

Responding to work intensification during Covid-19 induced lockdown: Zimbabwe women's adaptive and balancing strategies.

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Abstract

Covid-19 made working-from-home a new work mode and indications the world over is that it may be a permanent feature even after the pandemic. However, a considerable number of studies have shown that women workers experience work overload while working from home. The current study empirically explored coping mechanisms adopted by women workers experiencing constraining expanded responsibilities because of operating from home during the Covid-19 induced lockdown. Qualitative methodology was employed for the study. Twenty-eight women teleworkers identified through chain-referral sampling constituted the study sample. Data for the study, which were collected through semi structured face-to-face interviews were analysed through the thematic approach. Research findings established an assortment of adaptive mechanisms. The novelty of the study is in some of the revealed adaptive strategies and in the recommendation proffered. A recommendation for country-wide awareness campaign programmes of these strategies, so that women teleworkers can choose a work-from-home fit approach, was suggested for prospects of a better world of work during any emergency or catastrophe that may hit societies.

Key words: work-life-balance, coping mechanism, work-from-home, work intensification, coping.

1. Introduction

One of the effects of Covid-19 was abrupt and enormous life changes in the manner people do business. All too soon, times became unusual. One of the tenable alternatives was working-from-home, a phenomenon relatively new for most Zimbabwean workers. At the time of carrying out the study, Zimbabwe was under lockdown, with most of its industries and all schools closed, and many of its employees working from home, few fully back to in-person work and another very few on a phased return to in-person work. The authors approached this study against a background of previous research work that reveals that more than their male counterparts, working women as a group, encounter more challenges than their male counterparts even as they work-from-home (Beauregard & Adisa, 2021; Munganidze, 2020; Umesh et al, 2021). This was because working from home increased the women's workload and responsibilities during the Covid-19 era (Chung, Birkett, Forbes & Seo, 2021; Chung, Seo, Forbes, & Birkett, 2020). The adversity of working-from-home caused the women to adopt strategies to buffer themselves against or to at least reduce exacerbation of their strained situations. This study wore a feminist outfit as it pursued the issue of coping strategies from females' viewpoints. This article is structured as follows: First is this introduction which introduces and justifies the study; then a review of related literature which starts by providing the theoretical framework that underpinned the study before moving on to an exploration of the key concepts around which the study revolved. A gleaning of coping strategies seals the literature review. What follows the literature review is the study's objectives and research questions, which in turn are followed by the research methodology, research findings and discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

Background to the study

As the corona virus pandemic continued to spread across Zimbabwe, many Zimbabweans were ordered to work from home to try assist blunt the spread of the disease. While the study by Aczel, Kovacs, Van der Lippe, & Szaszi, (2021) reveal that people working from home reported more leisure time, other studies by

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Finstad et al (2021); Ryu, Yang, and Choi (2020) report otherwise. Earlier studies by Van der Lippe et al. (2006) as well as by Maunganidze (2020) support the latter findings. Reporting on Zimbabwe in particular, Maunganidze (2020), studying women in the practice of law in Zimbabwe, found working women working from home more involved than men in bearing the burden of household responsibility and childcare leaving them very little time for their professions. The author further claims that due to the cultural and structural impediments, women in Zimbabwe face severe challenges with the work-from-home practice as it increases their workload, responsibilities, and roles. Zimbabwe as a country is highly patriarchal, with a strict gender division of labour where household and family responsibilities are assigned to women and women's autonomy to make counter decisions is more often than not, constrained and restricted by this social system, which makes it expected of these women to perform such tasks. In this way gender shapes household responsibilities (Geist & Ruppner, 2018). It is such expectations, arrangements and creations that made Simone de Beauvoir to declare and claim that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', indicating that these cultural acquisitions and arrangements conspire to make her one (Leboeuf, 2015). The same observation that gendered norms impact on work-home balance in patriarchal culture is recorded by Mushfiqur et al (2018).

