



## INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT ON WORK ENGAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*In recent years there have been renewed interest in positive psychology that could enhance organizational productivity. This study is one of such studies. The study examined the influence of perceived social support and work-family conflict on work engagement. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design in which four hundred and thirty participants were purposively selected (men =252; women = 178), ages ranges from 24 to 58 years with a mean age of 36.7 years and standard deviation of 8.64. Results of Pearson r for independent group revealed a significant positive relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement [ $r=-.315$ ,  $df(428)$ ,  $p<.01$ ]; likewise, results of t-test revealed a significant positive of perceived social on work engagement [ $t=-6.609$ ,  $df(428)$ ;  $p<.01$ ]. Though, the study revealed a significant positive relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement, organizational managers should design and build into organizational structure, programmes that are specifically designed to reduce arising from work and family responsibilities in addition to introducing programmes that employees could see as being supportive and employee friendly, as these will increase the level of employee's engagement to their organization.*

**keywords:** *work-family conflict, perceived social support, works engagement.*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, particularly in developed economy, there has been renewed research interest in positive organizational behaviour research which is the scientific study of human strength and optimal functioning and defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002), since such studies can easily bring about increase and enhance productivities on part of employees, one of such study is work engagement.

In distant past, psychology has given more attention to negative aspects of human behavior such as malfunctioning, weakness and pathology, especially in Occupational Health Psychology (OHP). Then, even to a lay person, psychology literarily means repairing or healing the mentally sick or individuals with emotional problems or mere guessing of what an individual thinking internally, in most cases negative ones. This negative preconception of psychology is evidenced in number of researches on negative states compared to positive states by a ratio 17: 1 (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Bakker and Schaufeli (2001) also observed that about 94% of all researches that have been conducted so far in occupational health psychology focused on the negative aspects of worker’s health and well-being. In contrast, only about 5% deals with positive aspects. The reason for higher concentration on negative aspect of human behavior in the workplace may not be unconnected with its effect on productivity in organizations. No matter how creative and innovative an organization may be, negative behavior, such as workplace deviance could destroy such creativity and innovation. This has been one of the strongest reason scholars have been calling for more interest in positive organizational behaviour (POB) research, such as work engagement.

Work engagement was conceptualized by Khan (1990) as the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles where people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances. Work engagement

is the assumed opposite of burnout. In fact, it is research on burnout that stimulated studies on work engagement which is its opposite. Schaufeli; Salanova; Gonzalez-Roma; and Bakke. (2002a) defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. An employee full of *Vigor* will likely exhibit higher levels of energy and mental resilience while working. *Dedication* refers to being psychologically and physically involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge. *Absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, such an individual is attached and loss into the job, by being part of the job and the job being his/her part, as time passes; one has difficulties in detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). It should be noted that engaged employees are also human being, just like other workers, who are not engaged; after working for long hours, they do get tired like others. However, they describe their tiredness as a rather pleasant state because it is associated with positive accomplishments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

One theoretical model that has been used extensively to explain work engagement and burnout and organizational performance is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli, 2001). At the heart of the JD-R model is the assumption that though each occupation may have their own causes of employee well-being, these factors can be classified in two general categories (i.e., job demands and job resources). A high job demand exhausts employees' mental and physical resources and therefore leads to the depletion of energy and subsequently leads to health problems. This is the health impairment process. In contrast, job resources foster employee engagement and extra-role performance. This is the motivational process. Job resources can act as a buffer on the impact of job demands on stress-reactions and do provide motivational potential when job demands are high.

Studies have revealed that social support is an important factor that could influence work engagement. Studies have shown that support from colleagues and supervisors are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). For instance, studies have shown that supportive colleagues and performance feedback from supervisor increase the likelihood of being successful in achieving one's work goals (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007).

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) have also found a positive relationship between three job resources (performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching) and work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) among four different samples of Dutch employees. In other similar studies, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Van Rhenen, (2008) found that changes in job resources among managers and executives of a Dutch telecom company were predictive of engagement over a period of one year. Specifically, results showed that increases in social support, autonomy, opportunities to learn and to develop, and performance feedback were positive predictors of work engagement after controlling for baseline engagement Salience of job resources.

