, due to the rapid and dramatic change in family and labour market structure [7]. Accordingly, the concerns over work-family balance have become salient due to number of factors which include demographic and social change, such as, more women taking up paid employment, working mothers, dual earner families, single/lone parent household. Also, technological advancement, such as, the internet, cell phones, emails and fax, which has led to a 24/7 availability, making it easier for work demands to intrude into family life, resulting in increased pressure and causing work-family conflict [8].

The challenges of balancing work and family life apply to all households to varying degrees, not only parents with younger children. However, the demands of caring for children place additional constraints on parents leading to the organization, coordination and management of their work and care responsibilities is being particularly demanding. It maintains that, work-family balance is the fulfillment of the role-related expectations in family and work, negotiating individual's involvement in the two lite spheres.

Additionally, there are various options available to parents for childcare. Most parents, in particular mothers, will spend a sig-

nificant amount of time looking after their children. They may also rely upon family members or friends to provide some childcare. In addition, parents may use public childcare, and school. They may also use private care, such as a nanny or a child-minder.

In summary, there are different ways that parents can accommodate their responsibility to provide childcare this current study therefore seek to examine the strategies adopted my working mothers in Umuahia North local government area in dealing with challenges of childcare.

Nigeria is experiencing rapid growth in the number of women joining the labour force, and they are becoming more career oriented and less restricted in their professional pursuit. As a result, there has been a dramatic shift in the traditional role of women in Nigeria from family caretaking to the multiple roles of pursuing career and family responsibilities [9]. The researcher noticed that stress is one of the areas of learning that is often being taught without practical application and that 80% of the disease's women are suffering from today are facilitated by stress [10]. So much attention in workshops and seminars, yet the victims' situations are not better off. The researcher sees the need to put more emphasis on stress in order to recognize it, being aware of its damaging impact and control it on time in our lives.

Stress is a household name in the daily activities of every woman. Most times women are aware that they are working under stress, they proclaim it but for the pressure of the work load and the time frame, they do nothing about it and they continue to work until they breakdown. This situation is even worse for women who are employed and in leadership positions. In the process of matching their responsibilities they sometimes become impatient, exhausted, depressed, bored and even lack control. As a result, stress creeps in and if not managed adequately, it could lead to reduction in levels of productivity and other attendant consequences.

The problem of this study is that the employed female workers carry out a dual responsibility which leads to work overload and stressful condition. Interactions with many female workers and information gathered from personal observation revealed that these female workers most of them have their career, husband, children, relations, aged parents and household work to cater for, hence this has made them to complain.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This is a cross-sectional comparative study that sought to gain insight into the different coping strategies adopted by working mothers concerning childcare challenges in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. Comparison, as a fundamental research strategy helped us in this study to identify the basic determinants of coping strategies variables of civil servants in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State. However, Survey research method was adopted for the study.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Umuahia North. Umuahia North is a Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. Its headquarters are in the city of Umuahia. It has an area of 245 km² and a population of 220,660 at the 2016 census. Umuahia is the capital city of Abia State in southeastern Nigeria. Umuahia is located along the rail road that lies between Port Harcourt to its south and Enugu city to its north. Umuahia has a population of 359,230 according to the 2016 Nigerian census. Umuahia is indigenously Igbo.

Umuahia is renowned for being a railway and agricultural market center, which attracts traders and farmers from neighboring towns to sell their produce, such as yams, cassava, corn (maize), taro, citrus fruits, and palm oil and kernels. There are industries that help drive its economy, such as a brewery and a palm-oil-processing plant. Nigeria's National Root Crops Research Institute, at Umudike, is adjacent to the town. Umuahia also has several colleges including Trinity College (theological), Government College Umuahia, Holy Rosary Girls Secondary School and hospitals like the Federal Medical Centre, Umuahia (formerly Queen Elizabeth Hospital).

Umuahia comprises two local government areas: Umuahia North and Umuahia South. These local governments are also composed of clans such as the Umuopara, Ibeku, Oloko, Ubakala and Ohuhu communities. Umuahia town is traditionally owned by the Ibeku after early British administrators based the town in their lands.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was all the female civil servants of child bearing age working in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State. According to the data collected from Umuahia North Local Government Area, there were 1,903 female civil servants of child bearing age working in the study area. This therefore, gives a population of 1903 civil servants at the time of the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

A self-structured questionnaire with the title: different coping strategies adopted by working mothers concerning childcare challenges in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria, was distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into section A and section B. section A consist of the personal data/demographic information of the respondents while part B consist of information on coping strategies adopted by working mothers concerning childcare challenges.

Validity of the Instrument

The face and content validity of the research instrument will be established by the judgments of researcher supervisor who is a professional expert/lecturer in the field of health. A draft copy of the questionnaire will be presented to my supervisor for proper correction and adjustments to ensure that it suits the research questions, also to make it understandable and clear for the respondents. His constructive criticisms and suggestions will be used to modify and produce the instrument that will be used for data collection in the study.

