



Research article

Socio-cultural practices and stress among working mothers of underage children in Nigeria Public Universities

Ngozi Christina Nwadike^{✉1}, John Thompson Okpa^{ID✉2}, Nnana Okoi Ofem^{ID✉3}, Benjamin Okorie Ajah^{ID✉4}, Uzochukwu Chukwuka Chinweze^{ID✉5}, Isife, Chima Theresa^{✉6}

^{1,3} Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

² Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Nigeria

³ Department of Social Work, University of Calabar, Nigeria

⁴ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka:

⁵ Social Sciences Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

^{*6}Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Nigeria

Abstract

The study examined the socio-cultural factors that bring about stress to working mothers of underage children in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka by recruiting 504 academic and non-academic staff. To assess the study variables in a cross-sectional survey, a questionnaire, and an in-depth interview schedule were employed in collecting data from working mothers of underage children in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Chi-square (χ^2) statistical analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between husband's attitude towards domestic duties and the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. The data also demonstrated that there is no statistical significant relationship between the husband's educational status and the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. The study concluded that husband's attitude is a significant predictor of working mothers of underage children's stress experience. It was therefore recommended that policies should be enacted by the Nigerian government and enforced in public sectors to enhance 'favourable' working conditions for working mothers of underage children. This should include an extension of maternity leave to at least six months, less demanding/accommodative job times, and assigned duties in tunes that do not compromise the ethos of a given profession.

Keywords: Stress, working mothers, underage children, husband's attitude towards domestic duties



Reduced Inequalities, Gender Equality, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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Introduction

Women are actively participating in a wide range of professional vocations in today's society, while still retaining their traditional roles as mothers to their children (Shueh-Yi & Cai, 2014). In today's society, a woman's duties do not consist solely of housework, the bearing of children, and the provision of care for her family; rather, they have also begun to assume significant and, in some cases, primary roles in the maintenance of her family's financial well-being (Adhikari, 2012). The stress situation of working women is inevitably made worse by their combined responsibilities, particularly those mothers who have children under the age of 18. (Akanji, 2012). According to Ajala (2017), women who have multiple tasks are more likely to experience stress, coupled with despair and anxiety, which may result in severe medical conditions. Women who are caring for children under the age of 18 in many regions of the globe, including the global south as well as the global north, have been the subjects of several stress-related studies and studies documenting their personal experiences of stress. Among residents of St. Petersburg in Russia, women with underage children are said to be characterized by high levels of stress, as a consequence of the rapid changes in their social experience and occupational demands (Pietila & Rytikone, 2007). The stress experience of working mothers in South Korea is reportedly on the increase following the growing rate of commuter marriages (Yun-Suk, 2017).

In Africa, there is a high prevalence of stress among working mothers with underage children given to the interplay of various socio-economic and political factors. South Africa alone in 2015 recorded high cases of traumatic stress among its young working mothers which are perceived as having a link with the country's notorious history of political violence, criminal violence, and high level of domestic violence that heightens the burden of working mothers of underage children in the neighbourhood (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). The stressors also extend to minute but strong forms of gender discrimination and family-work interference embedded in South African unique cultural pattern that makes caring for children seem exclusive, a woman's undertaking (Van & Vanzyl, 2012). This makes it more difficult for working mothers of underage children to pursue alternate measures of coping with the associated stress.

The Nigerian formal sector typifies a huge stress arena for working mothers with underage children. This is due to the pressing demand to balance work and family roles, especially that of attending to the need of their growing children (Egbule, 2015). Female academia for example tends to be more exposed to work-related stress as they tussle between attending to their children's needs and the demands of being an academic (Omoniyi & Ongunsanmi, 2012). The magnitude of stress experienced by Nigerian citizens generally and working mothers specifically came to a global light in 2015 when Bloomberg published its report, recording Nigeria as the most stressful country in the world (Green, 2015). Working mothers with underage children in Nigeria are therefore more susceptible to stress. In all the identified cases of stress among working mothers, some underlying factors have equally been noted as contributing to the stress. Gardazi, Mobeen, and Gardazi, (2016) observed that factors like health status, work overload, environmental factors, age, and family conflict can lead to stress among working mothers. Furthermore, issues like job status, nature of career, physiological, behavioural, and individual factors of working mothers have equally been identified as having a moderate effect on their stress experience (Prasad, Vaidya, Kumar & Rekha, 2016). Other factors identified as causing stress

among working women with underage children include gender discrimination, family-work conflict/problem, lack of opportunity for job advancement, family finances/economic necessities, commuter marriages/couples living apart, large family size, and cultural stipulation of gender role that affects husband's attitude and value to house chores (Alenkhe & Ibiezugbe, 2015; Amoo, Ola-David, Ogunrinola & Fadayomi, 2012; Yun- Suk, 2015).

The reality therefore is that a great number of working mothers especially those with underage children struggle daily with tension emanating from the accumulated responsibilities of being a mother, spouse, worker and community member (Njiru, 2013). This reality is evident in health complications for the working mother, poor job performance, marital instability, abuse of children in such homes and lack of proper care for their underage children (Younkin, 2010). The effects of stress on working mothers' health are now recognized. Ugwu, Orjiakor, Enwereuzor, Onyedibe and Ugwu (2016) noted a close linkage between ill health and high level of occupational stress among working mothers in low-income developing countries. Stress among working mothers has equally been attributed to family instability. Aughinbaugh and Gittleman (2010) reported that young working mothers with high levels of stress were also likely to have issues in their family which in turn increases risky behaviours among their children, especially the adolescent ones. Some of the risky behaviours associated with such children include smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using marijuana and other drugs, engaging in early sexual practices and criminal activities.