Why perceived social support do have significant influence on work engagement have found strong theoretical base in social exchange theory. Social exchange theory is built on mutual exchanges of give and take (between employee-organisation; organisation-employees or employee-employee) and as such the norm of reciprocity is the cornerstone in the development of social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960).

Moreover, the experience of work-family conflict can diminish employees' work engagement among different occupational groups (Rothbard, 2001; Weig, Hornung, Parker, Petru, Glaser, & Angerer, 2010). The task of balancing the demands associated with work and family life has become increasingly prevalent, especially as recession bite harder in the country. This has increased dual participation of couples in the organized workforce and this have grown considerably in recent time, particularly among women who used to be fully time house wife when the earning of the man can take care of the whole family, Nigeria, just as other African

country, such as South Africa is no exception to this global phenomenon (Patel, Govender, Paruk & Ramgoon, 2006). Women, in most country, are in most cases at the receiving end of negative effect of family-work conflict. In addition to their newly acquired new work role, women are however still expected to perform their traditional roles, namely those of mother and wife and responsibilities associated with those roles in African setting, (Biernat & Wortman, 1991). Women are largely responsible for childcare and domestic duties associated with such roles (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Lewis-Enright, Crafford & Crous, 2009; MacDonald, 2004). Simultaneously performing the role of an employee, parent, and spouse may result in stress and conflict (Theunissen, van Vuuren & Visser, 2003). In fact, pressure to meet these demands makes work-family conflict almost unavoidable among women (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2006).

Because of the significant impact the work-family conflict may have on the employees' health and well-being as well as its impact on organisational outcomes, the topic has received considerable attention by researchers in recent years (Ajala, Alausa, Olabimitan, & Gandonu, 2014; Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Mitchelson, 2009; Poelmans, O'Driscoll & Beham, 2005).

Theories that have been consistently used to explain relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement are role stress theory and role expansion theory. Role stress theory is based on classical role theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). A central assumption of role stress theory is that high demand leads to stress, and the stress generated by demand from each of multiple roles increases the stress with each demanding role one occupies and intention to reduce the source of stress.

A variant of role stress theory is the scarcity perspective, which assumes a finite amount of psychological and physiological resources available to the individual to respond to their role obligations in organizational setting. Multiple roles increase the demand on resources and an individual risks depletion and/or exhaustion of presently available resources. As such, individuals must take trade-offs to reduce role strain/role clash (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). Proponents of the role expansion theory posit that occupying multiple roles enhances engagement in both work and family life. With some studies finding a positive effect of multiple roles on self-esteem and life satisfaction among multiple role occupants and subsequent satisfaction and work engagement (Barnett and Baruch, 1985). Studies on role expansion suggest that multiple roles may expand an individual's access to resources, thereby, increasing the support of various kinds (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

