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# Motherhood as Limitation in the Representation of Women in Higher Education Leadership at Lead City University and University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper examines how motherhood limits women's progression in academic leadership roles and argues for the importance of gender equity in addressing this issue. Motherhood represents a significant shift in a woman's life, requiring goal restructuring and personal development, which can affect their pursuit of leadership in academia. Although women can enter academic research, cultural, structural, social, and economic factors often hinder their rise to leadership positions. Previous literature has explored women's underrepresentation in various sectors, but few studies have focused on the potential benefits of equity over equality in academic leadership. The study aimed to investigate the challenges female lecturers face in attaining leadership roles, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and how gender equity, rather than equality, can improve women's representation in higher education leadership. Equity simply means being fair or fairness. Advocates of gender have focused more on equality than equity, but in spite of their advocacies, the quality and the population of women in higher education leadership roles is still predominantly low. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study applied Gender Role, Work-Life Balance, and Life Preference theories. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with thirty (30) female lecturers holding leadership positions in two Nigerian universities: Lead City University and the University of Ibadan. Findings revealed that motherhood significantly impacts time management, particularly in writing research papers required for promotion, and leads to exhaustion from multitasking. The study concludes that equitable policies are essential for improving women's representation in academic leadership, suggesting that equality alone may be insufficient to address these challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** Motherhood, Underrepresentation, Leadership and Education, Equity

## Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that there

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is unequal representation of men and women in higher education leadership roles in academia. According to scholars like Krause (2017), in higher education, women's representation in top-ranking leadership roles is less than one-third at colleges and universities. Akoto et al. (2024) discussed in their research the differing perceptions of leadership among genders, based on abilities and education. Meanwhile, religious and cultural beliefs perpetuate stereotypes that hinder women's advancement in leadership with negative impact in their development, contradicting the skills-based approach to leadership. Wilson (2023) identified barriers to women's career advancement and societal perceptions of women in leadership roles in higher education and organizational cultures. Hoyer (2024) explained the root causes of this issue, emphasizing the need to foster an inclusive academic ecosystem that empowers and nurtures the talents of all scholars, regardless of gender. Despite significant advocacy for gender equality, women remain underrepresented in higher education leadership roles. One potential factor contributing to this gap is the effect of motherhood on women's career ambitions. Numerous studies have explored the underrepresentation of women in academia (Krause, 2017; Akoto et al., 2024; Wilson, 2023; Hoyer, 2024), with many highlighting motherhood as a key factor limiting women's advancement. After obtaining their PhDs, women often make slower progress, with their career paths hampered by motherhood responsibilities. Motherhood is recognized as a dynamic, life-altering, and ongoing process of transition in a woman's identity, causing a permanent

shift in her life (Kuipers et al., 2021; Meca et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2022). Mothers may be judged more harshly than their non-mother colleagues and perceived as less committed to their careers. Research has also shown that women with children face biases and discrimination in the workplace, affecting their opportunities for career advancement in leadership (Torres et al., 2024).

Motherhood requires women to restructure their goals, behaviors, and responsibilities to achieve personal growth and development. In academia, leadership refers to institutional leaders who set their college's strategic vision and manage change and collaboration within the institution. Goodall (2009) observed a decrease in the number of women in leadership positions within the Nigerian university system, noting that leadership roles are often assigned to those with accrued academic capital, typically male academics. Furthermore, due to the patriarchal nature of university leadership, women are more frequently placed in lower-level leadership positions, such as department heads or directors, and with slight improvement, deans, but rarely as Deputy Vice Chancellors or Vice Chancellors. Women face cultural and institutional barriers that limit their progression in academia while also balancing the cultural demands of motherhood, leading to advocacy for equity in academic leadership.

Equity, in this context, refers to fairness and justice, influenced by principles of ethics and fair play. Cross-country research demonstrates a decline in women's workforce participation after childbirth. On average, 24% of women exit the labor market during their first year of motherhood. Five years later, the

percentage drops to 17%, and after a decade, 15% remain absent (Kleven et al., 2023). This decline has not been adequately addressed from an equity perspective as a potential solution to improving representation. Young et al. (2024) examined the historical, cultural, and structural factors perpetuating inequity, highlighting the biases and discrimination faced by academic mothers but failed to fully explore equity as a solution. The research called for new laws, policies, programs, and expectations to normalize motherhood in academia, advocating for universal recommendations to transform the academic environment. Purdy (2024) also emphasized the need for systemic changes, such as reevaluating evaluation criteria, fostering new leadership models, and redistributing service responsibilities.

