

Socio-cultural Career Progression Barriers for Women in Academics: A Case of the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2017/31674

Editor(s):

(1) David A. Kinnunen, Department of Kinesiology, California State University Fresno, USA.

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Reviewers:

(1) Hannah Mills Mechler, Texas Woman's University, Texas, USA.

(2) Muhammad Riaz Khan, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Pakistan.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/17887>

Original Research Article

Received 19th January 2017
Accepted 13th February 2017
Published 18th February 2017

ABSTRACT

Gender challenges in career remains a deterrent to career progression and has largely affected the female population in the workplace environment. In Nigerian society, women have a quite significant socio-cultural role. This study, therefore, examined the understandings of women academics on the cultural family issues that serve as barriers to their careers. The study is a contribution to the existing literature on women academics' career experiences which have been less investigated in developing countries compared to the developed ones. In doing this, the study tried to provide explanations to the impact of cultural family roles of women in achieving progression in their careers, using the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Nigeria as a case. The study utilized a mixed research approach to investigate this relationship. The qualitative data was used to corroborate quantitative findings. The study found that the socio-cultural roles of women as wives and mothers play a crucial role in their career progression as academics. The impact of a partner's support plays a crucial role in either the academics family or her partners

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family's ability to support her career thereby facilitating academic career progression. Also, a coping strategy that has been widely explored has been the sourcing for assistance with executing some of the socio-cultural roles of women.

Keywords: Academic; career; socio-cultural; women; progression.

1. INTRODUCTION

The inability to progress in a particular career causes frustration. Barriers within an organisation may prevent some employees from maximising their potential or marginalise a set of employees [1]. Such barriers may include favouritism, organisational policies, ethnicity, gender, etc.

Gender challenges in career remains a deterrent to career progression and has largely affected the female population in the workplace environment. Although gender equity has continued to receive global recognition as an issue of policy framework, as is evident from the efforts of the international development community to "mainstream" gender issues across the policy process [2]. The concept of gender mainstreaming is aimed towards introducing gender dimension in the policy process, both on international as well as the domestic front, involving not only the departments or ministries specifically dealing with women issues but rather all the concerned actors across a wide range of policy areas. The purpose is to make gender issues a vital consideration of not only the policy makers but the implementers as well as the evaluators, working both in the public and private sectors, thus promising to incorporate gender aspect into all national and international governance [3].

According to the United Nations [4] women who constitute over 49% of the world population have not achieved much equality in any country of the world. Gender inequality is widespread in virtually all employment sectors. Statistics shows that women are well represented in business administration enrollment figures, and the rapid expansion of this sector has given them a healthy share of lower and middle-level management positions. Their progress to top executive jobs is however blocked.

Based on existing knowledge on this concept, this study, therefore, seeks to investigate the career progression barriers for women in Academia. This study focuses more on perceived barriers which result from the multiple roles of

women as wives and mothers and academicians using the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Nigeria as a case. This is so considering the strategic status of the institution in the country.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, took off initially as the Federal Advanced Teachers College for Special Education FATC (SE), in May 1977, with academic activities taking off on 5th October 1977. This was the culmination of years of planning dating back to October 1974, when the then Head of State declared the Government's intention to establish a National Centre for Special Education Studies [5].

At its inception in 1977, the College was officially affiliated/attached to the University of Ibadan, by the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) for growing, supervision and monitoring. All the earlier programmes of the College were conjointly developed and produced by the University Of Ibadan Institute Of Education and the Department of Special Education; the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) as the NERDC was then called; the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) Special Education Department; and the College itself after many workshops and retreats. All teaching and learning activities including lecturing by staff, examinations (question setting and marking), teaching practice and other practicums were supervised and monitored by the University of Ibadan through the Institute of Education and the Department of Special Education. In the end, the certificate awarded was that of the University of Ibadan. This arrangement continued until 1993/94 session, when the College, considering Decree 4 of 1986, as amended by Decree 6 of 1993, which granted autonomy to all Federal Colleges of Education, had to emerge and started awarding the official National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), certificates [5].

The institution, according to [6] has the best-qualified Staff in Special Education not only in Nigeria but West, North, East and Central Africa.