Literature reveals that, faced with any adversity, women put up coping mechanisms to cushion themselves (Van der Lippe et al, 2006; Kausar, 2010; Maunganidze, 2020; Sommerlard, 2016; Tomilson, Muzio, Sommerlard, Webley, & Duff, 2013). Riding on this established fact, the study proceeded on the assumption that the women workers were not passive recipients of the Covid-19 brewed challenges, but they adopted coping tactics as they confronted work intensification. Although 'coping' refers to both the unconscious and conscious activities, (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991), this study focuses only on the conscious strategies (Ray, Lindop, & Gibson, 2005), individual female employees employed to manage the burdens of working from home. Without disregarding other definitions of coping, the definition of coping adopted by this study is the one provided by Wang, Pollock and Hauseman (2018, p. 289) who define coping as "making cognitive, emotional and behavioural efforts to succeed or survive in a difficult environment". In this article, coping strategy, coping mechanism, adaptation strategy and management tactic are used interchangeably as the study grounds them in the same meaning.

While the issue of increased work burdens as women work from home has garnered great attention as an important construct in the global research and in Zimbabwe, the ensuing management tactics seem not to have attracted a comprehensive consideration and attention in the Zimbabwe world of work. It is against this background that this study sought to investigate into the coping mechanisms that the working women in a suburb of a city in Zimbabwe adopted to protect and cushion themselves from the over-whelming strain of work intensification because of working from home. The study is therefore pertinent especially as working-from-home is likely to be a permanent feature with many Zimbabwe companies and institutions. A study by Lord (2020) reveals that most companies the world over are contemplating a migration from in-person to virtual work even as the pandemic gets eased up. The same view is shared by Xiao, Bererik-Gerber, Lucas and Roll (2021) that Covid-19 not only changed the world of work, but awakened nations to be fore-sighted and brace to face such in future.

An understanding of coping strategies may assist mitigate challenges of work intensification, thereby improving the overall work-life balance and resultantly well-being of the female workers in times of any emergency that may hit societies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

Researchers examine the world and human experiences through defined mind-sets known as theoretical frameworks especially when interpreting human behaviour, opinions, actions, and attitudes particularly in qualitative studies such as the current study. The intricacy of managing work intensification because of working from home in this study was conceived through two theoretical lenses: Work-Life Balance Theories and African Feminism. These two theoretical frameworks formed the bedrock that held this study together.

2.1.1 'Work-Life Balance' (WLB) theories and their alignment with the study

The WLB theories are ceased with describing and explaining the dynamics of work-life integration. These theories can broadly be put into two categories: those that claim that the domains of work and life do not affect each other and those that claim (to varying degrees, forms, and levels) that the two domains indeed influence each other. (Khateeb, 2021; Bello and Tanko, 2020; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). Theories in category two explain different aspects of the relationship between work and life and how the two affect each other positively or adversely. This study, based on earlier studies it hinges on, denounced, and rejected the first category's proposition that work, and life do not affect each other as they operate as separate entities. In this study, work and life, which

were brought into the same environment by the Covid-19 lockdown, were found to have an effect of ‘work intensification’ on the working women under study. As WLB is multistranded, complicated, broad, and complex, this study streamlined its focus only on the strand of ‘work-family’ balance (WFB). This is because WLB incorporates community, religious and other social activities, and pursuits outside the home (Morris and Madsen 2007), all of which were prohibited during the covid- 19 lockdown. Even with this streamlining it still must be borne in mind that the integration of work and home, (specifically productive and reproductive work), cannot be adequately anchored by one theory as no one prevailing theory is universally sufficient (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). Guided by the study focus, the two theories were the: Inter-Role Conflict Perspective (IRCP) as espoused by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), and the Resource Drain Theory (RDT) as espoused by Morris and Madsen (2007). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) came up with the IRCP. According to this theory, there is friction and antagonism when work and family make competing demands on an individual. This is why authorities such as Bello and Tanko (2020) and Edwards and Rothbard (2000) call the same theory ‘incompatibility or opposition perspective’. Much in alignment with the adopted definition of work intensification provided in the next subsection of this study, inter-role conflict was realised when the working women’s participation in one role (in this case reproductive role) affected ability to meet requirements of the other role (in this case the productive role). The RDT, in direct correlation with the argument advanced by the IRCP, tags on with a ‘competition for resources’ dimension. Competition is over the limited resources. Though the theory refers to any resource (Morris & Madsen, 2007; Greenhous & Allen, 2011), this study limited itself to only two resources that are of great relevance to it, which are time and energy. These two resources, when transferred from work responsibilities to the home, reduce the attention available to the work domain because the 24hour time and individual strength are limited resources (Morris & Madsen, 2007). The views of the RDT mimic the realms of the conflicts as provided by the IRCP which identifies three types of conflicts: Time, Behaviour and Strain (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). With high levels of demand, conflict erupts (Guest, 2002). Time-based conflict arises when there is not adequate time to satisfy both home and work. Behaviour based conflict occurs when one’s conduct in the home may not be compatible with practices in the work domain. Strain-based conflict is realised when the exertions produced by the home make it difficult to meet the responsibilities of work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Bello & Tanko, 2020). To that end, the chosen theories were found to be in alignment with the study as the study lends itself to unearthing fundamental issues that resulted in work-home conflicts and how the working women made the demands of work and home compatible.