Silva et al. (2024) argued that the promotion of gender policies has been reduced to the idea of women as a homogeneous category, neglecting the complexities of care politics and gender without incorporating intersectionality into the discussion. This impacts the advancement of gender policies and perpetuates sexism within academic spaces. Lastly, Rampersad (2024) outlined the challenges and opportunities women in academia face when pursuing leadership positions, suggesting a participative model of collaboration, nurturance, compassion, and self-care to equip women with the tools they need for career advancement.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the challenges faced by

female lecturers in balancing work and motherhood.

2. Explore the strategies used by female lecturers to overcome these challenges.

3. Assess the impact of motherhood on the professional success of female lecturers and highlight how equity, rather than equality, is crucial in addressing these challenges.

This study, titled "Motherhood as a Limitation in the Representation of Women in Higher Education Leadership: A Study of Female Lecturers at Lead City University and the University

### Theoretical Framework / Literature Review

The study was conducted using the theories of gender roles, work-life balance, and life preference. **Gender-role theory**, propounded by Alice H. Eagly (1987), is based on the assumption that individuals socially identified as males and females tend to occupy different ascribed roles within social structures and are judged against divergent expectations for how they ought to behave. **Work-life balance theory** has been credited to several authors, but for this study, Kirchmeyer (2000) suggested that balance is achieved when an individual's time, energy, and commitment are evenly distributed across life roles. It also refers to situations where there is little conflict between an individual's work and personal roles. Work-life balance is considered to be the degree of autonomy that people have over the demands of various roles and their ability to meet these demands, enabling them to accomplish goals in both work and personal life and achieve satisfaction in all life domains. **Life preference theory**, propounded by Catherine Hakim,

posits that women are increasingly able to make deliberate choices about their lifestyles and the relative priority they attach to paid work. Hakim claims that there are three main lifestyles chosen by working women: adaptive, work-centered, and home-centered. The theory predicts that men will retain their dominance in the labor market, politics, and other competitive activities because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritize their jobs (or other public-sphere activities) in the same way as men. These theories were found appropriate for analyzing the subject matter of this discourse.

In line with this study, a few related scholarly works were found to support existing studies on the topic and highlight gaps left by the authors.

Qian & Yavorsky (2021) argued that both women and men demonstrate early academic achievement during adolescence and show signs of future leadership potential. However, society differentiates their pathways to later leadership positions in the workplace. Rehbock (2020) highlights the unique demands of leadership in academia, which is characterized by changing conditions such as new public management and heightened international competition. Academics are expected to fulfill multiple demands and increasingly take on effective leadership roles.

Zipp & Sutherland (2024) examined the role of motherhood in understanding the gender gap in sports leadership, including management and coaching. Studies show that motherhood dramatically impacts women's career trajectories, including negative effects on earnings, advancement opportunities, career satisfaction, and pension/retirement. An

investigation by Torres (2024) explored both the negative and positive impacts of motherhood on career progression, affecting mothers' attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. This study also examined changes in interpersonal relationships and work conditions while calling for a nuanced examination of the challenges faced by mothers from diverse backgrounds. Torres recommended individual and institutional efforts, including societal support structures, organizational policy changes, and cultural shifts, as solutions to these challenges.

Avoli et al. (2024) demonstrated that the factors explaining the underrepresentation of women academics are diverse, complex, and intertwined, often related to socio-cultural parameters. Their literature review allowed the creation of an integrated framework of factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women academics, which includes six categories: personal, family, educational, social, organizational, and labor-economic factors.

Torres et al. (2024) offered an updated perspective on this classic challenge, providing practical insights for a more inclusive and structural understanding of the career trajectories of working mothers and the discriminatory practices affecting women's representation in higher education leadership. While their research made significant contributions, it still left gaps that this study attempts to address. Despite their contributions, women continue to face substantial barriers when seeking academic leadership positions. The lack of women in academic leadership roles, especially in STEM fields, is a multifaceted problem with far-reaching consequences. This

dearth of representation not only hinders progress toward gender equality but also perpetuates gender biases and stereotypes, creating an unwelcoming environment that discourages aspiring female scholars from advancing into leadership roles (Hoyer, 2024). Below is evidence of the underrepresentation of women in the academic staff of universities by rank and gender as of 2019, the earliest data found for the study, which supports the existence of the problem of underrepresentation of women in academic leadership. There is also a summary of data from secondary sources.

