
**WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF FEMALE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS
FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMME COMPLETION IN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined work-life balance in relation to academic programme completion of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 2,125 female postgraduate students across Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, and a sample of 390 was drawn using the Yamane formula and stratified simple random sampling. Data were collected with a researcher-designed instrument, titled - Work-Life Balance of Female Postgraduate Students and Academic Programme Completion Questionnaire. The test-retest was used to determine the reliability coefficient at 0.79. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics to answer the research questions, and z-test and Analysis of Variance were used to test the hypotheses with SPSS at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that time pressure from academic tasks reduces students' ability to maintain a healthy personal life, that personal responsibilities diminish capacity to complete coursework, and that school policies to support balance among students were perceived as inadequate. Students also reported emotional exhaustion and health effects linked to workload, while acknowledging some successes in maintaining relationships and completing required tasks despite constraints. The study concluded that work-life balance has a substantive bearing on timely programme completion for female postgraduate students, and that existing institutional supports are insufficient to neutralise the effects of competing domestic and academic demands. Based on the findings, the study recommended that universities should strengthen

flexible scheduling, expand counselling and childcare access, and enforce responsive supervisory practices to improve completion rates.

KEYWORDS: Work-life balance, female postgraduate, students, academic programme, completion, public, universities, Anambra State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

University education is seen as the pinnacle of formal education, and represents the final stage in the learning journey for many individuals. As a critical component of societal development, university does not only serve as institution for the training and development of skilled professionals, but also as an organ for fostering innovation, research, and dissemination of knowledge for overall betterment of the society. University students usually face diverse challenges associated with the rigours of university education; however, postgraduate female students often encounter even more significant struggles that often delay their programme completion. Many of them face financial constraints and often struggle to afford tuition fees, pay for accommodation, and research costs. Beyond these funding challenges, which may lead to academic programme interruptions or withdrawal from school, is the challenge of balancing work and academic responsibilities, as some of them often juggle between full-time jobs, family obligations and demanding academic coursework and research

Greenhaus and Allen (2017) opined that work-life balance is the ability to effectively allocate resources between work, family, and personal domains, in order to ensure that none of the said domains is unduly dominant. This highlights the need for individuals, including postgraduate students, to proactively plan and harmonize how and where they spend their time in order to achieve a healthy balance between their professional responsibilities and personal life commitment. Balancing the demands of academic programme, managing family responsibilities, and engaging in professional work can affect academic performance of postgraduate female students and, ultimately, their ability to complete their academic programmes within the stipulated time. Researches from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom indicate that postgraduate students often experience mental health issues as they make efforts to accommodate and balance academic and personal responsibilities (Lewis et al., 2007). Mendis et al. (2017) observed that female students reported that they had higher stress levels due to societal expectations, and the combined pressures arising from academic and domestic roles and obligations.

While many universities in the West have introduced supportive measures such as flexible scheduling of programmes and functional mental health resources, such systems are often absent and largely ineffective in many developing countries. Ashtankar (2016) observed that Indian female postgraduate students were more likely to experience delays in completing their academic programmes due to family responsibilities. Married women with children reported feeling overwhelmed by the dual pressures of caregiving and academic work. Adisa et al. (2017) in the United Kingdom also suggested that female postgraduate students struggled with work-life balancing, especially when managing childcare responsibilities alongside their studies. In Africa, these challenges are even more pronounced. Limited resources, rigid academic structures, and disproportionate cultural expectations are intensifiers of the difficulties faced by female postgraduate students.

Postgraduate education studies such as masters and doctoral levels studies are known for their rigours, and can be quite demanding than undergraduate studies. This is because, it requires advanced critical thinking, independent research, and the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical and often complex settings. Postgraduate students are expected to manage a heavy workload, which traditionally include coursework, research, and teaching responsibilities in some schools, all of which they have to combine with personal life and professional commitments (Tetteh & Attiogbe, 2019). Many postgraduate students are non-traditional students, meaning that they are somewhat older and more likely to have additional responsibilities, such as full-time employment or family care. These external commitments can be difficult at times, and may not allow them to dedicate sufficient time to their academic work. This often results in poor academic performance and delayed programme completion.

