

## **Freedom and Flexibility: Work-Family Balance of Single Female Entrepreneurs in Nigeria**

### **Abstract**

Work-family research has mainly been focused on nuclear families, neglecting other types of families such as single-self-employed parents. To what extent is the freedom and flexibility attached to being single and self-employed hinder or enhance single parents' work-family balance? Drawing on the accounts of twenty-five single-self-employed parents in Nigeria, we illustrate that freedom and flexibility form a double-edged sword that increases the spate of singlehood and intensifies commitments to work – altogether preventing the participants in the study from achieving work-family balance. The findings indicate that singlehood and a lack of spousal support cause and exacerbate work-family imbalance for this group. We also found that reconstruction of functions, and recreation of traditional masculine gender role overwhelm single-self-employed women with entrepreneurial activities – causing a lack of time and energy required to function well in a family role, thus creating imbalance between spheres of life. Rather than enhancing work-family balance, the freedom and flexibility attached to being single and self-employed remain the main source of work-family imbalance for Nigerian single-self-employed parents.

**Keywords:** Work-family balance, single, female entrepreneurs, Nigeria, role theory

## **Introduction**

The growing number of global interests in women entrepreneurs (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Marlow et al., 2009) and the corresponding increase in women-owned businesses continue to contribute to both local economies and global economic development (Ács, Autio and Szerb, 2014; Gender Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2011; Verheul et al., 2006; Wong, Ho and Autio, 2005). Over a period of 20 years, the number of women-owned businesses has increased tremendously across the globe. For example, in the US, women-owned businesses have increased by 114% (Lebowitz, 2018); in the UK, women-owned businesses contribute a staggering £105 billion to the economy (Federation for Small Business, 2018). Similarly, the World Bank (2018) and Monde (2018) postulate that Africa is the only region in the world where more women than men are entrepreneurs. For example, The Conversation (2019) puts it that 40% of Nigerian women are entrepreneurs. On the other hand, globally, single parenthood is on the rise (Gingerbread, 2020; Grall, 2016) with a particular emphasis on Nigeria (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008; Akintomide, 2017).

However, despite having the highest number of female entrepreneurs and the rise in the number of single parents in Nigeria, there is a shortage of research on single-self-employed parents and how they deal with societal and other social phenomenon such WFB. Research on female entrepreneurs has largely concentrated on western, Anglo-Saxon contexts such as the UK and the USA (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), focusing mostly on entrepreneurial opportunities and modes of organising (Busenitz et al., 2003), networking formation (Watson, 2012), process of authoring female entrepreneurs (Gherardi, 2015) – neglecting the social consequences such work-family balance (WFB) of single-self-employed parents in the global south, specifically Nigeria, a country that has experienced an increase in single working women (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008).

Therefore due to the calls by researchers such as Ozbligin et al. (2011) to expand work-family research to different types of family – not just nuclear families, but single parents as well and Casper and Swanberg's (2009) argument that single parent workers without children may deal with work-life issues differently because of their singlehood status; this study examine the WFB experiences of single-self-employed parents in Nigeria. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that employee's WFB in western developed countries is not an accurate reflection of employee's WFB in Africa, especially in Nigeria (Epie and Ituma, 2014). Therefore, understanding the WFB of this rarely study group is apposite. By exploring how

single-self-employed parents manage their multiple roles to achieve WFB in the context of a strongly patriarchal society, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and contextual understanding of WFB and role theory in a country specific terms.

Specifically, we investigate the extent to which entrepreneurial work demands and singlehood status affect female entrepreneurs' WFB experiences. We use role theory (Katz and Kahn, 1978) to understand the patterns of WFB among single-self-employed parents and how they achieve and maintain balance between their assorted life roles. To accomplish our goal, we interpretively explore one critical question: How would you describe the patterns of your WFB, considering your status as 'single' and your roles as entrepreneurs, mothers, and caregivers?

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we present a briefly present WFB and role theory. WFB. This is followed by a brief discussion on single-self-employed parents and the Nigeria context. Next, we explain our research methodology. We then present the findings of our empirical inquiry. In the penultimate section, we present the discussion of our findings and then present conclusion, limitation and agenda for future research.

### **Work-Family Balance and Role Theory**

WFB has always been understood from a role conflict perspective (for work-family conflict [WFC]) or a role accumulation perspective (for work-family enrichment [WFE]) (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). However, using a role balance perspective, researchers have found that WFB is conceptually and empirically different from WFC and WFE (Carlson, Grzywacz and Zivnuska, 2009; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007). WFB is the quest for balance between conflicting work and family roles. This is because participation in one role (often work) has often made desired participation in another role (usually family) difficult (Shaffer, Joplin and Hsu, 2011).

