Modern-Day Slavery? The Work-Life Conflict of Domestic Workers in Nigeria

Journal:	*Gender in Management: an International Journal*
Manuscript ID	GM-02-2020-0054.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Work-life conflict, Time-based conflict, Strain-based conflict, Domestic workers, Nigeria, Behaviour-based conflict

Table 1 Participants' Profiles

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Education	Age	No of day off per week	Years	No of hours worked per day	Sleep-in or Sleep-out
1	Emma	Female	SSCE	19	1	3	15	Sleep-in
2	Chaney	Female	SSCE	20	0	2	14	Sleep-out
3	Becky	Female	PSCE	20	1	4	12	Sleep-in
4	Fiona	Female	SSCE	22	1	4	12	Sleep-in
5	Brenda	Female	SSCE	21	0	4	13	Sleep-in
6	Debby	Female	PSCE	18	1	5	14	Sleep-in
7	Natacha	Female	PSCE	20	0	6	15	Sleep-in
8	Cathy	Female	Drop Out	21	0	7	14	Sleep-in
9	Katy	Female	Drop Out	20	0	6	12	Sleep-in
10	Pauline	Female	PSCE	20	0	4	14	Sleep-out
11	Lilly	Female	SSCE	21	1	4	14	Sleep-in
12	Marina	Female	PSCE	19	0	3	15	Sleep-in
13	Lizzy	Female	Drop Out	22	0	6	12	Sleep-in
14	Sue	Female	PSCE	23	0	6	12	Sleep-in
15	Agatha	Female	SSCE	21	1	4	13	Sleep-out
16	Ariana	Female	SSCE	21	0	3	14	Sleep-in
17	Andrea	Female	Drop Out	23	0	6	15	Sleep-in
18	Helena	Female	SSCE	19	0	2	13	Sleep-in
19	Victoria	Female	SSCE	19	1	3	14	Sleep-in
20	Ellen	Female	Drop Out	20	1	6	12	Sleep-out
21	Steph	Female	Drop Out	21	0	7	14	Sleep-in

Table 2: **Key Themes and Associated Codes**

Research Inquiry	Main Themes	First-order Codes	Illustrative Quotes	Conceptual and Theoretical Implications
Employee's perception of WLC	Domestic workers and the expediency of modern slavery	Job roles	I'm in charge of childcare, cooking, and general cleaning of the house (Chaney).	Time-based conflict Strain-based conflict Behaviour-based conflict
		The notion of domestic work as modern slavery	Every time I think of the way I'm being treated on the job; it feels like I'm playing out the slavery roles in the ancient slavery movies I have seen (Steph).	
	Long and unstructured working hours	Long and unregulated working hours	I do not have a regular start or finish time on this job…I am called to duty at any time even in the dead of night (Ariana).	
		Unstructured nature of job	I cannot really tell you the nature of my job because my employer keeps adding things all the time…some are rather unspeakable (Lily).	
Employer's perception of WLC	Employers' perceptions and workloads	Derogatory remarks by employers	To my employer, I am just a mere housemaid – I mean nothing to them…I feel disrespected when I'm called some derogatory names (Brenda).	
		Work overload	I experience severe stress and burnout because of the numerous tasks I am assigned as a housemaid (Katy).	

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Abstract

Purpose – The trend of domestic employment thrives almost in every society. It is most common in developing countries, and Nigeria is no exception. This article examines the nature of the role of a domestic worker in Nigeria and the work-life conflict issues involved in such work.

Design/Methodology/Approach – This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the nature of the role of domestic workers and the associated work-life conflict issues.

Findings – The findings show that the nature of the jobs of domestic workers in Nigeria gives rise to a situation of modern-day slavery in which an employee works without a formal employment contract, with little or no rights to private time. Long and unstructured working hours, employers' perceptions about domestic workers, and an enormous workload fuel and exacerbate work-life conflict among domestic workers in Nigeria.

Research Limitations/Implications – The extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is constrained by the limited and selected sample of the research and the research context.