Reliability Test Instrument

The reliability of the research will be estimated by the use of pre-test method which was given to similar groups other than the target group and was collected after their responses.

Methods of data Collection

In order to gain access to and co-operation from the respondents, a letter of introduction duly signed by the Director, National Open University of Nigeria. Umudike Study Centre, Umuahia will be obtained introducing the researcher and seeking permission to carry out the research. Copies of the questionnaire will be administered to the respondents in Umuahia North Local Government Area by the researcher. The instrument administered after filling by the respondents, will be collected back by the researcher on the spots.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean score and standard deviation will be used to answer research questions. The researcher checked the instrument for completeness and edited it to free it from errors and omissions. The researcher analyzed data using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative analysis was done where the raw scores were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) statistical software to express attitude. Qualitative data was arranged into thematic areas for easy coding and interpretation. The frequencies of the responses will be demonstrated to express mean.

Result Presentation

This section presented a research result on different coping stress strategies adopted by working mothers concerning childcare challenges in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State. The results were presented according to objectives of the study.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age Range		
Less than 26	39	9.8
26-35	112	28.0
36-45	174	43.5
46-50	48	12.0
Above 50	27	6.8
Mean =37.9		
Marital status		
Single	107	26.8
Married	178	44.5
Divorce	16	4.0
Cohabiting	16	4.0
Widow	39	9.8
Separated	44	11.0
Education		
Primary complete	12	3.0
Secondary not complete	7	0.8
Secondary completed	63	15.8
Tertiary education	318	79.5
Years in service		
2-5 years	92	23.0
5-10 years	71	17.8
10 — 15 years	78	17.8
15-20 years	116	29.0
20 and above	43	10.8

Source: Field survey, 2020

The result in Table 4.1 showed the distribution of respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics. The results showed that many (43.5%) of the respondents were within the age range of 36-46. About 28.8% were within the range of 26-35 years next to 46-50 years (12.5%), less than 26 years (9.8%) and above 50 years (6.8%) with a mean of 37.9 years. The result also found that majority (44.5%) of the civil servants in the study area were married, although the study recorded few single (26.8%), separated (11.0%), widow (9.8%) and divorce and co-

habiting (4.0% each).

The result on educational level of the respondents revealed that majority (79.5%) attended tertiary education, 15.8% and 3.0% had secondary and primary education respectively while 0.80% never complete secondary education. Those that have served 15-20 years as civil servants were 29.0% followed by 2-5 years (23.0%). About 17.8% each had put in 5-10 and 10-15 years in service while 10.8% have served for 20 years and above.

4.1.2 Source of stress among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

Table 4.2: Source of stress among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
Societal Stress	305(1220)	83 (249)	8(16)	4(4)	1489	3.72
Organizational Stress	177(708)	156(468)	60(120)	7(7)	1303	3.26
Role - Related Stress	118(472)	195(585)	80(160)	7(7)	1224	3.06
Extra - Organizational Stress	91 (364)	188(564)	105(210)	16(16)	1154	2.89
Emotional stress	192(768)	145(435)	52(104)	11(11)	1318	3.29

Source: Survey data, 2022

Acceptable mean (X) = 2.5. Figures in parenthesis are the lickert frequencies

SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree

The Table 4.2 presented the result on source of stress among working mothers in the study area. The result showed that majority of the respondents agreed that their level of sources are from societal stress (3.72), organizational stress (3.26), role-related stress (3.06), extra-organizational stress (2.89) and emotional stress (3.29) with a mean response above the criteria mean

ratio of 2.5. The sources of stress identified by the respondents as high were societal stress (3.72), organizational stress (3.26), role-related stress (3.06) and emotional stress (3.29). The study also found that societal stress was a high (3.72) source of stress among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State.

4.1.3. Coping Stress Strategies Adopted by Working Mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

Table 4.3: Coping stress strategies adopted by working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State.

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
I engaged the assistance of my family relatives in stress coping strategies	228 (912)	144 (432)	16 (32)	12 (12)	1388	3.47
Help from friends and colleagues around my neighbourhood aid my stress coping strategies	149 (596)	151 (453)	92 (184)	8 (8)	1241	3.10
I engage the services of paid care (nanny) in handling my children in other to reduce my stress	186 (744)	174 (522)	36 (72)	4 (4)	1342	3.36
I enroll my child in private child care center around my neighbourhood	128 (512)	108 (324)	156 (312)	8 (8)	1156	2.89
I enroll my child in established government child care center in my area of residence	178 (712)	134 (402)	56 (112)	28 (28)	1254	3.14
I utilized the use of labour saving devices or equipment (blenders and vacuum cleaners)	83 (332)	154 (462)	151 (302)	12 (12)	1108	2.77