Representation of Women in University systems

Table 1: Academic Staff of University by Rank and Gender Ordered by Grand Total as at 2019

University	Professors		Reader		Senior Lecturers		Lecturer and Below		Total Male	Total Female	Grand Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F			
Federal University of Technology Akure	178	24	75	17	104	26	326	107	683	174	857
Ondo State University of Sci. & Tech.	6	1	8	0	13	2	51	18	78	21	99
University of Lagos	137	26	123	37	217	93	402	210	879	386	1,265
Osun State University	35	3	23	10	57	12	193	75	308	100	408
Ekiti State University	202	30	89	19	213	71	299	153	802	273	1,075
Covenant University	52	5	21	12	52	19	177	129	302	165	467
University of Bingham	29	3	15	6	48	9	103	53	195	71	266
University of Calabar	317	92	126	56	234	96	910	462	1,587	706	2,293
University of Ibadan	403	97	108	53	282	154	388	197	1,181	501	1,682
Benue State University	109	20	57	15	67	17	289	138	522	190	712
Crawford University	8	2	1	0	9	2	41	19	59	23	82
University of Benin	378	89	141	34	151	72	624	351	1,294	546	1,840
University of Oyo	135	33	98	32	271	90	384	159	888	314	1,202
Ambrose Alli University	99	14	46	11	114	26	168	56	427	107	534
Akwa Ibom State University	28	8	13	0	72	12	261	94	374	114	488
University of Abuja	100	21	46	24	118	75	81	47	345	167	512
Federal University Lafia	62	4	29	6	57	6	215	50	363	66	429
Ahmadu Bello University	420	49	156	26	286	59	993	236	1,855	370	2,225
University of Jos	395	108	114	75	297	114	1,028	573	1,834	870	2,704

Source: National Universities Commission, Nigerian University

System Statistical Digest 2019.

The above literature reviewed show that the issue of representation of women in university leadership is a multifaceted problem with various contributing factors, one of them is the impact of motherhood. This topic has garnered significant attention from researchers, scholars, and policymakers who aim to understand and address the challenges that hinder women's advancement into leadership roles within academia.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate "Motherhood as Limitation for the representation of Women in University Leadership Systems." From the statistics provided above (as of 2019), it was discovered that women hold relatively few leadership positions in the universities focused on in this research. The study adopted the use of interviews and secondary data (existing literature, academic journals, newspapers, magazines, and the internet). Interview questions were administered online to respondents from Lead City University and the University of Ibadan, both located in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The interview questions were sent to thirty randomly selected married adult women who are lecturers in university leadership positions, ranging from Vice Chancellors to Deans of Student Affairs.

The questions explored various aspects of their positions in academia and the challenges they face in balancing work and personal life. The questions were as follows:

1. Are you a mother, and how many children do you have?
2. Has your career progress

influenced your decision on how many children to have?

3. What is your current title/position, how long did it take you to reach that position, and what obstacles did you encounter?

4. Have you ever felt overlooked for opportunities in comparison to a male counterpart, and if so, why do you think you were overlooked?

5. Do you believe that gender and gender inequalities impact how others perceive leadership and leadership abilities?

6.

7. How do you think motherhood as a limiting factor for women in university leadership positions can be minimized or eliminated?

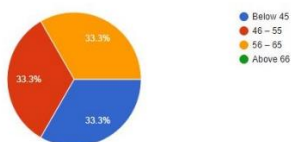
8. Do you have any recommendations or advice regarding networking or mentorship for women aspiring to reach senior leadership positions?

The data of this study was thematically analysed with the generated themes below.

## Findings

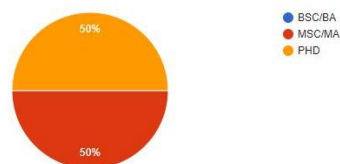
### Demographics of Respondents

**Age Group:** With regard to the distribution of the respondents by age, Fig 1.0 below, is a chart showing the varying age range of the respondents, encompassing individuals below 45, between 46-55, and 56-65 years old. This diversity in age groups offers insights from different generational perspectives on gender equity in senior leadership roles within Nigerian higher education.



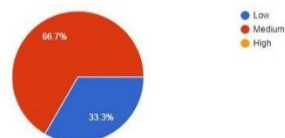
### Fig. 1.0: A Pie-Chart Showing Respondents' Age Groups

**Education:** From Fig. 2.0 below, the educational backgrounds of the respondents include individuals holding PhD degrees, and having MSC/MA qualifications. This diversity in educational attainment reflects a range of experiences and expertise within the academic community.