Practical Implications – The primacy of the employer over the employee in domestic employment means that both time and work-based conflicts continue to buffer work-life conflict if domestic workers' working hours remain unscheduled and their employers' perceptions about them remain unchanged. This invariably has a negative impact on the domestic workers' health and productivity. Therefore, domestic employment should be regulated by law, and domestic workers should be treated like other formal employees.

Originality/Value – This research contributes to the debates on work-life conflict by highlighting the nature of the role of domestic workers in a non-western context, Nigeria, and provides a nuanced insight into the work-life conflict issues involved in such work. The findings add conceptual thought and empirical evidence to the debate on work-life conflict.

Keywords: work-life conflict, time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, domestic workers, Nigeria

Introduction

The trend of domestic employment thrives almost in every society, but it is most common in developing countries, especially in Africa (Okafor, 2009). Such employment is also witnessing a resurgence rather than a decline in Europe and other developed countries (Gamburd, 2000; Williams, 2003). The nature and scope of domestic employment vary and can include a diverse range of domestic jobs, such as cleaning; driving; cooking; gardening; and caring for children and/or elderly persons in return for financial or other benefits (Rani and Saluja, 2017). More than 85% of domestic workers in Nigeria are female (Tade and Aderinto, 2014). The typology of domestic workers (either by employment arrangement or employment status) in many societies, particularly in Nigeria, provides an insight into the nature of domestic work and the living conditions of domestic workers (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2012).

Work-life conflict (WLC) often arises as a result of role pressures and incompatibility between an employee's work and private lives (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Researchers have argued that work and employment conditions, such as job insecurity and an intense work effort, intensify the risk of WLC (e.g. Sayah and Süß, 2013) and that women are particularly susceptible to this conflict (McElwain, Korabik, and Rosin, 2005). Domestic workers are often engaged in a myriad of domestic chores. In many cases, the efforts of formal workplace professionals to achieve work-life balance (WLB) often lead to the need for domestic workers (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2017). However, domestic workers have been classified as operating within the informal or unorganised sector, where there are little or no legal contracts that bind the employer and employee regarding working conditions (Husni and Suryani, 2018); this has led to a high propensity for WLC among domestic workers, as they find it difficult to cope with the unstructured nature of their work (Rani and Saluja, 2017).

Despite these challenges for domestic workers, specifically in Nigeria, no systematic analysis of their WLC has been performed to date. While a few studies have examined workers' WLC in Nigeria (e.g. Adisa et al., 2016; Majekodunmi, 2017), they do not focus on this under-researched group of employees. Moreover, the transferability of the results of these studies to the context of domestic workers is limited because domestic employment differs greatly in terms of the nature of the work, the legal aspects thereof, and the factors influencing individual perceptions of WLC. This study therefore examines the nature of the role of the domestic worker in Nigeria and the WLC issues involved in such work, including the factors that influence the WLC of domestic workers in Nigeria with a focus on time, strain and behaviour-based conflicts. Hence, the primary question from our research is 'what constitutes the

experiences of work-life conflict among the domestic workers in Nigeria?' To answer this question, the study further breaks the primary question into two specific questions, namely: (a) What are the elements of your work that generate work-life conflict? (b) In what way does the nature of your work and your experience as a domestic worker contribute to your WLC? (c) How do you perceive the effects of your work on your wellbeing?

Furthermore, extant research has shown an increase in the number of domestic workers in Nigeria (Tade and Aderinto, 2012); therefore, our study is intended to help employers of domestic workers improve such workers' WLC; to help government and policymakers regulate the relevant sectors; and to stimulate further research about this under-researched group of workers. Although we use Nigeria as our research focus, our study is also instructive and relevant for other developing countries, especially those in Africa, because of the current increasing trend in the use of domestic workers.

Work-Life Balance/Conflict: A Brief Review

The debate regarding the need to improve employees' wellbeing seems rather unending given the various contrasting views of scholars, employers, and the government about what should constitute a good wellbeing programme for employees (Guest, 2016). Work-life balance (WLB) remains a predominant discourse in the argument for employee wellbeing (Zheng et al., 2015). According to Parkes and Langford (2008), the term 'WLB' refers to an employee's efforts towards successfully satisfying both their work and non-work-related roles so that the activities of one role do not adversely affect the other. All of the different terms used interchangeably for WLB (e.g. work-life integration, work-life enrichment, work-life facilitation) are linked to employee flexibility, which advocates employees' ability to determine how, where, and when they work (Dex and Bond, 2005; Cooke et al., 2009). Nizam and Kam (2018) identified five fundamental elements of WLB: working time, workplace arrangements, reward systems, workloads, and leave policies. However, employees' inability to successfully manage both work demands and non-work-related responsibilities often results in WLC (Morris and Madsen, 2007).

