

Work-Family Stressors and Manufacturing Firms Performance: Influence of Work-Life Balance Strategies

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Abstract: Managing employees' work-family pressures without resulting in negative influence on employees' contributions and performance remains a challenge to human resource practitioners in the manufacturing industry. Efforts geared towards tackling this challenge have led to the development of various work-life balance strategies in the industry. Yet, the effectiveness of the developed work-life balance strategies to manage employees' work-family stressors and performance remains an issue. This study investigated the influence of work-life balance strategies on the interplay between work-family stressors and performance in the manufacturing industry. A quantitative survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 312 employees in the manufacturing firms operating in the Lagos metropolis using a simple random sampling technique. A self-report questionnaire was used for data collection. The preliminary data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 24. The variance-based Structural Equation Modelling was run using SmartPLS 3.3 for hypothesis testing and for path analysis of the structural model. This study found that work-life balance strategies fully mediate the relationship between work stressors and manufacturing firms' performance. It is recommended that the family aspect of the work-life balance strategies be redesigned to reduce the negative influence of family stressors on manufacturing firms' performance.

Keywords: Manufacturing sector; mediation; organisational performance; work-family demands

JEL Classification: M12; I31

1. Introduction

Stress is part of the human condition. In other words, it is natural for any person to experience stress at a particular point in time. Organisations globally have come to realise that work and family stressors influence performance. However, scholars have mostly focused on the negative outcomes of work and family stressors, and their impact on individual well-being. (Dunkley, Solomon-Krakus & Moroz, 2016; Repetti & Wang, 2017; Searle & Auton, 2015) It has been argued that stressors also have positive aspect referred to as eustress, otherwise known as "good stress". (Kozusznik, Rodríguez & Peiró, 2015; Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003; Snodgrass et al., 2016) Eustress is an individual perception of stressors as challenge determined to be overcome by effectively mobilising and using coping resources. (Simmons & Nelson, 2007) Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 32), argue that positive stressors "occur if the outcome of an encounter is construed as positive, that is, if it preserves or enhances well-being or promises to do so". Similarly, Tabassum, Farooq and Fatima (2017), revealed that moderate stress is benevolent and beneficial as individuals have the coping ability to deal with it. When an individual sees stressors as challenges that can be surmounted, coping resources are channelled towards motivating the self to achieving goals, changing the environment and prevailing in the face of life challenges.

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As individual response to stressful situation varies, so is the coping strategy adopted to cushion its effect. Abe, Fields and Atiku (2016, p. 206), argue that “an individual’s ability to manage work and family stressors, and equally distribute personal resources is largely dependent on the individual’s sense of coherence”. Ivancevich, Matteson and Preston (1982) categorised stress into (i) the stimulus variable and (ii) the response variable. These authors defined stress from the perspective of the stimulus variable as a force acting on an individual to cause strain. This definition has been criticised for limiting stress to environmental and organisational perspectives while ignoring the positive impacts of stress on a personal mental process (Lee & Lee, 2001). Stress may be explained from a personality perspective which triggers health and cognitive effects via mechanism unconnected to environmental factors (Bolger & Schilling, 1991). According to the response variable, stress is a physiological response resulting from stressors. Consequently, stress is measured with psychological strains such as anxiety, anger and high blood pressure. Stressors are therefore associated with health-related issues such as high blood pressure, weight gain, and dysfunctional coping ability (Cardon & Patel, 2015). Stressors emanating from work and family domains can increase employees’ pressure which may lead to symptoms of strains (Clark, Michel, Early & Baltes, 2014). Karatepe, Beirami, Bouzari and Safavi (2014, p. 14) identified “long and anti-social work hours, organisational politics, emotional dissonance, and work-family conflict” as some of the stressors that employees experience in the world of work. Employees’ perceptions and reactions to stressors are subjective.

This study examined the mediating influence of work-life balance strategies (WLBS) on the link between work-family stressors and manufacturing firms’ performance in the Lagos metropolis.

2. Review of Related Literature

In this section extant literature on work and family stressors in relation to WLBS is discussed.