Due to the multifaceted nature of WFB concept (McCarthy et al., 2013), a generally acceptable definition of the term is elusive. While some researchers equate balance with absence of (or low levels) of conflict, or low levels of negative spillover between work and family roles (Buffardi et al., 1999); others such as Frone (2003) defined 'balance' as the simultaneous experience of low conflict and high enrichment between work and family roles. Researchers often use conflict and enrichment to define balance between work and family roles (Casper et al., 2014). Based on Buffardi et al. (1999) and Frone (2003), could then be defines as a 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and home', with minimum role

conflict (Clark (2000, p. 751). Role theory, deals with individual conflicting and demanding roles and interpersonal relationships (Katz and Kahn, 1978). In their roles at work and at home, employees are confronted with role expectations which can be fulfilled by certain behaviours (Rodham, 2000). However, participation in multiple life roles can be described and understood by scarcity and enrichment perspectives (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; Frone, 2003).

Individual participation in multiple life roles can be described from two perspectives: scarcity and enhancement. According to the scarcity perspective, human energy is fixed and limited (Barnett and Gareis, 2006). As a result, when an individual engages in multiple roles, the roles compete for his/her limited time and energy. Thus, time and energy used in one life domain (e.g. work) become scarce for use in another domain (e.g. family) (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014). This is one of the reasons why people performing multiple life roles with conflicting demands often have difficulties in performing each role successfully (Ruderman et al., 2002). Being involved in multiple roles often causes conflicts between work and family domains (Barnett and Gareis, 2006; Maertz and Boyar, 2011). Enhancement perspective, on the other hand, suggests that involvement in multiple roles is beneficial because experience in one role positively affects experience in the other role (Frone, 2003). This means that engaging in multiple roles enhances individuals' overall available energy (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014).

Even though the extant literature has been dominated by the scarcity perspective (Barnett and Gareis, 2006), both perspectives have been found to best describe individuals' involvement in multiple roles, which is important for gaining a better understanding of employees' WFB (Frone, 2003; Rothbard, 2001). What is the impact of the flexibility and freedom associated with singlehood and being self-employed on WFB? How do single female entrepreneurs manage and balance their roles as self-employed women, mothers, and caregivers? The majority of the WFB research undertaken on normal nuclear families settings. In response to calls by researchers (such as Ozbligin et al., 2011), to expand work-family research to different types of family – not just nuclear families, this study examines single-self-employed parents WFB. We aim to examine whether their luxury of freedom flexibility and flexibility and involvement in multiple roles contribute to WF balance (enhancement) or imbalance (scarcity).

### **Single-Self-Employed Parents: The Nigerian Context**

Recent studies have included single workers in the work-life literature (Casper and Swanberg, 2009; Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga, 2007). Research has indicated that single parents do experience a higher WFC than coupled parents (Duxbury et al., 1994; Pedersen and Minnotte, 2012). For example, Baxter and Alexander (2008), in their study undertaken in Australia, found that single mothers experience a higher level of WFC than mothers in dual-parent families. Regardless of status, however, both single mothers and mothers in two-parent families have to deal with the conflicting roles of work and family (Reimann, Marx and Diewald, 2019). While dual-parent families share the demands of family between the two parents, single parents, in contrast, are solely responsible for negotiating and striking a balance between work and family roles (Voydanoff, 1988).

Women account for 80% of business start-ups in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Kitching and Woldie, 2004) and Nigeria, according to one BBC report (2017), has highest number of female entrepreneurs in the world. The involvement and level of entrepreneurial activities are higher among women (41%) than men (29%) in Nigeria (Adetoyinbo, 2019). This shows that more Nigerian women than men engage in entrepreneurship. The proliferated number of self-employed women in developing countries (especially Nigeria) could be attributed societal challenges; a desire for social and financial independence and many other possible reasons (Vossenber, 2013). However, despite the immense contribution of female entrepreneurs to the Nigeria economy and their recorded success rate over the years, they are impeded by many challenges and difficulties (Remi- Alarape et al., 2009). These challenges could be personal, family-, gender-, and/or market-based issues (ibid). The family-and gender-based challenges are often the results of gender roles and responsibilities that society places on women regardless of their employment status (Adisa et al., 2014). This often exacerbates WFC for women who are married with children (Adisa et al., 2016).

