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CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONGST CAMEROON FEMALE INTERPRETERS

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Abstract:

The current research aims at investigating the challenges Cameroon female interpreters face in maintaining work-life balance. It is a sociological study of the challenges faced by female interpreters in maintaining work-life balance in an African context where they are equally expected to be devoted housewives, in addition to being career women. Most youths investing in this field may never know what the field holds for them as professionals are usually distant and only mirror the good side of things. Based on a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, the study draws data from six (6) interviews and fifty (50) questionnaires. Findings revealed that Cameroon female interpreters face challenges related to family responsibilities, professional demands, health issues, disorganisation, financial constraints, job dissatisfaction, gender, stigmatisation, sexual harassment and incompetence. Results equally showed that the challenges faced across the three generations sampled are significantly similar by 88% and only different by 12%. Some coping strategies to balance work and life are: defining priorities, having support systems, adopting healthy lifestyle, making consensus, sticking to values and beliefs, and investing in capacity building..

Keywords:

Challenges, prospects, Cameroon female interpreters, work-life balance.

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I. Introduction

Kouega (2007) posits that the need for conference interpreting in Cameroon arose during the decolonization period, particularly during the 1960s. He continues by affirming that as Cameroon got independence, there was an increase in international conferences and meetings, which required interpreting services. Nkemele (2011) upholds that conference interpreters in Cameroon at that moment were expatriates who worked for international organisations like the UN and the EU. Eyongetah (2018) posits that the Cameroon government has made efforts to promote the development of conference interpreting in the country: the setting up of training institutions like ASTI in 1985. The question as to how many men and women have been trained in conference interpreting in Cameroon since 1985 till date is still to be determined. However, Mikassa (2017) supports that in Africa, women are increasingly dominating the profession in conference interpreting.

Interpreting and translation are predominantly female occupations: This assertion is corroborated by Angelelli (2004); Zwischenberger (2011); Pym et al. (2013); Dam/Zethsen (2013); and Gentile (2013), who indicate that female translators and interpreters considerably outnumber their male colleagues. With regard to conference interpreting, Pöchhacker (2016: 174) equally affirms that the profession has undergone feminisation, which means that it has become predominantly female after being originally male-dominated. This assertion is corroborated by Teuma (2017: 90), whose research posits that there is a predominance of male interpreters in Cameroon. However, while the ranks of female interpreters soar with younger recruits, those of male interpreter dwindle. Leading to the conclusion that there is a feminization of the profession in Cameroon.

Conrad and Marshall (2011) expounded the possible consequences that a higher percentage of women in certain occupations could have on women's own perceptions of these professions. O'Brien (2009) ascertains that women are not treated equally in the workplace, the value of their work is underestimated and that women tend to have lower incomes. Moreover, Sharma et al (1992) suggest that some female-dominated professions are seen as lower-status occupations, simply because the majority of these professionals are women. These phenomena can at least partly be attributed to the fact that, since women's work is often evaluated in direct or indirect interaction with male supervisors, stereotypical beliefs about women's work may affect the feedback women receive.

Zakrisson (2022: 14542), on the other hand, affirms that women rate the competence of their occupation higher than that of men. In other words, women perceive themselves as more competent than men. All these factors could well contribute to a situation where female professionals, such as female interpreters, perceive their professional status differently from men. This aspect, however, has scarcely been studied in interpreting studies. Angelelli and Bear (2016: 2) point out this reality by affirming that while issues of gender and sexuality have been broadly and consistently discussed in relation to translation, they remain understudied in the fields of interpreting. This statement definitely calls for further investigation into a gendered interpretation of some sociological aspects related to interpreting.

Thus, this research is motivated by the desire to look into the challenges faced by Cameroon female interpreters in maintaining work-life balance. The researcher's *modus operandi* consists in carrying out a diachronic and synchronic study. The diachronic study on the one hand, entails studying challenges faced by the old and middle generations of Cameroon female interpreters to better understand the challenges the young generation of Cameroon female interpreters face. The synchronic study on the other hand will focus solely on the challenges faced by the young generation of Cameroon female interpreters.

1.1.Statement of the problem

Ekanem et al (2022: 101) ascertain that in the traditional African society, men were the sole providers of their families while women were committed housewives. The trend has been reversed in the modern era as women have become co-providers. However, the African society has made it that women's professional responsibilities should not spare them from continuously being in charge of their households. Consequently, women are constantly navigating between their professional and household responsibilities. This phenomenon raises the issue of how women achieve and maintain work-life balance.

1.2.Research Objectives

This work therefore aims at the following:

1. Account for the challenges faced by Cameroon female interpreters in maintaining work-life balance;
2. Discover the coping strategies used by Cameroon female interpreters to overcome the challenges in maintaining work-life balance.

II. Literature Review

A review of related literature in the domain will focus on defining core concepts of the study, which are work-life balance, family-work conflict, work satisfaction, family satisfaction, gender mainstreaming and gender emancipation.