2.1. Work Stressors

Work-related stressors are linked to processes whereby employees interact with the organisational internal and external environment as consequences of the conflicts that arise from the ineffective allocation of limited resources to address work and family demands (Zheng, Kashi, Fan, Molineux, & Ee, 2016). Work stressors occur when the job demands exceed the employees’ capabilities. In this case, the job demands are more than what the individuals can offer, which may result in psychological and physical exhaustion. Many studies have been conducted on work stressors (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Lamb & Kwok, 2016; Repetti & Wang, 2017) and most of them were aimed at appraising and providing solutions to the adverse effect of stressors on job performance. (González-Morales & Neves, 2015) Jex (1998) defined work stressors as activities that stimulate strains such as anxiety, exhaustion and depression.

Work stressors are multi-dimensional and have been predicted to impact on employees’ job attitude and performance (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried & Cooper, 2008). In their meta-analysis Gilboa et al. (2008) identified three negative linkages in literature on the stressors-performance relationship: First, when employees view stressors as threatening, energy is dissipated to cope with such stressors at the expense of carrying out job tasks. Second, an increase in the level of stressors is linked with unconscious physiological reactions that hinder performance. The third link identified on the stressor-performance is the argument that stressors produce information overload, which may lead to employee neglect of information relating to performance. Individual perception and response stimulus to

stressors vary. Ventura, Salanova, and Llorens (2015) argue that a key factor that enhances individual perception of work environment and psychological well-being is self-efficacy. Bandura (1986, p. 391) defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances”. In other words, it is an individual’s belief in his or her own ability to influence situations that affects life. Self-efficacy influences the level of work stressors when employees are saddled with multiple job demands (Chan et al., 2016).

In order to examine the link between work stressors and WLBS in this study, three major common sources of work stressors were identified, namely role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. Role conflict refers to the degree of incompatibility in an employee’s job role. Role conflict, also known as inter-role conflict, occurs when an employee has two roles that are mutually incompatible (Mansor, Othman, Yaacob, & Yasin, 2016). Stress arises when employees are saddled with two conflicting responsibilities and are expected to deliver on both. Role ambiguity refers to a lack of clarity on an employee’s job responsibilities, chain of command and relationship with co-workers (Amilin, 2017). It has been established that role conflict and role ambiguity have a negative influence on job performance, work-family satisfaction, turnover intention, job commitment and organisational outcomes (Ren & Zhang, 2015; Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau, 2014; Searle & Auton, 2015). The lack of a clearly defined role causes employees to function less effectively. Role overload, on the other hand, occurs when employees are confronted with work responsibilities beyond what is stated in the job description or as hitherto presumed. It may involve employees working extra hours, taking jobs home or working on weekends. Studies have revealed that the impact of role overload can have diverse impacts on employees’ performance (Eissa & Lester, 2017; Tabassum et al., 2017). The study on which this article draws measured work stressors, taking into consideration the subjective perceptions of individual employees.

2.2. Family Stressors

Situations arise whereby family demands exceed the resources to cope with such demands. When such conditions occur, families experience stress which leads to a time of disequilibrium and disorientation (Patterson, 2002). The family demands become stressors due to the lack of adequate resources to meet the competing demands. Family-related stressors may involve a broad spectrum of conditions such as psychological and emotional strain which may hinder the functionality of the family. McCubbin and Sussman (2014) refer to family stressors as life events which have an impact on the family unit resulting in the alteration of the family social system. Stressors may emerge from family response to relational tension, parental workload and extended family pressures. The family perception and response to the various life events affect the emotional state of family members (Greder, Peng, Doudna & Sarver, 2017). Family stressors have been regarded as a major source of work-family conflict as employees experiencing stress may find it difficult to maintain the balance between work and family responsibilities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Panatik et al., 2012; Sharma, Dhar & Tyagi, 2016). The competitiveness in the labour market causes employees to spend more time on their job at the expense of spending quality time with the family and on other personal activities. (Saleem, 2015) The ability to be able to work round the clock or at any point in time means the quality time the employees spend with their family are being encroached upon as a result of the job demands. Job inflexibility has been categorised as a stressor. According to Minnotte, Pedersen and Banstrom (2015), job inflexibility refers to the inability to manage time at work; such that time spent carrying out a job function does not affect family responsibilities. Lack of job flexibility may affect the ability of the family to maintain a balance between work and family, thus resulting in conflict. The functionality of

a couple has implications for family stressors. The psychological strain experienced by a couple who lack the resources to function may have an effect on parental responsibility. A dual-earner family with pressure from work tends to report overwhelming multiple commitments which may have an adverse effect on parental responsibility (Watkins, Pittman & Walsh, 2013).