The College is the only one of its kind in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa. It has the largest conglomeration of disabled students that could be found in any higher institution in Nigeria and the largest concentration of specialised facilities for teaching and training of teachers of the Handicapped in Nigeria.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMING

The theoretical framework adopted for this study will be as such as used and combined by [7]. Adesinaola in analysing marital roles and career among female academics in selected universities in Lagos and Ogun state combined both the Human role theory and Multi-tasking theory.

Gender roles refer to the set of social and behavioural norms that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex in the context of a specific culture, which differ widely between cultures and over time. However, in relating this theory to the marital role and career, a progression objective of women in academics the way of life which is a culture of the society determines the role which is given to males or females. According to her in the African context, women are only to be seen and not be heard. So gender role of a woman is believed to be inborn because she is created with a womb and breast for childbearing while the male has much strength to protect and able to do strenuous jobs. In the African context, women are often expected to contend with domestic and family responsibilities. In conceptualising the gender roles, she utilised the role theory [7].

Role theory is a perspective in sociology and in social psychology that considers most of the everyday activity to be the acting out of socially defined categories (e.g., mother, manager, and teacher) [8]. Each social role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviour a person has to face and to fulfil. The model is based on the observation that people behave in a predictable way, and that an individual's behaviour is context specific, based on social position and other factors. The theory posits the following propositions about social behaviour: The division of labour in society takes the form of the "interaction among heterogeneous specialized positions that we call roles; Social roles included "appropriate" and "permitted" forms of behaviour, guided by social norms, which are commonly known and hence determine expectations; When individuals

approve of a social role (i.e., they consider the role "legitimate" and "constructive"), they will incur costs to conform to role. Role theory in this study is relevant as the barriers investigated in this study are such that emanates from their social roles as women regarding their position as wives and mothers.

The Role theory posits that there is an expectation for each to carry out their roles. However, with globalisation and western world women getting more involved in various careers including Academia, African women too have joined the wave leading to a multitasking position that requires the combination of their African contextual role as wives and mother to be combined with expectations of their individually pursued careers. According to [9], **multitasking** is a "mythical activity in which people believe they can perform two or more tasks simultaneously as effectively as one." The term is derived from computer multitasking. An example of multitasking is taking phone calls while typing an email. The term "multitasking" originated in the computer engineering industry. It was used to refer the ability of a microprocessor to apparently process several tasks simultaneously. Empirical studies investigating this concept have found interference in executing more than one activity at the same time [10]. [11] found that decisions to switch task reflected either the reward provided by the current task or the availability of a suitable opportunity to switch (i.e. the completion of a subgoal).

As a married woman and an academician women are left to multi-tasking which ranges from tasks that include her sexual and emotional obligations shared with her husband as a wife; sisterly role to her siblings; daughterly role to her parents; sister-in-law role to her husband's siblings and daughter in law roles to her husband's parents; motherly role as a mother to her kids, with her husband, her parents and in-laws grandchildren and home management for all parties involved. Regarding her career, women are faced with the similar responsibilities and aspirations as her male counterparts. These roles include Lecturer to her students, Mentor to her students, Research to promote her career and improve what she teaches her students, writing to promote her career, Lecturer to her students and within her institution, and Administrative responsibilities assigned to her by her institution.

