



## **Strategies for Coping with Childcare and Selfcare related Stress among Working Mothers in Ondo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the strategies for coping with childcare and selfcare related stress among working mothers in Ondo State. It was a survey. The population consisted of all working mothers in Ondo State, Nigeria. 399 working mothers were drawn from across the state using purposive sampling technique. Instrument used to collect data was questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using mean. Findings reveal six (6) stressful situations working mothers are experiencing with childcare and selfcare, which include among other things: inability to bond with child appropriately; stress spillage to production at work; physical and emotional health issues. five (5) strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with childcare related stress, which includes among other things: patronizing nanny that will not be staying with the family, staggering time at workplace that allows mother to personally attend to all her child's essentials and patronizing child substitute care giver during working hours. Sixteen (16) strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with selfcare related stress, which includes among other things: avoiding over commitment for the day, taking break from workplace at the appropriate time and setting achievable targets alone in order to do away with irrelevant stress. Recommendations were made for mothers to feel free to ask for break (for instance leave) from workplace, not minding the cut in pay, when the need arises; mothers should not commit themselves with too many tasks at a time to avoid health breakdown.

**Keywords:** Working, Mother, Childcare, Selfcare, Stress, Coping Strategies.

### **Introduction**

A working mother is a female individual with child and career/vocation; she might be a wife as well. Loto and Adeyanju (2017), working mothers are women with child or children, with or without husband, who has in addition to domestic chores, career responsibilities to handle. Kadale, Pandey and Raje (2018), working mother could as well mean a woman that can successfully join career with child raising duty. All the areas of the life of a working mother come with its peculiar tasks and challenges.

Working Mothers in Ondo State and all around the world have several roles to perform. In a typical Nigerian household, it is expected of mothers, in addition to their career, prepare meals, take care of the house while also caring for children and spouse, and (in certain instances) care for the aged (Ikpeama, Olaitan, & Ngwu, 2023). Mothers are saddled with the obligation of bringing up and nurturing children properly which is what one gets to see from time to time in developing countries such as Pakistan (Aslam, 2020). Mukasheva (2024), these days, women are involved in numerous activities, coherently changing from daughters to sisters and niece, thereafter, to mothers, wives, aunts, companions, employers and employees among others. De Ravindranah, Singh, Arumugam, and Kularajasingam (2021), women as well combine the obligation of handling issues at home, taking care of children and home-works while also doing workplace related duties. Kylash (2024), many working mothers do have the feeling of inadequacy

for not been available for their children as desired or not been able to attend every school event or activity in their children's school.

Working mothers generally, be it in Ondo State Nigeria, other parts of Nigeria as well as other parts of the world, are often stressed up with the workload from workplace and home. One of the leading causes of stress is number of commitments and responsibilities one bears (Sokpuwu, & Ibara, 2021). Ikpeama et al (2023) observed in a study that, mothers working at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria display obvious effect of stress from job with most of the respondents (77%) describing their feeling of stress while handling job demand, keeping companies and trying to sustain life with available time. Kadale et al (2018), as women run after career and financial sustainability while also handling the stress emanating from doing the work at home, there can be significant issues with the health of the women both physically and mentally. In several families, the paid that mothers received from their workplace is what they used in maintaining their living standard, because of this, commitment from work and family is really hard on the mothers, more importantly, that husbands are not sharing in the burden, is even a source of stress for them (Craig & Powell, 2018). Prathipa and Kulandaira (2019) observed in India that, two major issues working mothers experienced and which should never be ignored are: not sleeping well and feeling of distress. De Ravindranah et al (2021), numerous tasks handled by working mothers which spills to home and family duties is causing stress for them. Kylash (2024), in a bid to attend to clarion calls

from work and family life, there can be stress and exhaustion. Sharp (2023), no matter the amount achieved at work or the amount of love and care poured into the families, there is always that nagging voice in the head saying enough has not been done yet and the sad part is that, from experience, these expectations are often self-imposed.

Despite the stress experienced by working mothers due to workload, mothers are still seen almost everywhere working. Salman, Rufai, Salawu and Ogunniyi (2020), females cover around 46% of the Nigeria labour force, showing the extent to which the country has contributed substantially to female employment in Sub Sahara Africa. The labour force involvement in Malaysia is 39.1% women, from which 62% of them are taken to be mothers (De Ravindranath et al 2021). Rajgariah, Chandrashekappa, Babu, Gopi, Ramaiha and Kumar (2021) a huge percentage of women in India are working. This perhaps, might be because, the mothers need the job, their children need them to be able to put something on the table for them and workplace as well needs them. According to Turban, Wu and Zhang (2019), putting into consideration gender variation, suitability and organization creativity, women are viewed as great value to the labour force.