2.3. Work-Life Balance Strategies

Globalisation, with its attendant competitiveness, has brought about a demographic shift in the labour market. The changing demographics mean that employees are saddled with more responsibilities from the family domain, in addition to the concern to achieve success in the work domain (Ko & Hur, 2014). More so, the level of competitiveness which has made it difficult for organisations to attract and retain the best talent in the labour market has propelled the attention given to WLBS (Caillier, 2016; Lee & Hong, 2011). Organisations are keeping up with this trend to enhance performance which can lead to greater competitive advantage (Al-Damoe, Ab Hamid & Omar, 2015). The inability to implement WLBS effectively may result in employees living in perpetual anxiety. Work-life balance strategies (sometimes referred to as work-life policies or family-friendly policies in literature) are aligned with HR strategies to help employees manage both the work and the non-work aspects of their lives. Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, and Walters (2002, p. 56) see WLBS as those factors whether intentionally or otherwise enhance the flexibility and autonomy of an employee in negotiating attention and presence in employment. Organisations around the world have seen the need to adopt WLBS as part of HR strategies to help employees cope with stressors and attract the best talent in a competitive labour market. As employees struggle to meet work and life demands, the onus rests on HR practitioners to examine the challenges associated with the adopted WLBS (Morris & Madsen, 2007).

Life responsibilities vary from one person to another and they are based on many factors which include marital status, gender orientation, child care, extended family demands, hobbies/interests and many other dynamics outside of work (Mazerolle, Eason, & Trisdale, 2015). The current recession in Nigeria is taking its toll on the organisations; this has forced many to demand higher productivity from their employees. The importance of WLBS to enhance performance is being recognised by the corporate bodies in Nigeria. Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) found that organisations that implement WLBS, such as flexible work arrangements, on-site day care and dependent care, experienced improved performance. Beauregard and Henry (2009) argue that in business WLBS involves the attraction and retention of skilled employees to enhance organisational outcomes.

The assumption is that WLBS is a reciprocal gain system that benefits both organisations and their employees (Caillier, 2016; Las Heras, Bosch & Raes, 2015). Since imbalance between work and life may influence employees' turnover intentions and absenteeism, WLBS can help address the imbalance thereby enhancing employee motivation and curtailing the rate of turnover and absenteeism. Organisations benefit from WLBS through the reduction in the stress level of employees and turnover intentions with adverse effects on employees' achievement of work-life balance and improved performance for the organisations (Las Heras et al., 2015; Lee & Hong, 2011). Organisational efforts aimed at helping employees achieve balance may include the implementation of WLBS, such as flexible work arrangements, child and elder care options, employees' health and wellness programmes, leave options, and stress management (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit, 2005; Subramaniam, Overton & Maniam, 2015).

2.4. Work-Life Balance Strategies and Performance

Adopting WLBS and high-quality management practices will produce positive effects on employees and organisational performance alike (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Mahesh, Prabhushankar, Chirag and Amit (2016) argue that high-quality work as well as family life is crucial for organisational sustainability in the face of global competitiveness. Amit (2016) emphasise that quality of work and family life hinges on organisational support for WLBS. For instance, effective implementation of WLBS, such as flexible work arrangements and health and wellness programmes, can enhance employees' productivity with a positive effect on the organisation. However, Beauregard and Henry (2009) posit that the influence of WLBS on organisational performance may be rendered questionable by practices that fail to accomplish projected objectives.