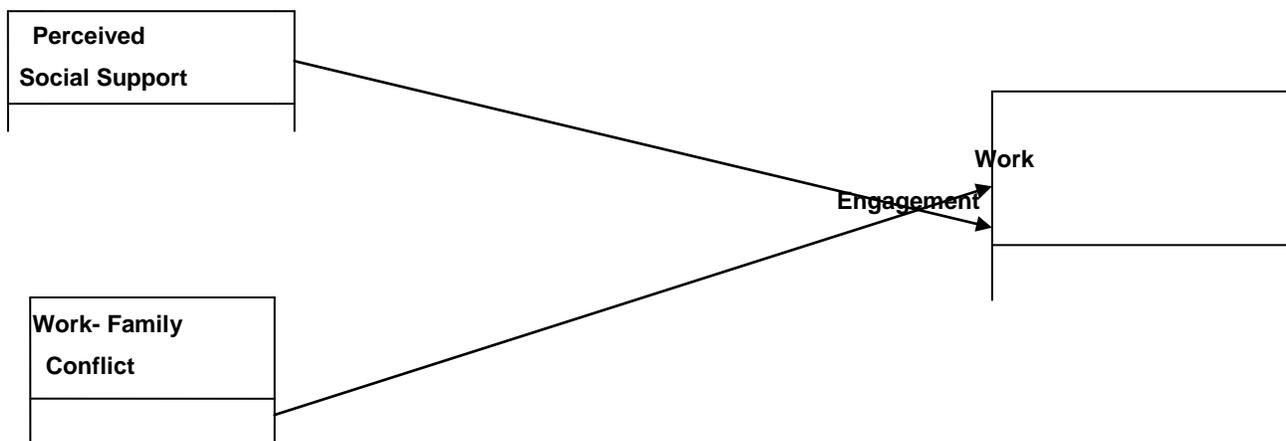
Researchers worldwide are becoming more aware of numerous advantages of positive psychology and work engagement in particular, because when a worker is engaged to his/her work, such engaged worker possess personal resources, including optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, and an active coping style, that gave such worker the needed energy to control and impact upon their work environment successfully, and to achieve career success (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008).

Studies and showed times over time, the numerous advantages of work engagement, for instance, studies have showed that engaged employees received higher ratings from their colleagues on in-role and extra-role performance, therefore, such an employee perform well and are willing to go the extra mile in the work performance (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004); survey among Dutch employees from different occupations revealed that work engagement is positively related to in-role performance, whereas workaholism is not (Schaufeli, Bakker Salanova, 2006); the study of 327 secretaries by Gierveld and Bakker (2005) found that secretaries that are engaged scored higher on in-role and extra-role performance than their non-engaged counterparts and the engaged secretaries, apart from scoring higher on in-role and extra-role performance, also had more influence on daily business.

One thing that is common to all these studies is that engaged employees perform better on a daily basis. The higher employees' levels of daily engagement, the higher their objective

financial returns. Literature have identified at least four reasons why engaged workers always performed better than non-engaged ones (Schaufeli and Van Rhenen, 2006). The most common reasons are that unlike non-engaged employees, engaged employees often experience positive emotions, such as being happy, joyful, and being enthusiastic; and this may be the reason why they are more productive. Happy people are more sensitive to opportunities at work, more outgoing and helpful to others, and more confident and optimistic. Secondly, they experience better health; engaged workers report less psychosomatic complaints than their non-engaged counterparts. Demerouti et al. (2001) have found a moderate negative correlations between engagement (particularly vigor) and psychosomatic health complaints such as headaches, chest pain. Thirdly, engaged employees create their own job and personal resources. One important reason why engaged worked are more productive may be their ability to create their own resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Finally, engaged workers can transfer their engagement to others. Crossover of engagement among members of the same work team does increases performance in such group. When engaged colleagues influence each other with their work engagement, such a team perform far better (Barsade, 2002).

**The Conceptual Model on relationship between perceived social support , work-family conflict and work engagement.**



### Statement of Problem.

Nigeria's emergence from a traditional agro-based (agricultural) society to a semi-industrial society with increasing growth and spread of formal organization and industries have made the need to study and have deeper knowledge work engagement concept in workplace more very important in present day Nigeria than ever. Even though previous studies have identified the many enormous advantages of work engagement, to individual, organizations and community at large and Lagos in particularly being the commercial nerve of Nigeria, only a few quantitative studies have been carried out in this important organizational construct to determine how work engagement can be use to enhance employee's job performance and productivity in the workplace. This gap in study have made it more important than ever for researchers to qualitatively examine variables influencing work engagement among workers in Nigeria and Lagos in particular.

Though literature have identified many antecedents of work engagement, however two of this variables stand out, particularly in our environment, because little or nothing have been done by researches to quantitatively investigated this variables: Perceived social support and work-family conflict. Due to high rate of unemployment, many employers sees an employee as an ordinary commodity who does not deserve any support from the organization, except being

given his/her monthly salary at the end of month and in some situation they may be owned months or salary and yet such employer expect such an employee to be engaged, in some organization superior-subordinate relationship are not in existence at all.