### Fig. 2.0: A Pie-Chart Showing Respondents' Academic Qualification

**Average Income:** The responses do not provide specific details regarding average income. However, the consideration of income levels from Fig. 3.0 below, could offer insights into the potential impact of socioeconomic factors on gender equity issues in higher education.



### Fig. 3.0: A Pie-Chart Showing Respondents' Average Income

**Ethnicity and Religion:** From Fig. 4.0 and 5.0 below, the respondents identified with diverse ethnicities such as Yoruba and Igbo, and various religious affiliations including Christianity. This diversity reflects the multi-cultural and multi-faith landscape within the Nigerian higher education.

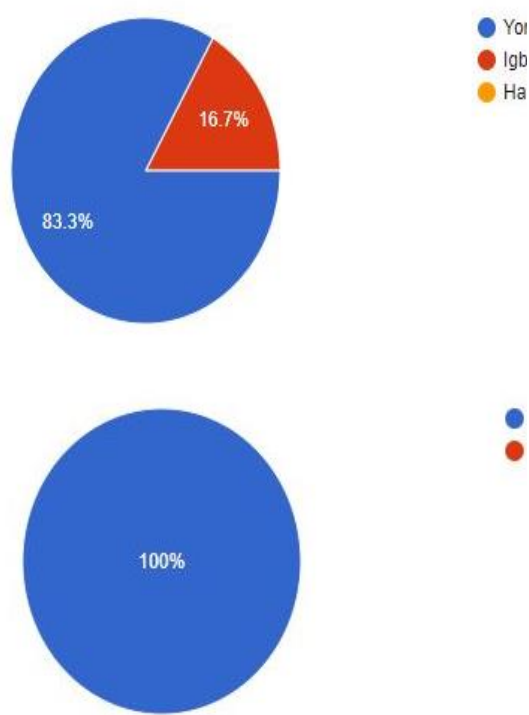


Fig. 4.0 & 5.0: A Pie-Chart Showing Respondents’ Ethnicity and Religion

**Marital Status:** The marital status of the respondents includes individuals who are either married or widowed. This diversity in marital status provides insights into the potential influence of family dynamics and support structures on perspectives related to gender equity and family responsibilities.

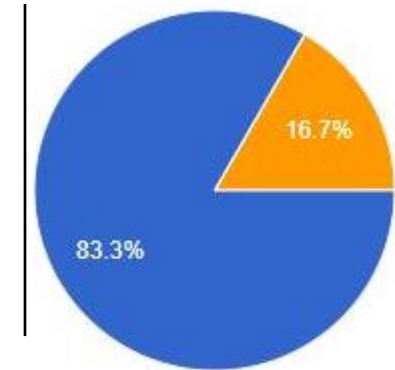


Fig. 6.0: A Pie-Chart Showing Respondents’ Marital Status

From Table 2.0 below, evidence abounds

University	Professors		Reader		Senior Lecturers		Lecturer and Below		Total Male	Total Female	Grand Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F			
University of Ibadan	403	97	108	53	282	154	388	197	1,181	501	1,682
Lead City University	12	6	10	5	21	20	97	99	140	130	270

on the cases of gender inequity and underrepresentation of women in the leadership positions in Nigerian universities, and in the case studies. From the responses to the first interview question, it’s evident that the participants hold a range of positions in academia, such as Senior Assistant Registrar, Professor/Dean, Readers, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer. This diversity of positions provides a broad perspective on gender equity issues across different levels of the academic hierarchy.

Table 2.0: Academic Staff at Case Study Universities as at 2019  
The issue of inequity in the representation of women in the leadership positions in

Nigerian universities is confirmed by the above representation. From the responses to the first interview question, it's evident that the participants are all mothers from the two universities considered for the study.

The responses to the second interview question- Has career progress played a role in the decision about how many children you have? highlighted that motherhood has been a limiting factor to women's performance and aspirations in the academia and sometimes parenting decisions are made between spouses to control birth. Some respondents however stated that childbearing can be a limitation to women's pursuing universities leadership positions. For example, a respondent has this opinion:

"I took time to raise them properly by changing career to a less time demanding one. Then I switched back to a high-flying time demanding one after they were grown up and I have been able to reach a top position". (5<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 2, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

"I had all three children between 1997-2004 as a young Lecturer. Had no idea child raising could be so demanding, so it retarded my promotion a bit profoundly!" (7<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 2, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

These responses establish the fact that motherhood does affect the acceleration of women in leadership role in the academia.