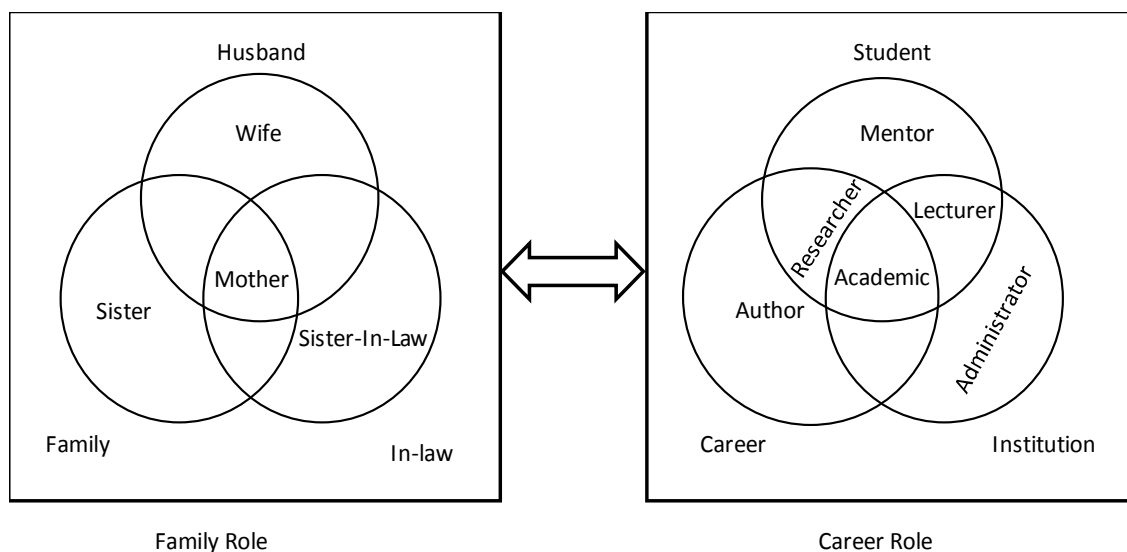


Fig. 1. Family - Academic career balancing

Source: Adapted from Raburu, (2015)

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the recent past decades, women have continued to attain relatively high levels of educational participation and outcome in the different regions of the globe. [12] suggested that there are 74 females enrolled in tertiary education for every 100 males. For example the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) estimate that there are currently 31 million undergraduate students in tertiary level education in the Asian region- a participation rate of 43%, of which 13 million are women [13].

In several countries, women have higher enrolment rates in schools, colleges and universities and have effectively dominated certain sectors such as health and education. This phenomenon, however, cannot be said to hold for a higher position with equal opportunities to see them rise to the peak of even this very career paths. There is a known global trend affecting females that see their career development plateaus at mid-management positions [14]. Although women have made decent progress in penetrating managerial levels of their careers globally, it remains obvious that men continue to dominate executive and senior management positions. [15] posits that in four out of ten businesses in the world, there are no women in senior positions. [16] opines that in the USA and UK, there has been an increase in the number of women in management at junior and middle management levels. Despite government

legislation, legal sanction, greater participation in education and increasing entry into the workforce in general, however, career advancement remains slow and uneven. According to [17], the proportion of women that advance to senior levels of their career is very small. Researchers over the years have sought to understand why this occurs, and why many women fail in reconciling ambitious career aspirations with responsibilities of the family [18].

The World Economic Forum (WEF) conducted a study to measure gender gap and revealed that in relations to narrowing gender gap, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and New Zealand were among the top of ten countries in the overall rankings [19]. Noticeable absences in the top ten were the USA, UK and Australia. According to the WEF report, no country in the world has yet reached equality between women and men [19] nor seen the end of the gender gap where women and men share decision-making power. The report also analysed the position of women in management and showed that although women were claimed to be employed for wages in similar numbers to men globally, the number of women holding managerial positions was rather not proportionate [20]. Women have been claimed to be making "uneven, and slow progress" [21] in achieving equality in managerial positions, with only 20-40 percent of management positions reported to be held by women in 46/63 countries [22,23,24].

According to [25], “men and women are pillars of society and without their equal participation in all spheres of life; no society can make meaningful progress”. They assert that as women capabilities are concerned, they are in no way inferior to that of men. Since time immemorial women have been participating in social, economic life with men but low labour force participation has not given the same consideration as men’s work have received. Women are often treated as a second class citizen who is further reinforced by the “thin” range of vocational opportunities usually made available to them. Their contributions often remain unnoticed as most women have to work in the unorganised and informal sector which comprises all sorts of work, such as casual framework, labour in family enterprises, private crafts, private schools or unskilled labour in houses. In every situation, in all key sets of development and socio – economic status, women have done inferior to men in all levels of participation and all areas [22].