WLC is an inter-role conflict in which the pressures from the work domain and the pressures from the life domain are incompatible (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). WLC happens when work activities interfere with an employee's personal life activities or vice versa (Adisa et al., 2016). This means that WLC is directional (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999); it could start at work or at home (Frone, Yardley and Markel, 1997). In other words, WLC exists when the

expectations or demands from one life role inhibit an employee's ability to meet expectations or demands in another role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) explained that there are three categories of WLC: time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflict. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), the sources of WLC could be time-based, meaning that the time pressures of one role make it difficult to fulfil the demands or expectations of another role; strain-based, meaning that the strain symptoms or effects produced by one role interfere with one's ability to carry out another role; or behaviour-based, meaning that a specific pattern of in-role behaviour may be incompatible with expectations concerning behaviour in another role. Such a conflict is conceptualised in the literature as bidirectional (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Frone et al., 1997). Time is a scarce resource (Gasparini, 1988) and may sometimes result in time-based WLC when time-based demands in one role affect the proportion of the time needed to be effective in other roles (Steiber, 2009). Furthermore, time-based conflicts are exacerbated with the increasing number of roles (particularly for women) resulting in an overlap between roles as roles compete for individual's limited time (Lambert et al., 2006). Behaviour-based conflict, on the other hand, is associated with the incompatibility of behaviours across different roles (Lapierre and Allen, 2012). In our current study, we examine the relationship between domestic workers' working time as well as time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based WLC, evidenced by the extent to which workers report not having enough time to fulfil their private life responsibilities.

Domestic Workers in Nigeria

Domestic workers constitute a segment of the informal sector of various world economies (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019), where individuals or a group of individuals are hired within the households of their employers to perform menial duties in return for financial or other benefits (Rani and Saluja, 2017). According to ILO (2019), there are 66 million domestic workers over the age of 15 worldwide, of which 80% are women. Historically, domestic workers are often from disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups or families that tend to provide domestic and care services to wealthier households (ILO, 2019).

Domestic employment is a common phenomenon in Nigeria, where children are trafficked to work as domestic workers in 'well-to-do' households in the city (Tade and Aderinto, 2012). This is also the case in all other African countries (Okafor, 2009). For example, ILO (2002) estimates that there are over 47 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa who are economically active in the labour market. This figure is higher in Africa than anywhere else in the world (Admassie, 2003). This study found that young adults (between the age of 19 and 21) are

involved in domestic employment. This corroborates the studies undertaken by UNICEF (2004, 2006) that found that around 15 million children in Nigeria were working in the informal economy. Research has revealed that the majority of Nigerian domestic workers popularly known as 'Omo odo'[1] in southwest Nigeria, 'bawa' in northern Nigeria, or 'nwaulo' in eastern Nigeria are predominantly female (Akanle, Adesina and Nwaobiala, 2016; Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2017). These women are hired to undertake various household chores (such as doing the laundry; washing dishes and other kitchen utensils; general house cleaning; babysitting; and cooking) at the homes of their employers. On the other hand, their male counterparts are mostly employed as drivers, gardeners, and gatekeepers (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2017). The majority of domestic workers in Nigeria are not well educated due to financial problems (Akanle and Ejiade, 2012). This phenomenon may be attributed to poor economic conditions, which also affect their standard of living (Ntoimo and Abanihe, 2014).