Globally, single parenthood is on the rise with approximately 13.7 million single parents in US, almost 2 million single parent in the UK and about 28% of South African women are single parent (Gingerbread, 2020; Grall, 2016). In Nigeria, single parenthood used to be anathema, and regarded as something that is both culturally and socially unacceptable. However, nowadays, single-parenthood is fast becoming a norm (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008). Although there is no statistics on single parents in Nigeria, practical experience and newspaper reports show that there is an increase in the number of single parents in Nigeria (Akintomide, 2017). Due to the increase prevalence of single parents and female

entrepreneurs in Nigeria (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008; Akintomide, 2017), this study explores WFB experiences of single-self-employed parents in Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

Given the nature of the issues that this study seeks to address (WFB of single female entrepreneurs), a qualitative exploratory approach (Corbin and Straus, 2014; Creswell, 2013) was deemed appropriate to advance our understanding of the phenomenon under study. We conducted our study in Lagos, Nigeria. The participants were recruited through the method of ‘snowballing’, where one participant guided the researchers to another (Ekman, 2015). We devised three theoretical sampling criteria (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to select our research participants. Firstly, the participants were required to be self-employed business owners who are solely responsible for running and managing the day-to-day activities of the business. Secondly, they were required to be single – not married. This could be as a result of ‘never being married’, widowed, or divorced. Thirdly, they should have children and other care responsibilities, e.g. care for elderly parents. We employed a range of strategies to reach and recruit our research participants, who met the aforementioned criteria. These strategies include referrals, snowballing (Noy, 2008), a local institutional contact, local churches, and mosques (Sarpong and Maclean, 2015).

While incentives for participation were not offered, 32 participants expressed an interest to participate in our study. However, following purposeful sampling criteria (Patton, 2002), 25 single female entrepreneurs met our sampling criteria. All the participants had a very good command of the English language – they were educated to at least the level of a first university degree (18 have bachelor’s degrees, and 7 have master’s degrees). They were aged between 35 and 49, all single. While 14 had never been married, 11 are single following divorce. Together, they reported an average seven years of having been self-employed. Table 1 provides the biographical summaries of the participants. We adopted a semi-structured interview style that allowed new, as well as predetermined issues to be examined (Cooper and Schlinder, 2008). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed us to elicit the participants’ viewpoints more effectively than standardised interviews or questionnaires (Yin, 2003). Data for the study was collected in Lagos, the commercial centre of Nigeria.

All interviews were conducted individually at a time and place that suited the participants. Furthermore, all the interviews were digitally recorded, and each lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each interview began with information about the aims of the study and assurances of anonymity. Participant were then asked to complete a short biographical data form to capture contextual factors like age, marital nature of singlehood, education, number of children and other basic information (see Table 1). Thereafter, participants were invited to relate their WFB patterns; the reality of their WFB considering their single status; and their roles as entrepreneurs, mothers, and caregivers. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, with participants accorded pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

**Table 1 Participant Descriptors**

No.	Pseudonyms/Age	Gender	Marital status	Education	No of Children	Years	Other care receiver(s)
1	Wilma (43)	Female	Single	Bachelor	2	5	1
2	Chantell (35)	Female	Divorced	Masters	2	6	1
3	Rebecca (40)	Female	Single	Bachelor	1	5	2
4	Fredina (45)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	4	1
5	Brenda (38)	Female	Single	Bachelor	3	7	1
6	Debrah (39)	Female	Single	Masters	2	6	1
7	Naomi (46)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	6	1
8	Catherine (41)	Female	Single	Bachelor	3	7	1
9	Kate (48)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	3	2
10	Paula (37)	Female	Single	Bachelor	3	9	1
11	Lesley (48)	Female	Divorced	Masters	1	10	1
12	Wendy (47)	Female	Single	Bachelor	3	8	1
13	Elizabeth (37)	Female	Single	Bachelor	2	9	1
14	Betty (45)	Female	Divorced	Masters	2	6	2
15	Verity (49)	Female	Single	Bachelor	2	12	1
16	Amanda (42)	Female	Single	Bachelor	3	5	2
17	Easter (40)	Female	Divorced	Masters	2	6	1
18	Helen (35)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	6	1
19	Teresa (44)	Female	Single	Bachelor	2	8	1
20	Margret (48)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	1	9	1
21	Edith (39)	Female	Single	Masters	3	7	2
22	Daisy (43)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	6	2
23	Abigail (47)	Female	Single	Bachelor	2	5	1
24	Camila (40)	Female	Divorced	Bachelor	2	5	1
25	Barbara (41)	Female	Single	Masters	2	10	1

‘Years’ refers to the number of years the individual has been engaged in self-owned business. ‘Other care receiver(s)’ means the number of other people that individual care for aside from their children. ‘Education means the participants’ level of education’.