Work-family conflict is already having it toll too on the family and on employee's work engagement. In a few years back, women stayed back at home to take care of the home and also performed other traditional responsibilities that goes with womanhood. But, the recent economic situation in the world had made it more important than ever for both couple to be involved in income earning job in other to sustain the family. The situation had even made worse in the last one year in the country and this have made it more important for researchers to examine this concept and it effects on engagement at workplace.

It upon this basis that the researcher raised the following statement of hypotheses:

1. There will be a significant negative relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement.
2. Employees scoring high on perceived social support will significantly score higher on work engagement.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research design and participants

The study adopted a cross sectional survey design. The design was adopted in order to collect data from participants from different age groups, gender, religious and educational background at a single point in time. The independent variables in this study are perceived social support and work-family conflict, while work engagement served as the dependent variable. Four hundred and thirty local government employees (Men =252; Women = 178) were selected for the study using purposive sampling technique. The participants' age ranges from 24 to 58 years with a mean age of 36.7 years and standard deviation of 8.64. In terms of job position, 271(63.02%) were in junior cadre, and 159(36.97%) are of senior cadre. In term of educational qualifications, 65 (15.12%) are school certificate holders; 227 (52.79) had National diploma or Nigerian certificate of education; 114(26.51%) had Higher national diploma and 24 (5.58%) had additional professional qualifications. 203(47.2% ) of the participants were Christians, 221 (51.4% ) Muslims, while 6 (1.4% ) are Traditionalist. Participants were all married, since marriage is one of the inclusion criteria in this study, so single and divorced employees were excluded. The study therefore, purposeful selected married employees alone for the study.

### Measures.

*Work Engagement* was measured using 17- item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker, (2003). The scale consists of three subscales: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The scale was in a 7- point likert format ranging from 1= never to 7 = always. The values of Cronbach alpha for the scales have be in the range of .80 and .90. For the current study, the researcher obtained a reliability of .83 .

*Work- family conflict scale* developed by Carlson and Williams (2000) was used to measure work-family conflict. The scale is a 9-item scales in subscales. The scale is in 5-point likert format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 =strongly agree. The author reported an internal consistency 0.82 for the whole scale, while the researcher obtained a Cronbach Alpha of .83 for the present study.

*Perceived social support* was measured using the multidimensional scale of social support developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley( 1988). The scale was designed to measure

three major areas relating to the source of social support; family, friends, and significant others with four items measuring each of the domains making a total of 12 items. The items were also rated on a seven-point scale format which ranged from 1 = very strongly disagree to 7 =very strongly agree. The author reported an internal consistency of .85 for the scale, while the researcher reported an internal consistency of .89 for the present study.

**Procedure.**

The participants for this study were drawn from Ojo ; Alimosho local governments and Iba local development area. The researcher sought for and obtained permission to carry out the study in the 3 selected council from the director of personnel in each of the council after the purpose of the study were explained to the participants and their confidentiality assured. With the assistance of trained research assistants and council staff at the councils, questionnaires were randomly administered to married employees in each department with assistance of employees. They employees were informed that participation in the research work are purely voluntary and for married employees only. Over 500 questionnaires were distributed to participants that consented to participated in the study, of which 430 that were correctly filled and who are married employees were finally used for the present study.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1:** There will be a significant negative relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>
<b>Work-family conflict</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>30.00</b>	<b>8.69</b>	<b>.315</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>&lt;.01</b>
<b>Work engagement</b>		<b>92.53</b>	<b>13.48</b>			

The result in table shows that there is significant positive relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement [ $r=-.315$ ,  $df (428)$ ,  $p<.01$ ]. Employees experiencing conflict in work and family responsibilities are also scoring high on work engagement. The result implies that there is significant positive relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement. Therefore, the stated hypothesis is thereby rejected