2.1. Work-life balance (WLB)

Lewis and Beauregard (2018) believe work-life balance has multiple overlapping definitions that differ across organisations and research areas. However, it generally entails striking an equilibrium between an individual's professional and personal life. Hogarth and Bosworth (2009) posit that it was first coined around in the nineteenth century after a long protest staged by workers, against long working hours in factories. Myers (1924) relates it to the early twentieth century when several labour unions campaigned for a cap on the maximum working hours. But for Dizaho et al (2017) the concept emerged when women first entered the workplace and began experiencing difficulties in managing the demands of work and the demands of their personal life. According to Sullivan (2014), a significant turning point of WLB was when President Roosevelt signed the Fair Labour Standards Act of 1938. This act ushered in some far-reaching changes in work regimes: the setting of minimum hourly wages, and the regulations to determine and record overtimes and setting maximum work weeks to 40 hours.

Kirchmeyer (2000) perceives WLB as the achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources like energy, time, and commitment. The author goes further by affirming that these resources are spread across all the domains. Chandra (2012) describes WLB as an employee's attention towards four areas of fulfillment, namely personal and work fulfillment, family role and community fulfillment. Since these roles come with different obligations and perceptions for each individual, WLB then essentially becomes a personal perception of how an employee manages and integrates both work and personal life fulfillment, given the various role responsibilities that come with being involved in work, family and the community.

There is a complex relation between work and individuals' personal lives. Barnett and Hyde (2001) view WLB as the extent to which individuals are equally involved in and satisfied with their family role and their work role. In this case, work and family roles should be beneficial to the individual's health. They go further by affirming that the quality of the roles,

rather than the number of roles occupied, or the amount of time spent in a particular role, determines the degree to which individuals experience the positive effects of participating in multiple roles.

Grzywacz and Calson (2007) suggest that a conceptualisation of WLB should consider the impact of an individual's balance or lack of balance on their work and family environments.

It is glaring that work domain can either divert one's attention from family life or help improve commitment to family life. Family life influences work attitudes, behaviours and outcomes positively or negatively. For example: extensive work hours, inflexible work hours, over-involvement in work and job stress may produce distress within the family domain, withdrawal from family responsibilities, and adversely affect one's overall quality of life. Similarly, extensive care-giving responsibilities and intensive involvement with family activities can limit individual's career choices and aspirations and negatively affect their work involvement, job satisfaction, and intention to continue their employment. Greenhaus and Beutell (2005)

This implies that role-related expectations are negotiated and shared between an individual and their role-related partners in the work and family domains. In this context, WLB is operationalized by individuals' perception of whether expectations are shared and agreed with their work and family role partners. Consequently, it shifts the concept of work-life balance from a psychological construct to a focus on role-related performance.

Some authors have rejected the concept of balance based on the inherent implication that equal time be split between multiple roles. Halpern and Murphy (2005) likened the concept of balance to a balancing beam, with work and family roles on either side of a fulcrum, where time spent in one role will always negatively impact the other role. In this way, WLB could be seen as an unrealistic expectation according to Allen (2005) who has rather employed terms like work-life integration or work-life harmony to reflect a more holistic appraisal of the WLB concept. This author even went further by using the term work-life family but applied it to the multiple domains of individuals' lives. Kalliath et al (2008) assert that WLB is more inclusive of those employees who are not parents but who nevertheless wish to accommodate interests such as study, sports, religious observance, and travel with their work commitments. Casper et al (2018) suggest that this concept can be more accurately stated as

work-non work balance. The accentuated employees' assessment of how personally favourable the combination of work and non-work roles was for them.

Whether WLB entails work-life integration, work-life harmony or work-non-work balance, it boils down to the same reality: the equilibrium or satisfaction an individual experiences when juggling between work and personal responsibilities.

2.2. Work-family conflict (WFC)

Work-family conflict entails the challenges individuals face in balancing their work responsibilities with family obligations. Work-family conflict has gained increasing attention due to changing societal standards, the rise of dual-income households, and the growing recognition of mental health issues related to work-life balance.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) posit that work-family conflict occurs when the demands of work and family roles are mutually incompatible, leading to stress and reduces satisfaction in both family and work domains.

Work-family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) framework identifies three dimensions of WFC: (a) time-based conflict, (b) strain-based conflict, and (c) behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when the time demands associated with one role restrict the amount of time that can be devoted to the other role, inhibiting one's performance in the latter role. As for strain-based conflict, it occurs when stress from one domain makes it challenging to fulfil the requirements of the other role. And behaviour-based conflict arises when behaviours demanded in one role interfere with the performance of another role.

Work-family conflict exists when: (a) time devoted to the requirements of one role makes it difficult to fulfil requirements of another; (b) strain from participation in one role makes it difficult to fulfil requirements of another; and (c) specific behaviours required by one role make it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another.