### Data Analysis

In an iterative fashion, we analysed the qualitative data by traveling back and forth between the data and an emerging structure of theoretical arguments (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The

data analysis was done in three major stages, following Pratt et al.'s (2006) pattern. Firstly, we created provisional categories and first-order codes. We began by identifying statements regarding the participants' views of their WFB patterns via open coding (Locke, 2001) and then drew on common statements to form provisional categories and first-order codes. Following the procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), we used a contact summary form to record the provisional categories revealed in each interview at each point in time. For example, there were several data fragments that related to research question one, 'how would you describe the patterns of your WFB, considering your status as 'single' and your roles as entrepreneur, mother, and caregiver?'. After the codes were named and the categories were constructed, we meticulously reviewed the interview data to evaluate important narratives in the participants' accounts (Labov, 1997) and to see which, if any, fitted each category. Sometimes the revisited data did not fit well into a category, and we had to revise the category.

Secondly, we integrated the first-order codes and created theoretical categories. We developed two aggregate category (base on role theory): enhancement and scarcity. That is, we analysed the interview data based on the participants' involvement in multiple roles and how it contributes to WFB (enhancement) or imbalance (scarcity). These categories helped us make the data intelligible for analysis and for viable theoretical explanations. Finally, we delimited theory by aggregating theoretical dimensions. We then searched for dimensions underlying the theoretical categories that were generated in order to understand the participants' patterns of WFB. Before we present our research findings, we wish to reflect on our methodological limitations. Firstly, by employing semi-structured interviews, we could not rule out the potential impact of self-serving bias in attribution (Mezulis et al., 2004), as we invited only single female entrepreneurs to discuss their pattern of WFB based on their status and roles. Furthermore, the researchers' kinship connection to the research context might shape our assumptions and latently influence our understanding of the phenomena that we studied.

## **Research Findings**

### ***Lack of Spousal Support: Exacerbating Work-Family Imbalance***

A lack of spousal presence to offer assistance with family duties was widely reported as a major source of WF imbalance among single female entrepreneurs. Participants shared their experiences of their involvement in and having to deal alone with multiple roles within the family domain (as mothers and caregivers) without spousal assistance as well as how



combining these roles with their very demanding roles as female entrepreneurs makes WFB difficult for them. Ordinarily, female entrepreneurs often struggle to combine their demanding and time-consuming entrepreneurial activities with domestic responsibilities (Jennings and Brush, 2013). The lack of spousal support further exacerbates the pressure and role conflict, leading to severe imbalance between the work and family domains. As Fredina explains:

I used to have a husband who was helpful, and even with him I struggled a bit to achieve a balance between my self-managing business activities and family duties. Now that I am divorced, the struggle becomes higher because of my involvement in multi-roles at work and at home. I do everything alone, making WFB really difficult for me (Fredina, 45 years old).

Corroborating Fredina's statement, Barbara also mentioned that a spousal support would have helped her achieve WFB:

My work demands as a female entrepreneur are huge. It requires a lot of time and energy, and my domestic duties as a single mother of three with an aged mother to care for are also huge. In fact, they overwhelm me. Balancing these two is a big struggle, which would have been easier if I had a husband. At least my husband would have supported my entrepreneurial adventures and would have helped me with domestic duties. My being single makes involvement in multiple roles at work and home difficult...both work and family suffer (Barbara, 41 years old).

Discharging multiple roles without spousal support exacerbates single female entrepreneurs' WFB as the participants' found domains' activities competing for their time and energy. Wendy also explained:

No husband to help with my entrepreneurial activities, and no man to help with my domestic chores. My being single means that I have to discharge these multiple roles and duties alone...most of the time, they negatively affect each other. My WFB suffers the consequences of being a single female entrepreneur (Wendy, 47 years old).

Our data reveals that being single affects female entrepreneurs WFB because there is no husband/partner to help them with their self-managed business activities and familial duties. As a result, their entrepreneurial activities and domestic duties compete for their time and energy. Even though the concept of 'mumpreneurship' evinces women's balancing of multiple roles as entrepreneurs and mothers (Duberley and Carrigan, 2013; Nel, Maritz, and Thongprovati, 2010), our data reveals that single female entrepreneurs struggle to achieve WFB without a spouse to assist in discharging their roles.