Series of policies at the national level have been adopted to address the challenges faced by working mothers. Such include the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) maternity leave act which stipulates a minimum of 14 weeks maternity leave (Omorotionmwan, 2015). Other approaches have been developed by private agencies and non-governmental organizations to address the issue of stress among working mothers such as individual psychological intervention, therapy counselling, intranet/internet counselling, complementary therapy, helpline/telephone coaching and organization courses (Bhui & Dinos, 2016). Such non-governmental intervention in Nigeria like G- WIN, which is under the Ministry of Finance, focuses more on supporting women and girls in Nigeria to be gainfully employed in different sectors of the Nigerian economy (Social Development Direct, 2017). There is a limited empirical study that focuses on working mothers with underage children and the various socio-cultural indices that could bring about stress to them. To ensure that stress-related issues are handled among working mothers of underage children, there is a need to empirically determine the factors that bring about stress among working mothers of underage children, a task which the current study is anchored on.

Methods

Participants: A total of 511 respondents were recruited for this study; 504 for the quantitative study and 7 for the qualitative study. Participants (i.e., academic and non-academic staff) were selected from the nineteen (19) academic faculties, while the non-academic staff were selected from over twenty-two (22) departments/units. Four faculties and four departments/units were selected for the study. In the second stage of the sampling, four academic departments and four non-academic sub-units were selected each from the selected faculties and departments. In doing

this, the process of selection described in stage one was repeated in each of the earlier selected eight clusters to select 32 departments and sub-units.

In the third stage, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique where the list of female staff with underage children was obtained from the sub-units secretary. This served as the sampling frame for every unit. Female staff in the departments or units where their number is less than 20, were all selected and studied. However, in situations where they are above 20; a systematic sampling technique was applied using appropriate intervals to select 20 respondents from such unit or department. At the end of the third stage, the targeted sample size was not obtained, stage one was repeated to pick three sub-cluster each from the academic and non-academic clusters after which stages two and three were repeated on the two clusters. This continued till the desired sample size of 504 respondents was obtained.

The population for the study was limited to only the female staff of the University of Nigeria Nsukka campus. The population of female staff as contained in the 2021 nominal roll obtained from the Personnel Department of the University is 2,206. Out of the 2,206 female staff, 755 are academics while 1,451 are non-academics. However, those eligible for the quantitative aspect of the study, aside from being female staff, are also working mothers with at least one child or children that are or are below 18 years of age.

Instruments

The study made use of both quantitative and qualitative tools of data collection. The quantitative tool was used to obtain information from working mothers through the use of the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes both open, close-ended and matrix questions which were structured into sections and also serve as the major instrument for data collection. Part of the questionnaire contained a matrix question of 15 stress indicators obtained from Cohen, Kamarch, and Mermelstein (1983). This enabled the researcher to obtain data on the stress experience of the respondents that were evaluated against some of their socio-cultural conditions. The in-depth interview (IDI) guide served as a complementary instrument for the qualitative data collection. This gave the researcher a deeper insight into different socio-cultural factors that bring about stress among working mothers of underage children. After constructing the items, the instruments were subjected to standardised validation by seeking for experts' opinions to obtain certification for the face and content validity. This was done by approaching some lecturers in the Departments of Psychology, Sociology and Social Work who specialised in Biopsychosocial, Industrial Sociologists, Human Resource Management and Medical Sociology to scrutinise the scale. Thereafter, construct validity and reliability were conducted. Before the use of the research instrument, it was first pilot-tested on a separate sample (N=41) of participants to ensure that the items were clear and conveyed the intended message. The 41 participants were both academic and non-academic staff respectively selected from the Faculty of Vocational Teacher Education and School of General Studies for academic staff while the non-academic staff were selected from the Bursary and Student Affairs departments (who were not part of the main study) and a Cronbach Alpha measure of .85 was obtained which clearly shows that the instrument was highly reliable with good internal consistency.

Setting: University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus served as the research setting. The University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) is the second oldest university to be established in Nigeria. UNN was established on October 7, 1960, and is located in Enugu, Nigeria. It has a total of nineteen Faculties and a School of Postgraduate Studies. The institution has three campuses which are located in Nsukka, Enugu and Ituku Ozalla. The University dominates the landscape of Nsukka, offering employment to most of the inhabitants and constituting its main economic base or its main industry.

Design and Statistics: The study utilised a cross-sectional survey research design, and chi-square (χ^2) was used to test the level of significance that exists between the dependent and independent variables in each of the hypotheses. The qualitative data from IDI sessions were analyzed using the thematic method. The data were transcribed, to ensure that the participants were not quoted out of context. Phrases with contextual connotations were noted and pulled out as illustrations and quotes to complement the quantitative data under the relevant themes.

Result

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Data presented in Table 1 shows that 30.3% of the respondents had either a child or two children, 49.1% had 3-4 children, 20% had 5-6 children and 0.6% had more than 6 children. This shows that approximately 1:4 children (one mother to four children) are the most common child ratio of working mothers in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, while almost one-third (30.3%) had either a child or two. Table 1 further shows the distribution of respondents by the age range and sex of their children. Those who had either a male or female child in a given age range were listed under the "yes" column of the identified gender, while those who indicated that they had no child within a given age range were grouped under the "no" column. Emphasis was however on the percentage of respondents that had a child (male or female) in each given age range. It can be deduced from the table that 33.4% of the respondents had male children of 0-2 years old while 26.8% had female children of the same age range. Also, 37.3% had male children of 3-5 years old while 28.9% equally had female children of the same age cluster. The table also reveals that 47.8% of the respondents had male children of 6-8 years while 40.8% had female children of the same age cluster. Furthermore, 26.4% had male children of 9-11 years while 23.9% had female children of 9-11 years. The table also shows that 25.4% of the respondents had male children of 12-14 years while the percentage of respondents with female children of the same age cluster is 20.2%. For children, 15-17 years of age, the table shows that 13% of the respondents had male children of such age bracket while 14.4% of the respondents had female children of the same age range. Given that more than one-third of the respondents had either a male or female child within the age cluster of 6-8 years, it implies that children (both male and female) within 6-8 years were the common age cluster in the distribution of the children of working mothers with underage children in UNN.