From the responses to the third interview question, it is evident that the participants hold a range of positions in academia, such as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor, however, there were varying lengths of time it took for participants to reach their current

positions due to motherhood effect. These durations range from 2 years to 10 years, indicating a significant disparity in the time it took for individuals to progress in their academic careers. This disparity could potentially be attributed to a variety of factors, including individual career paths, opportunities, and challenges faced by each participant. The obstacles mentioned include challenges related to promotion delays, task demands, stress, balancing home and work responsibilities, and the demands of parenting. For example, according to the 13<sup>th</sup> respondent from UI;

"I started as Assistant Lecturer in 1997, rising through the ranks but the longest stretch was 2004 – 2014 as Senior Lecturer, a space of 10 years spent raising the children." (13<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 3, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

The responses to the fourth interview question highlighted that majority of the respondents have indeed felt overlooked for opportunities in comparison to male counterparts, while others have not experienced such instances, however, a respondent from UI responded, "Yes, a few times in my early career". The respondent highlighted several factors that could contribute to the perception of women being overlooked for senior positions. These factors include societal biases that limit women's intelligence and strength, the challenges of time and availability due to family responsibilities, the impact of motherhood and caregiving duties, and the perception of a lack of competence. For example,

"I had stronger performance than the fellow promoted within the same performance period." (16<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 4, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).



"I can't say precisely." (19<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 4, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

Additionally, one respondent mentioned a preference for men in society, which could also influence decisions related to leadership roles. These responses collectively suggest that gender-based biases and societal expectations may play a role in the under-representation of women in university leadership positions. The responses to the fifth interview question indicated that respondents recognize that gender can impact how others perceive leadership and leadership abilities. The range of responses, including "yes," "sometimes," "maybe," and "not applicable," suggests a mix of experiences and perspectives. This acknowledgment of gender's influence on perceptions aligns with the broader conversation about gender bias and stereotypes affecting women's advancement in leadership positions. In respect to the impacts of gender inequality in the perception of others regarding leadership, the respondents stated how it can be prevented. For example,

"Yes, by re-orientation by women living to the responsibilities given to them" (1<sup>st</sup> respondent to question 5, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

"Through gender mainstreaming, gender sensitization, workshops, addressing issues of confirmation bias and implicit discrimination" (4<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 5, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

"By giving softer conditions for women advancement in career" (9<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 4, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

"Yes, let there be fairness in policies, what is good for the goose is also good

for the gander" (16<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 5, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

"No, because there are positions that our society believe can only be occupied by males and as such, they tend not to respect or cooperate with the female occupying such a position" (8<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 5, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

"No, because we live in a patriarchal society where women are relegated to the background even among academies. Besides many women will support men over their women folk" (10<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 5, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

The responses to the sixth interview question reflected respondents' thoughts on the current underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions. The responses touch on various factors contributing to this issue, including backward beliefs, the need for women to work harder, the importance of women's representation in leadership, unconscious discriminatory attitudes, the potential impact of domestic demands, and the urgency to address the issue.

These responses collectively point to societal attitudes, gender biases, and the importance of addressing the systemic barriers that hinder women's advancement into leadership roles. For example,

"At the university level, women should be encouraged to vie for leadership position and be genuinely supported by all" (11<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 6, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

"It cannot be eliminated, being pregnant and raising a child takes time. Time taken prevents productivity. Female staff should engage in proper time management so that they can be ahead of

expectation regularly so that pregnancy and maternity period will not be a disadvantage” (6<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 6, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

These responses collectively pointed to societal attitudes, gender biases, and the importance of addressing the systemic barriers that hinder women's advancement into leadership roles.

The responses to the seventh interview question emphasized the importance of mentorship and support for women aspiring to reach senior leadership positions. Generally, the women that are in leadership positions should help support and mentor junior ones without bitching or seeing them as threat and the junior women should upskill themselves, attend conferences and workshops, work collaboratively, and prioritize opportunities.

The 8<sup>th</sup> respondents suggested that women in the echelon of their profession should organize workshops to empower the younger ones. (17<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 7, Anonymous from UI, July, 2023).

“Yes, my recommendation is that women who have successfully reached leadership positions should be ready to mentor upcoming women” (9<sup>th</sup> respondent to question 7, Anonymous from LCU, July, 2023).

### Analysis

The study used thematic analysis, and below are the arguments of the researcher.