Research Methodology

Data Collection

Given the lack of empirical research on the WLC of domestic workers in Nigeria, a qualitative, interview-based method was deemed appropriate for this study (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). The interviews were guided by a semi-structured format to gain insight into the WLC experience of domestic workers in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible technique for small-scale research (Drever, 1995) and allow the interviewees to open-up about sensitive issues (Alvarez and Urla, 2002). We conducted our study in Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria, which has a population of more than 20 million people (World Population Review, 2019). Due to the difficulty of gaining access to domestic workers who were working in private households at the time, we had to use participant referral and snowball sampling methods (Noy, 2008). Such methods involved asking friends and relatives of domestic workers as well as domestic workers themselves to recommend another domestic worker who might be willing to participate in the study. Each new participant was asked to recommend someone who might also be willing to participate in the study.

In all, 21 out of the 43 domestic workers that we invited participated in the study. All of the participants are female between the age of 19 and 23 years old with minimal educational qualifications (see Table 1 for the profile of the participants). The participants were afraid to participate in the study for fear of their employers not being happy with their giving information

[1] 'Omo odo' is a term, often derogatory, used to refer to a domestic worker in Nigeria.

about the nature of their jobs, which could lead to the termination of their employment. All of the participants declined permission to record their voices during the interviews for the same reason. In this case, two research assistants were hired to take detailed notes of the interviews along with the first author. These notes were later compared to ensure they were accurate and that no information had been omitted. The participants were recruited by their respective agents for domestic employment in Lagos. The reason why there were only female participants may be that the majority of domestic workers in Nigeria (80%) are female (Essiet, 2016). In this article, we concentrated on the nature of the work of domestic workers in terms of how it has prevented or enhanced their WLC. Specifically, we asked the following questions: (a) What are the elements of your work that generate work-life conflict? (b) In what way does the nature of your work and your experience as a domestic worker contribute to your WLC? (c) How do you perceive the effects of your work on your wellbeing? These questions were open-ended, as they allowed the participants to elaborate on the nature of their domestic work; and prompted other questions in the course of the interview process.

All the interviews were conducted in the English language. Although all of the participants had not been educated beyond the secondary-school level, they could understand and express themselves in simple English language. Most of the time, they spoke 'broken English', which was perfectly understood by the researchers and the research assistants because they are also natives of Nigeria. The participants were also permitted to speak their native language, which was immediately translated into English. According to Welch and Piekkari (2006), it is easy for an interviewer to build a rapport with an interviewee when the interview is carried out in the interviewee's native language. Furthermore, the authenticity, richness, and accuracy of the data are normally better when interviewing in the interviewee's native language than if a different language was used (Welch and Piekkari, 2006). For the translation, a meaning-based translation technique was employed (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004), according to which the original meaning of the participants takes centre stage and translation is conducted by means of paraphrasing and interpretation rather than mechanical translation, which might lead to quotations being stilted (Harzing, Koster, and Magner, 2011).

Data was collected individually, one semi-structured interview at a time (e.g. on the domestic worker's day off from work), and at locations that were convenient for the participants (public places, such as restaurants or an outside space in the employer's house). This was done so as not to disturb their work and to ensure that they felt free to respond truthfully. All of the

participants sought special assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms were guaranteed in order to avoid the risk and possibility of being identified. Participants were informed of their unreserved right to refuse to answer any question that they were not comfortable with or to altogether terminate their participation. No one terminated their participation in the study, and all the questions that were put to them were answered in detail. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Insert Table 1 about here

'Years' refers to the number of years the individual had been engaged in domestic employment. 'SSCE' means 'secondary-school certificate education'. 'PSCE' means 'primary-school certificate education'. 'Drop out' means that a participant was unable to finish their secondary-school education. 'Sleep in' means the participant lives with her employer, while 'sleep out' means the participant does not live with her employer.

Data Analysis

In inductive research, theorising occurs during and after data collection (Patton, 2002). Following Locke's (2001) recommendation, we used an analytical process similar to data collection using an 'open coding' technique (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We meticulously studied every line of the interview in order to determine what exactly had been said, and each line was then labelled with an appropriate provisional code. All transcripts were coded with English labels. Some codes were taken directly from the data; that is, the labels reflected the participants' exact words. For instance, participants talked about the nature of domestic employment and domestic workers in Nigeria as 'Domestic Workers: Modern Slaves'. We assigned these codes to any statements directly related to them (e.g. 'I dare not eat if I have not finished my morning chores…sometimes, I eat my breakfast at 3 pm') or information that we interpreted as being related (e.g. 'I often work in pain and sometimes through sickness. My "Madam" really does not care'). Other codes were informed by the literature and marked theoretical concepts reflected in our data (e.g. the statement 'I work all the time, making it difficult for me to attend to many private life activities that I would have loved to attend'). The participants' statements evidence the prevalence of time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts among domestic workers.