Data in Table 1 further shows that 2.3% of the respondents had First School Leaving Certificate as their highest educational attainment, 2.1% had a West African School certificate, 7.8% had a National Certificate of Education (NCE) or National Diploma (ND), 50.3% had First Degree while 37.5% had Master's degree or PhD. The implication is that most of the respondents were educated

with more than half (50.3%) possessing a minimum of First degree. This could be connected to the fact that the study was carried out in a university community. It is also evident that 24.7% of the respondents were teaching staff while 75.3% were non-teaching staff. This implies that the study comprised more working mothers with underage children who were non-teaching staff. This could be connected with the distribution of staff in the University which according to statistics obtained from the personnel unit of the University, shows that women of childbearing age are more in the non-teaching category. Table 1, also demonstrated that out of 485 respondents for the study, 95.1% were married, 1.0% were divorced, 2.3% were widowed and 1.6% were separated. The result shows that the majority of the respondents (95.1%) were married.

Stress and types of stress, existing among working mothers of underage children

The understanding of whether working mothers with underage children have heard about stress, what they know about stress, the nature of stress they experience and conditions they believed expose them to such stress were considered preconditions in ascertaining the socio-cultural factors associated with the stress. This section presents data that address the above identified preconditions to create an insight into the nature of stress existing among working mothers of underage children.

Table 1: *Percentage distribution of respondents by what they understand by stress (N=485)*

Understanding of stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Working or living condition beyond ones capacity	60	12.4
Conditions that results from pressure and recent demands	58	12.0
Conditions of self-inflicted or unrealistic demands	8	1.6
Conditions that demands unusual physical and emotional re- Sponse	104	21.4
All of the above	245	50.5
No response	10	2.1
Total	485	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

From Table 1 above, it can be deduced that out of 485 respondents that have heard of stress, 12.4% understood stress as a working or living condition that is beyond one's capacity. Also, 12.0% understood stress as conditions that result from pressure and recent demands. Stress was also understood by 1.6% of the respondents as conditions of self-inflicted or unrealistic demands while 21.4% understood stress as conditions that demands unusual physical and emotional response. Furthermore, 50.5% of the respondents understood stress as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses all the other conditions identified while 21.4% did not respond to the question

on the ground that they don't know what stress is. The implication, therefore, is that a slight majority of the respondents (50.5%) understood stress as capable of taking different forms like working or living conditions that are beyond one's capacity, conditions that result from pressure and recent demands, conditions that contained within it self-inflicted or unrealistic demand and conditions that demand unusually physical and emotional response.

Most of the respondents interviewed using in-depth interview schedules also perceived stress in relation to workload, unmet goals, and situational-induced pressure. According to a 38-year-old non-teaching staff, *"In my understanding, I can say that stress is when somebody overworks his or herself, or when somebody has excess workload more the person's ability that he or she finds it difficult to accomplish the task in a given day"*. Another respondent, a 51-year-old female lecturer, related stress to a condition of imbalances in the physical and mental condition of an individual. According to her,

I think stress is a situation or a condition when your body that is, physically and mentally is not balanced or not feeling too relaxed or is disturbed which affects every other thing that you do, due to certain circumstances, sickness, or any other thing. (IDI: 51-year-old female lecturer in Igbo Center).

A similar opinion was expressed by another respondent with an emphasis on the pressure that results from unaccomplished goals. According to the 48-year-old female lecturer *"Stress is a condition or situation that puts pressure on someone especially when trying to fulfil/meet up with things. It is a mental or physical torture that accompanies an individual's unmet goal/unrealistic goals"*.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by whether they have experience any of the stress conditions listed in Table 1(N=485)

Experienced stress condition	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	466	96.1
No	19	3.9
Total	485	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The respondents were further asked if they had experienced any of the conditions listed in Table 1 which they understood as stress. The response, presented in Table 2 shows that out of 485 respondents, 96.1% had experienced at least, one of the conditions they understood as stress while 3.9% indicated that they have not experienced any of such. This implies that the majority of the respondents (96.1%) have experienced the conditions listed in Table 1, which for them, defines stress. All the respondents interviewed acknowledged that they experienced stress in one way or another at various times in their lives. A 50-year-old female lecturer narrated her stress experience as connected to her dual role of work and caring for her children. According to her:

I usually experience stress a lot when schools are in session. The stress of waking up early to prepare the kids for school, going to bed late so as to prepare things for the next school day, bringing back the kids from school, and clearing/washing things for the next day. The stress somehow reduces when the children are on holiday because I will no longer wake up so early and sleep so late (IDI: 50-year-old female lecturer in Education).

Another narrated the regularity of her own stress experience as well as things/ circumstances that result in such stress thus:

Stress is what normally comes once in a while, like in a week, two or three times. In the office, I experience it at least once a week or twice depending on the nature of the assignment. Also, when am at home, I do experience it, though not every day of the week. But I think it's because I do not have house-help. Most of the work in the house is done by me and my husband helped a little but I do most of the work (IDI: 39-year-old female non-teaching staff in Personnel).

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by the condition that relates most to their stress experience (N=485)

Condition relating to stress experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Work related stress only	19	3.9
Family related stress only	62	12.8
Work-family related stress	375	77.3
Self-inflicted stress	10	2.1
No response	19	3.9
Total	485	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 above shows that out of 485 respondents that indicated to have experienced stress, 3.9% indicated that their stress experience emanated from a work-related stressor, 12.8% believed that the stress they experienced is family related, 77.3% indicated that theirs relates to work-family stress, 2.1% indicated that the stress they experienced was self-inflicted while 3.9% gave no response. It can therefore be deduced from the table that the majority of the respondents that have experienced stress (77.3%), was due to work-family conditions.

Work-family-induced stress was equally indicated by the majority of the respondents that were interviewed. A 36-year-old non-teaching staff narrated how the continuous absence of a mother in the home due to work can result in future stress. She said:

Working and raising children is not easy and causes lots of stress. For instance, the woman will go out very early in the morning, leaving the children with the house-help and comes back late in the evening without knowing what has happened. By the time you realize it, your children will start misbehaving and such behaviour can also add to your stress. So, trying to maintain both to avoid such is not easy and leads to stress too (IDI: 36 year old non-teaching, female staff Bursary).