### Challenges Faced by Female Lecturers in Balancing Work and Motherhood

Gender role theory is grounded in the supposition that individuals socially identified as males and females tend to occupy different ascribed roles within

social structures and are judged against divergent expectations for how they ought to behave. In line with this theory, by virtue of the roles ascribed to women, they cannot keep pace with their male counterparts when they return from motherhood responsibilities. Often, age and health conditions are no longer in their favor. The only way women in this category can come close to leadership is through the entrenchment of gender equity, which would provide room for fair play and affirmative action. The study argued that in university systems, men occupy virtually all higher leadership positions and often dominate decision-making on gender-related issues, leaving less valued positions for women, who are encumbered by family nurturing duties. Below is the collation of data into themes.

#### 1. Work Overload:

Life preference theory, one of the theories adopted by this study, suggests that women increasingly make deliberate choices about their lifestyles and the priority they attach to paid work. The theory identifies three main lifestyles chosen by working women: adaptive, work-centered, and home-centered. It predicts that men will retain their dominance in the labor market, politics, and other competitive activities because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritize their jobs (or other activities in the public sphere) in the same way as men. Female lecturers often experience difficulty effectively managing their time as they juggle demanding work schedules, research responsibilities, and domestic duties. These dual roles can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion, contributing to a constant feeling of role overload.

2.

3. **Barriers:**

Limited support from institutions, such as inadequate childcare facilities and a lack of maternity-friendly policies, often impedes female lecturers' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities. These barriers create added stress, making it challenging to maintain productivity and job satisfaction, contradicting the work-life balance theory. The theory suggests balance is achieved when there is little conflict between individuals' work and personal roles, but here, there is much conflict between motherhood and attaining leadership positions. Female lecturers can advocate for equity to meet the demands of leadership without necessarily lowering standards.

4.

5. **Gender****Bias:**

This reflects the impact of patriarchy. Some respondents acknowledged feeling overlooked for opportunities compared to male counterparts, indicating a persistent gender bias in academic settings.

6. **Perceptions of Leadership:**

Respondents recognized that gender impacts how others perceive leadership abilities. Societal biases can limit women's opportunities and influence decision-making. Patriarchal norms may lead to the perception that effective leaders should prioritize careers over family responsibilities. As a result, mothers may face biases, with their commitment to leadership roles questioned due to assumed conflicts with caregiving duties.

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### Strategies Used by Female Lecturers to Overcome Challenges

1. **Support****Networks:**

Female lecturers often rely on support

networks, including family members, partners, and colleagues. These support systems provide emotional, practical, and caregiving assistance, helping them manage work-life balance more effectively.

2. **Work****Flexibility:**

Leveraging flexible work options, such as remote teaching, adjusted office hours, and modified workload distribution, allows female lecturers to manage their schedules more effectively and allocate time for family responsibilities without compromising professional commitments.

3. **Promoting Gender Equity:**

Strategies to address gender inequalities (patriarchy) include gender reorientation—reorienting society to focus on equity rather than equality, which may be unattainable in African society. Other strategies include gender sensitization, merit-based evaluations, and creating supportive conditions for women's career advancement.

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### Assessing the Impact of Motherhood on the Professional Success of Female Lecturers

1. **Career****Limitations:**

Motherhood often impacts career advancement opportunities for female lecturers, leading to slower promotion rates and limited access to leadership roles. This effect is due to frequent career interruptions, which reduce availability for research and increase pressure.

2. **Professional Engagement:**

Despite its challenges, motherhood can enhance certain skills that positively impact professional success. Many female lecturers report that their experiences as mothers have improved their emotional intelligence, leading to better engagement with students and a

deeper understanding of student needs, thereby improving their teaching effectiveness.

### Conclusion/Recommendations

The inequity in the representation of women in university leadership positions appears to stem from a complex interplay of factors. While motherhood is one consideration among many, societal biases, gender-based expectations, and challenges related to child-rearing contribute to hindrances in women's career progression. Strategies such as mentorship, upskilling, addressing implicit biases, and fostering a supportive environment could collectively help reduce the underrepresentation of women in university leadership. Women, however, are counseled to refrain from adopting a victim mentality in leadership roles, to believe in themselves, and to engage in mentorship.

These findings highlight the need for systemic changes to create a more equitable academic landscape where women's leadership potential is fully realized. Addressing this challenge involves reimagining traditional expectations, challenging biases, and implementing policies that empower women to succeed both as leaders and caregivers. Above all, this study believes and recommends that women in academic leadership should focus on advocating for equity rather than equality, as achieving equality may be elusive in academic institutions, as evidenced by the impact of motherhood in the Nigerian context.

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