In other words, time allocated to an activity hinders the fulfillment of another and a specific behaviour impedes the fulfillment of another and in this case work responsibilities hamper the fulfillment of family responsibilities.

Frone et al (1992) and Allen et al (2000) examine work-family conflict from the outcome perspective. Frone et al (1992) empirically tests the relation between work-family conflict and various outcomes such as job satisfaction, psychological distress and overall well-being. Frone highlights the bidirectional nature of work-family conflict as he found out that WFC is not only a source of stress but also has significant implications for individual health and organisational effectiveness. And Allen et al (2000), in their meta-analysis titled *Consequences Associated with Work-Family Conflict*, they synthesized findings from numerous studies to assess the effects of WFC on various outcomes such as job performance, turnover intentions, and mental health issues like anxiety or depression. Their comprehensive review underscored the pervasive nature of WFC across different demographics and industries while also suggesting potential interventions to mitigate its effects like flexible working arrangements, supportive organisational culture, employee assistance programmes (EAPs), family-friendly policies and communication strategies. Concerning the relation between this concept on the research, the concept enabled the researcher to highlight stressors in the questionnaire that contribute to work-family conflicts in Cameroon female interpreters' life like: marital status, number of children or dependents, and household responsibilities the next concept under analysis is family satisfaction.

2.7. Theoretical Framework

The theories that underpin this study are Work-family conflict theory and Role theory. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) are some of the earliest and most influential figures of work-family conflict. They defined work-family conflict as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect." Their research established a framework for understanding how demands from one domain can negatively impact performance and satisfaction in another, thus highlighting the bidirectional nature of this conflict.

This theory has three principles, which are time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts. Edwards and Rothbard (2003) coined time-based conflict as they proposed a model that examined how time-related pressures affect individuals' ability to balance their work and

family commitments. Their work highlights that time-based conflict arises when individuals face competing demands for their time, which can lead to stress and decreased satisfaction in both domains. In their studies, Edwards and Rothbard (2003) explored various dimensions of time-based conflict, including how long working hours or family obligations could create a strain that affects performance across both roles. They emphasized that understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate work-family conflict.

Greenhaus and Buetell (1985) ascertained that strain-based conflict arises when the demands of one domain (either work or family) create psychological or physical strain that spills over into the other domain. The conflict manifests when an individual experiences stress in their work life that affects their interactions and performance at home, or vice versa. Talking of behaviour-based conflict, the difficulty lies in the individual's ability to adapt their behaviour according to the demands and expectations of each role they occupy. Greenhaus (1985). The implications of behaviour-based conflict can be significant, as it can lead to reduced effectiveness both at home and at work. When individuals fail to adjust their behaviours appropriately, it can result in strained relationships with family members or colleagues, ultimately affecting overall satisfaction and performance in both domains.

The three aforementioned principles are important to this research as they informed the researcher on variables to assess during interviews and through questionnaires. The assessed variables as per the time-based conflict is workload, which exerts negative power on family responsibilities. Health impediment was assessed alongside productivity. They are related to strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts respectively. The level of productivity at work was assessed in relation to the Cameroon female interpreters' marital status.

The Role theory was coined in 1957 by Merton. The theory falls under sociology and psychology. It examines how individuals fulfil various roles in society and how these roles influence their behaviour, identity, and social interactions. The concept of roles encompasses the expectations, norms, and behaviours associated with particular social positions. In other words, the Role theory concerns the tendency for human behaviours to form characteristic patterns that may be predicted if one knows the social context in which those behaviours appear. It explains those behaviour patterns, (or roles) by assuming that persons within a context appear as members of recognized social identities (or positions) and that they and others hold ideas (expectations) about behaviours in that setting.

Merton (1960) introduced essential concepts such as role strain, role conflict, and role expectations. Role strain describes the difficulties individuals face when trying to fulfil the expectations associated with their social roles, particularly when these expectations conflict or exceed their capacity to meet them. In other words, Merton's theory of role strain highlights how social institutions operate through role relationships and how individuals may experience strain when they cannot adequately fulfil their sociological duties within these roles.

As for role conflict, coined by Merton in 1957, it is particularly in relation to how individuals navigate multiple social roles that may have conflicting expectations. Merton's work emphasises that individuals often occupy various statuses within society, each associated with specific roles. When the demands of these roles clash, it creates a state of role conflict, which can lead to stress and confusion for the individual trying to fulfil these competing expectations. This idea is significant in understanding the dynamics of social behaviour and the challenges faced by individuals in complex social structures. As for role expectations, Merton articulated it in his 1949 work, *Social Theory and Social Structure*. This text expands on how individuals within a society have specific expectations associated with their social roles, which are shaped by cultural norms and values.