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by how often they experience such condition (N=485)

Regularity of stressful conditions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Once in a while	199	41.0
Once or twice a month	34	7.0
Once or twice a week	34	7.0
Three or four time a week	97	20.0
Only during working days	70	14.4
Every day of the week	32	6.7
No response	19	3.9
Total	485	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

To get a clearer picture of the stress experience, respondents who have experience stress were asked how often they experienced such. Table 4 shows that 41.0% of such respondents experienced stress once in a while, and 7.0% of such respondents had such an experience once or twice a month. Another 7.0% indicated that they experienced stress once or twice a week, 20.0% of such respondents experience stress three to four times a week while 14.4% experienced the same during every working day. Furthermore, 6.7 % indicated that they experience such stressful conditions every day of the week while 3.9% did not respond to the question. It, therefore, implies that more than one-third of the respondents (41.0%) believed that they experience stress once in a while.

Indices of stress among working mothers of underage children

Measuring stress in a social context is not easy given the multiplicity of stress indicators and how such indices vary from one social context to another. However, 15 items were adopted from Cohen et al. (1983) stress measurement indices and contextualized within the everyday life of a working mother with underage children. This is to understand the aspects of their social lives where stress is likely to manifest, as well as to enable a neutral measure of their stress experience, through a

summation of the stress experience scores. **Table 5:** Percentage distribution of respondents by how often they experience stress indicators (N = 485) (% in parenthesis)

Stress Indices	Never	Rarely	Sometime s	Most times	Always	Total
Have a hard time feeling really relaxed.	63 (13.0)	93 (19.2)	250 (51.5)	69 (14.2)	10 (2.1)	485(100)
Get severe or chronic headaches	48 (9.9)	139 (28.7)	212 (43.7)	80 (16.5)	6 (1.2)	485(100)
Lack of physical energy.	40 (8.2)	148 (30.5)	243 (50.1)	49 (10.1)	5 (1.0)	485(100)
Barely have time to sleep	78 (16.1)	129 (26.6)	190 (39.2)	71 (14.6)	17 (3.5)	485(100)
Takes pills to relax and sleep	332 (68.5)	65 (13.4)	63 (13.0)	23 (4.7)	2 (0.4)	485(100)
Feels tired after sleeping	81 (16.7)	138 (28.5)	189 (39.0)	64 (13.2)	13(2.7)	485(100)
Have to work late	61 (12.6)	83 (17.1)	217 (44.7)	95(19.6)	29 (6.0)	485(100)
Feels too weak to have sexat the end of the day	50 (10.3)	82 (16.9)	225 (46.4)	112 (23.1)	16 (3.3)	485(100)
Arrive at work late	89 (18.4)	153 (31.5)	188 (38.8)	36 (7.4)	19 (3.9)	485(100)
Worry a lot	107 (22.1)	158 (32.6)	154 (31.8)	56 (11.5)	10 (2.1)	485(100)
Experience difficulty relaxing at work	77 (15.9)	154 (31.8)	185 (38.1)	53 (10.9)	16 (3.3)	485(100)
Feel very angry inside	168 (34.6)	143 (29.5)	141 (29.1)	27 (5.6)	6(1.2)	485(100)
Really don't feel good about yourself	242 (49.9)	117 (24.1)	102 (21.0)	20 (4.1)	4 (0.8)	485(100)
Goes to bed very late	36 (7.4)	60 (12.4)	241 (49.7)	97 (20.0)	51(10.5)	485(100)
Feel like other people don't understand you	72 (14.8)	123 (25.4)	218 (44.9)	60 (12.4)	12 (2.5)	485(100)

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

Table 5 contained descriptive information on how often working mothers of underage children go through certain experience that indicates stress. Data presented in the first row shows that out

of 485 respondents, 13.0% do not experience a hard time feeling relaxed, 19.2% indicated that they rarely had such experience, 51.5% indicated that they sometimes have such experience, 14.2% indicated that most times they have a hard time relaxing while 2.1% indicated that they have such experience always. This implies that the majority of the respondents sometimes find it hard to feel relaxed. In the second row, 9.9% of the respondents indicated that they have never experienced severe or chronic headaches, 28.7% opined that they rarely experience such headaches while 43.7% indicated that they sometimes experience severe or chronic headaches. Also, 16.5% indicated that they experience severe or chronic headaches most times while 1.2% opined that they have such experience always. This implies that the majority of the respondents (61.4% i.e., summation of sometimes, most times and always responses) experience severe or chronic headaches at different intervals of their life.

In the third row, it was evident that out of the 485 respondents, 8.2% opined that they never lack physical energy, 30.5% opined that they do lack physical energy on rare occasions, 50.1% indicated that sometimes they lack physical energy, 10.1% indicated most times while 1.0% believed that they always lack physical energy. This implies that more than half of the respondents (50.1%) sometimes lack physical energy, having exhausted the same in working at the office and attending to their domestic roles in the family. The fourth row shows that out of the 485 respondents, 16.1% have never been in a position where they barely have time to sleep, 26.6% rarely find themselves in such situations, 39.2% indicated that sometimes, they rarely have time to sleep, 14.6% opined that most times they barely have time to sleep while 3.5% indicated that they don't always have time to sleep. It can therefore be deduced from the forgoing that, more than half of the respondents (57.3%) barely have time to sleep. The fifth row shows that 68.5% of the respondents do not resort to taking pills to enable them to relax and sleep, 13.4% rarely took a pill to relax and sleep, 13.0% do that sometimes, 4.7% do that most times while only 0.2% do always take pill to relax and sleep. This implies that though the majority of the respondents in the fourth row indicated that they barely have time to sleep, most of them (68.5%) do not resort to taking pills to enable them to sleep.

