

# The experiences of work-life balance, stress, and coping lifestyles of female professionals: insights from a developing country

The experiences of work-life balance

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Babatunde Akanji

*Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Nigeria*

Chima Mordi

*Brunel Business School, Uxbridge, UK, and*

Hakeem Adeniyi Ajonbadi

*Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences, Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Given the limiting conditions of the gender roles confronting professional working women and drawing on spillover theory, the purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of work-life balance with an emphasis on the causes of the imbalances, perceived stress, and coping techniques experienced by female medical doctors in an African context – Nigeria, a geographical location that is considered under-researched.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The qualitative data is based on one-to-one in-depth interviews with 52 Nigerian female medical doctors.

**Findings** – Based on the findings of the thematic analysis, it is clear that time squeeze, as a well-known factor in the medical profession, exacerbates negative work-home interference. However, other themes, such as patriarchal proclivities and task-pay disparity, that affect female doctors but are rarely considered in studies on work-life balance also emerged as sources of stress and work-family conflicts, leaving these doctors to devise individual coping methods as mitigating strategies.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study relies on a limited qualitative sample size, which makes the generalisation of findings difficult. However, the study contributes to the limited literature on the implications of stress and work-family incompatibilities facing women in a society that is not particularly egalitarian, with an extremely pronounced culture of masculine hegemony that is contrary to western cultures. The article unveils the socio-cultural difficulties of the work-life demands facing women specific to the Nigerian society and experienced with a different level of intensity.

**Originality/value** – The majority of the research on work-life balance has been undertaken in western countries and has focused on various professional groups and organisations, including the health sector. Nevertheless, work-life balance is a novel concept within the Nigerian work environment, where female medical doctors, as a professional group, are rarely studied. The article also provides valuable insights into the macro-contextual features influencing the work-life balance of Nigerian professional women.

**Keywords** Coping strategies, Female doctors, Work-life stress

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The practice of medicine in Nigeria is a respected occupation, with highly talented workers trained following the introduction of western standards and ethical practices to the Nigerian health sector. However, work in this sector is notoriously intense, with growing concerns of medical doctors experiencing job stress associated with the profession (Aslam *et al.*, 2014). Evidence from developed economies, such as the United Kingdom, Norway, and the USA, underscores factors that undermine the work output and work-life balance (WLB) of medical professionals, such as high job demands and low autonomy (Walsh, 2013). Historically, WLB, as a social concept, is largely concerned with the inherent demands and struggles



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