Balancing work, family, and academic life can create significant pressure on postgraduate students, and may adversely impact on their academic performance and mental well-being (Adisa et al., 2017). Some of these challenges stem from cultural norms and societal expectations the society imposed on women. The culture of most Nigerian tribes for instance, place women in caregiving roles, and this effectively require women to prioritize their family wellbeing over personal or professional growth. This societal expectation often creates a double burden for female postgraduate students, who must balance these responsibilities with academic demands in order to have a sense of belonging and able to complete their programmes on schedule. In many cases, the lack of support from spouses, extended family, or institutions can be quite constraining, exacerbating their challenges and pushing some of these students into mental health problems. Okeke et al. (2020) noted that married female students in Nigeria often report feelings of exhaustion and often overwhelmed by the

competing demands of their academic and domestic lives – a situation that often elevates their stress levels and, in some cases leading to their withdrawal from academic programmes. DeMinck (2017) suggested that women tend to bear a disproportionate burden of household keeping and caregiving responsibilities. This can create additional stress to female students, who are already engaged in demanding academic programmes. The need to balance family, work, and academic responsibilities is often exacerbated by structural factors such as inflexible university schedules, limited childcare facilities, and social norms that expect women to prioritise family roles (Crompton & Lyonette, 2019). Therefore, work-life balancing is not just a personal challenge, but also a structural issue highly influenced by organisational and societal factors that shape how women navigate their academic and personal responsibilities. This makes the pursuit of postgraduate education uniquely demanding for women, particularly in institutions with inadequate support from the family and the university.

Public universities in Anambra State, like many in Nigeria, are faced with significant challenges in terms of providing the infrastructure and policies necessary to support work-life balance for female postgraduate students. The rigid academic timelines, which are often characterised by inflexible deadlines for coursework assignments, research, and thesis submission, offer little allowance for personal responsibilities to these women. The lack of essential support services, such as on-campus childcare facilities and efficient counselling services in some schools often exacerbates the struggles of female graduate students, who are also required by their family members to measure up to family obligations. In effect, this often compels these women to manage academic and domestic demands without institutional support. In addition, the lack of funding opportunities to these female students effectively induces many of them to rely on self-funding, thus adding financial pressure to their already demanding academic schedules. These factors can create an environment that amplifies stress, hinders academic progress, and negatively impacts their overall well-being, thereby limiting their ability to complete their coursework and research on schedule.

The above narrative is consistent with the observations of Ezeokoli (2023), who remarked that female postgraduate students who struggle with balancing their roles are more likely to experience delays in meeting academic requirements, which could lead to extended programmes durations and associated additional cost implication, all of which could worsen their stress levels. In some cases, these challenges lead to attrition, as some of the students may not be able to cope with the demands of their academic and personal lives. This issue not

only affects the female postgraduate students, but also undermines the broader goals of gender equity and academic excellence in higher education.

Achieving work-life balance requires female postgraduate students to adopt a range of practical strategies that can effectively help them to manage academic and their personal demands. Effective prioritisation and time management are crucial in maintaining balance. For instance, breaking tasks into smaller and manageable portions can help the students to effectively allocate proportional time to studies, and similarly to personal obligations. Seeking support from family and peers is equally important, particularly for students with significant domestic responsibilities. Involving family members in sharing household tasks or forming study groups with peers can likewise provide the desirable emotional and practical environment and support they need to progress in their academics. Additionally, taking advantage of university resources such as academic counselling, mental health services, and childcare facilities can significantly help in reducing the stress levels and in improving their productivity. Ezeokoli (2023) observed that students who took advantage of these resources were more likely to complete their programmes on time, compared to those who did not. The university's childcare services, where available, can enable student mothers to attend to their academic responsibilities while ensuring that their children are cared for.

Flexibility and self-care can also assist postgraduate female students to maintain a healthy balance between their personal lives and academics. Patel and Singh (2021) reported that postgraduate students who maintained flexible routines to rejuvenate their lives reported higher satisfaction with their work-life balance than their counterparts with rigid and non-negotiable schedules. Ugwu (2021) observed that Nigerian students who practiced mindfulness and regular exercise were more able to cope with academic pressures than their counterparts. This implies that adequate rest, nutrition, and taking breaks during study sessions could help students to maintain both mental and physical health. While some of the said variables of WLB have shown to be potentially helpful in assisting students to balance their personal lives with academic demands, there is however a research gap on how these variables enhance the programmes completion among postgraduate female students in universities in Anambara State. The object of this study is to examine how work life balance (WLB) of female postgraduate graduate students relates to their academic programme completion in public universities in Anambra State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The challenge of achieving work-life balance among female postgraduate students in public universities has far-reaching implications, particularly for academic programme completion. Preliminary observation of the researchers suggests that balancing academic, personal, and professional responsibilities has become an increasing challenge to a sizable number of female postgraduate students. These challenges mirror those faced by female academics, whose workloads include lesson planning, grading, research, supervision, and community service, often spilling into evenings and weekends. For female postgraduate students, these competing demands are further compounded by household responsibilities and societal expectations, creating a constant struggle on which task to prioritize. Some of them have expressed how combining academic workload, personal life and professional responsibilities have become increasingly overwhelming and exhausting. Societal expectations and family pressures often create role conflicts problems for these women. The associated psychological stress arising therefrom can impair their ability to focus on their academic pursuits and could disrupt their work-life balance.