### ***Breadwinner Status: Huge Family Responsibility***

Rather than taking the traditional position of a homemaker, all the participants have experienced shifts role and are the breadwinners of their family. A phenomenon which attributed to their status as single entrepreneurs. This means huge familial responsibility in terms of providing for their families. Family as a specific configuration in Nigeria is extended, thus the pressure on the breadwinner is multiple and, in most cases, multiplied. Participants' breadwinner status does not help in achieving WFB. Teresa elaborate this point:

I am the breadwinner of my family with 2 children, my mother, and a list of other relatives to support. Honestly, I don't think about work-family balance. The pressure to make more money to support my family is huge...I just concentrate on that (Teresa, 44 years old).

Here, Teresa's status as the breadwinner of her family piles pressure on her and negatively affect her WFB. This is upshot of having to support extended family in the global south setting specifically, in Nigeria. Another participant commented:

The responsibility of being a breadwinner of the family is huge and excruciating for me as a single lady. I work harder to be able pay the rent, the children school fees, pay my dad and my aunt's medical bills. I also support 3 of my nieces. I dedicate my time and energy to my business so that I can more money to be able provide for all of these people. It is difficult to create time to do other things (Amanda, 42 Years Old).

In a related extract, Helen said:

Supporting my nuclear and extended family means I must to work hard to make more money. I am a woman, but I am fulfilling the breadwinner responsibility of a man. So, other important things such as attending parent meeting in my daughters' school or attending family social functions suffer (Helen, 35 Years Old).

Culturally in Nigeria, men are the breadwinners of their families, who provide for wives, children, and the extended families (Akanle and Ejiade, 2012; Bammeke, 2007). However, the participants' status as single entrepreneurs have reconstructed this cultural position and placed them in the difficult position of breadwinners. Their WFB often suffer for the reconstruction of gender role.

### ***Less Time for Building and Nurturing Relationships***

Participants revealed that being single has considerably increased their working time, which then affects the time they spend attending to domestic duties. Participants spend little or, in some cases, no time at all in building and nurturing relationships such as friendships and nuptial relationships. Having to deal alone with work demands and, particularly, domestic

duties depletes the participants' time and energy for building and nurturing relationships.

Paula commented:

I am a single lady with many roles. My time and energy is mainly divided between my entrepreneurial activities, my children and attending to my sick dad. I really don't have enough time [for friendship], visiting and socialising with my friends suffers (Paula, 37 years old).

Another participant explained how she has tried to enter into another relationship after her divorce, but lack of time and energy have prevented her from doing so:

I have been divorced twice, and my lack of time was a huge contributing factor on the two occasions. I devote a lot of time to my business, otherwise it won't be a success. This leaves me with little time for my family, and I'm often very tired when I'm eventually around. I tried going into another relationship, but it lasted only a month because I practically have no time for it...I'm used to it (Lesley, 48 years old).

Similarly, Rebecca explained also how entrepreneurial activities including business trips deprive her chances of having nuptial relationships and how business activities and trips sometimes keep her away for weeks. She explained:

I have tried being in relationships, but it didn't work. My business and entrepreneurial activities take a lot my time. I travel a lot. I'm simply not always available for nuptial relationships...even my relationship with my family and friends suffer because of a lack of time. For example, sometimes, I don't get to see my child for days because I'm away on a business trip...so, no WFB at the moment. I think I'm used to being single...it's psychological (Rebecca, 40 years old).

Reflecting on this theme, the participants unanimously averred that they have very little or no time to build and nurture relationships. The lack of time and frequent 'busyness', which have widely been reported as features of modern life (Lewis, 2003; Rotondo et al., 2003), are practically responsible for single female entrepreneurs' inability to build and nurture relationships. Scholars have argued that relationships that are based on friendship are a source of social glue, important for wellbeing, and are important for social integration (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Uchino, 2004). However, single female entrepreneurs tend to devote a lot of their time to entrepreneurial activities in order to make success of them, thereby squeezing and relinquishing relationships. Rebecca and five other participants mentioned being psychologically attached to being single. This could extend the scarcity of time and energy for the family domain for single female entrepreneurs.