[15] reveals that despite a slow increase of women in senior positions, they still crawl behind their male colleagues regarding representation in management and CEO positions in South Africa. [26] argues that despite increasing representation, women still experience difficulties in developing a career in male occupations in Nigeria. Working women have unique issues and challenges by their gender and roles in the society as mothers, wives and many times daughters of ailing parents [27]. The problem of organisational and cultural hindrances that limit women career advancement has led to huge underrepresentation and marginal status in positions of decision making.

[28] concluded that although women in academia have progressed relatively well to senior levels, a gap however still exist at the professoriate cadre using Australian institutions of higher learning as an example. In the case of developing countries and indeed African nations, in particular, the case may not necessarily be the same. [20], explicitly explains the importance of investigating the extent to which western hypothesis are relevant to developing countries like Nigeria, given the differences in socio-cultural and religious infrastructure between these environments. Culture surrounds us and plays a certain role in determining the way we behave at any given point in time. Culture is a very dynamic concept, culture defines and is defined by events that are taking place both locally as well as

regionally and internationally, it is shaped by individual events as well as collective ones, and it is a feature of the time or epoch we live in. Because it is so vast, culture is also often used as a tool to corroborate all forms of actions not, all of which may be acceptable to all concerned - and are often intimately, connected to issues of identity. Cultural frameworks are not always imposed but are open to manipulation and interpretation from many angles and sources.

A significant social feature resides in the multiplicity of responsibilities of women. In most countries, women are perceived to have ‘primary’ responsibilities as wives and mothers. But in many cases, either as a result of a preference for personal development or out of sheer economic necessity, women also go out to be actively involved in the labour market. The effective combination of all these activities and the consequent responsibilities is not an easy task for anyone be it man or woman. Most African cultures define women regarding what they should be or do for men. For most African cultures, a married woman’s major role is “to enhance her husband’s career goals by providing him with moral and emotional support”. She is expected to carry out all the family responsibilities and chores while the husband is away working. Women can only pursue their professional dreams only after fulfilling their culturally accepted roles, an expectation nearly impossible considering at what age this would be happening [29].

In most ethnic groups in Africa, women are perceived from a low status particularly the lack of decision-making ability on matters that affect her and her household. These responsibilities are often allocated to the men. This culturally determined expectation and attitude towards women, therefore, reflects in the allocation of resources towards the training of children. This explains the disparity in gender representation in schools and ultimately in workplace environments. This gender-biased cultural assumption and the subsequent differential treatment of boys and girls at home not only work against girls’ access and performance in the education but also influence their career choices [30].

5. METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the assessment of the inhibitions to women career progression in the academia using a case study of female

academics at the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. The study employed the use of both qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative data was used to corroborate quantitative findings. Based on the structure of the School not being excessively large; in conducting the quantitative study, 30 married female academics with kids were administered with semi-structured questionnaires with a purposive sampling technique but voluntary participation to investigate the challenges they face as married women in academics and combining that with their family responsibilities. In analysing the quantitative data collected, the use of SPSS 22 Software was utilised. Simple percentages were used to explain the demographic distribution of the collected data and to analyse the perceptions of respondents about barriers to their academic career progression. The qualitative data collected was used to corroborate these findings. Based on the dichotomous nature of the responses, a logistic regression analysis was then conducted to examine the relationship between female academic progression and the selected socio-cultural factors.

The qualitative aspect involved asking questions around coping strategies and experiences of older women in academics. The sample size for the interviews was five female academicians using a purposeful sampling criterion of above 50 years and a minimum of 10 years in their academic career.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data collected the mode work experience ranges were 6-10 and 21-30 who

accounted for 28.60 percent respectively making a total of 57.20 percent of the respondents. The lowest range of respondents was the range 0-5 which accounted for 10.30 percent. The work experience period 11-15 years and 16-20 years accounted for 14.30 percent and 18.30 percent respectively.

Academic qualification data collected from the study revealed that about 57.20 percent of the respondents have above the Bachelor's degree. 42.90 percent and 14.30 percent had Masters and Doctorate respectively. 14.30 percent of the respondent had Bachelor's degree while 28.60 percent had Higher National Diploma's. Data collected on partners highest qualification revealed that most of the partners to the women academic covered in the sample had a Master's degree. A total of 71.40 percent had a Master's degree; an additional 14.30 percent had a Doctorate while about 14.30 percent had Higher National Diploma.

