

Men's View of Female Scientists Work/Life Balance at the University of Benin, Nigeria

A.N.G. Alutu¹ and F.M. Ogbe²

1. *Department of educational Psychology, Curriculum Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, or P.O.Box 10322 Ugbowo, Benin City, Nigeria*
Telephone: 234 52601944, E-mail: alutuaz@yahoo.com

2. *Botany Department, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria*
Telephone: 234 52251127 or 234 8023404115, E-mail: foluogbe@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT A survey of men's views about female scientists' family and work/life balance was carried out at the University of Benin, Nigeria. The study focused on male academics in science disciplines. Out of the 10 faculties in the University, 5, science-based faculties were sampled. These are the Faculties of Science, Pharmacy, Medicine, Dentistry and Agriculture. An instrument on family and work/life balance was administered to a sample of 200 male scientists. The result showed that men realise the fact that they need women scientists to complement their efforts. They also noted that there is conflict between the demands of a scientific career and bringing up a young family. The effect of the prevailing work environment on female University scientists' work/life balance, men's views and establishment of a University gender policy were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming, that is, the consistent use of a gender perspective at all stages of development and implementation of plans, policies and programmes is becoming the norm worldwide. Gender mainstreaming was proposed during the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) as a key strategy to reduce inequalities between women and men. The underlying principle is that there can be no sustainable development as long as discrimination of one of the two sexes exists. The World Bank has indicated to the need to examine ways to deepen the links between gender equality and development. According to UNESCO (2000), how men and women are perceived and treated in a society is one of the cornerstones of any political system. Information, views, attitudes and analyses about women can help achieve maximum gains from choice of appropriate gender related interventions.

The shift in emphasis from integrating women into development to the institutionalisation of gender issues in development, policy and planning is as a result of the recognition that institutions are already stereotyped as to the roles and functions of the sexes

Sex – disaggregated data on students, staff, facilities, curriculum, finance, applications, hiring and admissions are available and analysed to

address Federal Government policy issues. The data show that males and females have unequal access to higher education. Student enrolment at the University of Benin for 2000/2001 session is typical of the trend within the past five years. Female undergraduate students were 43% of the total enrolment in full time courses. There was the usual clustering in the traditional female studies of Arts, Education and Law where female enrolment was over 50%. There was marked under-representation of females in Engineering (17.7%), Medicine (38%) and inequalities existed in Dentistry (40.7%), in Science (44.6%) and Social Science (45.4%), Agriculture (47.5%) and Pharmacy (48.2%). There is shortfall in equal tertiary enrolment in a wide range of disciplines.

Alutu and Eraikhuemen (2004) in their study on "Shortfall of female mathematics lecturers in Nigeria" noted that in the three Universities surveyed, the ratio of male to female lecturers in Mathematics is 16:1. Currently, in the University of Benin staffing position showed that 18.5% of academic staff is women

However, during the planning process of the University's 2002, 10 – year strategic plan, it became necessary to address the gender imbalance within the organisational structure. It was imperative that further surveys be conducted on organizational culture as to views and decision-making policy as regards the work life balance

Work - life balance has been a concern of

those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to the social wellbeing of the individual. According to Guest (2001), there is growing concern that the quality of home and community life is deteriorating. In the developed countries, there is increasing pressure on the labour force to be more productive and innovative, thereby increasing work-life stress. In Canada, the University of Guelph Centre for Families, Work and Well Being and the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition published the work-life compendium 2001. One of the authors of the publication, Donna Lero said that some of the changes fuelling tensions, stress and work-life conflict include family care giving and relationship maintenance, more irregular work schedules and the drive to be increasingly more competitive, productive and innovative. Among the compendium highlights is the fact that dual-earner families rose from 36% in 1976 to 62% in 2001 of two-parent families. On average, women in dual earner families contributed about 32% of total family income.

In 2002, the British Department of Industry and Trade (BDIT) published a report on maximising returns to Science, Engineering and Technology careers in the United Kingdom. It was stated that an estimated number of 50,000 women who graduated in Science, Technology or Engineering are not working at any one time. The workshop on women in industrial research titled – "Speeding up Changes in Europe" – was held in Berlin in 2003 to discuss ways of promoting women in industrial research and address the waste of talent and money.

Statistics on the proportion of women faculty within the hierarchy of the University of Benin is similar to that in other universities in both the developing and developed countries. Dallimore (2003) emphasized that if only a tiny proportion of female science graduates reach top positions; there must be a huge amount of talent that goes unused.