Source: Survey data, 2022

Acceptable mean (X) = 2.5, Figures in parenthesis are the lickert frequencies

SA=Strongly agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree

The result in Table 4.3 presented the distribution of respondents based on their coping stress strategies adopted. The result identified that most coping stress strategies adopted by working mothers as from assistance from family relative in coping stress strategies (3.47). help from friends and colleague around neighbourhood (3.10), engaging the services of Paid care (nanny) (3.36), enroll my child in private child care center around

my neighbourhood (2.89), enroll my child in established government child care center in my area of resident (3.14) and the use of labour-saving devices or equipment (blenders and vacuum cleaners) (2.77). It was found out that the most adopted coping stress strategies among working mother In Umuahia was assistance from family relative in coping strategies (3.47).

4.1.4 Types of Childcare Support Available to Working Mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

Table 4.4: Types of Childcare Support Available to Working Mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

Risk factors	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
Family and Friend	309(1236)	63(189)	12(24)	8(8)	1454	3.64
Paid care (nanny)	105(420)	220(660)	36(72)	12(12)	1164	2.91
Private child care centers	246(984)	106(318)	36(72)	12(12)	1386	3.47
Government child care center	123(492)	234(702)	43(86)	0(0)	1280	3.2
Social support	106 (424)	239(956)	32 (64)	23 (23)	1467	3.67

Acceptable mean (X) = 2.5, Figures in parenthesis are the lickert frequencies
SA=Strongly agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree

The results on table 4.4 examine the types of childcare support available to working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. The study shows that the entire item (Family and Friend, Paid care (nanny), Private Child care centers, Government child care center and social support) were the available child care support available to working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. Nigeria with a mean response (3.64, 2.91, 3.47, 3.2, 3.67 < 2.5) respectively.

4.1.5: Childcare Challenges Faced by Working Mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State.

Table 4.5: Childcare Challenges Faced by Working Mothers

Non-modifiable factors	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
Work productivity	111(444)	191(573)	90(180)	8(8)	1205	3.01
Breast feeding and nutrition	124(496)	248(744)	20(40)	8(8)	1288	3.22
Child health care	83(332)	1 54(462)	151(302)	12(12)	1108	2.77
Early childcare education and development	177(708)	156(468)	60(120)	7(7)	1303	3.26

Source: Field Survey. 2020

Acceptable mean (X) = 2.5, Figures in parenthesis are the lickert frequencies
SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree, 1)= Disagree

The result in table 4.5 as shown above seek to determine the childcare challenges faced by working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. The result shows that the challenges of childcare are work productivity (3.01), breast feeding and nutrition (3.22), child health care (2.77) and early childcare education and development (3.26). The finding of the result shows that all the above item were agreed by majority of the respondents in the study are their challenges on childcare.

4.1.2. The Extent to Which Coping Stress Strategies Has Helped in Meeting the Challenges of Childcare in Umuahia Lga of Abia State.

Table 4.6: Coping Stress Strategies Has Helped in Meeting the Challenges of Childcare

Variables	SD	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
It helps in giving child proper nurturing and child growth	305 (1220)	83 (249)	8 (16)	4 (4)	1489	3.72
Assist in providing a favourable environment for the upbringing of the child	177 (708)	156 (468)	60 (120)	7 (7)	1303	3.26
Help preventing hazard that might arise in the absence of the mother	118 (472)	195 (585)	80 (160)	7 (7)	1224	3.06
It helps in the feeding of the child with required nutritional diet for the growth and development of the child	91 (364)	188 (564)	105 (210)	16 (16)	1154	2.89
It helps in the provision of proper health care for the child	192 (768)	145 (435)	52 (104)	11 (11)	1318	3.29

Source: Survey data. 2022

Acceptable mean (X) = 2.5, Figures in Parenthesis Are the Lickert Frequencies
SA=strongly agree, A= agree, SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree

Table 4.6 above seeks to determine the extent to which Coping stress strategies has helped in meeting the challenges of childcare in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. The study result shows that giving child proper nurturing and child growth (3.72), Assist in providing a favourable environment for the upbringing of the child (3.26), help preventing hazard that might arise in the absent of the mother (3.06). It helps in the feeding of the child with required nutritional diet for the growth and development of the child (2.89) and it help in the provision of proper health care of the child (3.29) are the means Coping stress strategies has helped in in meeting the challenges of childcare in Umuahia LGA of Abia State.