Stress in mothers is not something to be ignored at all because it has a multiplying effect. Pelcovitz (2013), there is likelihood of appearance of depression in mothers who worked full-time and children are obviously affected by their mother's depression. Stressed working mothers can hardly take care of themselves due to family life conflicting with work-life (De Ravindranath et al., 2021). According to Krishna (2014), prolonged stress can result in health issues, in addition to headache and stomach upset, this condition might even be worse in women leading to mental health situation such as depression and anxiety. Rajgariah et al (2021), not only will parental stress disturb the development of the child, but will also go ahead to affect the parent's health negatively. One terrible and destructive thing about the aftermath of build-up stress is that, many a times, the affected persons do not take cognizance of it.

Inasmuch as quitting job is never an option for mothers, because according to Salman et al (2020) mothers' low financial strength in Nigeria, has been linked to the children's poor health. Coping strategy is definitely, inevitable for the working mothers. Ikpeama et al (2023) the skills needed by mothers to ease the effect of stress are what make up coping mechanism. Rajgariah, et al (2023), coping strategies are deliberate actions taken to proffer solution to stressful situations.

Aside to the woman herself, children are the next impacted by the stress experience by working mother, for this reason, the study specifically addresses the coping strategies for childcare and selfcare related stress of working mothers. Sharp (2023), advice working mother to take it easy on themselves, that they are doing the best they can at work and home, and that is what truly matters. This is because, according to Mukasheva (2024), women do not have time for their personal life, health, and relaxation when juggling to harmonize work and family duties. Khan and Mathan (2025), working moms often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and exhaustion as they attempt to satisfy numerous tasks at the same time.

Conclusively, Butler (2013) opined that, one single answer cannot solve the issue of taking care of oneself. Sharp (2023), the reality is that there is no such thing as a perfect balance, it is all about finding what works for the family and the business

and making compromises when needed. Mukasheva (2024), it goes beyond being stuck to a position, rather, it is about exploring what works in certain situations of life. Being meticulous about one's plans and taking up strategies that works will perform wonders in time of stress (Loto & Adeyanju, 2017).

## Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the strategies for coping with childcare and selfcare related stress by working mothers in Ondo state. Specifically, the study identified;

1. Stressful situations working mothers in Ondo State are experiencing with childcare and selfcare.
2. Strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with childcare related stress in Ondo State.
3. Strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with selfcare related stress in Ondo State.

## Research Questions

The study answered the following questions

1. What are the stressful situations working mothers in Ondo State are experiencing with childcare and selfcare?
2. What are the strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with childcare related stress in Ondo state.
3. What are the strategies adopted by working mothers for coping with selfcare related stress in Ondo state?

## Methodology

**Design of the study:** The study adopted a survey research design. Survey research was considered suitable because according to Emaikwu (2011), it is described as that in which the same information is gathered from an unbiased representative group of interest.

**The area of the study:** The study was conducted in Ondo State Nigeria. Most people in the state are Yorubas who as well speak diverse dialects of Yoruba language. Several people in the state are educated elites. Good percentage of women in the state make up these educated elites and they are engaged with one career cum vocation or the other. Ondo State today is classified as one of the states with advanced education because of her reasonable production of educated elites. As a result of these academic quality, this research study is bethink as required in the state.

**Population of the study:** The population for the study comprised of all working mothers in Ondo state. Record from the department of research and statistics, ministry of economic planning and budget, Akure, Ondo State (2010), indicates that all literate married women within age 15-64 in Ondo state was 433,954. This forms the population for the study.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** Simple random sampling technique was used to select 399 working mothers from the total population across the state.

**Instrument for data collection:** Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument for data collection consists of thirty-one items of multiple-choice questionnaires. It comprised of

four Likert-scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD).

**Validation of Instrument:** The questionnaire was validated by three experts from the Faculty of Vocational Teacher Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Reliability of Instrument:** The reliability of the instrument was determined using a test-re-test method. Fifteen copies of the instrument were given to 15 teachers in Ekiti state. After two weeks the same number of instruments were given to the same set of teachers, their responses were correlated using Pearson Product Correlation, it yields the internal consistency of 0.86.