Most researches confirm that a work-life imbalance has negative consequences for well-being and effective functioning. This has resulted in employers in industry developing a wide range of work-life balance options. This approach needs to be emulated by universities. Universities will benefit from the research and work-life policies of industry. However, as Mühlenbruch (2003), pointed out, industry has an edge over the universities in certain aspects, for example,

flexible working hours. In academic research, 12 – 14 hours/days are still often expected. Productivity is too often linked with the time spent in the laboratory and only very few institutions address the issue.

Young people are placing greater value on a work-life balance, particularly those keen to combine work with further studies or outside interests. North America and North European researchers have dominated research on work-life balance. There is need for diverse research on work-life balance in Africa where values are different. In Nigeria, marriage is very important to women, and children are naturally expected soon after marriage. On the other hand, the studies of Ivie et al. (2002), showed that one third of women in Physics over 45 from developed countries interviewed in 2001, did not have children.

It is important to promote the contribution of women to the development of science in the 21st century, especially for developing countries, where more needs to be achieved. Although work-life balance concerns both men and women, it is more important for women because it is closely linked with the home and care giving. More women in science moving up the institutional hierarchy will mean diverse ways of thinking, bringing creativity to research. This will maximise their talents, broaden perspectives and add to the richness of contributions to their discipline.

Women and men have different views of their work environment. This study aims at documenting men's view on women scientists who more often than the men experience work-life imbalance.

METHODOLOGY

University of Benin is one of the seventy – five (75) universities in Nigeria. It is located in Benin City, capital of Edo state, in the South-South region. There are 36 other states in Nigeria. The university was founded on 23rd November 1970 initially as the Midwest Institute of Technology and became a Federal Government university in 1975. Its original objective was to produce high level – human resources in the scientific and technological fields but this perspective quite early assumed a wider focus to embrace the humanistic branches of Arts, Social Sciences, Engineering and Law. The University started in 1970 with three Faculties of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Science Engineering. The number

of Faculties increased to five in 1974 when the Faculty of Education, Arts and Social Sciences were added. Since then the University has continued to grow in the rising number of departments as well as the diversities of academic programmes. In the 2004/2005 session, the academic structure of the University was as follows:

- a. College of Medical Sciences
 - (i). School of Dentistry
 - (ii). School of Medicine
 - (iii). School of Basic medical Sciences
 - (iv). Institute of Child Health
- b. School of Postgraduate Studies
- c. *Faculties of:*
 - (i). Agriculture
 - (ii). Arts
 - (iii). Education
 - (iv). Engineering
 - (v). Law
 - (vi). Pharmacy
 - (vii). Sciences

Out of the ten academic units in the University, 5, Science-based units were sampled. These are the Faculties of Science, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Agriculture and School of Medicine. An instrument on family and work/life balance was administered to a sample of two hundred (200) male scientists.

A structured questionnaire was designed to elicit information on men's views about career women scientists' work/life balance. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. In the first section of the questionnaire, information was solicited on the socio – demographic characteristics of the respondents and a few general questions about their opinion on the study. In the second part of the questionnaire, made up of twelve items, the respondents were required to check (agree, disagree or undecided) as the case may be on each item. The third section of the questionnaire asked qualitative questions on focal themes selected.

Data Analysis: Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of collected data were adopted. The completed questionnaires were collected and their scores collated by the researchers. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the number of male Scientists who responded to the items in the questionnaire. This quantitative analysis is presented Tables 1 and 2. For the qualitative data, content analysis was adopted to analyse the

information collected from the three focal themes. The major issues raised by the male Scientists were recorded and ranked in a descending order of importance.

FINDINGS

The results generated from the analysis of collected data in this study are presented in Tables I and 2. The response pattern of men's views about women scientist's work/life balance is presented in Table 1. The number of men agreeing, disagreeing or indifferent to each of the items is reported and the figures in parenthesis represent their percentages.

The qualitative analysis of the data collected on three focal themes is presented in Table 2. These are presented under theme A – Specific factors affecting women scientists' work/life balance. Theme B - Men's views about gender issues in Education.