2.1.2 African Feminism and its fitness with the study

The intricacy of managing work intensification because of working from home in this study was also conceived through a feminist theoretical lens of African Feminism (AF), a brand of feminism perceived to be compatible with African norms, values, and beliefs. This theory acted as a toolkit to the analysis of the phenomenon under study, hence offered a logical interrogation and nuanced platform to comprehend the working women’s experiences with work intensification and subsequent choice of specific coping strategies as they managed working from home. The theory thus also guided the structure of the entire study particularly interpretation of research findings. Before exploring key tenets of AF, it is important to contextualise the term feminism within the confinement of this article. Feminism as a concept is quite complex and so multi-stranded to have authorities defining it differently. However, despite the pluralities of the term, authorities are agreed that focus of all feminisms is ending sexist oppression. Specifically, feminism “seeks to understand the ways in which women are oppressed - socially, economically, politically and psychologically, in order to reduce, if not eliminate their oppression”, (Bressler, 2007, p. 144). Developed by anthropologist Filomina Chioma Steady, AF is that strand of feminism that evolved as a result of perceived failure of western feminism to understand, comprehend, confront and embrace the needs and concerns of Black women in Africa (Terborg-Penn, 1995). Filomina Chioma Steady is of the view that African women evolved their own trademark of feminism as they began to search for answers to their situations (Terborg-Penn, 1995). To that end, AF was found compatible and well aligned to the study as it lends itself to the experiences of women in Africa. Two dominant institutionalised values of AF most appropriate for the study are: upholding the value placed on marriage and developing survival strategies (Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

These two values influenced the choice of the study participants which included only women in heterosexual marriages and sought to establish how they survived their ‘double day’, juggling with both the productive and reproductive work.

The two mentioned theoretical frameworks guided the structure of the entire study, more pronounced the choice of the research participants (working women, from dual career couple families, who had indicated that they were experiencing role overload) and the analytical approach (i.e., themes emerging from the data), thus added insights in the interpretation of the research findings.

2.2 Work-life-balance (WLB): the concept

From small beginnings as issues of working mothers only, in the United Kingdom, and later in the United States of America, WLB gained attention and popularity in public discourse to become a world-wide vital issue (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Kelliher, Richardson & Boiarntseva, 2019, Gragnano, Simbula & Migliorett, 2020; Khateeb, 2021). The 'balance' construct in WLB does not refer to equal amounts but to a state of equilibrium, hence in simple terms WLB is effectively balancing career and non-career demands. Pursuing this thread of thought, among an array of definitions of WLB, the definitions endorsed by this study are those most captivating to its focus. The study considers WLB to be "the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in the work and family roles are compatible with the individual's life role priorities at a given time" (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011, p.10), and characterised by "low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation" (Frone, 2003, p. 345). Put in another way, WLB is "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimum of role conflict" (Bello & Tanko, 2020, p. 219)

The importance WLB to an organisation cannot be over emphasised as it is the individual who plays centre stage in the functioning of a healthy organisation. Despite the many studies on WLB, individuals still face challenges to balance work and life, (Greenhaus & Kosset, 2014) as role conflicts ensue. If work threatens home, it is called work-home conflict and if home threatens work, it is called home-work conflict but for this study, the boundaries of home and work more than ever before became blurred as the two were brought within the same environment by the covid-19 lockdown.

Absence of balance and satisfaction between the demands of home and work result in negative consequences for an organisation. A chief negative effect of the imbalance is role over load or work intensification that will lead to inter role conflict and strain, which will eventually lead to burnout and other stress related disorders (Ratliff, 1988), behavioural challenges (Guest, 2002), which in turn leads to employee unwell-being (Frone, 2003) and subsequently in turn leads to decreased work productivity (Barnett & Bauch, 1985; Clark, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2003; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; Morris & Madsen 2007; Greenhaus & Kosset, 2014; Khateeb 2021). There is therefore a strong association between work-life imbalance, work intensification, role conflict, employee unwell-being and decreased work production as these entities are in a causal relationship (Barnett & Bauch, 1985). A satisfying adaptive strategy to work intensification eases interference of one domain with the other. The current study is in search of adaptive strategies that may lead to a gratifying work-life balance.