**Table 1: Mean Responses of working mothers on the stressful situations experiencing with childcare and selfcare in Ondo State.**

**N = 399**

S/N	Possible stressful situations with childcare and selfcare	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	Inability to bond with child appropriately.	4.73	0.48	Agreed
2	Stress spillage to production at work	4.81	0.43	Agreed
3	Good child care center/crèche not close by.	3.37	1.54	Agreed
4	Less control over one's schedule.	4.74	0.47	Agreed
5	Not enough time to attend to both (childcare and selfcare) satisfactorily.	3.51	1.42	Agreed
6	Physical and emotional health issues.	2.32	1.32	Agreed

**Key:** N = Number of the working mothers,  $\bar{X}$  = Mean.

Table 1 indicates, the respondents agreed with all the items because their means are above the cut-off point of 2.5

**Table 2: Mean Responses of Working Mothers on Strategies for coping with child care Related Stress.**

**N = 399**

S/N	Possible strategies for coping with child care related stress.	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1	Patronizing nanny that will not be staying with the family.	3.70	Agreed
2	Making use of grandmothers.	2.42	Disagreed
3	Taking in relative of either husband or wife.	2.18	Disagreed
4	Employing a staying house helper or baby sitter.	2.46	Disagreed
5	Obtaining in-home post-natal helper to handle household responsibilities while the mother takes care of baby.	2.47	Disagreed
6	Staggering time at workplace that allows mothers to personally attend to all her childcare essentials.	3.68	Agreed
7	Patronizing any available childcare centers, be it private owned or at public centers such as schools or companies.	3.65	Agreed
8	Making use of part-time baby care, for instance, cooperative of baby-sitting parent, care for sick child, drop-in care.	3.96	Agreed
9	During working hours, childcare substitute care giver is better.	3.47	Agreed
10	Seek help from available neighbour.	2.23	Disagreed
11	Boarding school for children is a good option.	2.26	Disagreed

**Key N = Number of working mothers  $\bar{X}$  = Mean.**

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed with five of the items with the mean range of 3.47 -3.96 as strategies that can

**Method of Data Collection:** Four hundred and thirty-six copies of the questionnaire were personally administered by the researcher with the help of 4 research assistants. Four hundred and four were eventually retrieved representing 93% retrieval among which three hundred and ninety nine were properly filled and eventually analyzed.

**Method of Data analysis:** Data were analyzed using mean. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered agreed and anyone that had mean score below 2.50 were considered disagreed. The analysis was done using statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

**Table 3: Mean Responses of Working Mothers on strategies for coping with selfcare related stress.**

**N = 399**

be adopted to cope with childcare related stress because they are above the cut-off point of 2.5. They disagreed with the rest six items with the mean range of 2.18- 2.47 because they are below the cut-off point of 2.5.

S/N	Possible strategies for coping with self-care related stress	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1	Avoiding over commitment for the day.	3.58	Agreed
2	Setting achievable targets alone in order to do away with irrelevant stress.	3.86	Agreed
3	Taking break from workplace at appropriate time.	3.39	Agreed
4	Going on vacation cum annual leave.	3.57	Agreed
5	Sometimes patronizing relaxation centers or going for break.	3.51	Agreed
6	Exercising regularly to improve emotional state.	3.57	Agreed
7	Maintaining adequate nutrition.	3.54	Agreed
8	Having enough sleep, at least eight hours every night.	3.86	Agreed
9	Avoiding rigidity, that is, accepting people for who they are to avoid certain stress.	3.66	Agreed
10	Prayer can be a very strong antidote for stress.	3.12	Agreed
11	Taking good care of one's physical appearance.	3.58	Agreed
12	Doing one's hobby can be a stress diversion.	3.38	Agreed
13	Quick response to the body's warning of stress.	3.64	Agreed
14	Cultivate the habit of sharing out duties both at home and workplace, rather than doing them all alone.	3.41	Agreed
15	Plan budget within one's financial limit to avoid financial stress.	3.76	Agreed
16	Learn to reject certain commitments.	3.62	Agreed

**Key:**  $\bar{X}$ = Mean, N= number of working mothers.

Results of table 3 indicate that the working mothers accepted all the sixteen items as strategies that can be adopted for selfcare related stress because the mean range (3.23 -3.86) is above the cut-off point of 2.5. Table 3 reveals that, all the sixteen items fall within the mean range of 3.12-3.86 which is above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicated that the working mothers agreed that all the items can be adopted as strategies for personal self-care related stress.

## Discussion

These are the situations giving mothers stress in caring for their children and also want to care for themselves, these situations are: Inability to bond with child appropriately; stress spillage to production at work; good child care center/creche not close by; less control over one's schedule; Not enough time to attend to both (childcare and selfcare) satisfactorily and physical and emotional health issues. Stressed working mothers can hardly take care of themselves due to family life conflicting with work life (De Ravindranath et al., 2021); Sharp (2023), no matter the amount achieved at work or the amount of love and care poured into the families, there is always that nagging voice in the head saying enough has not been done yet. Prathipa and Kulandaira (2019) observed in India that two major issues working mothers experienced and which should never be ignored are: not sleeping well and feeling of distress. Kylash (2024), finding reliable and affordable childcare can be a major challenge for working mothers.