Merton's approach of the Role theory synthesises elements of structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism. This integration allows for a more nuanced understanding of how social structures and individual agency interact within the context of roles. He equally emphasises the importance of social structures in shaping individual behaviour through roles. He argued that individuals do not merely adopt roles passively; rather, they actively negotiate and perform their roles based on societal expectations, which reflects a dynamic interplay between structure and agency.

Over time, several scholars have contributed to the development of Role theory, each adding unique perspectives and insights. Mead (1863-1931). His contributions to role theory are foundational in understanding social interaction and the development of self-identity. His work emphasizes that individuals develop their sense of self through social interactions, particularly by taking on various roles within different contexts.

Mead also finds interest in the "generalized other". A significant aspect of Mead's role theory is the idea of the "generalized other." This concept refers to the collective attitudes,

expectations, and norms of society that individuals internalize as they interact with others. By understanding how one is perceived by this generalized other, individuals can adjust their behaviours and roles accordingly.

The role theory is pivotal for this research because it paves the way for understanding how the behaviour and identity of Cameroon female interpreters are shaped as they run from one responsibility to the other. Merton's principles helped identify variables like marital status, motherhood and/or guardian, which were instrumental when drafting the questionnaire. These variables were highlighted to assess the stressors that contribute in exacerbating the challenges faced by Cameroon female interpreters in maintaining WLB.

III. Methodology

This study is a survey that adopts a mixed method research design. The research is both qualitative and quantitative. The researcher collected qualitative data through the use of semi-structured interviews and quantitative data, through questionnaires.

Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility while ensuring that key topics related to work-life balance were covered. Its reliability lies in the fact that it introduced variability as they gave elbow room to respondents to express themselves. This gave leeway for follow-up questions based on participant responses. Six Cameroon female interpreters from the old and middle generations were sampled through semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire includes multiple choice and open-ended questions. It assessed the various dimensions of respondents' work-life balance situation. The designed questionnaire underwent a pilot testing to achieve high validity levels by ensuring that questions accurately reflect the constructs being studied. 50 Cameroon female interpreters from the current generation were sampled. This questionnaire collected data on background information (age, gender, year of enrolment in an interpreting training institute and year of graduation, highest level of education and years of seniority), working environment, number of working hours, family responsibilities, and self-reported measures of work-life balance, just to name a few.

Ultimately, the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments enabled the researcher to have an in-depth knowledge of the overall perception Cameroon female interpreters have of their experience as per the challenges faced in maintaining work-life balance as well as prospects for WLB.

The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistical tools to analyse data. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, and percentages; and Kappa, Gamma, and Chi-Square tests were the inferential statistical tools used.

The Kappa test was used to compared and contrast challenges faced by old, middle, and current generations of Cameroon female interpreters to see if they faced the same challenges. In addition, the Kappa test was also used to compare the productivity at home and work for single and married female interpreters to see if they perform the same. Again, the same test was used to compare their productivity at work as single and married Cameroon female interpreters to also know if they perform significantly the same or differently.

Furthermore, the Gamma test was used to compare how Cameroon female interpreters differ in the experience of work-life balance based on their understanding of work-life balance as well as the effect of poor work-life balance on their work-life experiences.

The Chi-Square test, together with the likelihood ratio technique, was used to find out which of the challenges faced by the Cameroon female interpreters in achieving work-life balance is significant. More so, the Chi-Square test of Goodness of Fit was used to find out if having support systems, defining priorities, adopting best practices, and making consensus would enable the female interpreters significantly achieve work-life balance.

Finally, findings were presented using tables, pie arts, figures, and all inferential statistics were presented at 95% confidence interval. As for qualitative data, collected from interviews, it was analysed through the thematic analysis approach, which entailed familiarisation with date, coding, identifying themes and reporting.

The overall number of respondents for this research is 56 Cameroon female interpreters. For qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews were used to sample the opinion of six Cameroon female interpreters as the researcher targeted three respondents from the old gen and three respondents from the middle generation, respectively. For quantitative data collection, 50 Cameroon female interpreters from the current generation were sampled through questionnaires, to ensure statistical significance.

IV. Findings and Discussions

Here, focus is on what obtains from the different research that were carried out. In the course of presenting data, illustrations were drawn from respondents' quotes, graphs, pie charts and tables. This data is presented through research objectives as follows.

4.1. Challenges faced by Cameroon Female Interpreters in maintaining Work-life Balance

On the one hand, findings showed that Cameroon female interpreters from the old and middle generations mostly face challenges related to family responsibilities with six (6) on six (6), that is 100%, followed by professional demands with five (5) on six (6), that is 83.3%, and health impediment with three (3) on six (6) that is 50%.