2.3 Work intensification contextualised

Based in a sociological framework, work intensification is realised when "...employees feel pressed to complete more tasks within one working day" (Kubicek & Tement, 2016, p. 26). In her PhD thesis, Giorgulla Thrasyvoulou brings out two determinants of work intensification as 'doing more' and 'coping with less' (Thrasyvoulou, 2018). This study utilised both dimensions. Although the two dimensions were conceived in the contexts of wider market changes that affected employees' (Burchell, 2002; Hargreaves, 1992; Marx; 1990; Larson, 1980), all cited in Thrasyvoulou (2018), the departure this study makes is grounding the two dimensions in the context of working-from-home during Covid 19 induced lockdowns. In this context, the female workers found themselves with expanded duties which resulted in an increase of their workloads and at the same time having to cope with less as they could not hire external helping hands to assist since travel was restricted. With work intensification, quality of life in one section (in this case the work) deteriorates because of one's participation in the other (in this case the home), thus revealing the nexus between work-life imbalance and work intensification. A preliminary study established that the women participants had their formal employment workload interfering with home roles, and the home responsibilities interfering with formal work as a result of working-from-home during Covid 19 induced lockdown. As it were, the job prevented time with the home, and the home prevented time with the job thereby creating inter-role conflict, (Chung, Seo, Forbes, & Birkett, 2020)

Expanded work-home responsibilities is a major setback and challenge for women in Zimbabwe, a country where household and family responsibilities are assigned to women regardless of their education level or financial stamina. This study gives insights into how the working women developed resilience.

Even as numerous definitions capture the meaning of resilience, the notion of resilience taken by this study is that of "adaption despite adversity" (Bottrell, 2009, pp. 323).

2.4 Coping with expanded responsibilities

Literature has registered quite several coping strategies men and women employ during episodes of expanded work responsibilities (Kausar, 2010; Sommerlard, 2016; Tomlison et al, 2013). Scholars generally agree that the main function of a coping strategy is to manage the situation of adversity (Jaaskelainen, Lopez-Iniguez &

Lehikoinen, 2022; Kausar, 2010; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In a situation of adversity due to expanded responsibilities, an individual adopts two things: either tries to alter the situation for the better or makes no effort or attempt to change the situation. Where no attempt is made to challenge the adverse situation, the individual quits, either wholly or partially. This strategy is called ‘Avoidance Coping’ (Kausar, 2010). The opposite of ‘Avoidance Coping’ is ‘Active Coping’. This coping strategy involves removal or circumventing of the adversity (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), more or less what Lazarus and Folkman (1984) call ‘Problem-Focused Coping.’ The individual here challenges the challenger through a positive processing and reinterpretation of the unbearable and unfriendly situation.

Some individuals cope through ‘Conceding’ where a conscious effort is made to forgo valued aspects of life in order to create time for tasks (Maunganidze, 2020). Utilising this strategy, the individual copes through screening or putting aside other activities. Kausar (2010) calls the same strategy ‘suppression of competing activities.’

Some individuals cope thorough depending on fellow work mates to bail them out during times of overwhelmingness (Maunganidze, 2020). The individual sources or seeks out social support and assistance, usually, after winning their sympathy. Yet other individuals prefer ‘Restrain Coping’, whereby they wait for an opportune time to present itself to best tackle the situation head-on, to avoid premature mishaps, (Kausar, 2010).

The women in the study found higher demands of household activities posing difficulties in balancing work and family. Literature has it that failure to strike a work-home balance may have adverse effects on physical health (Ratliff, 1988) and psycho-emotional exhaustion and distress (Clark, 2000), which may directly translate into reduced work productivity. This study sets recommendations that may prevent and avoid such pitfalls.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

As indicated earlier on, massive working from home is relatively a new phenomenon in the Zimbabwe context and has therefore, not gained significant attention. As such, not a lot of research in that regard has been undertaken, particularly in the search for adaptive strategies while working from home. The novelty of the study is a search for such strategies. Pursuantly, the central objectives of the study were:

- i) To establish how the working women managed working from home
- ii) To examine reasons that made the women settle for survival mechanism.