Yamamoto and Matsuura (2014) investigated the effect of WLBS on organisational productivity among 1 677 firms in Japan using panel data. The results of their findings revealed that organisations that invest in human resources can profit from WLBS through reduction in employees' turnover intentions. The quality and effective use of WLBS in an organisation can serve as good attraction for highly talented employees. Pradhan, Jena, and Kumari (2016) found that WLBS have significant consequences on employees' attitudes, conducts and well-being as well as on organisational performance. Consistent with this argument, a study conducted by Fapohunda (2014) in Nigeria revealed that employees' contribution to work and organisational outcomes can be enhanced through flexible work arrangement as WLBS. The conceptual framework underpinning this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

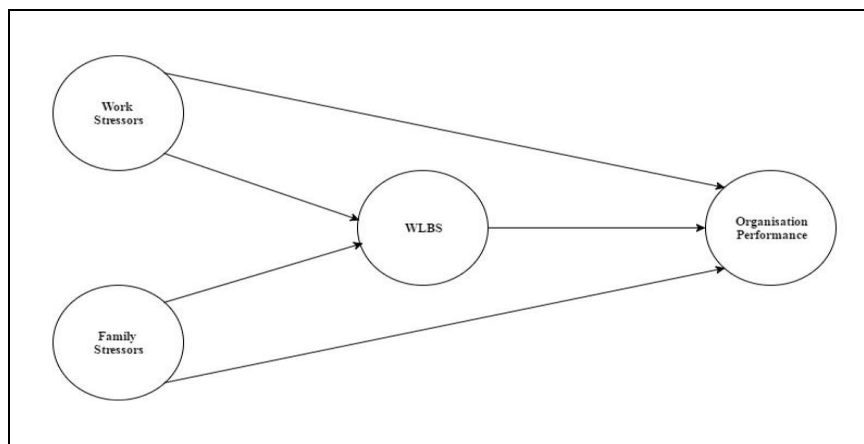


Figure 1. Conceptual framework on the mediating role of WLBS

Source: Authors' own compilation

As evident in Figure 1, work and family stressors are the exogenous latent variables influencing WLBS and performance in the manufacturing industry. WLBS is the latent variable mediating the relationship between work and family stressors, and performance in the Nigerian manufacturing industry. Organisation performance is the endogenous latent variable in this study. In line with this specification, this study hypothesised:

- H1: A significant positive relationship exists between work-family stressors and WLBS;
- H2: A significant positive relationship exists between WLBS and performance of selected manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis;

H3a: WLBS mediates the relationship between work stressors and performance of the selected manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis;

H3b: WLBS mediates the relationship between family stressors and performance of the selected manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis.

3. Method

This study utilised a quantitative survey by adopting an advanced explanatory research design in providing the required explanations of the mediating influence of WLBS on the link between work-family stressors and performance in the manufacturing industry. The population for this study were employees from two manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. The staff strength of the two firms at the time of conducting this survey was 508. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select respondents who participated in the study. The reason for adopting this sampling technique was its simplicity and lack of bias features to make possible the generalisation of research outcome back to the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table was adopted to arrive at a minimum sample size of 312. A self-reported questionnaire was used as the main research instrument for this study. The structured questionnaire for the survey was divided into two sections: section A of the questionnaire contained information on demographic data, while section B contained questions on the variables under investigation. A total of 350 questionnaires were administered, while 312 questionnaires were returned and properly populated.

3.1. Measures

Work stressors were measured by 15 items adapted from Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970). These items, which centred on role conflict and role ambiguity, were validated by González-Romá and Lloret (1998). Family stressors were measured according to the adapted scale developed by Kopelman, Greenhaus and Connolly (1983). This scale by Kopelman et al. (1983) was supported by another scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). A 5-point Likert-type rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was designed to elicit responses from respondents on the stressors experienced from work and family domains.

Items for WLBS were drawn from a scale developed by De Cieri et al. (2005). The scale has two dimensions, which were aimed at measuring the availability and effectiveness of WLBS. Six items were developed to measure manufacturing firms' performance. The items on the scale measuring WLBS and organisational performance were designed using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The validity and reliability of all constructs in the measuring instrument were conducted to ensure data quality control (see Table 1 below).

3.2 Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected in this study were captured on the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24 to conduct the preliminary analysis. After various preliminary analyses were conducted, the SPSS data file was saved as Comma Delimited (*.CSV) to import the data file into SmartPLS 3.3. The SmartPLS 3.3 was instrumental in analysing the quantitative data using variance-based structural equation modelling. (PLS-SEM) (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015)

4. Results and Discussion

The results of internal consistency of the research instrument used in measuring the work-family stressors, WLBS, and performance of the manufacturing firms are presented in Table 1. The validity (convergent and discriminant validity using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses) of the measurement model is also presented in Table 1.