The sixth row shows that 16.7% of the respondents do not feel tired after sleeping as evident in some chronic stress conditions, 28.5% do have such feelings but on rare occasions while 39.0% sometimes experience such. Also, 13.2% indicated that most times, they feel tired after sleeping while 2.7% believed that they always feel tired after sleeping. This implies that more than one-third of the respondents (39.0%) sometimes feel tired after sleeping. Data presented in the seventh row shows that out of the 485 respondents, 12.6% have never had to work late, 17.1% rarely have to work late, 44.7% sometimes have to work late, 19.6% most times, have to work late while 6.0% always have to work late. The implication is that the majority of the respondents (70.3%) do have a course to work late at different time intervals. In the eighth row, it is evident that 10.3% of the respondents have never felt too weak to have sex with their spouse at the end of the day, given loads of official duties and domestic chores. Also, 16.9% of the respondents indicated that they rarely feel too weak to have sex at the end of the day, 46.4% opined that it sometimes happens to them, 23.1% indicated that most times, they feel too weak to have sex at the end of the day while 3.3% believed that it happens to them always. This implies that the majority of the respondents (72.8%) from time to time feel too weak to have sex at the end of the day.

Data presented in the ninth row, also indicated that 18.4% of the respondents had never arrived late to work, 31.5% indicated that they rarely arrive late to work, 38.8% indicated that they sometimes arrive late to work, 7.4% indicated that most times, they arrive late while 3.9% believed that they always go to work late. The tenth row shows that out of the 485 respondents, 22.1% do not worry a lot, 32.6% rarely worry too much, 31.8% sometimes worry a lot, 11.5% most times worry a lot while 2.1% always worry a lot. This implies that constant worrying is not a feature of more than half of the respondents (54.3%). In the eleventh row, it is evident that 15.9% of the respondents have never experienced difficulty relaxing at work, 31.8% rarely have difficulty relaxing at work, 38.1% sometimes have difficulty relaxing at work, 10.9% indicated that most times, they have difficulty relaxing at work while 3.3% always experience difficulty relaxing at work. This implies that the majority of the respondents (52.3%) from time to time experience difficulty relaxing at work. Data presented in the twelfth row shows that out of 485 respondents, 34.6% indicated that they do not have deep feelings of anger in them, 29.5% indicated that they rarely have such feelings, 29.1% indicated that they sometimes feel very angry inside, 5.6% indicated that most times, they have such feeling while 1.2% indicated that they always feel very angry inside. This implies that more than one-third of the respondents (34.6%) do not feel very angry inside as exemplified in some chronic stress conditions.

In the thirteenth row, 49.9% of the respondents responded 'never' to whether they do not feel good about themselves, 24.1% indicated rarely, 21.0% indicated sometimes, 4.1% indicated most times, and 0.8% indicated always. This shows that approximately half of the respondents (49.9%) do not find themselves in conditions where they do not feel good about themselves. This is probably because the stress associated with motherhood equally has some sense of self-actualization attached to it, especially within the context of African culture. Data presented in the fourteenth row shows that out of 485 respondents, 7.4% indicated that they do not go to bed very late, 12.4% opined that they rarely go to bed very late, 49.7% indicated that sometimes, they do go to bed very late, 20.0% believed that most times, they go to bed very late while 10.5% indicated that they always go to bed very late. This implies that nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) sometimes go to bed very late and if added to the 30.5% that go to bed late most times and always; it means that the majority of the respondents (80.2%) go to bed very late. In the fifteenth row, 14.8% of the respondents indicated that there was never a time they feel like other people don't understand them while 25.4% indicated that they rarely feel like other people don't understand them. Also, 44.9% indicated that sometimes, they feel like other people don't understand them, 12.4% indicated that they have this feeling most times while 2.5% indicated that they always have such feeling. This implies that more than half of the respondents (59.8%) at one point or another feel like other people do not understand them.

Taking all data presented in Table 5 into account, it is evident that all the respondents had at least one indicator of stress manifesting in an aspect of their life, which implies that all experience stress but in different magnitudes. However, one cannot use one or two indicators to ascertain the proportion that feels stress more. Consequently, the average stress of the respondents was obtained by dividing their general stress score by the number of respondents. Respondents whose stress scores were below the average point were re-coded as experiencing lesser stress, while those from the average point and above were re-coded as experiencing more stress. The result is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: *Percentage distribution of respondents by their stress experience using the average stress experience of all the respondents as the intercept point (N=485)*

Stress experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less stress	234	48.2
More stress	251	51.8
Total	485	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

Table 6 above shows that out of the 485 respondents, 48.2% experience less stress while 51.8% experience more stress. This implies that more than half of the respondents (51.8%) experience more stress judging by the average stress experience of all. An attempt was equally made to obtain data on how the stress, experienced by working mothers of underage children affects them. Information obtained through in-depth interviews revealed that among other things, stress impacts negatively on the health of working mothers of underage children. One of the respondents with respect to how stress affects working mothers said:

The effect is much especially health-wise. Stress makes mothers to experience so many sicknesses, some mothers suffer high Bp because of the stress. When a working mother is pregnant and nursing a child, everything will be on her, she will do housework, she will think about cooking, think about office work and all these things weighs her down and could lead to complications in the pregnancy (IDI: 36-year-old non-teaching in Bursary).

Another respondent while noting that stress affects working mothers of underage children negatively equally added that their children are also affected in the process. She said:

The stress affects mothers; especially their health and it also have an effect on the children, because the mother will not always be there for them. Children like playing and will always want to play with their mother but the mother will not avail herself, because she will be thinking of what and how to do her work. The anxiety that comes from such stressful condition gives rise to an attitude that also affects the children because when they need you, you are not available for them (IDI: 51-year-old female lecturer in Igbo Center).