Discussion

The result showed that majority of the respondents agreed that their level of sources is from societal stress (3.72), organizational stress (3.26), role-related stress (3.06), extra-organizational stress (2.89) and emotional stress (3.29) with a mean response above the criteria mean ratio of 2.5. The sources of stress identified by the respondents as high were societal stress (3.72), organizational stress (3.26), role-related stress (3.06) and emotional stress (3.29). The study also found that societal stress was a high (3.72) source of stress among working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. This result is in conformity with the finding of a study conducted on levels of stress among working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State [14]. The result revealed that the source of stress of 144 working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State is high, the source of stress of non-teaching working mothers is higher than that of teaching working mothers. The study also conforms to the study of Latha (2014) on factors causing stress among working women and strategies to cope up. The findings of the study reveal that under socio-economic stresses unexpected guests, followed by absence of domestic help causes major stress among working women. Similarly, being perfectionist with unnecessary worries which cause psychological set back among working women.

Coping strategies adopted by working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State

The result identified that most coping stress strategies adopted by working mothers as from assistance from family relative in coping stress strategies (3.47), help from friends and colleague around neighbourhood (3.10), engaging the services of Paid care (nanny) (3.36), enroll my child in private child care center around my neighbourhood (2.89), enroll my child in established government child care center in my area of resident (3.14} and the use of labour-saving devices or equipment (blenders and vacuum cleaners) (2.77). It was found out that the most adopted coping stress strategies among working mother in Umuahia was assistance from family relative in coping strategies (3.47). The result of the study was in conformity with the finding of on coping strategies on breastfeeding-working mother [15]. The results showed that all participants faced problems related to their role as breastfeeding-working mothers and perform several coping strategies such as anticipatory coping, preventive coping, problem-focused and emotion focused coping which can be included as reactive coping. The study however is contrary to the finding

of the study conducted on parenting stress and coping strategies adopted among working and nonworking mothers and its association with socio-demographic variables: A cross-sectional study [16]. 13% of non-working women and 26% of working women experienced high stress and apart from working status of the mother, there was no significant statistical difference seen between the parenting stress scores with respect to any other socio-demographic variables under consideration. Significant difference was seen with respect to the scores of religious coping ($p = 0.020$), Behavioural disengagement ($p = 0.003$) and Acceptance ($p = 0.05$) as coping strategies between the working and non-working mothers.

Types Of Childcare Support Available to Working Mothers in Umuahia Lga of Abia State

The findings of the study show family and friend, paid care (nanny), private child care centers, government child care center and social support were the available child care support available to working mothers in Umuahia LGA of Abia State, Nigeria. This result conforms with the finding of the study conducted by the on Quality of life of working and non-working Jordanian mothers caring for chronically ill child and its associated factors [17]. The quality of life of working mothers was significantly lower than those of non-working mothers on all domains of WHO-QO1.-BREF. Mother's working status, monthly income, evaluation of their own health explained 41% of the variance. Social, family and employer support may help them overcome the challenges of caring for a child with a chronic illness and maintain good QOL. The study also conforms to the finding of the study of on childcare arrangements and working mothers' satisfaction with work-family balance, results show that a balanced mix of paid and unpaid childcare is associated with mothers' highest satisfaction, difficulties related to the affordability and the flexibility of paid childcare negatively relate to the satisfaction with work-family balance [18].

Childcare Challenges Faced by Working Mothers in Umuahia Lga of Abia State

The result shows that the challenges of childcare are work productivity (3.01), breast feeding and nutrition (3.22), child health care (2.77) and early childcare education and development (3.26). The finding of the study was in line with the result of study conducted on Early Motherhood: Maternal Challenges and Coping Strategies among First-Time Ghanaian Mothers [19, 20]. This study employed a qualitative study design through in-depth face-to-face interviews with 15 first-time mothers at 12 months postpartum. First-time mothers identified motherhood challenges such as difficulty combining mothering and work-family dilemma and having sleepless nights. Two themes emerged as coping strategies used by first-time mothers; these include obtaining support from parents, family relatives, external sources and self-designed coping strategies.

The Extent to Which Coping Strategies Has Helped in Meeting the Challenges of Childcare

The finding of the study shows that giving child proper nurturing and child growth (3.72), Assist in providing a favourable envi-

ronment for the upbringing of the child (3.26), help preventing hazard that might arise in the absent of the mother (3.06), It help in the feeding of the child with required nutritional diet for the growth and development of the child (2.89) and It help in the provision of proper health care of the child (3.29) are the means coping stress strategies has helped in in meeting the challenges of childcare in Umuahia LGA of Abia State. The finding of the study is in line with [21] on challenges and coping strategies of student nursing mothers in University of Ibadan. Oyo State. Nigeria [22].

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that working mothers suffer from stress, which originates from different sources. This stress affects their job/tasks performance and the management of their homes. Since this is the case, working mothers' home will have problem. This might be responsible for many broken homes. Stress also affects working mothers' offices duties thereby reducing their productivity. This affects the organizations where working mothers work and the whole society and therefore stress is considered to be one of the problems hindering the growth of the nation [23].

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