### ***The Spate of Divorce among Single Female Entrepreneurs***

The data analysis reveals the state of divorce among single female entrepreneurs and its connection to work-family issues. Forty-four per cent (eleven) of the participants are single following divorce. They explained that a change in priorities, a neglect for domestic responsibilities, and a strong desire for entrepreneurial success are the factors responsible for their failed marriages that eventually led to their becoming single. For example, Chantell felt that a change in her priorities led to the dissolution of her marriage. She explains:

My priority was just my family, but this, at some point, changed to family and my business. I gave my business the same attention and importance that I accord my business. My husband did not like it. He wanted me to change my priority to less time and attention for business and more for family...but I had invested too much money, energy, and time in the business...we could not reconcile our priorities, so we had to go our separate ways (Chantell, 35 years old).

The participants also commented on their neglect of domestic responsibilities as another reason that led to dissolution of their marriages. Women often struggle to combine the demanding and time-consuming entrepreneurial activities with their domestic responsibilities and ambitions (Jennings and Brush, 2013). Many participants agreed that, although unintended, neglecting their family and domestic responsibilities was responsible for their marriage failure. This was caused by the very demanding nature of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. A participant commented:

Yes. I admit that it was neglectful, and I think that was the sacrifice I had to make for building a successful business. Putting in the required time, energy, and attention led to abandoning some familial duties. My husband kept complaining about it, but I was determined to make a success of my business. We both could not come to a common ground; consequently, it affected my marriage and family. It's sad that I lost my marriage, but my business flourishes (Easter, 40 years old).

Wilma recounted her experience of the three factors:

I think it was priorities (I mean giving my business a high priority), an inability to attend to domestic duties (as is expected of a typical African woman) and a burning desire to make success of my business. All of these led to incessant role conflict (between work and family roles), which eventually led to the dissolution of my marriage. It happens to many female entrepreneurs who are ambitious and determined to achieve entrepreneurial success (Wilma, 43 years old).

The participants' comments show that the demands for managing and sustaining privately-owned business, the family role, in terms of responsibilities and expectation of a woman (especially in Africa), and the demands for managing caregiving role are often in conflict.

The role contention means that the participants allocate more time to their work role and less to the family role, which then results in differing role pressures.

### *A Double-Edged Sword: Freedom and Flexibility*

#### *Freedom*

The data analysis also reveals that singlehood relieves the participants of the cultural subordination that is grounded in Nigerian patriarchal societal norms (see Adisa et al., 2019), which consigns women to subordination by males. Being single allows the participants to fully engage in their entrepreneurial activities without a husband's hindrance, but it also affects their WFB. A participant commented on how the freedom destroys the 'no travel overnight and no weekend business' regulations:

To be honest, my work-family balance was better when I was married than what it is now. Then I really could not do much, because my husband would not let me. There were lot of dos and don'ts. For example, I could not go on any business trip and stay overnight. I had to be home by 6pm every day and I was to undertake no business activity on Saturdays and Sundays. Yes, I was able to spend time with my family and promptly attend to family duties, but my business suffered. Now, I have freedom, which is good for my business – but no work-family balance. Sometimes, I could travel for days and would leave my kids at the mercy of a house help. I work all the time including weekends. I think that is the price I have to pay for putting my business in order (Camila, 40 years old).

When asked about the freedom associated with being single, Lesley commented:

My time and life were regulated by my husband when I was married. I felt imprisoned because I practically had no freedom to attend to my business as I want. You know, in Africa, a man makes decisions on everything under his roof. I now enjoy unregulated time and life, but it really is affecting my work-family balance. For example, my child has been with the minder for four days now because I've been really busy with my businesses and I have not seen my mum for days as well. Not good for family ties but I have to work hard to pay my bills (Lesley, 48 years old).

Elizabeth said:

I'm single, and I have all the time in the world for my business...even though that really is affecting my roles as a mother and a daughter. On the one hand, I am happy because my business strives on the other hand, I am not happy because my family suffers. I could not discharge my roles as expected (Elizabeth, 37 years old).

The participants believed that the freedom associated with being single distances them from their family as no one regulates their time and lives, thus making them spend most of their time and attention on their businesses.

## *Flexibility*

Aside from freedom from men's clutches concerning time regulation, which single female entrepreneurs affirm that is good for their entrepreneurial success but damaging to their WFB, the participants also commented on the flexibility associated with being single and self-employment as a hindrance to their achieving WFB. Flexibility is often mentioned as one of the features of 'good jobs' (Constable et al., 2009). Single female entrepreneurs enjoy high flexibility of work and time. They referred to this as one of the benefits of being single and self-employed. However, they feel that the flexibility negatively affects their WFB. Abigail commented:

Personally, I would say the flexibility associated with being single and self-employed is only good for my business and not good for my work-family balance. I practically work everywhere. Sometimes, I will lock my children in their room so that I could have a Skype meeting, or I could talk to a client (Abigail, 47 years old).