From the data collected, 85.70 percent agreed that they think that social/cultural factors influence the upward mobility of women, while 14.30 percent do not necessarily think so. From the interviews conducted, one of the five senior female academic selected for the interviews disagreed and argued that social/cultural factors do not influence the upward mobility of women in academics in the institution. She argued that:

"Women only tend to hide behind cliché arguments and thereby indulge their laziness".

However, in the course of the interview, she expressed her life experiences as coming from a

Table 1. Demographic data

Work experience	Percentage	Highest qualification	Percentage	Partners highest qualification	Percentage
0 – 5	10.3	PhD	14.3	PhD	14.3
6 – 10	28.6	M.Sc.	42.9	M.Sc.	71.4
11 - 15	14.3	B.Sc.	14.3	B.Sc.	0
16 - 20	18.3	HND	28.6	HND	14.3
21 - 30	28.6	OND	0	OND	0

Source: Authors computation

Table 2. Do you think that social/cultural factors influence the upward mobility of women

Response	Do you think that social/cultural factors influence the upward mobility of women (%)
Yes	85.7
No	14.3

Source: Authors computation

poor background and same as her husband whom she met at an early age, and they were both determined to break the cycle. She explained that her husband has a Master's degree in Accounting and has a lot of professional qualification and works in another City (Lagos).

"He comes home only during the weekend but is always in touch during the week, speaks and monitors the kid, supports me in my career and protects me from any unfair intrusion from his and my family members".

3.1 Socio-cultural Setting

The focus of this study is focused on understanding various intersections of socio-cultural environment on the career of women academics. In achieving this, questions explaining socio-cultural setup around these women were asked.

From the data collected, 70 percent of the women in the study, agreed to have assistance at home. These assistances include maids, nannies, washmen, cooks among others, who help with their day to day roles as women in their context. 30 percent assented to not receiving any form of assistance with executing their womanly roles.

80 percent of the respondents answered "Yes" to having supportive partners while 20 percent disagreed to not having supportive partners. The role of partners certainly does influence one's career. In the course of the interviews, one of the interviewed senior academics argued that:

"your partner determines how far you can go in any career If your partner is not supportive your career will feel like a nightmare".

In explaining how her husband supports her career one of the respondents claimed that: *"I could not have any publication put out without my husband first reading through, He is my first reviewer. We set targets for each year together with regards each other's career".* Another respondent argued that:

"Your partner just has to be in support, or you might quit the career out of frustration or leave the relationship, but a choice has to be made. Otherwise, you will not enjoy both home and career. Your partner is your

closest nucleus, and the energy just has to be positive".

With regards to the support from their direct family, almost all the women alluded to their personal (nee) family being supportive. In the course of the interviews, one of the respondents argued that: *"Why Won't your family be supportive especially when they see you climbing through the ranks, everyone wants their children to be successful".* Another respondent said:

"They may only be sceptical at the initial stages due to fear for its impact on your home and which is actually when you need the most support, but as you mature in the career they begin to become more supportive".

With regards to whether partner's family is supportive or not 75 percent agreed while 25 percent did not agree to have supportive partner's family. One of the senior interview respondents argued that: *"as long as I can cater to my husband and my children (their grandchildren, nephews and nieces) are happy; my husband does not complain then it's nobody's business".* Another respondent maintained that: *"one's partner is meant to ensure his family is in support and this can only be when he is in support".* Another respondent argued that while a woman's family may want to support her career the fear of its impact on her relationship with her husband and ability to discharge her roles may discourage them. *"If the partner is happy with the career then most likely her parents will not have any problem with her career, their only fear will be his disapproval which may split the union, and we all know the disapproval failed unions get around this part of the world".*

3.2 Institutional Setting

Issues bothering on the institutional bias against the female gender were investigated in the study. Although that was not a focal point for the study as the institutional policy documents are clear on its stand as not in support of any form of gender bias. However, questions were asked just to investigate if the female academics felt the presence of any bias against them understanding the contextual set up within the African setting.