On a daily basis, these ladies juggle between their house chores, catering for children and spouses. These female professionals fulfil their duties as mothers and wives by ensuring that children are ready for school in the morning. Moreover, they make sure that their assignments are done when need be. This is illustrated by the following assertion: "Upon returning home, my top priority is to ensure that my children have had their meals, completed their homeworks, and are tucked into bed. Furthermore, my day begins before dawn, as I wake up at 4 am to initiate the morning routine for the kids, getting them ready for school before I start preparing for my own workday." In addition, they equally ensure that their spouses have their meals in the morning before they leave for work and in the evening when they return from work: "My husband's expectations can be exceedingly exacting, as he consistently asserts that I should assume sole responsibility for preparing his meals, regardless of the hour at which I arrive home from work." Some Cameroon female interpreters face family pressure as they are expected to provide for the latter.

Some affirm that having a dual function of administrator and interpreter is over-weighing: "Beyond my role as an interpreter, I also serve as the Director of Operations, a position that necessitates a high level of organisational oversight. Consequently, my workday starts at 7:30 am sharp, at which time I attend to my mail correspondence and initiate my daily responsibilities." Some are compelled to take work to their homes and others are obliged to become in-house interpreters to make-end-meet. This is supported by the following quotes respectively: "In exceptional circumstances, I transition my task to a homebased setting." "Upon discovering I was pregnant, I experienced a sudden and unfortunate diminution in

professional opportunities with my then employers. To mitigate the potential impact on my career trajectory, I proactively adapted by transitioning into an in-house interpreter.”

As for health impediment, Cameroon female interpreters bear the brunt of mental and physical health issues. Some complained of experiencing headache and fatigue on a daily basis. To this statement, one of the respondents said: “Upon returning home one day, utterly exhausted, I inadvertently dispatched an email to a client that was devoid of coherence. It was not until the following day, when I had regained composure, that I realised the email was replete with nonsensical content. Needless to say, I promptly extended my sincerest apologies to the client, acknowledging the unprofessional nature of my earlier communication.”

Concerning the non-less significant challenges faced by Cameroon female interpreters from the old and middle generations, disorganisation and sexual harassment came up with two (2) out of six (6) that is 33.33% each, followed by job dissatisfaction, stigmatisation, financial constraints, gender and incompetence with one (1) on six (6) each, that is 16.67%.

The interpreters who affirmed that disorganisation is a challenge believe that it has gotten to the point that 24 hours are not enough for a day because there is a lot to do as a professional, mother and wife. As for sexual harassment, respondents confirmed that they faced sexual harassment from male colleagues as the latter never missed an opportunity to blackmail these female professionals and touch their bodies against the ladies’ will. This is exemplified by the following: “The situation had escalated to the point where I felt a persuasive sense of trepidation whenever my male colleague entered my office, as could not help but wonder what intentions he harboured. Furthermore, he would often wait for opportune moments, such as when I was alone in a corridor, to engage in unwelcome physical contact. Ultimately, I was compelled to report these disturbing incidents to our organisational hierarchy, seeking their intervention and support in addressing this egregious behaviour.”

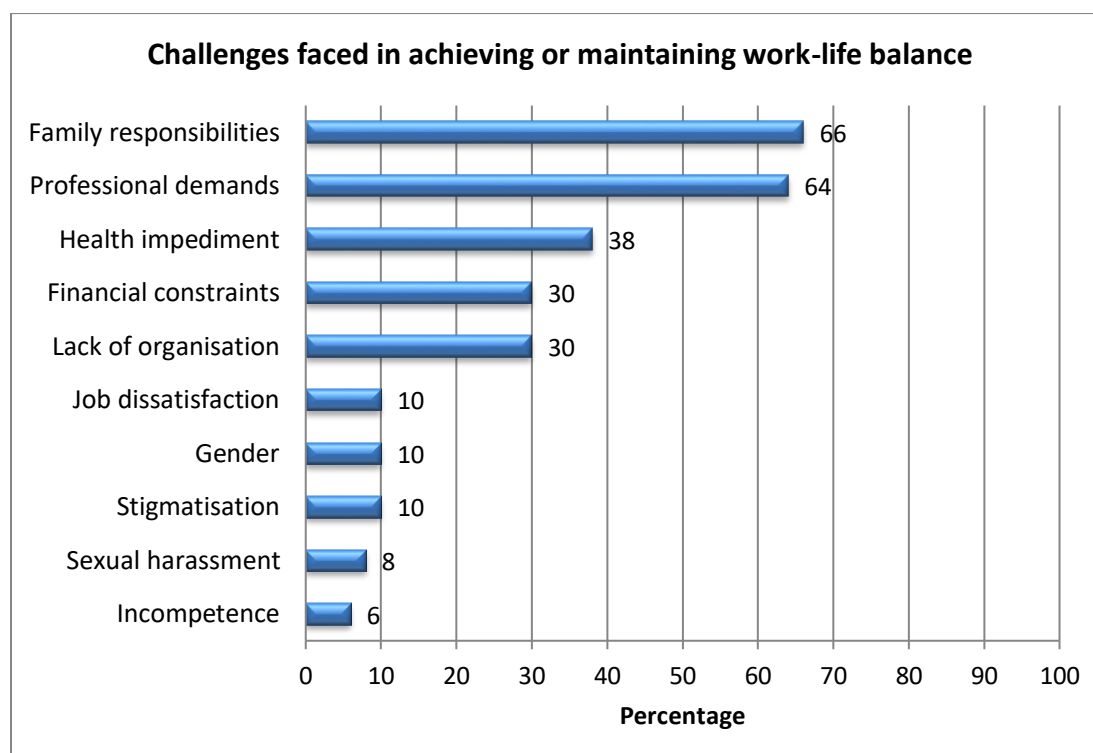
As for job dissatisfaction, a respondent affirmed the following: “It was incumbent on me to champion the interests of my profession in an environment where not only was our work grossly devalued, but also the professionals themselves were disparaged. This pervasive issue permeated every facet of my professional and personal existence, exacting a profound impact on my overall wellbeing and career satisfaction.” Thus, she felt it was incumbent on her to ensure that the conference interpreting profession be known within the administration.