The objectives guided the study to explore two questions:

- i) How did the working women adapt?
- ii) What made the working women settle for the survival mechanism?

4. Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology was employed for the study. The objective of the study was to establish coping mechanisms employed by twenty-eight women teleworkers from dual career couple families, in a city of Zimbabwe. The women were identified through chain-referral sampling, where informants were recruited through the researchers’ networks and these informants’ identified others from among their acquaintances, (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Representativeness of the sample was not of paramount importance since generalisability was not a target, so the chain-referral sampling technique, with its vulnerability and proneness to sampling bias (Creswell & Poth 2018; Onwegbuzie & Leech, 2007) was preferred because of the need to select informants best suitable to achieve the study’s objective. The women in the study were working from home during the first, second and third waves of Covid-19, making them a perfect case study for the study. The sample size was arrived at after the interviews suggested ‘theoretical saturation point’, which is the point at which the interviews did not yield any new data in terms of new insights and dimensions, (Saunders et al., 2018).

All the women in the sample were from dual career couple families and had children. None of the women had experienced work-from-home before. The criteria were meant to make the conditions easily comparable. The full description of the women is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants’ demographics

Table 1a) Participants’ position at work

Upper-level position	Middle-level position	Low-level position
8	3	17

Table 1b) Size of family

1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5+ children
3	7	9	6	3

Table 1c) Age of participants

21 -25	26 -30	31-35	36 - 40	41 -45	46- 50	51+
4	6	8	4	2	1	3

Table 1d) Age range of youngest child in the home

0 – 3years	4 – 7years	8 – 11years	12 – 15years	15+years
6	10	4	3	5

A semi structured interview was used to solicit primary data from the twenty-eight working women. The face-to-face interviews took place in the women's homes (observing all the Covid-19 regulations), in not a so formal way to create rapport and engineer a climate of trust with the interviewees, who then spoke openly and freely. Yin (2009) opines that a case study design is most appropriate where the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions. These questions dominated the interview as thrust was to unpack how the women coped with increased workload and why they settled for the particular adaptation strategy. The research design was found most suitable as the researcher wanted to cover contextual conditions as these were most relevant to the phenomenon under study. The case was 'adaptation strategies of the working women', but this could not be meaningfully considered without the context of working-from-home.

Several precautionary steps were followed to secure trustworthiness of the data. Key among the measures was pilot testing the interview instrument with a group of women from a suburb which was not part of the research sites. Observations from this pilot test provided insights into further refinement of the instrument. Another measure employed to promote trustworthiness of the generated data was member checking which allowed the 28 respondents validation of the data. Findings were referred back to the 28 women for them to check on accuracy and interpretation of their voices, (Candela, 2019).

Data analysis is critical and pivotal to the credibility of any study. In analysing the data, the researchers drew their analysis approach mainly from Braun and Clarke (2006) guiding framework on qualitative data analysis, augmented by Clarke and Braun (2013)'s ideas. The augmented six step framework was preferred because of its clarity and usability. Following is a brief run-down of the implemented analysis process.

- First was a reading and re-reading of the data several times until the researchers had a thorough overview of the collected data.
- The reading and re-reading made the researchers identify data features that appeared of interest to the study. These were ideas that kept coming repeatedly and expressions that indicated the contexts of the conversations. This Braun and Clarke (2006) call 'coding'. The authors utilised open coding as they did not pre-set the codes but build them.
- Building and modification (the researchers modified codes that they found vague) of the codes, as the researchers worked through the data, resulted in patterns or categories emerging from the coded data as relevant data extracts were preliminarily brought together. Braun and Clarke (2006) call the patterns 'preliminary themes'. Interpretive analysis started here.
- The generated themes were reviewed several times. More time was spent on this stage and the previous one as the researchers kept moving back and forth between the two steps.
- The reviews resulted in relevant and related preliminary themes being brought together forming broad and overarching themes.
- The last step was in two parts: writing of the research findings as an interpretable piece of work that related to the formed broad themes and research questions and the writing of the research article.

Combinedly, the steps enabled the researchers not only to understand the data, but to describe, explain and interpret the coping strategies and styles the working women employed in their contexts and circumstances. Every woman had her own account of her points of view and experiences. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the women and to uphold confidentiality.