Table1. Construct reliability and validity

Construct	CA	CR	AVE	FS	OP	WLBS	WS
Family stressors (FS)	0.844	0.881	0.514	0.717			
Organisational performance (OP)	0.879	0.907	0.621	-0.272	0.788		
WLBS	0.853	0.890	0.576	-0.255	0.523	0.759	
Work stressors (WS)	0.791	0.864	0.614	0.526	-	-0.389	0.783

Note: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$. Diagonal are the square roots of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted), CA is Cronbach's Alpha and CR is composite reliability.

As illustrated in Table 1, the internal consistency of the items measuring the major constructs was analysed and double checked using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients. The rationale for conducting composite reliability is based on its unique feature in providing a more appropriate measure of internal reliability of the instrument used in measuring the latent variables. (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins & Kuppelwieser, 2014) The Cronbach's alpha revealed that all constructs produced alpha coefficients above 0.7. The implication of these results is that the scales used in measuring the variables investigated in this study are reliable. Each of the constructs except for work stressors has Cronbach's alpha of above 0.8, which indicates good internal consistency of items in the scale. The Cronbach's alpha for work stressors, as shown in Table 1, is 0.791, WLBS is 0.853, organisational performance is 0.879 and family stressors is 0.844. Furthermore, the composite reliability of each construct was conducted to ensure the internal consistency and reliability of all the constructs' measurement.

The validity of the research instrument was achieved using AVE. The AVE provided evidence of the internal consistency of all constructs as each value is greater than the acceptable level of 0.5. The AVE calculated revealed that the loading for all constructs is greater than the acceptable level of 0.50. This means that each construct explained over 50% of its items' variance. The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was applied to ensure discriminant validity of all constructs. This was achieved by comparing the cross-loading of all constructs to the square roots of AVE as depicted by values in the diagonal in Table 1. The analysis revealed that all constructs in this study did not violate discriminant validity. The variance-based structural equation modelling showcasing the beta loadings and adjusted R^2 from one path to another is presented in Figure 2.

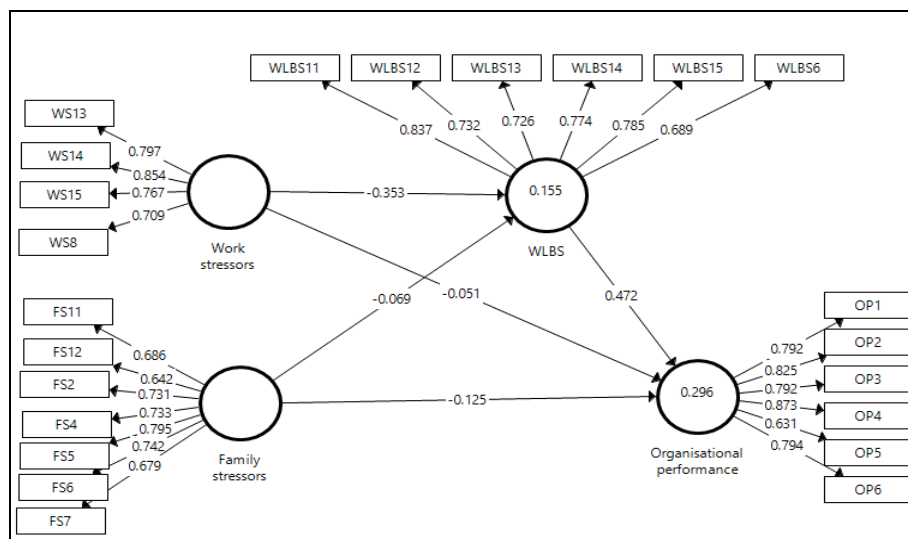


Figure 2. Structural model of constructs

Figure 2 depicts the results of the PLS analysis using SmartPLS 3.3. The beta loading from the path work stressors to WLBS ($r = -0.353$, $p < 0.001$) is negative, but statistically significant. The implication of this result is that there is an inverse relationship between work stressors and WLBS adopted by the manufacturing firms operating in the Lagos metropolis. The R^2 square value (0.155) shows that work stressors explained 15.5% variance in WLBS. The path coefficient from family stressors to WLBS ($r = -0.069$, $p > 0.05$) is also negative, but statistically insignificant.