Female interpreters equally feel stigmatised as they always use family responsibilities as excuses each time she arrives late at work. One interpreter affirmed the following: “My colleagues have a propensity to stigmatise me, as my frequent discussions about my husband’s exacting expectations have led them to scrutinise my productivity as a conference interpreter. Their intolerance is particularly evident when I arrive late to work, which, albeit infrequent, can be a challenge to manage due to the intricate balancing act between my personal and professional responsibilities.” In the same vein, one lady complained about finances as she insists that being connected all the time and having up-to-date gadgets is costly. As for gender and incompetence, these women said: “Female interpreters are frequently denied opportunities for professional collaboration with their male counterparts, solely due to their gender. This systematic exclusion renders the vulnerable to exploitative situations, including sexual harassment and emotional manipulation, which can manifest when male colleagues initiate contact under the guise of professional opportunities.” They equally highlighted that: “To effectively address the issue of incompetence in contract negotiation, it would be beneficial for the Professional Practice course to provide comprehensive instruction on contract negotiation strategies. The insights gained from this course would empower professionals to navigate complex contractual agreement with confidence and expertise.”

Also, Cameroon female interpreters from the current generation mostly mentioned family responsibilities as one of the challenges they face in maintaining work-life balance, with 66% (33). This is followed by professional demands 64.0% (32), health impediment 38% (19) lack of organisation 30.0% (15) financial constraints 30% (15) stigmatization 10.0% (5), job dissatisfaction 10.0% (5), sexual harassment 8.0% (4), and incompetence 6.0% (3). These statistics are illustrated with the following graph:

Figure 1:

Challenges faced in maintaining Work-life Balance



4.2.Coping Strategies Cameroon Female Interpreters adopt to overcome the Challenges they face in maintaining Work-life Balance

Concerning female interpreters from the old and middle generations, findings revealed that the most significant coping strategies are support systems with five (5) out of (6) participants attesting to it., representing 83.3%. This is closely followed by defining priorities with four (4) out of (5), representing 66.67%; and adopting best health practices with three (3) on six (6), representing 50%. As for the not very significant coping strategies, results revealed that making consensus and having values and beliefs accounted for 33.33% each, with two (2) over six (6). And capacity building accounted for 16.67%, with one (1) out of six (6).

Cameroon female interpreters mentioned that it was very important to have support systems to achieve work-life balance. Some of them highlighted that it is very important to have people to whom you can trust your children like family members and friends: “Whenever feasible, I avail myself of the opportunity to entrust my children to a trusted individual, thereby freeing myself to attend to various obligations. These occasions may arise from either professional necessities, such as work commitments, or personal requirements that demand my undivided attention.” Apart from having family support systems, some female professionals mentioned that it is equally very important to have professional support systems. This is corroborated by what one respondent told the researcher: “When faced with an overwhelming workload, I leverage my professional network by delegating tasks to a

trusted group of collaborators, thereby ensuring efficient task management and optimal productivity.”

On defining priorities, female interpreters affirmed that it is primordial to define priorities to achieve Work-life balance. This is confirmed by the following assertion: “To achieve a better work-life balance, I have adopted a conscious strategy of avoiding the temptation to bring work home. By doing so, I create space for meaningful engagement with my loved ones, fostering deeper connections and a sense of unity within my family.” Another respondent said: “Occasionally, I am faced with the unenviable task of making tough decisions that necessitate prioritising my professional obligations over family responsibilities. This inevitable complexity, is an unavoidable reality of my career.”

These professionals affirmed that to achieve work-life balance, they adopt best healthpractices. Some resort to leisure trips and resting while others use social media to relax. Some female interpreters asserted that “I have the good fortune of being part of a close-knit community of interpreter friends with whom I regularly embark on rejuvenating trips. Additionally, I often find solace in the virtual realm of social media, where I indulge in humour therapy by watching amusing videos on Tiktok, finding the comedic relief to be a balm for my frazzled nerves” Another lady said: “Whenever circumstances permit, I seize the opportunity to entrust my children to a trusted caregiver, thereby affording myself a rare and welcome respite from parental responsibilities.”