As shown in Table 1, 60% of the 200 male scientists sampled, agreed that professional scientists experience some conflicts in their domestic and official duties, while only 3% were undecided. This shows that men are aware that career women scientists are stressed. Despite the conflict, 93.5% of male scientists admitted that women contribute to national development while 76% strongly support that women should be encouraged to opt for science courses. All men sampled disagreed that science should be left exclusive for men. While 90.5% of them disagreed that there was no need for more women scientists in the university.

As to how their careers as scientists affect their homes, 55% of the men agreed that women's duties as house wives were affected by their careers, but 66% of the men disagreed that the women hardly have enough time for family needs. However, 63% of them admitted that the women experience family stress, which 53% of them admit they can cope with. An overwhelming majority of men, (97%) disagreed that women scientists cannot make adequate contribution to their discipline. In fact, 55% think that they are coping well with their work situation.

A large number of men (79%) consider women scientists efficient and productive within the university system, while 69.5% to 84% of them agree that efficient water supply and regular electric supply will assist women to achieve greater professional productivity.

Table 1: Response pattern of men's view about women scientists work/life balance.

A	Yes	(%)	No	(%)	Undecided	
Do you think career women scientist experience conflict in their domestic and official duties?	120	60.0	74	37.0	6	(%) 3.0
Do you think they contribute to National Development?	187	93.5	13	6.5	0	0
If given a choice will you suggest career women scientists should opt for courses in the Arts and Humanities?	45	22.5	152	76.0	3	1.5
B	Agree		Disagree		Undecided	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Women's careers as scientists, affect their duty as house wives.	110	55.0	77	38.5	13	6.5
Women scientists cannot make adequate contributions to their discipline.	3	1.5	194	97.0	3	1.5
They hardly have enough time to attend to family needs.	65	32.5	132	66.0	3	1.5
Regular electric supply will assist them to make progress in their work.	168	84.0	29	14.5	3	1.5
Efficient water supply will assist them achieve work-life balance.	139	69.5	55	27.5	6	3.0
Career women scientists experience work stress.	167	83.5	27	13.5	6	3.0
They are coping fine with the work situation.	110	55.0	74	37.0	16	8.0
Career women scientist experience family stress.	126	63.0	55	27.5	19	9.5
They are able to cope with family stress.	106	53.0	71	35.5	23	11.5
Science career should be left exclusively for men.	0	0	200	100	0	0
I consider women scientists efficient and productive within the university system.	158	79.0	32	16.0	10	5.0
We do not need more career women scientists in the University	13	6.5	181	90.5	6	3.0

The qualitative data analysis clearly showed that the two major factors noted by the male colleagues that affect women scientists' work/life balance are family constraints and cultural factors, other factors mentioned are work environment, personal disposition, economic factor and stress. Socio cultural inhibiting factors to women's entry into higher education included conflict between women's productive and reproductive roles, early marriage and child bearing and fear of deterioration of social structure.

In terms of men scientists' views about gender issues in education, 67% said there is need for equal right to be accorded male and female. 33% indicated that individual should be allowed to undertake what they have capacity to do irrespective of sex. In other words, there should not be any form of gender discrimination. Although University of Benin has a gender policy, which allows equal opportunity to all irrespective of sex, gender imbalance within the organizational

structure has not been seriously addressed. However, when asked whether gender issues should be addressed or not, 90% of men affirmed that there is the need for it to be addressed whereas 10% said it should not be addressed.

Table 2: Responses on the focal themes in descending order of importance.

Theme A	Men's view on other factors affecting women scientist work/life balance
Family constraints	22%
Cultural factors	20%
Work Environment	18%
Personal Attribute/disposition	14%
No Opinion	14%
Economic Factor	8%
General Stress	4%
Theme B	Men's view about gender issues in education
Individual capacity building	67%
Equal right to education	33%
Should be addressed	90%.
Should not be addressed	10%

DISCUSSION

Six problem areas were identified in this study; the major contributory factors are family constraints, cultural factor, the work environment and personal attitude/disposition. The first three are external factors, while the last is personal. As Finch (1997), pointed out, however as strong as women's aspirations are, there is the need for public recognition that a problem exists and needs to be tackled.

The results show that men realise the fact that they need women scientists to complement their efforts. They also noted that there is conflict between the demands of a scientific career and bringing up a young family. Men are of the view that this constitutes a major stress coupled with the non-functional laboratory equipment, epileptic electricity and water supply associated with a developing country such as ours.