In the subsequent step of the analysis, we analysed the interview transcripts and identified recurrent themes across all transcripts, making sense of the themes and their connections, guided by inductive epistemology (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002). The authors each went back

and forth through the transcripts in other to nurture a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Thorough and close reading and re-reading resulted in the emergence of several related themes repeatedly highlighted by the participants. However, three overriding themes emerged: domestic workers and the expediency of modern slavery; long and unstructured working hours; and employers' perceptions and workloads. This article focuses on these three themes to examine the nature of the role of domestic workers in Nigeria and the WLC issues involved in such work.

We constantly compared the illustrative examples, searching for similarities and differences between the participants' stories, when we coded and categorised the transcripts accordingly. We cycled back and forth between the data, codes, and categories in an iterative fashion until no new categories emerged and saturation had been achieved (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Locke, 2001). Coding was predominantly done by the first author, with the emerging categories being frequently and intensely discussed among the co-authors during the entire process of data analysis. Following the investigator triangulation procedure, we conducted an additional reliability check by having a research assistant independently code 15 transcripts. His coding was compared with the coding conducted by the first author, based on the same set of transcripts and discrepancies were not found. This helped in establishing confidence in the data analysis process.

In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the data, following Hayashi et al.'s (2019) validity and reliability procedures, the authors ensured descriptive validity by avoiding any distortion to the information provided by the participant. While data was transcribed verbatim, the authors also retained the original meanings of the translated language (i.e., from broken English to standard English). Interpretive validity was also ascertained by carefully capturing and interpreting the conscious processes and concepts.

Research Findings

Responses to questions about the nature of the participants' work and its impact on their WLB resulted in the emergence of three major themes. The participants recounted their experiences and how the three themes gleaned from the data fuel and exacerbated their WLC.

Insert Table 2 about here

Domestic Workers and the Expediency of Modern Slavery

The experiences recounted by the participants demonstrate a type of modern-day slavery in which there is no binding formal contract between domestic workers and their employers. Domestic workers have a little or no right to request for a change in the conditions of employment or redistribution of job tasks; and the employer is seen as a 'demi-god' whose decision is always final. The participants described the nature of their job as labour intensive. Katy commented:

> My work is difficult in the sense that I have to carry out different tasks in the course of the day. For example, I wash the toilet twice a day, I prepare food for everyone in the house, prepare the kids for school, and take them to school. I will come back home to do the laundry, clean the house, go to the market to shop, and many more…it really is tedious, and that is my daily routine. I really do not have a day off because I live with my employer. I am able to talk to you now because I am on an errand to the market (Katy, 20 years old).

Emma likened her job to slavery with the notion of having no right to complain:

> For me, it is slavery, but what I call voluntary slavery. I came into it voluntarily to salvage my parents' financial situation. I wake up at 5 am every morning and do not go to bed until 11 pm at the earliest. All the hours of my day have been planned by my 'Madam'…I am always on duty, and I dare not complain about anything, because I will lose my job. I am like my employer's property (Emma, 19 years old).

Another participant described domestic job as a dirty job with no dignity. She commented:

> It is a dirty and undignified job because I do all sorts of things, such as washing the toilet and gutter, mopping floors, and doing the laundry. I am not proud of it. I can't even boast of my job. I work like a slave...I have been programmed to work all the time. That is the nature of the job (Andrea, 23 years old).