When students are unable balance their work and life effectively, it can weaken their commitment to their studies. Work-life balancing challenge has also been blamed by some students as the reason for delays in completing their coursework and dissertation/thesis. The resulting weakness and burnout arising from too much workload may be the reason for the decline in academic performance of some female postgraduate students. Preliminary observation of the research indicate that some have even withdrawn from their programmes due to the intensity of stress associated with combining academic pursuit and family responsibilities. At times, after completing their coursework, some female graduate students find it difficult to move along with their supervisors due to different reasons, including sexual demands. In addition to that, the rigid academic schedules by some lecturers, inadequate childcare facilities, and limited support for working mothers have also been blamed as contributory issue potentially making postgraduate studies a bit more difficult for married and working-class women. Without proper interventions, these challenges can significantly impede programme completion rates among these women, and may lead to delays, exacerbate poor performance, and increase their attrition. As part of addressing the issues, this study examined work life balance of female postgraduate graduate students and academic programme completion in public universities, with a view to identifying actionable solutions on ways to create supportive environments for female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambara State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. In what ways does work-life balance influence the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State?
2. In what ways do family responsibilities influence the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 significance level.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference among the opinions of PGD, masters and Ph.D students on the ways work-life balance influence the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the opinions of single and married students on the ways family responsibilities influence the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a descriptive survey design, which was considered appropriate because it enabled the investigation and description of existing conditions without manipulating any variables. The population of the study comprised 2,125 female postgraduate students drawn from Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU). Using the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination, a total of 390 respondents, representing 18% of the population, was selected. The stratified simple random sampling technique was used and it ensured equitable representation of the respondents from across the PhD, Master's, and Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) levels in both institutions. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire titled: Work-Life Balance of Female Postgraduate Students and Academic Programme Completion Questionnaire (WBFPGSAPCQ). The instrument comprised two sections: Section A obtained demographic information, while Section B contained items that measured the six key variables of the study using a four-point modified Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instrument's content validity was established through expert review of the researchers. This ensured that the items in the instrument were clear, appropriate, and in alignment with the research objectives. Reliability of the instrument was determined through the test-retest method, using respondents from public universities in Imo

State. The test produced a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.79, which indicated satisfactory internal consistency.

For the data collection procedure, the researchers obtained approval from relevant university authorities and enlisted two trained research assistants to assist in questionnaire administration. The respondents were fully briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality of their responses during data collection. Out of the 390 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 384 (98%) were retrieved and deemed valid for data analysis. The data analysis was conducted with the aid of SPSS. Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics, including the z-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were applied to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: In what ways does work-life balance affect the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of response of female postgraduate students on the ways work-life balance affects the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

S/ N	Description of Items	Means of Postgraduate Students								
		Ph.D (n = 97)			Masters (n = 181)			PGD(E) (n = 106)		
		\bar{x}	S.D	Remark	\bar{x}	S.D	Remark	\bar{x}	S.D	Remark
1	Balance between academic work and personal life responsibilities is achieved.	2.74	0.96	Agreed	2.91	0.93	Agreed	2.90	0.89	Agree
2	Time spent on academic tasks reduces ability to keep a healthy personal life.	3.35	0.92	Agreed	3.15	0.98	Agreed	2.98	0.90	Agree
3	Poor balance between study and personal	2.57	0.89	Agreed	2.52	0.88	Agreed	2.76	0.90	Agree

	life has reduced academic performance and progress.									
4	Difficulty in balancing study and personal life causes frequent emotional exhaustion.	2.52	0.95	Agreed	2.42	1.01	Disagreed	2.67	0.78	Agree
5	Academic workload negatively impact health	2.56	0.94	Agreed	2.49	0.93	Disagreed	2.65	0.93	Agree
6	Personal responsibilities reduce ability to complete coursework.	3.11	0.61	Agreed	3.19	0.60	Agreed	2.88	0.93	Agree
7	School policies to support balance between study and personal life are not enough.	2.76	0.79	Agreed	3.00	0.81	Agreed	2.78	0.87	Agree
8	Academic workload makes it hard to maintain personal relationships.	2.63	0.82	Agreed	2.79	0.63	Agreed	2.71	0.90	Agree
9	Problems with balancing study and personal life have led to thoughts of leaving the programme.	2.13	0.70	Disagreed	2.07	0.65	Disagreed	2.16	0.87	Disagree
	Aggregate Mean	2.71	0.84		2.73	0.82		2.72	0.89	