This result implies that there is no significant relationship between family stressors and WLBS in the selected manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis. Based on this empirical evidence, it can be inferred that the adopted WLBS has not been effective in addressing the family stressors experienced by employees in the manufacturing firms. Therefore, hypothesis one (H1) cannot be supported on the ground that there is no significant positive relationship between work-family stressors and WLBS in the manufacturing firms. The result of H1 is very surprising due to the fact that HR practitioners are expected to adopt or develop WLBS in line with the work-family stressors being experienced by the employees. The inverse relationship between the variables could mean a lack of adequate work-life balance programmes addressing employees' work and family pressures in the manufacturing firms. This result is similar to the finding in the study conducted by Deery and Jago (2015), in which it was revealed that employees experiencing poor work-life balance, which may be due to ineffective WLBS, tend to experience poor health conditions. Also, González-Morales and Neves (2015) found that stressors have an effect on performance. They suggested that mechanism should be put in place to cushion the effect of stressors. An effective WLBS could serve as a good mechanism to address stressors experienced by employees.

The path coefficient from WLBS to organisational performance ($r = 0.472$, $p < 0.001$) shows that WLBS has a significantly strong positive influence on manufacturing firms' performance. This result supports hypothesis two (H2) in the sense that WLBS has a positive influence on the performance of manufacturing firms operating in the Lagos metropolis. This corroborates the finding of Pradhan et al. (2016) which revealed a significant relationship between WLBS and organisational performance.

The R^2 square value (0.296) shows that work-family stressors and WLBS explained 29.6% of the variance in manufacturing firms' performance. The path analysis of the structural model presented in Figure 2 revealed that work stressors exert no significant direct effect on manufacturing firms'

performance ($r = -0.051$, $p > 0.05$). The Sobel test calculator for significance of mediation ($p = 0.000$) confirmed that WLBS fully mediate the relationship between work stressors and manufacturing firms' performance. Therefore, work stressors exert a significant indirect effect on manufacturing firms' performance through WLBS. The implication of this result is that WLBS fully mediate the relationship between work stressors and manufacturing firms' performance. Having examined the direct and indirect effects, hypothesis 3a (H3a) was supported based on the results presented in Figure 2. Therefore, WLBS were effective in addressing the work stressors experienced by employees in selected manufacturing firms. The family stressors, on the other hand, were found to have a significant direct effect on manufacturing firms' performance ($r = -0.125$, $p < 0.05$). The analysis revealed that family stressors exert no significant influence on WLBS ($r = -0.069$, $p > 0.05$). This result was also confirmed by the Sobel test calculator for significance of mediation ($p = 0.77$), which corroborated the fact that WLBS exert no significant mediating influence on the relationship between family stressors and manufacturing firms' performance. The implication of this result is that WLBS does not mediate the relationship between family stressors and manufacturing firms' performance in the Lagos metropolis. Based on this finding, hypothesis 3b (H3b) cannot be supported in this study. This implies that the work-life balance programmes adopted by the manufacturing firms were not effective in addressing family stressors being experienced by their employees.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to the global debate on work-life balance by investigating the influence of WLBS on the interplay between work-family stressors and performance in the selected manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. The result of the statistical analysis revealed that the WLBS adopted by the manufacturing firms in the Lagos metropolis were effective in addressing employees' work stressors. This is evident from the significant relationship between work stressors and WLBS. However, the relationship between family stressors and WLBS was insignificant. The WLBS put in place at the selected manufacturing firms were effective in cushioning the effects of employees' work stressors, but were ineffective in addressing family stressors. Therefore, the onus rests on HR practitioners to design and incorporate WLBS as part of organisational corporate strategy that will be effective in addressing family stressors in conjunction with work stressors. This can be achieved when management desist from regarding WLBS as costs, which could only benefit the employees. WLBS can enhance employees' productivity thereby contributing to organisational performance. Efforts should be geared towards introducing work-life balance policies that would address employees' work stressors, and furthermore meet the needs of the employees' family demands. Based on this study, it is recommended that the family aspect of the work-life balance strategies be redesigned to reduce the negative influence of family stressors on manufacturing firms' performance.

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