5. Research Findings and Discussion

Categorisation of case study data emerged with two main categories of coping mechanisms. The two were: i) Avoidance and Withdrawal and ii) Acceptance and Adaptation.

The Avoidance and Withdrawal Strategy (AW)

The AW strategy involved a deliberate shunning and turning away from the expanded workload. Only two (6.7 %) women in the study reported a conscious effort to withdraw their attention from the challenge of work intensification. The two reported efforts of moving away from the problem by opting to take early retirement from active employment. Age seemed to have no effect on the decision as the women were both within the range of the majority of those who accepted the challenge. Compared to the group that accepted its predicament, these two women were more emotionally charged during the interviews and had a negative and defeatist attitude towards the pandemic. One of them remarked: *It is God punishing us. Who am I to challenge the Lord? I cannot cope with the pressure. I have tendered my intention to resign within 2 months. Right now, I am serving the notice period and will be home waiting for God.* (Shupi) Since one's mind-set and attitude towards a challenge plays an important and pivotal role in determining the acceptance level of the challenge, it was the two women's attitude to the challenge that was responsible for their disengagement with the challenge and resultantly their decision of surrendering and resigning from service.

While in the study by Maunganidze (2020), women who left their jobs because of work intensification sought alternative employment, the two women in this study who indicated leaving employment due incapability to cope made no indication of such moves. Although the geographical and cultural contexts of the women are to a large extent similar, a potential explanation for this divergence could be in the time contexts. The Maunganidze (2020) study was carried out in the pre-Covid era when times were 'normal'. This study was carried out during the 'new normal era' filled with uncertainty of what tomorrow might hold in terms of being alive or not. Even as humanity has lived through pandemics before covid 19, the pandemics were not of the magnitude of Covid-19 (Chung, Birkett, Forbes, & Seo, 2021; Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021). At the time of carrying out interviews, the women were trapped in the fear of Covid-19, a phenomenon Ramose and Sethunsta (2020) term 'coronaphobia'. Initially, people dying of corona virus were not known to Zimbabwe, but within no time the tremor of eruption greeted the country with people dying initially not known to women in the study, then in record time death visited someone known by someone the women knew, then it moved to someone in their vicinity, then moved to close family people. This brought a sense of helplessness, unpredictability, and powerlessness over the direction their lives were taking and what lay ahead as people died quickly and unpredictably. It is in this spirit that the agony in the remark "... *waiting for God*" can be understood. In the old normal people felt a sense of control over their well-being and own life but covid 19 overnight unarmed the women's sense of security as circumstances quickly galloped beyond their control. They, thus, developed what Maunganidze (2020) label 'pulling out strategy' and Ryu et al. (2020) call the same 'avoidant coping'. This finding was in full alignment with literature as the 'avoidant strategy' was least employed (Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021; Maunganidze, 2020; Ryu et al., 2020). The reason for its next-to-nil employment could be that it was counter-productive as it barricades attempts to face challenges allowing anxiety and insecurity to take centre stage unabated.

Hence, even as covid 19 had disrupted lives, and even as the pandemic had brought fear and uncertainty about the future for a few, most of the women in the study (twenty eight out of thirty) said life had to go on. These women developed what Ramose and Sethunsta (2020) call 'conformist behaviour' and Maunganidze (2020) label the same 'conceding strategy'. This study labels the same strategy 'Acceptance and Adaptation' strategy.

Acceptance and Adaptation

Women who employed this strategy reportedly made a conscious effort to deal with the situation. The women accepted the sudden abnormal and difficult situation they were in and devised plans for adaptation. Their adaptation mechanisms were inter-personal (i.e. involved others) and intra-personal (that is, involved themselves only).

My schedule was wearing me out. Things took a toll on me. I started to think seriously about my situation realising that the situation was significantly impacting my functions, both home and work. Home and work were simultaneously present and both equally greedy. I had to manage the situation before the situation managed me. I had to get ahead of the situation (Tabitha)

Both inter-role conflict and resource drain manifested themselves in Tabitha's case. To these women 'Acceptance' was the first step. After 'acceptance' followed 'adaptation' as the following excerpts confirm.