Even though Dickisson (1997) stressed the importance of having a separate room in the home in which to work, Abigail still sometimes locks her children up in their rooms to attend to business activities. Flexibility has been argued to enhance WFB (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004; Reeves *et al.*, 2007). However, Kate described the flexibility associated with being single and self-employed as too much and not good for WFB:

Flexibility is good, but I think the flexibility associated with being single and self-employed is too much and is really not good for work-family balance. I was married so I know what it was like as a married person and what it is like now. I allocate my time and attention freely and independently, and trust me, my business gets the fattest share (Kate, 48 years old).

Another participant describes the freedom and flexibility associated with being single and self-employed as a double-edged sword that negatively affects the enactment of WF role:

The freedom is sweet because no one regulates my time and life. The flexibility is also sweet because it allows me to work everywhere and at any time. However, it's like a double-edged sword. It is damaging my work-family balance, as I could not separate work from home and home from work. It is especially affecting my relationship with my children and aged mother, I have no time and attention for them (Catherine, 41 years old).

The participants described the freedom and flexibility associated to being single female entrepreneurs as good for their entrepreneurial success but affecting their work-family role synthesis, thus damaging for their WFB.

## **Practical Implications**

This study has identified a huge inter-role conflict among single female entrepreneurs. While literature espouses freedom and flexibility as important ingredients needed to achieve WFB, this study shows that they enhance inter-role role conflict. Thus, we suggest creation of private or family time that is going to be devoid of work or entrepreneurial engagement for single female entrepreneurs. This will promote and ensure quality time and energy for the family and fresh and rejuvenated energy for the business at its time. Flexibility is one of the tenets of good work-life balance (Galea et al., 2014; Russell, O’Connell and McGinnity, 2009). However, single female entrepreneurs use the freedom associated with flexibility to harm their WFB. Therefore, in order to ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and home’ with minimum role conflict (Clark, 2000), single female entrepreneurs need to evince right attitudes in terms of using flexibility to achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and family roles with little or no conflict. It must reflect in their judgement, attitudes, and use of resources a strong will and desire to achieve good balance between their work and family roles. It will be a good practice that single female entrepreneurs respect family time and separate it from work time. Employees’ work and family lives will always overlap – thus causing conflict between the two domains (Galea et al., 2014); however, it is particularly essential that single female entrepreneurs do not misuse the freedom and flexibility associated with singlehood by limiting the influx of their entrepreneurial activities into their family domains.

## **Discussion**

This study makes an important contribution by highlighting crucial phenomena that cause and exacerbate single-self-employed parents’ WFB. Firstly, contrary to the popular notion in the literature that many women continue to engage in self-businesses in order to gain more flexibility and control required to increase work-life balance (Baber and Monaghan, 1988; Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004; Golden and Veiga, 2005; Machung, 1989; Reeves et al., 2007; Ward, 2007); The participants described the freedom and flexibility associated with being single and self-employed as double-edged sword that frees them from the bondage of patriarchal norms and troubles of corporate work – but negatively affects their WFB. Freedom and flexibility extend the participants’ scope and hours of work thus constrained and diminished the time and energy for the family domain.

Secondly, the study highlights the extent to which the reconstruction of functions, and recreation of traditionally masculine gender roles, which place single-self-employed parents

in the position of breadwinners, immensely contribute to work-family imbalance. Lack of spousal support further intensifies the recreation of gender role for the participants. Single female entrepreneurs struggle to cope with 'do it all alone' syndrome – a situation in which they shoulder all responsibilities alone. Spousal support would have created time, enhanced their energy and fostered a positive mood (Ruderman et al., 2002), which would then enhance WFB. While women in this study desire WFB, breadwinner role overwhelms them with entrepreneurial activities – causing a lack of time and energy required to function well in a family role, thus creating imbalance between spheres of life.