This finding evidences the true nature of domestic work in Nigeria, which is described as 'modern slavery' by the participants. Consistent with the findings of Mantouvalou (2018), the concept of modern slavery within our findings also illustrate cases of humiliation, exploitation,

and denial of choice. The finding resonates with Bales (1999, p. 3) argument that 'slavery is not a horror safely consigned to the past'; rather, it is still very prevalent in the present time, but in a different form. Andrea, in her statement 'being programmed to work at all times', described the unpredictable and unstructured working hours associated with domestic work. This could be likened to late nineteenth-century indentured labour (Castles and Miller 1998). Furthermore, the responses of many participants can be linked to their experiences of WLC. For example, comments like 'I do not have a day off' and 'I wake up at 5 am every morning and do not go to bed until 11 pm' illustrate time-based conflicts, such that the increase in the number of roles (particularly job roles) results in the overlapping of roles and compete with the participants' personal time (Lambert et al., 2006). Furthermore, the strain-based conflicts associated with the role stressors that exacerbate WLC (Adisa et al., 2016) are inherent in the participants' comments, such as 'it is tedious, and I find myself stressed out every day' and 'the job generates tension and anxiety…because I have to complete my tasks before going to bed late at night if I do not want to lose my job'. The nature of a domestic worker's job presents debilitating implications for their WLB because their work and private life roles are incompatible, leading to behaviour-based conflicts (Lapierre and Allen, 2012).

Long and Unstructured Working Hours

The findings suggest that long and unstructured working hours trigger the participants' WLC. The participants spend an average of 13.3 hours daily and 72 hours weekly attending to various domestic duties. Some of the participants work as much as 105 hours a week (see Table 1). A participant commented:

> I work for unbelievably long hours to look after the kids, and I am responsible for the general upkeep of the house. I cannot even start to mention what I do, because I practically do everything. I work a minimum of 15 hours daily, let me say, I work all the time, because I live with my employer, and I'm called upon whenever the need arises even at midnight…so I have no time to attend to my private life (Natacha, 20 years old).

Emma explained that long and unstructured working hours reduce the time allocated to fulfil her private life activities:

> I have not done less than 90 hours a week in the last three years…those hours are unstructured. I am like a slave who could be called and tossed around anyhow. '*Omo odo*', as domestic workers are called here, are treated like

> slaves. I normally have a day off…but I will sleep throughout because I am worn out. There is no time to hang out with friends and family (Emma, 19 years old).

Participants who live with their employers do not have any days off because they are often called upon to work. A participant said:

> Let's just say I don't have any days off. We agreed that Sundays would be my days off. But there has been no Sunday since I started working with Madam (her employer) that I don't work…maybe not normal long working hours, but I will work for at least four to five hours. I do not have time for myself…I would have loved to spend time with my parents and sisters, but this job does not permit that (Victoria, 19 years old).

Victoria commented on her desire to spend time with her family, but such plans are hindered due to the nature of her job. Another participant also commented on the impact of the long working hours on her health:

> Long working hours are a problem. I am always very tired and worn out. In fact, there are times that I am sick. Madam provides me with medication, but I will still work through my sickness. The long working hours are affecting my health (Ariana, 21 years old).

Lily explained the 'sleep in' and 'sleep out' dichotomy in relation to work and private live domains:

> Practically, a domestic worker does not have any day off if she lives with her employer (we call that 'sleep in') because they still call you to work, even on your day off. If you don't live with them ('sleep out')…yes, you will have your day off to yourself, but trust me, you will sleep throughout the day off, because you will be dead tired (exhausted). So, [there is] no time and energy for private life role or activities (Lily, 19 years old).

Chaney's account corroborates Lily's point on the 'sleep in' and 'sleep out' issue. Chaney commented:

> I don't live with my employer. I normally resume work at 7am and close at 10pm, sometimes 11pm. So, it is just a matter of getting home and crashing

> into my bed. I don't work on Sundays, but they are sleeping days for me to recoup my lost strength and energy. For example, I slept throughout yesterday (Sunday), such that I could not even attend to a friend that visited me…I didn't know when she left (Chaney, 20 years old).