Table 1 shows how work-life balance affects programme completion among female postgraduate students across PhD, Master's, and PGD levels. Respondents moderately agreed that they could balance academic and personal life (PhD = 2.74; Master's = 2.91; PGD = 2.90), though time spent on studies reduced personal well-being (3.35; 3.15; 2.98). They also agreed that lack of balance negatively affected academic progress (2.57; 2.52; 2.76). Emotional exhaustion was more evident among PhD and PGD students (2.52; 2.67) than among Master's students (2.42), while workload-related health effects were reported by PhD and PGD groups (2.56; 2.65) but not by Master's (2.49). All groups agreed that personal responsibilities hindered coursework completion (3.11; 3.19; 2.88) and that institutional policies were inadequate (2.76; 3.00; 2.78). Academic workload also strained relationships (2.63; 2.79; 2.71), although respondents disagreed about programme discontinuation due to such pressures (2.13; 2.07; 2.16). The overall mean values (2.71; 2.73; 2.72) confirm moderate agreement that work-life balance challenges influence academic completion.

Research Question Two: In what ways do family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of response of female postgraduate students on the ways family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

S/N	Description of Items	Means of Postgraduate Students					
		Married (n = 245)			Singles (n = 139)		
		\bar{x}	S.D.	Remark	\bar{x}	S.D.	Remark
10	Family duties such as household chores and spousal roles reduce time for studying.	2.98	0.86	Agreed	2.50	0.54	Agree
11	Family expectations such as child-rearing and caregiving interfere with academic work.	2.63	0.96	Agreed	3.13	0.59	Agree
12	Family responsibilities often lead to extension of the academic programme.	2.10	0.94	Disagreed	2.41	0.82	Disagree
13	Family provides enough support to complete the academic programme.	3.19	0.74	Agreed	2.67	0.72	Agree
14	Academic deadlines are often missed because of family responsibilities.	2.10	0.85	Disagreed	2.02	0.78	Disagree
15	Emotional stress arises from combining family duties and academic work.	3.29	0.70	Agreed	2.51	0.65	Agree

16	Family obligations require frequent breaks from studying	3.42	0.77	Agreed	2.89	0.60	Agree
17	Lecturers provide support in relation to family responsibilities.	2.94	0.60	Agreed	2.93	0.59	Agree
18	Family responsibilities such as caregiving and child-rearing limit participation in academic group activities.	2.85	0.98	Agreed	2.60	0.88	Agree
19	Balancing family and academic responsibilities reduces concentration during studies.	2.82	0.86	Agreed	2.55	0.54	Agree
	Aggregate Mean	2.83	0.82		2.62	0.69	

Table 2 presents the mean ratings of married and single female postgraduate students on how family responsibilities affect academic programme completion. Married students agreed that family expectations interfere with academic work (3.13), while single students also agreed though at a lower level (2.63). Both groups disagreed that family duties caused programme extension (2.10; 2.41), suggesting minimal impact on study duration. They agreed that families provide adequate support for programme completion (3.19; 2.67). Both groups disagreed about missing deadlines due to family duties (2.02; 2.10), indicating that deadlines are generally met despite domestic pressures. Respondents agreed that juggling family and academics causes emotional stress (3.29; 2.62) and that family obligations often necessitate study breaks (3.42; 2.89). Domestic tasks were seen to reduce academic time (3.15; 2.88), though family duties were not viewed as limiting group participation (2.52; 2.35). Both groups agreed that childcare reduces study time (3.11; 2.77). The overall mean scores (2.83; 2.62) show moderate agreement that family responsibilities affect academic completion.