I soon focused on ways to support and nourish myself, I had to be my own manager (Jane)

Realising that I was on a constant chase for time, a chase I failed to accomplish. I had to devise strategies to keep myself afloat. I felt rushed and pressed for time (Joy)

In trying to adapt, the women employed various styles. Of the twenty-six women who employed the adaptive technique, seven (3.7%) settled on overcoming cultural and structural barriers within their home fronts to ease challenges in their favour, a practice this study calls 'reforming patriarchy', as the adversity empowered them to challenge the system. The women testified that the feminisation of household work (Chung, Seo, Forbes, & Birkett, 2020; Maunganidze, 2020; Mushfiqur, 2018) that used to prevail in their homes before lockdown was a thing of the past after they took determination and charge to engender the cultural norms around home chores. The women at first thought that fighting patriarchy was a battle with nature that they were not going to win. The remark by Faith in the excerpt that: "*it was like getting blood out of a stone*" testifies this but the war was finally won. The aftermath of an unpleasant situation can thus have a positive influence and impact on people. This gender transformation was observed mostly from women in managerial positions as all the seven women belonged to this bracket. The women made calculated manoeuvres to make things convenient to them as they claimed to have neutralised and untangled patriarchy in a way that stripped it of its conservatism potential. Three of the seven women declared their happiness and appreciation with male involvement in household tasks, claiming '*it's time societies get reshaped and renewed and even values reinterpreted.*' (Spiwe)

I had to work to change my husband's attitude. At first, he was conservative. Discrimination started with him not taking me seriously and doubting my claim of work overwhelmingness. I demanded that we share household chores. It is not a sin to be born a woman. Getting him to do household work was like getting blood out of a stone, but I won. (Faith)

I realised that I was not a superhero woman. Realising that I was in a constant chase for more time, the chase I never accomplished, I drew up a duty roster for the household tasks that involved every member of the family including him. He sounded offended and reduced at first, but later he conformed. I did not budge, and now things are manageable. There is no longer any strict patterning of work in my home according to male or female as it used to be. What could I do? There is no external hand that can assist us with household work because this is lockdown time. (Babra)

I started by defining myself. I said I am a working woman not a housewife. I then engaged my husband over the issue explaining that I needed to attend to my work just as he did. I decided that we share household work. Right now, I am no longer as pressurised by the excessive home responsibilities as before (Naume)

My life had become unbearable, always me alone doing the household chores day in, day out. I had to scream it out. We just had to share the chores. After all time is finite. I am aware of the African saying that 'Silence is golden. A married woman should behave like a snail (especially to the husband) which is non-confrontational with any object that obstructs it, but calmly negotiates its passage. But here I had just to be confrontational. I exploded and attacked head-on. I am happy be re-oriented. (Mercy).

Some women (11/28) survived the expanded work responsibilities through establishing clear work boundaries. The eleven were evenly spread across the levels of the participants, position at work and size of family as well as with age.

I convinced myself to draw a line between home and work. I set boundaries with my family members. When it is work time my husband and children know that I am working, it is not time for play. It is these strict work schedules that have made me able to draw the lines between work and personal life and so to me home-work divisions are not at all blurred. My day starts at 8am and at 4.30pm I switch off everything and leave work at work. (Maggie)

Expressing a slightly similar adaptive style was Eunice.

I devised 3:1 work rule. I work for one and half hours and then take a 30minutes break. It is within this break that I prepare my meals, sometimes sweep the house or the yard. I take these short breaks off throughout the day as I try to be kind and considerate with myself. The segmentation helps me keep focused, (Eunice)

In also a similar manner, Viola talked about setting a 'standard' style.

To avoid sending myself into a wrong mood, I wake up as if I am going to work, even dressing so that I do not end up sweeping the house/yard during work time. I feel I must hold myself to the standard as I would be going to work to keep myself in the mood and mode of work. (Viola)

Most of the women (18/26) reported of spicing their work schedules with relaxations to help them to freshen up and calm down their exhaustion from extended responsibilities. These were cuts-off from either work or household tasks. A reading through literature did not reveal this strategy. This study labels the strategy: 'Relaxation and Recharging strategy'.

Every morning I actively construct my day. I allow myself time to relax while listening to inspiring gospel preaching and songs from recordings from our local church. You know we are not allowed to congregate. (Chipo).

I joined online dance classes. I find this mood boosting and gives me an opportunity to recharge, regenerate and reset. (Mary).