This finding aligns with studies that argue that long working hours prevent employees from spending time with their families (Ammons and Markham, 2004), thereby fuelling a fierce WLC (Othman et al., 2009) and negatively affecting employees' quality and quantity of sleep (Walter, 2012). Furthermore, the greater the heavy responsibilities of domestic workers' duties, the more likely the occurrence of work-life imbalance. Consistent with the argument of Mantouvalou (2018), our findings aver that the unstructured nature of domestic workers' jobs subject them to substandard working conditions and exacerbate their WLC. For example, time-based conflict is evident in the participants' account – they work unregulated hours (e.g. working throughout the day or 13.3 hours daily [on average]). This also generates strain-based conflicts for the participants, which is evident in their account. Participants complain of 'burnout', 'worn out', 'exhaustion' and 'fatigue'. This consequently hinders them from active participation in their private life responsibilities. In accordance with the study of Yucel and Latshaw (2020), our findings are relevant to the cases where the participants reported specific stressors at work that produce fatigue, tension and frustration, preventing them from effective involvement in their non-work roles.

Employers' Perceptions and Workloads

All the participants commented that the employers' perceptions of domestic workers in Nigeria are not only derogatory but also exacerbate their WLC. Many employers fail to acknowledge domestic workers as humans who also have private life roles and demands. For example, Lizzy, who has been working with her employer for six years, commented:

> To them (my employers and her family), I am just like a machine that could be deployed to undertake all sorts of jobs. They don't think that I have any right to private life or to fulfil my private life obligations…I am just a common *'omo odo'* to them (Lizzy, 22 years old).

The participants believe that without a change in their employers' perceptions regarding the duties of a domestic worker, the prevailing conflict between their work and private lives could remain inevitable. Some participants gave details on their views of the issue:

> The perceptions have to change, especially the employers' perceptions. To my employer, I deserve no respect, because I am a housemaid. She doesn't treat me like I'm human; for example, she once said that owns me, and she can do anything with me. To her, I am like a piece of wood…that's the perception (Helena, 19 years old).

> The perception is that I am an *'omo odo'*, and I am being treated like one. Let me tell you how '*omo odos*' are treated. They are looked down upon and are usually overused, such that they don't have time for private life. For example, I like to read and meditate, but I really don't have time to do all of that…I think all these problems will change if the perceptions change (Sue, 23 years old).

The issue of workload emerged within this theme. A domestic worker's workload is enormous, and it runs throughout the day and even on weekends. The participants shared their views and experiences as follows:

> The amount of work that I do in a day is unimaginable. I normally start at 5am, and the earliest that I go to bed is 10 pm. Where do I get time for myself? I think this is informed by the perceptions. If I am being perceived as human, my workload will be humanly moderate (Steph, 21 years old).

Another participant mentioned:

> …there is no pride in being a domestic worker, it is all about work, I work all the time. I hardly have time for myself (Marina, 19 years old).

The vulnerability of domestic workers could be attributed to their level of dependence on their work and employers to earn a living, support their families, and the isolated nature of their job roles. Aside from time-based and strain-based conflicts, participants' comments also highlight some boundary management issues that further exacerbate their WLC. For example, the intrusion of work into their personal lives reflects the weakness of the border between the work and non-work lives of the domestic workers, which causes WLC.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on data from a sample of female domestic workers in Nigeria, this article examined the nature of work of domestic workers in Nigeria (whether it is the traditional 9 am - 5 pm working week) and the WLB issues therein, such as the factors that influence their WLC, with

a particular focus on time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts. The participants recounted an unpleasant experience, which can be likened to modern-day slavery. This study adopts Mantouvalou's (2018) concept of modern slavery as evidence of humiliation, vulnerability, exploitation, and denial of choice is inherent in the participants' accounts. Participants described their job as 'voluntary slavery' in which the nature and conditions of the job were equivalent to slavery. The domestic workers' self-willingness to engage in the job was to help salvage their family's financial situation. This finding resonates with Bales (1999, p.3) argument that 'slavery is not a horror safely consigned to the past'; rather, it is still very much prevalent in the present time – but in a different form. The participants and their employers have no formal binding contract between them, which means the terms and conditions of employment are solely decided by the employers, to their advantage.

Furthermore, the participants have little or no right to request a change in the conditions of their employment or redistribution of job tasks, and their employers are regarded as 'demi-gods', whose decisions are always final. The nature of a domestic worker's job in Nigeria is labour intensive. There is a significant level of work-based pressure placed on the participants, and it is highly related to WLC, especially strain-based conflict, which consistently contributes to work-based pressure and stress. These stressors have been found capable of producing both time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts and produce an enormous strain on employees (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). We therefore extend Greenhaus and Beutell's argument to a lack of a formal contract between domestic workers and their employers, which can contribute to and exacerbate time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts.