Another respondent indicated that the stress effect is multidimensional and can manifest in different ways. According to her:

Stress can lead to regular ill health, it can lead to quick aging, it leads to pains, body aches, and it causes a lot of things like mental ill-health. The stress of working mothers can also have an effect on the working mothers' children if she transfers the aggression to the children whenever she is so tired and they do something, she will yell at them. This will make the children avoid their mother and at the same time keep to themselves which is not an ideal thing as you may lose the kids to the influence of the peer group (IDI: 40-year-old non-teaching staff Medical Center).

Given the various effects of stress identified, the respondents were further asked about the ways or mechanisms they put in place to reduce their stress experience. Planning and proper allocation of time was common in all the responses obtained. For example, one of the respondents emphasized proper allocation and mapping of time thus:

For me, I can say that working mothers should map out time table on what to do and when to do it. This is because, no matter what you do, there must be work in the office and at home, all you need to do is to map out time table of what to do every day after work and even at the office. For example, as I earlier told you, I mapped out time table on how many emails I will treat in a day in the office and at home the days to wash cloth, clean the house, cook soup, and do other pressing work (IDI: 39-year-old non-teaching staff in Personnel).

In a similar way, another respondent indicated that she maps out daily her daily routine in a way that accommodates things she needed to do without stressing her much. According to her:

I draw out time table on how to put all these things, I don't try to labour myself again, I mapped out time table like Monday the things I will do, on Tuesday and the rest of the days to enable me to look at my children, like in their homework and what they are passing through emotionally and their social life. I do map out timetables to cover office work and family work (IDI: 50-year-old female lecturer in Education).

Husband's attitude towards domestic duties, education, and stress among working mothers of underage children

Husbands who support their wives in the performance of domestic duties like cooking for the family, bathing the children, taking the children to school, and assisting the children in their homework in a regular order that is from the average point and above, were in the current study regarded as having a positive attitude towards domestic duties. Consequently, those whose rates of assistants to their wives, in the performance of domestic duties were below the average attitude score were regarded as having negative attitudes. Husband's attitude towards domestic duties is regarded as socio-cultural because it is essentially embedded in the cultural conception of gender roles in the family. An attempt was thus made below to cross-tabulate husbands' attitude towards domestic duties with the respondents' stress experience to find out if husbands' attitude relates to the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. Education was the second socio-cultural variable associated with the spouse that was also cross-tabulated with the respondents' stress experience to ascertain how it relates to the stress experience of working mothers of underage children.

Table 7: Respondents husband's attitude and stress experience (N=485)

Stress Experience	Husband's attitude		Total	
	Negative	Positive		
Lesser stress	55 (38.5)	179 (52.3)	234 (48.2)	$\chi^2 = 7.778;$ df=1; p<0.004

More stress	88 (61.5)	163 (47.7)	251 (51.8%)
Total	143 (100%)	342 (100%)	485 (100%)

Source: *Field Survey, 2021*

Data presented in Table 7 shows that 61.5% of the respondents whose husbands have a negative attitude towards domestic duties experience more stress while only 47.7% of respondents whose husbands have a positive attitude towards domestic duties experience more stress. Also, 38.5% of respondents whose husbands have negative attitudes towards domestic duties experience lesser stress while more than half of the respondents (52.3%) whose husbands have positive attitudes towards domestic duties experience lesser stress. This indicates that working mothers whose husband exhibits positive attitude towards domestic duties experience lesser stress. Furthermore, with a Chi-square value of 7.78; $df = 1$ and $p < 0.004$, it shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the husband's attitude towards domestic duties and the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. This implies that working mothers with underage children whose husband displays a positive attitude towards domestic chores are less likely to experience stress.

Qualitative data also pointed out the role of the husband's attitude in reducing the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. One of the respondents explained the effect of the husband's attitude toward domestic roles thus:

If a husband has a positive attitude toward domestic roles, it counts in reducing stress among working mothers. For example in my house, I know my husband helps a lot that's why my stress is not always on the increase, it is minimal. For now, ASUU is on strike, he is at home doing something and when I come back I will have lesser things to do, that's why my stress is minimal. When the husband helps his wife, her stress experience reduces and she will not feel tensed up all the time (IDI: 39-year-old, non-teaching staff in Personnel).

Another respondent explained how the husband's attitude towards domestic duties when negative could affect a working mother with underage children and how every form of assistance offered by the husband towards domestic duties will reduce the stressful experience of a working mother. She said:

If a husband has a negative attitude towards house chores/domestic roles, it will definitely affect the woman. It will be a huge burden to the women, especially when the children are still tender to help out and there is no house-help/nanny. The woman will suffer more stress. After doing the work in the office, she will come back home to tackle the homework with nobody to help in any little way. But if the husband is the type that helps no matter how little, her stress experience if it is 100%, can go down to 90% and so on depending on the amount of effort the husband puts into domestic roles (IDI: 51-year-old female lecturer in Igbo Center).

Table 8: Respondent's husband's educational status and stress experience (N=485)

Stress Experience	Husband's Education		Total	
	Lower Education	Higher Education		
Less stress	31 (47.0%)	203 (48.4%)	234 (48.2%)	$\chi^2 = .050$; $df=1$; $p > .822$
More stress	35 (53.0%)	216 (51.6%)	251 (51.8%)	
Total	66 (100.0%)	419 (100.0%)	485 (100%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 8 above shows that 47.0% of respondents whose husbands had lower education experienced lesser stress while 48.4% of those whose husbands had higher education experienced lesser stress. Also, 51.6% of respondents whose husbands had higher education experienced more stress while 53.0% of the respondents whose husbands had lower educational status equally experienced more stress. This shows that in each case the discrepancies between the stress experience of respondents whose husbands had higher education and those whose husbands had lower education is less than 4%. Furthermore, given that $\chi^2 = .050$; $df = 1$; $p > .822$, it is evident that there is no statistically significant relationship between the husband's educational status and the stress experience of working mothers with underage children.

Respondent's education, staff category, and stress among working mothers of underage children

Having taken factors that revolve around the spouse into account, it was considered worthwhile to also examine certain factors that relate to the working mother's immediate socio-contextual environment to find out how each relates to her stress experience. Two of such factors taken into account due to their re-occurrence in the extant literature include; the education status of the working mothers of underage children, and the nature of the job she is involved with, captured in the current study as a job category.