Test of Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference among the opinions of PGD, Masters and Ph.D students on the ways work-life balance affect the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance of the Means scores of PGD, Masters and Ph.D students on the ways work-life balance affect the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Between Groups	1.124	2	.562	1.771	.171
Within Groups	364.539	1149	.317		
Total	365.663	1151			

As presented in Table 3, the analysis of variance produced an F-value of 1.771 and a p-value of 0.171. Since the p-value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is retained. This result establishes that there is no significant difference in the views of PGD, Masters, and PhD female students on how work-life balance influences the completion of academic programmes. Consequently, post hoc test is not necessary, as the responses across the groups were largely consistent.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the opinions of single and married students on the ways family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 4: T-test analysis of the difference in means scores of single and married students on the ways family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

Group	Sample Size (n)	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	P-value	Remark
Married	245	2.69	0.82	382	2.93	1.96	0.000	Significant
Single	139	2.53	0.69					

Table 4 presents the result of an independent samples z-test comparing the opinions of single and married postgraduate students. The calculated z-value obtained was 4.83, with a corresponding p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the opinions of single and married students on how family responsibilities affect academic programme completion. The result suggests that marital status influences students' experiences in balancing family demands with academic progress.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Ways work-life balance affects the completion of academic programmes among female postgraduate students in public universities.

The findings from the present study showed that the three categories of female postgraduate students, namely Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), Master's, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students, experience a significant impact of work-life balance on their academic completion. The aggregate mean scores obtained for the respectively categories of the respondents are 2.71 for PGD, 2.73 for Masters, and 2.72 for PhD students, indicating. The results established a strong consensus among the respondents, that the competing demands of academic responsibilities, work obligations, and family roles often resulted in stress, fatigue, and delays

in programme completion. Furthermore, students across all the three categories acknowledged that the intensity of academic tasks disrupted their personal schedules and placed considerable strain on their emotional wellbeing.

These challenges are indications of a wider reality echoed in a previous study conducted by Ojo et al. (2014), who investigated Nigerian female university students' perceptions of work-life balance. The authors revealed that the majority of the respondents found it difficult to balance the demands of academic work, part-time employment, and social obligations, which in turn resulted in missed deadlines, academic fatigue, and diminished mental focus. The situation is particularly complex in patriarchal societies such as Anambra State, where women are culturally expected to shoulder the greater burden of domestic and caregiving duties.

The specific nature of work-life imbalance encountered by female postgraduate students in the Nigerian higher education system are apparently multidimensional, involving not just time conflicts but also psychological strain and institutional neglect. The findings of this current study, particularly the respondents' agreement that they feel emotionally exhausted because of overlapping work and academic schedules, re-echoes the report of Bashir and Khan (2022), who explored the lived experiences of female academics in universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Their study documented that female academics were frequently overwhelmed by excessive workloads and familial responsibilities, with limited institutional support and little recognition of their dual roles. The parallels are noteworthy, and implies that academic institutions in developing contexts often overlook the unique burdens faced by female scholars and students, thereby failing to establish effective policies and practices that could mitigate such stress.

The result from one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was no significant difference in the responses of PGD, Masters, and PhD students on the effect of work-life balance on their academic performance ($F = 1.771, p = .171$). This non-significant result reinforces the descriptive findings, implying that irrespective of academic level, female postgraduate students face broadly similar challenges in reconciling their academic pursuits with life demands. This homogeneity of experience aligns with the conclusions reached by Eke et al. (2023), who studied academic staff in Nigerian public universities and found that work-life balance constraints were uniformly reported across different cadres of employees. Both junior lecturers and senior female academics expressed similar challenges associated with balancing teaching, research, and personal life, indicating strongly the presence of

deeply embedded constraints in the institutional culture, and a lack of significant differentiation by rank (Eke et al., 2023).

The implications are far-reaching. Universities, particularly public ones in Nigeria, especially those in Anambra State, must reconsider their student support frameworks, including the adoption of flexible academic schedules, provision of childcare facilities, integration of psychological counselling services, and the mainstreaming of gender-responsive academic policies. As revealed by Boyede and Omotoye (2021), flexible work arrangements significantly increased engagement and performance among women in technical education in Osun State. Therefore, similar strategies could be effectively adapted to academic environments to support female postgraduate students. While the findings suggest no significant difference in perception across academic levels, the qualitative implications are profound. Academic institutions must shift from passive acknowledgement to proactive intervention, by developing strategic frameworks that recognise the layered realities confronting female students. In doing so, they not only reduce attrition and associated completion delays, but also enhance the academic and emotional well-being of a vital segment of the higher education community.