The study identified the following as the coping strategies that working mothers can use to ease childcare related

stress: Patronizing nanny who will not be staying with the family; Staggering time at workplace that allows mothers to personally attend to all her childcare essentials; patronizing any available childcare centers, be it private owned or at public centers such as schools or companies; making use of part-time baby care, for instance, cooperative of baby-sitting parents, care for sick child, drop-in care; during working hours, childcare substitute care giver is better. In support of these are: Benfield (2009), as it is not possible for working mothers to be there at all time with their children, there is need for reliable and trusted childcare to foster both physical and mental growth of children; De Ranvindranah et al (2021), the childcare support magnanimously preferred was the one on-site; Frey (2013), parent babysitting cooperatives and Sick child care. Pelcovitz (2013), unsteady working hours that enables parents to personally attend to childcare needs themselves should be part of the notable set of choices for child care; Prathipa and Kulandaira (2019) observed in India that, as dealing with child is as important to working mothers as accomplishing the objectives given at workplace, maternity leave is additionally a call for concern. Khan and Mathan (2025), working mothers should have access to affordable childcare.

This study, however rejects the following options: Making use of grandmother; taking in relatives of either husband or wife; employing a staying house helper or baby sitter; employing in-home post-natal helper to handle household responsibilities while mother takes care of baby; seek help from available neighbour; Keeping children in boarding school at certain age. Pare and Dillaway (2005) intensive mothering involves three major principles of which all mothers must abide by if they are to be

considered as good mother; one of which is; childcare is basically the responsibility of the mother.

This study identified the following as strategies to cope with selfcare related stress by working mothers: Avoid over commitment for the day; Setting achievable targets alone in order to do away with irrelevant stress; taking break from workplace at appropriate time; going on vacation cum annual leave; sometimes patronizing relaxation centers or going for break. The study also identified: Exercising regularly to improve emotional state; taking adequate nutrition is essential; having enough sleep, at least eight hours every night; avoiding rigidity, that is, accepting people for who they are to avoid certain stress; prayer can be a very strong antidote for stress; The study also identified the following in addition: Taking good care of one's physical appearance; doing one's hobby can be a stress diversion; quick response to the body's warning of stress; cultivate the habit of sharing out duties both at home and workplace rather doing them all alone; to avoid financial stress, plan well on income; it is good to reject certain commitments. Mathieu (2007), take into account, taking small break during the day, it might just be taking the time to drink one's favourite coffee; Scott (2012), a lot of people are unaware that, not eating right can expose one to stress; Edralin (2012), advised mothers to look for guidance and spiritual strength through prayers as this will give them inner fortitude to do all their duties if they believe in the guidance and protection God can give them: Segal et al (2012), do not put too much on yourself to be performed in a day; Adedeji and Gbadebo (2015), healthy eating contributes to all round wellness, it is also a strong pillar in avoiding certain situations; Oguche (2016), adequate nutrition is important for everyone including the childbearing aged women. Ikpeama et al (2024), rest, holiday and job that pays well should be used by working mothers as coping strategies. Khan and Mathan (2025), support systems should include policies that encourage a healthy work-life balance.

## Implication

The study exposed the facts that mothers that are working are experiencing stress in handling the workload emanating from caring for their children and also caring for themselves. The study brings to limelight the strategies working mothers can use to appropriately care for their children and also care for themselves. As a result, this study has implication for children as it identified how they can be given the care required for their proper growth and development irrespective of their mother's job. The study also has implication for mothers that are working to be able to look good for themselves, keep fit as well as maintain sanity irrespective of the workload from home, childcare and workplace. Mothers that are working should try as much as possible to be available for themselves as much as they are available for their children and their job.

## Limitation and Future Research

The study was carried out on mothers that are working in Ondo State, Nigeria. Further studies can be carried out in other part of the country. The study put all mothers in the same category, further studies can segregate into mothers that are in the beginning, expanding and contracting family. This study does not consider the nature of the working mothers' job, further study can consider the effect the nature of certain jobs has on the mothers' time and energy that should be available for childcare and selfcare.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Mothers to feel free to ask for break (for instance leave) from workplace, not minding the cut in pay, when the need arises regarding, especially, how they feel with their body system.
2. Mothers should not commit themselves with too many tasks at a time to avoid health breakdown.
3. Dual home life style should be avoided as much as possible so that both husband and wife will be available at the time necessary to perform their roles.
4. Distribution of responsibilities within the family should not be lopsided so that one person will not be over-worked at the expense of another.
5. Health they say is wealth, working mother should create time to take care of their spirit soul and body.

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