Others affirmed that agreeing with spouses is very important to achieve work-life balance. These women said that it is key to have a supportive husband to grow in the profession. One of them asserted that: “Despite his exacting nature, my husband demonstrates a commendable ability to find common ground and adapt to challenging situations. Notably, whenever I am required to travel for work, often for extended periods of up to two weeks, he selflessly assumes primary caregiving responsibilities for our children. This necessitates him to venture out of his comfort zone, exemplifying his capacity for flexibility and support.”

Cameroon female interpreters affirmed that to overcome the challenge of sexual harassment, it is better to be faithful to one’s values and beliefs. One of them confirmed that: “To counter this challenge, I remain steadfast in my commitment to my personal values and principles, resisting the temptation to compromise my integrity by acquiescing to their unwelcome

overturse.” Another lady confessed that in the context of an in-house, it is better to inform hierarchy to take necessary actions to address the challenge.

As for capacity building and mentoring, these professionals confirmed that to address the concern of incompetence in contract negotiation, it is advisable for Cameroon female interpreters to take capacity building training. According to her, it will equally be good to do professional internships and accreditation with international organisations as subsequently “Upon recognising the deficiency in my contract negotiation skills with clients, I proactively sought to augment my expertise through professional internships and certification programmes, notably with the United Nations This strategic investment in my professional development has yielded tangible results, as I am now a trusted and go-to interpreter for the United Nations, with direct commissions to undertake high-profile interpreting projects.”

As concerns the current generation of Cameroon female interpreters, findings revealed that the coping mechanisms mostly used to overcome challenges faced in maintaining work-life balance are defining priorities 86.0% (43), adopting best health practices (rest, medical check-ups, outings, sports, hobbies etc.) 68.0% (34), having support systems 62.0% (31), while less than 50% used consensus 46.0% (23), capacity building 44.0% (22), value and beliefs 36.0% (18) and, mentoring 28.0% (14). These statistics are illustrated with the following table and graph:

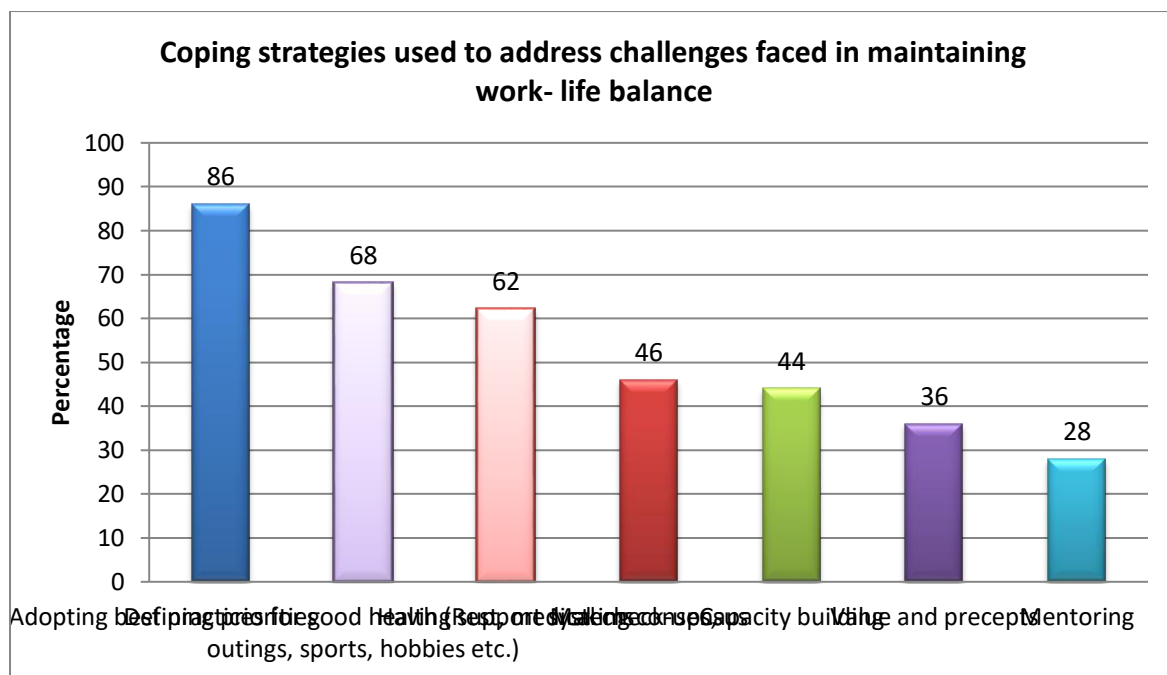
Table 2:

Coping Strategies used to address Challenges faced in maintaining Work-life Balance

	Yes	No	Total
Making consensus	23 (46.0%)	27 (54.0%)	50
Having support systems	31 (62.0%)	19 (38.0%)	50
Defining priorities	43 (86.0%)	17 (34.0%)	50
Adopting best health practices (Rest, medical check-ups, outings, sports, hobbies etc.)	34 (68.0%)	16 (32.0%)	50
Mentoring	14 (28.0%)	36 (72.0%)	50
Capacity building	22 (44.0%)	28 (56.0%)	50
Value and precepts	18 (36.0%)	32 (64.0%)	50

Figure 3:

Coping Strategies used to address Challenges faced in maintaining Work-life Balance



V. Conclusion

This section provides a summary of the study and a general conclusion. It also makes some recommendations and suggests further areas for research.