This finding was not in full alignment with some study findings such as the Maunganidze (2020)'s study which reports women who had to forgo their leisure time to create time to cover both home and work assignments. Maunganidze (2020) calls this practice 'conceding'. This practice in this study was found to vary with position at work and age of youngest child in the home. The strategy was mentioned by the majority of those in the middle or senior management and those whose age of youngest child was at least twelve years. None in the low-level position at work made mention of it, and none with children of between zero and seven years mentioned it either. Participants' age and family size did not show an impact as respondents were evenly spread across these categories.

However, from the conversations above, the study findings replicate literature on the fact that faced with challenges, Zimbabwe working women came up with coping strategies to blunt the effects of the expended work-home responsibilities. This study however expands on the coping styles within each strategy. The most prevalent coping style was adaptation. Unlike studies in literature that explored coping strategies of women in specific employment fields such as law (Maunganidze, 2020), this study investigated the phenomena from a diversity of employment. Unlike the Maunganidze (2020) study and other studies conducted prior to the Covid-19 era, this study explored issues during the Covid-19 induced lockdown only. Another departure with literature was registered where experiences of the women in literature studies registered overwhelmingly maintenance of 'male hegemony' tendencies. This study registered women whose behaviour patterns did not show conformity with patriarchal culture. The remark '*I had to scream it out.... I had just to be confrontational. I exploded and attacked head-on...*' (Mercy) and '*It is not a sin to be born a woman*' (Faith), and remarks by Babra and Naume expose open resistance to patriarchy.

An analysis of the data further revealed that the coping style of the working women employed to manage their family-home obligations was to a significant extent found to be dependent on the job characteristics (such as position at work) and family variables (such as age of youngest child in the home and intensity of expanded responsibilities). It could be that senior-level positions offered the women workers charge and control over others and as such enjoyed delegating work, leaving them with a lot of breathing space. Thus, the lower-level women who earned less, saved less and in some cases reported living close to poverty seemed to adopt styles that did not afford them breathing spaces. This group of women, though affected as the others in failure to hire external helping hands, had the effects amplified because they had to do everything manually themselves such as washing clothes and cutting children's hair. They did not afford washing machines and hair cutting gadgets. Thus, the lower the position at work, the more increased the workload due to increased volume of work from both the home and work fronts. Working women with very young children in the home (zero to seven years) experienced higher intensity of the expanded responsibilities and did not register engagements in relaxations episodes. All the eight women who reported not having time to relax had the ages of the youngest child in home ranging from zero to seven years. The other eight women with children within the same age ranges who reportedly engaged in relaxations, had been locked down with their house maids in their homes. Thus again, where there was no supporting hand to work within the home, the unimaginable responsibility denied women relaxations. There were no apparent differences in coping styles depending on age and family size.

6. Conclusion

Faced with the adversity of work intensification because of work-home imbalances, the affected women put up coping and balancing styles to cushion themselves, a phenomenon this study calls 'balanced or adaptive coping'. It was not a one-size fit all, as the women settled for different work-from-home fit approaches. While the age and family size did not have an influence on the coping style, the position at work and age of the children influenced the adaptive style.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations are made in the pretext that people do not know what may hit humanity in the near or far future. This makes working-from-home a phenomenon likely and seemingly here to stay especially as many companies are contemplating a move from in-person to remote work even as the pandemic is easing (Lords, 2020). With these developments, it may be a while before people flee back to the office. This explains the need for companies and institutions to be long-sighted and futurist as a pandemic or any other catastrophe may continue to reshape the world of work. In any case, most employers have already invested resources through fixing systems for remote work for their employees, (Xiao, Bererik-Gerber, Lucas & Roll, 2021) This study recommends a country-wide awareness of female employees on adaptive coping.

The awareness leads to empowerment, a long-term coping strategy that builds and strengthens self-will and self-confidence. While it is normal to feel anxious, scared and unsettled during a pandemic, pressing the panic or denial button does not yield results. The idea is to avoid 'failed coping' as was the case with Ruzi in this study. Capacity to cope translates into capacity to recuperate from erosive encounters. It is efficacious to support the women to be able to work effectively from home during a crisis that may dictate mass home working. The governments and other non-governmental entities must be supportive of these strategic, critical, progressive, and crucial campaigns. There is lesser evidence of practice of these campaigns in Zimbabwe as no research has gone into it. It is in this context that the researcher urges government and non-government entities to partner in a targeted and purposeful country campaign programme. The campaign programme will facilitate the creation of supportive work-home cultures that build a successful work-home balance through reducing work-home conflict, thus enhances working women's well-being and subsequently higher work productivity.

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