### *Time, Energy, and Relationship Paradox*

An interesting finding of this study is the link between the participants' time, energy, and their singlehood status. Singlehood has considerably increased the participants' working time, which then affects the time they spend in building and nurturing relationships such as friendships and nuptial relationships. Relationships that are based on friendship are a source of social glue that is required for wellbeing and social integration (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Uchino, 2004). However, single female entrepreneurs' relationships are being pushed out by an increasing lack of time, which is orchestrated by a profound desire for entrepreneurial success. This finding corroborates Lewis's (2003) argument that lack of time and feelings of 'busyness' are features of contemporary life. We found compelling evidence that lack of time and 'busyness' with entrepreneurial activities deplete the participants' time for building and nurturing relationships. The lack of time for building and nurturing relationships and friendships fuels the general perception that single people are less sociable (see Casper and DePaulo, 2012; DePaulo, 2011). Furthermore, the data analysis revealed the spate of divorce among single female entrepreneurs and its connection to WF issues. Forty-four per cent (eleven) of the participants are single following a divorce. The participants explained a change in priorities, neglect of domestic responsibilities, and a profound desire for entrepreneurial success as the factors responsible for their failed marriages which eventually led to their being single. Similarly, and relatedly, time and energy are concentrated on entrepreneurial activities, which cause scarcity in the family domain (Barnett and Gareis 2006; Barnett, Marshall and Singer, 1992). Consequently, the incompatible role demands lead to conflict and marriage dissolutions. This resonates well with Barnett et al.'s (1992, p. 209) argument that 'the more roles a person – usually a woman – occupies, the greater the pressure on her time and energy and more depleted her reserves'.

### *Theoretical Contribution*



Kossek et al. (1999) argued that a person's ability and skills to manage WF roles is dependent on having a work context that affords one with the opportunity to exercise discretion or choice. However, this is not entirely true for the participants in this study who exercised discretion and yet have an unfavourable WFB due to their involvement in multiple roles that deplete their time and energy. Enhancement, in role theory (Frone, 2003), means that involving in multiple roles is beneficial to people, because experience in one role positively affects experience in the other role. For single-self-employed parents, involvement in multiple roles lead to a lack of time and energy, as the time and energy expended in work domain becomes extremely scarce for use in family domain (see Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014). Furthermore, there is role pressure which is a resultant of the participants' singlehood status and desire for entrepreneurial success. Taken together, all of these affect how the participants structure and combine multiple roles. This study therefore argued that the relationship between single-self-employed parents and WFB is complex than acknowledged (Ezzedeen and Jelena, 2015).

While our study advances understanding of WFB among single female entrepreneurs in a non-western context, it also has some limitations, which in turn open opportunities for future research. Firstly, our study is based on only 25 interviews with single female entrepreneurs. We therefore cannot generalise our results to other research contexts (e.g. Europe, America, etc.) and research group – e.g. single male entrepreneurs. In future studies it would be of interest to include single male entrepreneurs to see if they have the same WFB challenges as women. Furthermore, this line of research offers fertile ground for probing the dark side of flexibility in relation to achieving WFB. Secondly, this study employed the qualitative research method, a future study may employ longitudinal research which would involve many samples. This would allow for generalisation of results.

### **Conclusion, Limitation and Future Research**

Flexibility and freedom are two essential ingredients widely believed to be required to achieve WFB. However, as in the case with participants in this study, these two ingredients form a double-edged sword that deplete the participants' time and energy – making them unable to function appropriately in the family domain. The scarcity perspective of role theory proposed that human energy is fixed and limited (Barnett and Gareis, 2006); therefore, when an individual engages in multiple roles, the roles compete for his/her limited time and energy (Stock, Bauer and Bieling, 2014). The competition for the participants' time and energy

favours their work-life as they spend more time and energy in this domain. Consequently, their family life suffers the inglorious consequence of lack of time and energy to attend to family matters and even to build and nurtured nuptial relationships.

The study highlight the importance of spousal support in the management of multiple role as the participants struggle to manage their multiple roles as single parents, care-givers, and entrepreneurs. A phenomenon that is responsible for some participants' failed marriages. Conclusively, we argue that long working hours and the ability to work everywhere (borne out of a strong desire for success and effort to fulfil breadwinner role) increase the time and energy expended on the work role. Thus causing a lack of the time and energy required to function well in the family domain. Therefore, the more roles an individual has to perform, the higher their involvement in all of the roles, the less time they get for each role, and the more energy that gets depleted. As recommended by Özbilgin et al. (2011), this study expands work-family research to different types of family – single-self-employed parents – other than nuclear families. Despite the contributions made by this study, we recognise that its findings cannot be generalise due small sample. We also acknowledge the generalisability limits imposed by the convenience sample adopted here, and one restricted to one group (single-self-employed parents) and one country (Nigeria). It is therefore hoped that this study will stimulate exciting research opportunities into the patterns of single-self-employed and encourage them to reflect on their WFB in terms of drawing boundaries between their work and family demands. Future research may use longitudinal design on larger representative samples to examine the boundary management and work-family experiences of single-self-employed parents and how these experiences change over time – using both male and female representative samples.

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