This study also found that domestic workers in Nigeria worked unstructured and longer hours, which essentially exacerbates the participants' WLC. Participants spend an average of 13.3 hours attending to various domestic duties in a day. They work a minimum of 72 hours a week, and some of them work as much as 105 hours a week. This study describes domestic workers as 'prisoners of the long working hours regime'. Their working hours are unstructured and unpredictable. This ultimately prevents them from spending time with their families and attending to other non-work activities, such as hanging out with friends and attending church services, thereby leading to severe WLC. Long, unstructured, and unpredictable working hours produce time-based and strain-based conflicts that prevent employees from attending to their non-work responsibilities (Henly and Lambert, 2014).

Furthermore, this article tends to confirm one of the dominant themes in the WLC literature: the tensions that can occur between a person's work and personal lives. These have long been a topic of interest within organisational studies (Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). However, rather than helping domestic workers to reduce their WLC, employers' perceptions about domestic workers in Nigeria are pejorative and increase the time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts among them. Many employers of domestic workers treat them inhumanely, as though they have no private life roles to fulfil. A positive change in this perception will be crucial in reducing WLC among domestic workers. In addition, we found that domestic workers' workloads are enormous and often run throughout the weekdays and weekends, especially when the participant lives with their employer. Participants who live outside of the workplace also reported an inability to attend to their private life commitments as a result of tiredness. Even though some participants who sleep out are not recalled to duty on their off days, they are unable to function well in their non-work domain as a result of stress and burnout. This phenomenon ultimately produces both time-based and strain-based conflict, which often results in unidimensional WLC. The enormous workload leaves the participants with little or no time for other life roles. It has been argued that the major source of WLC is a lack of time to tend to one's private life obligations (Parcel, 1999).

Theoretically, the findings add conceptual thought by extending Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) WLC model and adding empirical evidence to the debate on WLC. We highlight the nuances of the theory, such as employer's perceptions and employees' experiences. We argue that employers' perceptions of employees are significant in reducing or enhancing time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts. In summary, we argue that the nature of a domestic worker's role in Nigeria is tantamount to modern-day slavery and that time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts will continue to buffer WLC if domestic workers' working hours remain unscheduled and their employers' perceptions remain unchanged. Building on Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) WLC model, we ascertain that role overload remains a critical factor that impedes the WLB of domestic workers in Nigeria.

From a practical perspective, our study identifies the unstructured nature of domestic workers' job as the primary factor enabling WLC. The primacy of the employer over the employee in domestic employment means that both time-based and work-based conflicts continue to buffer WLC if domestic workers' working hours remain unscheduled and their employers' perceptions about them remain unchanged. This invariably has a negative impact on the domestic workers' health and productivity. Additionally, the broader societal perception and

stereotypical insinuations associated with domestic workers as 'dirty workers' and other derogatory names and remarks accorded to domestic workers in Nigeria have adverse effects on their physical and psychological wellbeing. Thus, the need to regard domestic workers as formal employees may influence employers' perceptions and the attitude of the public towards them. We argue that such actions are more likely to improve the quality of life of Nigerian domestic workers, who at present, are at the mercy of their exploitative employers due to their need to earn a living.

Like other studies, our research also has its limitations. The sample composition of 21 participants out of the invited 43 domestic workers meant that the study is based on a smaller sample size than was anticipated. This was due to the invited participants' fear of been identified by their employers, even though anonymity was promised. The context in which the study was undertaken presents another limitation, as different contexts might produce different results. Given these limitations, future studies may use a quantitative, mixed-method, or cross-sectional design approach to examine the WLC of domestic workers in other research environments and particularly within the Sub-Saharan African region in which the concept of WLC is relatively under-researched. Future research may also consider the implications of WLC, which might be distinct between sleep-in and sleep-out domestic workers and the coping strategies adopted by these groups of domestic workers. Furthermore, future studies may also examine the domestic workers' voices and the activities of trade unions within the Nigerian context.

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