Table 9: Respondents' educational status and stress experience (N=485)

Stress Experience	Respondent's Education		Total	
	Lower Education	Higher Education		
Less stress	30 (50.8%)	204 (47.9%)	234 (48.2%)	$\chi^2 = .182$; $df=1$; $p > .660$
More stress	29 (49.2%)	222 (52.1%)	251 (51.8%)	
Total	59 (100.0%)	426 (100.0%)	485 (100%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Data presented in Table 9 shows that 50.8% of respondents with lower education, experience lesser stress while 49.2% of similar respondents experience more stress. Also 47.9% of respondents with higher education experience lesser stress while 52.1% of similar respondents experience more stress. Furthermore, given that $\chi^2 = .182$; $df = 1$; $p > .660$, it shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between the educational status of working mothers with underage children and their stress experience.

Table 10: Respondents' staff category and stress experience (N=485)

Stress Experience	Staff category		Total	
	Teaching	Non-teaching		
Less stress	47 (39.2%)	187 (51.2%)	234 (48.2%)	$\chi^2 = 5.27$; $df=1$; $p < .014$
More stress	73 (60.8%)	178 (48.8%)	251 (51.8%)	
Total	120 (100.0%)	365 (100.0%)	485 (100%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Working mothers of underage children in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka do not perform the same official role and therefore belonged to distinct staff categories/job descriptions. Some are of the teaching staff category while others belong to the non-teaching staff category. Each job could be demanding in its own way and consequently, poses a distinct challenge that could impact the stress experience of working mothers with underage children differently. Taking such distinction as a social variable, its' relationship with the stress experience of working mothers with underage children was tested. From Table 10 it is evident that out of 120 respondents who were teaching staff, 39.2% experienced lesser stress while 60.8% experienced more stress. Also, out of 365 respondents that were non-teaching staff, 51.2% experienced lesser stress while 48.8% experienced more stress. This shows that the discrepancies in the stress experience of working mothers with underage children who are teaching staff vary noticeably from that of the non-teaching staff. Furthermore, the $\chi^2 = 5.27$; $df= 1$ and $p < .014$ which therefore implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between the job description of working mothers and their stress experience.

The nature of a working mother's job was indicated in the qualitative data as capable of affecting her stress experience. However, the irony is that each staff claims that their job is more demanding than that of others. For example, one of the respondents, a non-teaching staff described how a working mother's natural job can affect her stress experience thus:

Yes, I believe the nature of the job they do affect them because if you are self -employed for instance you have time, you work at your own pace, you carry out your job when you feel like it or when you are opportune, but when you have the kind of job that civil servants do, especially non-teaching staff that are time bound, you have to meet up certain targets,

certain schedule, you must meet up whether you are ready or not despite having your home chores. So, I think the nature of job/official duties influences and cause the level of stress of working mothers (IDI: 39-year-old non-teaching in Personnel).

Another respondent regarding this said:

The type of job a working mother does will also determine the type of stress she experiences. For example, as a lecturer, everyone thinks you have time but you have a lot of things to do. That's not all, you are still expected to write and publish while also doing all the housework and taking care of the children. But if it's the type of work that gives you enough time, where you work only during the day, close before four, and have time to attend to housework (IDI: 48-year-old lecturer in Microbiology).

However, for another non-teaching staff, the nature of the job affects one stressful experience when it doesn't give room for planning. She said:

It is true that the kind of work a working mother does affects her stress. Take for example as a non-academic staff, I am expected to come to work every working day and must come on time, sign in and wait till 4: pm before I leave the office. But the academic staff only has to go to class once or twice and from there, can go home and take care of their children (IDI: 36-year-old non-teaching staff in Bursary)

Discussion of findings

Given that socio-cultural factors are multi-dimensional, social issues surrounding working mothers of underage children and vital socio-demographics were itemized and cross-tabulated with their stress experience to understand/ ascertain how each factor relates to stress. The study yielded important findings, such as insight into what working mothers at the University of Nigeria Nsukka perceived as stress, the nature of stress they experience, and how social-cultural factors like the husband's attitude towards domestic duties, and education relates to the level of stress they experience. More than half of the respondents (51.6%) believed that stress encompasses different things like working or living conditions that are beyond one's capacity, a condition that results from pressure and recent demands, a condition of self-inflicted or unrealistic demands and a condition that demands an unusual physical and emotional response. These conceptions are in various ways in line with extant literature positions on what stress is. For example, Oboegbulam (2007) noted that stress occurs when the working and living conditions of an individual are demanding in a way that supersedes the individual's physical and emotional capacity to deal with it. Mian, Rehman and Reham (2016) also adopted a similar conception in their model representation of stress which noted that the higher the perceived demand, the higher the level of stress. Also, the acknowledgement of stress as multi-dimensional by the majority of the respondents corroborates Malik, Bjorkqvist and Osterman (2017) position that stress is multi-faceted and occurs in various aspects of our daily activities.

Furthermore, the nature of stress experienced by more than two-thirds of the respondents was that of work-family related. This implies that the most common pattern of stress experienced by working mothers of underage children in UNN is that which emanated from over-demanding work and family conditions which a working mother finds hard to cope with. Nezhad et al (2010)

through their study in Iran, also arrived at a similar conclusion, that the demanding nature of an occupation mixed with family difficulties was the most explanatory feature of the stress experienced by working mothers. Dhanabhakym and Malarvizhi (2014) reported a high level of work-family conflict and stress among working mothers in South Africa. Rani and Bhuvaneshwari (2014) also noted that most women are caught in the web of managing/balancing work and family roles. Given that in the current study, such a high number of respondents experience difficulty balancing work-family roles; it is not surprising that 51.8% of the respondents, relatively, experience more stress. The proportion however is relatively low compared to Adhikari (2012) and Balogun (2014) reports. For example, Balogun study of the banking sector in Lagos, Nigeria found that 60% suffers from high level of stress-related symptoms.