Ways family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students in public universities

The study revealed that family responsibilities affect the completion of academic programmes of female postgraduate students to a moderate extent. The findings showed that students experienced difficulties in managing household duties alongside academic work, often faced emotional strain, and encountered frequent interruptions in their study schedules due to family obligations. These findings indicate that family responsibilities play a substantial and complex role in determining the academic experiences of female postgraduate students. Analysis of responses across marital categories in this study showed that both married and single students acknowledged the pressure exerted by family-related expectations on their academic performance, although the nature and intensity of these pressures varied. While single students often reported being drawn into extended family obligations such as caregiving for siblings or supporting household needs, married students frequently cited spousal duties, child-rearing, and marital expectations as direct disruptions to their academic routines.

Items such as “Family expectations often interfere with my academic commitments” and “I experience emotional stress from juggling family and academic duties” recorded mean scores

above 2.70 and 2.51 for married and single women, signalling a shared understanding of the academic strain induced by domestic roles. These findings align closely with those of Ufoaroh et al. (2023), who reported that female students in tertiary institutions often serve as primary caregivers and emotional anchors within their families. Their study further revealed that marital status alone did not sufficiently buffer the impact of these responsibilities; instead, it often compounded the pressure by introducing expectations of submissiveness, availability, and uninterrupted domestic presence.

The study by Eke et al. (2023) further provides additional context, although their focus was on female academic staff rather than students, however their study conclusion indicates that family-friendly institutional practices enhanced work-life balance and productivity among the respondents. This resonates with the struggles identified by the female students in the present research. In both cases, the burden of familial roles without structured support systems led to academic delays, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of being overwhelmed. These experiences appear to be consistent across various societal contexts, particularly in patriarchal cultures where caregiving is predominantly feminised. In Nigeria, for instance, the traditional gender norms have not relented in reinforcing the assumption that women must prioritise domestic obligations over personal or professional ambitions (Peter & Igbozuruike, 2020). These traditional suppositions have intensified the struggle for female postgraduate students, who must constantly negotiate their academic schedules around external family demands that are both culturally sanctioned and socially enforced. The psychological toll of this balancing act was quite evident in the students' responses, as a substantial number of them admitted to having lost motivation to continue their study, experienced burnout, and failed to meet academic deadlines due to unrelenting family pressures.

T-test analysis showed that married and single students experiences in balancing work and study was significant different ($t = 4.83, p = .000$), indicating that marital status substantially influences how female postgraduate students experience family responsibilities in relation to academic progress. Married students were significantly more likely to report scheduling difficulties, unplanned interruptions, and unmet academic targets due to spousal and parental roles. This finding is supported by Okeke et al. (2022), who noted that married female students in Nigerian public universities faced considerable challenges in managing coursework alongside their familial obligations, adding that the difficulties often resulted in delayed thesis completion and missed academic deadlines. In contrast, while single students were not exempt from family-induced pressures, their challenges were often described as intermittent and situational, rather than daily and continuous.

The work of DeMinck (2017) offers a psychological and identity-based lens through which to understand these findings. Her qualitative study revealed that working mothers in academia are shaped by lifelong relational patterns, motivational drives, and adaptive styles, all of which influence how they manage academic and family responsibilities. Applying this to the current context, it may be inferred that female postgraduate students develop internal strategies to negotiate role conflict. However, these strategies, though admirable, cannot substitute for structural reforms. Without tangible university support such as on-campus childcare, spousal involvement programmes, and counselling services tailored to women's unique needs, these students will continue to suffer in silence, often at the expense of their academic potential.

CONCLUSION

The study examined work-life balance among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State, focusing on family responsibilities, work demands, and institutional support systems. Findings showed that work-life balance significantly affects programme completion across all study levels. Female students experience stress, fatigue, and emotional strain arising from academic workload, family duties, and employment. Married students reported greater difficulty in balancing academic and domestic responsibilities than single students. Although universities provide some flexibility and counselling services, financial assistance and childcare support remain inadequate. The study concludes that these combined challenges adversely affect academic progress and delay timely programme completion among female postgraduate students in public universities in Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed to address the factors affecting work-life balance and programme completion among female postgraduate students.

1. University authorities should incorporate flexible academic structures, including adaptable lecture schedules and blended learning options, to enable female postgraduate students to manage academic responsibilities alongside work and family life. This will help to reduce stress and promote timely programme completion.
2. Public universities should provide family-responsive services such as parenting support groups, efficient marital and academic counselling, and academic leave for caregiving, to minimise the negative impact of family responsibilities on students' academic progress.

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