In coping with family constraints, both men and women need to address time management skills, workshop and mentoring on coping strategies. Still very strong in Nigeria are cultural barriers where boys are preferentially educated. There is the persistence of cultural values and attitudes that strongly support women's childcare, family and domestic responsibilities as priority over career aspirations (Luke, 1999). From this survey 55% of the men sampled agree that a career in science affects women's duties as housewives.

Creating an enabling academic environment is one of the goals and objectives of the University's Strategic Plan. Although inadequate and broken down equipment and infrastructural facilities affect both men and women, the coping abilities of women have to be studied, considering their multiple roles. The university plans to diversify sources of funds and provide opportunities for growth and development.

Personal attributes/disposition is a factor affecting women's work/life balance. Indeed, the way women cope with the other three factors may be indicative of their disposition. These factors acting together can create a compounding effect leading to a breakdown of relationships within and outside the family. As to the economic factor, male colleagues think that women go into Science and Technology for economic gains to their family. It would be interesting to know why women opt for science and whether others not in science would have preferred a career in science.

The last factor considered as affecting the women in their scientific careers is general stress, which both men and women have to cope with.

Participation in science and technology is overwhelmingly male dominated. The full participation in the development and application of science and technology is critical to socio-economic development of African countries. There should be deliberate effort to address the gulf between men and women in the field of science and technology at the University of Benin (UNIBEN).

UNIBEN has a non-discriminatory policy in section 18, cap 452, University of Benin Law, 1990, which states:

"No person shall be required to satisfy requirements as to any of the following matters, that is to say, ethnic grouping, sex, place of birth or of family origin, or religious or political persuasion as a condition of becoming or continuing to be a student at the university, the holder of any degree of the university or of any appointment or employment at the university or any body established by virtue of this law, and no person shall be subjected to any disadvantage or accorded any advantage, in relation to the university, by reference to any of those matters."

Varying data on the main resources and inputs into the educational system are routinely collected, collated and analysed. The university gender analysis done for the strategic plan 2002, showed gender inequalities and imbalance despite the Federal Government non-discriminatory policy.

In Nigeria, gender discrimination in access to education arises from factors, which are entrenched in culture and traditions rather than law. The education of females in Nigeria has been adversely affected by political, religious, socio-cultural and economic factors, which suppressed the education of girls. Emphasis was on male education where parent's resources are limited; the boy was preferred to the girl who would invariably be married off.

In many countries, women's enrolment also decreases as they move up the higher education system with few exceptions. Women enjoy good representation in non-degree courses but their numbers decline in degree courses and further diminish in postgraduate courses. Alutu and Eraikhuemen (2004) in their study on the shortfall of female mathematics lecturers, noted that in the three universities surveyed in Nigeria one female

lecturer each was among the male Mathematics lecturers. According to Goetz (1995), gender equality goals cannot be attained without changing institutions to reflect and represent women's interests. Attention should focus on unequal access to higher education as one of the main causes of inequalities between men and women and the important role which access to all levels of education can play in expanding and enhancing the involvement of women in public affairs.

In the final strategic plan published by UNIBEN in November 2002, the university laid emphasis on the place of women within the organizational structure as worthy of serious attention. As such, gender issues were generally interwoven into the strategic plan in the specific objectives, which include creating an enabling academic environment, promoting excellence in Science and Technology and gender mainstreaming. The major thrust of the university's gender programme is the establishment of a Centre for Gender Studies. The goal of the Centre for Gender Studies is a university where every individual irrespective of sex is able to develop his/her full potential. This contributes to the shared vision of the university, which is "to be a model institution of higher learning which ranks among the best in the world and is responsive to the creative and innovative abilities of the Nigerian people.

CONCLUSION

According to UNESCO (2002), the problem facing women in higher education cannot be adequately addressed by individual institutions alone, but by a wide alliance between government, association of universities, donor agencies and other key players. The extent of integration of gender issues into strategic plans was identified as the most critical factor for success. This is because improving the working conditions of women and their participation in higher education, particularly in Science and Technology will be tied up to the overall developmental aims of the institution.

The odds that need to be overcome by some women Scientists include higher qualifications

(increase in numbers participating in academic pursuit and policy), flexible doctoral and postdoctoral programmes and special scholarship scheme. At the University of Benin, with the 2002, (10-year strategic plan), the university has mapped out a course which will lead to changing the present structural organization towards one that is more gender sensitive with shared responsibilities as more women occupy positions of authority and participate in the decision-making process.

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