Using a scale of ten indices, the study evaluated the attitude of the respondent's husband regarding domestic duties. This includes how regularly they assist in cooking for the family, bathing the children, feeding them while their mother sleeps or attends to other things, taking the children to school and bringing them back, preparing them for functions, assisting them in their homework, do laundry and goes to the market to buy foodstuffs. It was found that 70.5% of the respondents had spouses with positive attitudes in that regard. This was commendable when compared with the 60% positive husband attitude reported by Sultana and Noor (2011). It was also a major departure from Nwosu (2012) position that men in African society are more akin to playing along traditional gender roles; leaving their wives to be engulfed in domestic duties alone. Also, a cross-tabulation of this attitude with the stress experience of working mothers revealed that 61.5% of respondents whose husbands had negative attitudes towards domestic duties experience more stress while only 47.7% of respondents whose husbands have positive attitude towards domestic duties experiences more stress. With a χ^2 value of 7.78; $df = 1$ and $p < 0.004$, it was concluded that a statistically significant relationship exists between husbands' attitude towards domestic duties and the stress experience of a working mother of underage children. This was supported by previous studies (Van & Vanzyl, 2012; Vanzyl, 2012; Alenkhe & Ibiezugbe, 2015). Van and Vanzyl (2012) for example, reported that the culture of seeing domestic roles and caring for the children as exclusively a woman's job accounts for the larger stress experience of working mothers, especially when the husbands take advantage of such to abstain from offering assistance.

A cross-tabulation of the educational status of the respondents and that of their spouses separately, consistently showed that the educational status of couples is not related to the stressful experience of working mothers of underage children. For spouse education, the study found that 53% of respondents whose husbands had lower education experienced more stress while 51.8% of respondents whose husbands had higher education equally experienced more stress. Also given that $\chi^2 = .050$; $df=1$; $p > .822$, it was evident that the husband's education had no statistically significant relationship with the stressful experience of working mothers with underage children. Given that such was also the case for the working mothers' educational status, the findings disagree with Chi and Xu (2018) position of lower stress among the educated segment of their sample.

Conclusion and policy implications

Contemporary family is characterized by role dynamics as families struggle to meet up with economic demands (Yun-Suk, 2015; Egbule, 2015). The traditional notion of mothers as one who sits at home to take care of the children is almost fading away as women while maintaining their traditional obligation of motherhood, also compete with their men counterparts in high formal positions (Prasad et al., 2016). The current study found that the social-cultural atmosphere in which a working mother of underage children works has a tremendous influence on her stress experience. Among such conditions, is the supportive tendency of the husband via his attitude towards a domestic role as working mothers whose husbands have positive attitudes towards domestic duties were found to experience lesser stress compared to those whose husbands have negative attitudes. By revealing how certain social and cultural factors affect the stress experience of working mothers with underage children; the need for appropriate policy targeted at modifying the work conditions of mothers with underage children in Nigeria's public sector needs to be reviewed. Allowing mothers to work in a very demanding environment and afterward fulfil their obligatory role as a mother to their underage children could impact negatively the stressful experience which will in turn affect the nature of the upbringing she gives to the children. A social support network is not limited to one's immediate family or friends; it is essentially an aspect of the social contract on which the basis of government existence is legitimized. The implication, therefore, is for the Ministry of Women's Affairs to streamline its programme to develop more supportive programmes for working mothers in public sectors. Such a programme has to be created to address the need for support centres where working mothers experiencing difficulty can go for counselling, advice as well as direct assistance. Also, given that the current nature of global economic affairs has inflicted the rate of commuter marriages irrespective of its potency to disrupt family lives and lead to stress; public sector policy needs to favour easy transfer of married couples to enable them to live together with their spouse. This is because the study found that such cohabitation has a good predicting influence on the stress experience of working mothers with underage children. Whereas the current-day Nigerian public sector accommodates the transfer of a wife to another location of the same establishment to enable her to stay with the husband, specific policies needed to be enacted to make the process more efficient. It is recommended that policies should be enacted by the Nigerian government and enforced in public sectors to enhance 'favourable' working conditions for working mothers of underage children. This should include an extension of maternity leave to at least six months, less demanding/accommodative job times and assigned duties in tunes that do not compromise the ethos of the given profession.

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Ngozi Christina Nwadike is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She holds a M.Sc. degree in Social Work from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Her research interests are women empowerment, gender issues, and medical social work

John Thompson Okpa is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria. His research interests are Cyber Criminology, Penology and Security studies. He has conducted several multi-disciplinary researches, such as, Human trafficking and Socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. Cybercrime and Socio-economic development of corporate organisations in Nigeria. He is a Member of Nigerian Anthropological & Sociological Practitioners Association.

Nnana Okoi Ofem is lecturer in the Department of Social Work, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State. He holds a Master Degree in Social Work and Community Development from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His research interests are Community Development, Child Welfare/Protection, and Women Empowerment.

Benjamin Okorie Ajah is a lawyer and a lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) Degree in Criminology and Sociology of Deviance from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This is after obtaining a Master of Science (M.Sc.) Degree in Sociology and Anthropology (Criminology) from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) Degree from the Enugu State University of Science and Technology, and a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) Degree from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Dr. Ajah is equally a Chartered Arbitrator (AICMC), a member of the American Psychological Association (APA), a member of the International Society for Development and Sustainability (ISDS), and about to be inducted as a member of Nigerian Young Academy (NYA). His research interests are Criminal Justice, Security and Conflict Studies, Criminology, Social Issues, Conflict and Peace Studies.

Uzochukwu Chukwuka Chinweze is a lecturer in the Department of Social Science Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His research interests are health and social psychology, conflict and peace studies, and development.

Isife, Chima Theresa is a lecturer in Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Nigeria. Her research interests are Health Studies, gender issues, medical social work and development.