5.1.Summary of the study

This study focused on examining the challenges and prospects of work-life balance amongst Cameroon female interpreters. The objectives of this study were to identify, describe and explain the different challenges Cameroon female interpreters face in maintaining work-life balance; and identify, describe and explain the coping strategies these professionals adopt to circumvent the challenges they face in maintaining work-life balance. The study adopted a dual approach: diachronic and synchronic, to sample the old and middle generations, and the current generation. The aim is to better understand and harness the challenges faced by the current generation of Cameroon female interpreters.

The research adopted a mixed-method approach to carry out this work. Interviews to sample the old and middle generations of Cameroon female interpreters, and questionnaires were used to sample the current generation of Cameroon female interpreters. Six (6) and fifty (50) Cameroon female interpreters were sampled respectively by interview and questionnaire. Data was analysed with thematic content analysis, for qualitative data and statistical and inferential models, for quantitative data.

5.2. Significance of the Study

Work-life balance is a very important aspect in conference interpreting as it focuses on the actor, without whom interpreting services would not be available. Below, the importance of work-life balance to Cameroon female interpreters, the interpreting industry and training institutions, will be outlined.

5.2.1. Significance to Cameroon Female Interpreters in the Industry

This work is significant in that it depicts the challenges Cameroon female interpreters face in trying to achieve and maintain work-life balance. Besides, it gives an overview of the coping mechanisms female interpreters use to address the aforementioned challenges. In addition, this work stands as a mouthpiece for Cameroon female interpreters as they live in a world where everyone knows what they go through but not bold enough to voice these challenges.

5.2.2. Significance to Training Institution

This study exposes the challenges Cameroon female interpreters face because of their gender. Sexual harassment and stigmatization are the two challenges female interpreters faced because of their gender. According to information gathered, male colleagues and even some clients tend to underestimate female colleagues because they feel the latter may be good for other purposes, reason why women end up being harassed sexually or stigmatized when attempting to secure a contract for a conference. Training institutions can use this write-up to guide upcoming generations and lay more emphasis on courses like professional practice. Students must be taught how to scout for conferences, clients.

5.2.3. Significance to the Interpreting industry

This work is significant to the interpreting industry as it calls on stakeholders like the Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters, to take relevant actions that would contribute in enabling Cameroon female interpreters to maintain work-life balance, and adopt reforms that regulate the wellbeing of interpreters (fewer working hours, support systems at workplaces).

5.3. Implication of the Research to the Body of Existing Knowledge

To carry out this work, the researcher adopted the role, inter-sectionality and work-family conflict theories. To begin, the role theory examines how individuals fulfil various roles in society and how these roles influence their behaviour, identity and social interactions. This research confirms Merton's theory as Cameroon female interpreters mostly grapple with

challenges related to family responsibilities. Thus, their gender imposes on them the roles they play in society as mothers, wives and breadwinners.

Furthermore, the inter-sectionality theory by Crenshaw posits that gender, role and status are intertwined. In other words, these variables especially gender, influence the challenges Cameroon female interpreters face. When respondents were asked if their gender contributed to the challenges they face as Cameroon female interpreters, a majority, 60.0% (30) confirmed. Their reasons were that they have kids and their spouses under their care as well as other family responsibilities. Other reasons were gender stereotypes, pregnancy, patriarchal system (male dominance), societal stereotypes and biases; where qualification and experience are often questioned based on their gender. Some reported that they are harassed sexually by their male colleagues. In short, this study confirms Crenshaw's intersectionality theory as it ascertains that gender and role can affect employment conditions.

As for the work-family conflict theory, it stipulates professional responsibilities exert significant power on family responsibilities. This is mostly true as one of the most significant challenges faced by Cameroon female interpreters in maintaining work-life balance is related to professional demands. It is obvious that this research gives more impetus to Greenhaus and Buetell's theory of work-family conflict as it confirms the theory's tenets.

In conclusion, this study is important as it brings to light the challenges Cameroon female interpreters face in maintaining work-life balance. Besides, it highlights the different coping strategies these professionals use to overcome the challenges they face. This is a call for adequate policies that would support Cameroon female interpreters as they put on the different helmets the society offers them.

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