**Table 2. Summary Table of independent T-test showing comparison of perceived social support and work engagement**

<b>Work engagement</b>	<b>Perceived Social Support</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>P</b>
	Low		223	88.69	14.34			
High		207	96.66	11.13				

The result on the table shows that perceived social support has a significant positive influence on work engagement [ $t=-6.609$ ,  $df (428)$ ;  $P<.01$ ]. From the mean score, it can be deduced that employees with high perceived social support ( $x= 96.66$ ) significantly score higher than employees with low perceived social support significantly score higher than employees with low perceived social support ( $x= 88.69$ ) on work engagement. This confirmed the stated hypothesis

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of perceived social support and work-family conflict on work engagement. The influence of gender on work engagement was also examined.

Hypothesis 1, which stated that There will be a significant negative relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement. was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis and the result revealed a significant positive relationship between work-family and work engagement, hence, the result did not confirm the stated hypothesis. This finding contradicts some of the previous studies on work-family conflict and work engagement. This suggested that participants experiencing conflict in dual responsibility of work and family duties are also engaged in their work. In other words, participants scoring high on work-family conflict are also scoring high on work engagement. The finding contradicts Rothbard, (2001); Weighl, (2010) who found a negative relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement. The finding also contradicts both role stress and role expansion theories which both assumed that multiple roles increases the stress and that multiple roles increases the demand on resources and as such individual with multiple roles risks depletion of resources available and may not be engaged at work. However, the finding is supported by role expansion theory which posit that occupying multiple roles enhances engagement in both work and family life. Studies on role expansion have suggested that multiple roles may expand an individual's access to resources, thereby, increasing the support of various kinds (Barnett & Hydes, 2001). This supports may be from couples, In-laws, couples, co-workers, supervisors, religious bodies among others. Moreover, the situation in the country, unprecedented job loss as a result recession in the country responsible for differences in findings. In other to keep one's job, employees who are experiencing work-family conflict may still be engaged at work just to safe their job, in order not to join the labour market. This therefore called for more researches in this area, particularly with the recent happening in the country's economy and in the labour market.

In support of the second hypothesis employees scoring high on perceived social support are also scoring higher on work engagement. This finding is supported by the results of previous studies. This result by Bakker and Demerouti, (2007); Schaufeli and Salanova, (2007) who found that colleagues and supervisors' support are positively associated with work engagement. The researchers found a significant positive relationship between colleagues supports and performance feedback from supervisor and likelihood of being successful in achieving one's work goals. This suggests that when employees perceived her organization as being supportive, such perception will positively enhance work engagement. This findings is also support by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who a positive relationship between three job resources (performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching) and work engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) among four different samples of Dutch employees. This result is further supported by Gouldner's Social exchange theory (1960), which is built on mutual exchanges of give and take.

The study examined the influence of perceived social support and work-family conflict on work engagement. The findings revealed that a significant positive influence of work-family conflict and perceived on work engagement. Though, the findings revealed positive relationship between work-family conflict and work engagement, organizational managers need to have an in-built social support mechanisms that could mediate the influence of conflict from family interacting with work responsibilities, since high demand from both could leads to stress and such stress could deplete available resources available to such work and subsequent withdraw. Though, the situation in the country may artificially forced employees to be engaged to their work, irrespective of strain in family and work interaction, yet programme such as flexible work schedule, child day-care services, health service, loan facilities, flexible leaves should be available so that, workers can successfully combine both family and work together since they have access to multiple sources of support from home and work that could mediate the strain



arising from performing both roles. Moreover, employees are more likely to reciprocate such support in form of commitment to such organization in form of work engagement. Despite its significant contributions to positive psychology in this part of the world, this study has its own limitations. Firstly, the study of this nature should have large sample size and spread across the country for a wider generalization. Secondly, there are other variables that could influence work engagement that the study could not cover. For instance, variables such as job status, managerial position, age among other factors could also have significant influence on work engagement. It may, therefore be of immense benefits if future researches in this area can take those variables into consideration among large sample size and spread over the country.

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