From the data, 70 percent claimed that they have never missed a promotion, while 30 percent said they had missed promotions in the past.

Table 3. Socio-cultural Setting

Response	Assistance at home (%)	Supportive partner (%)	Supportive (nee) family (%)	Supportive partners family (%)
Yes	70	80	94	75
No	30	20	6	25

Source: Authors computation

80 percent agreed to the presence of gender bias in their institution, while 20 percent argued not to have witnessed any form of gender bias in their institution.

Table 4. Institutional setting

Response	Get all Promotions (%)	Female gender Bias (%)
Yes	70	80
No	30	20

Source: Authors computation

Going further, to understand how much impact socio-cultural roles has on the ability of female academics to get all promotions; a logistic regression was carried out. In doing this, a simple model was set up. The model is such that has responses to the question "X₁= do you get your promotions" as dependent variables and responses to "X₂=Do you receive assistance at home; X₃= Do you have a supportive Partner; X₄= Do you have a supportive family; X₅= Do you have a supportive Partners family".

To understand the predictive ability of the variations in the dependent variable that can be explained by the model, Cox and Snell R Square and Nagelkerke R Square values, were used.

Table 5 presents the Cox and Snell R Square and Nagelkerke R Square values, which

are methods of calculating the explained variation. These values are sometimes referred to as *pseudo R²* values. They are interpreted in a similar manner, but more cautiously. Therefore, the explained variation in the dependent variable based on our model ranges from 45.9% to 56.1%, depending on the Cox and Snell *R²* or Nagelkerke *R²* methods, respectively.

Binomial logistic regression estimates the probability of an event occurring or not. In this case, the event is the probability of getting or not getting all promotions by women academics in the Federal College of Education (special) Oyo. If the estimated probability of getting all promotion is greater than or equal to 0.5, it is classified that all promotions will be gotten but if the probability of not getting all promotion is greater than or equal to 0.5, it is classified as not all promotion will be gotten.

Table 6 shows the result of the regression analysis.

From the analysis, the statistical significance for each independent variable is X₂=Do you receive assistance at home (p= .023); X₃= Do you have a supportive Partner (p = .415); X₄= Do you have a supportive family (p=.619); X₅= Do you have a supportive Partners family (p= .001)". From the result, it reveals that family support of the woman academic in this case does not necessarily influence her promotion. It may, however, be

Table 5. Model summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	101.086	.459	.561

Source: Authors computation

Table 6. Variables in the equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
x2(1)	.185	.027	9.132	1	.023	1.006
x3(1)	.556	0.049	5.356	1	.415	1.089
x4(1)	.247	0.146	4.266	1	.619	.906
x5(1)	.593	0.039	.253	1	.001	1.026
Constant	-2.197	.745	8.690	1	.003	.111

Source: Authors computation

necessary to note that the cultural setting in this region is such that suggests that once a woman goes into marriage, her ties with direct family reduces; especially when she does not have any major marital challenges.

Also from the table, it shows that the chance of getting all promotions is 1.006 greater if the female academic receives assistance at home, holding all other variables constant. Similarly, the chance of getting all promotions for female academics is 1.089, .906 and 1.026 respectively if she has a supportive partner, has a supportive family and a supportive partners family.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on the objectives of the study, to investigate the effect of the socio-cultural roles of women in an African setting on their academic career progression using a case of women academics in the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, it was discovered that women academic need support both at the home front and institutional to be optimal in their career. From the data collected, a large percentage of the sample population agreed that socio-cultural factors influence career progression in the academics. The study found that most of the female academics perceived that their family always supported them in their academic career, while less felt they got support from their partner's family. However, from the quantitative study, it was deduced that family support was not significant in getting promotions, while other factors were found to be significant.

In conclusion, the study pertinently discovered that the impact of a partner's support plays a crucial role in either the academics family or her partners family's ability to support her career thereby facilitating academic career progression. Also, a coping strategy that has been widely explored has been the sourcing for assistance with executing some of the socio-cultural roles of women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors will like to acknowledge the assistance of Adedokun Titilope during the data collection process.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:

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