

**Psychological Resilience of Working Mothers in Government Organizations: The case of Adama City Municipality, Eastern Shewa, Oromia.**

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the role of psychological resilience in managing stress based on the experiences of working mothers in Adama city Municipality.. The study population was comprised of 20 working mothers and out of this 6 sample members were involved as respondents in the study. The convenience sampling technique was used in selecting participants for the study. The data collection tools used for this study were semi-structured interviews and case narratives. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted using qualitative data collection tools and applied the approaches of thematic content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that some of the resilience strategies employed by working mothers were building connection with colleagues, having organization skills, religious coping and adjustment. Moreover, the challenges that working mothers face are lack of help at home, a non-friendly work environment and financial strain. There have been many suggestions to achieve work-life balance and avoid potential burnout such as prioritizing life by importance and timelines, sticking to the plan and creating a supportive network, applying flexible work-schedules, on-site child care and zero tolerance for harassment.

**Key words:** Working Mothers, Psychological Resilience, Work-life balance

### **1. Introduction**

At the individual level, Singh (2017) defined psychological resilience as a pervasive belief that one can respond effectively under stress. They identified three common elements in resilient people: 1) Sense of commitment to persevering through stressful events, 2) Sense of control over the outcome of stressful events (trust in their abilities to handle the controllable aspects of an adverse situation), and 3) challenge (openness to learning and growing from challenges or the ability to face problems and consider mistakes as learning opportunities and potential for growth).

According to Singh and Koradia (2017), psychological resilience embodies the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity. Resilience skills prepare people to deal with adversities, reach out for opportunities, establish healthy relations and be less inclined towards depression. Therefore, resilience appears highly relevant in the context of work environment considering the changes and hardships that working mothers face. Several studies have suggested that resilience minimizes the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation. Studies conducted on working mothers found high resilience to be related to improved wellbeing and lower depression (Morano, 2010).

Resilience could be understood as a capacity to perform and manage everyday tasks in uncertain and often stressful circumstances (Riley, 2005). It can exert motivation and strength to face and overcome obstacles by employing own resources (Rosenfeld, 2010). Mshololo et al. (2011) consider resilience as a dynamic adaptation process that enables and facilitates adjustment and implementation of remedial strategies in the face of imminent adversity. Therefore, the process of resilient coping may arise only when an individual, firstly, is confronted with an adverse situation and,

secondly, has a capacity to use resources that allow for its remedy (Stephens, 2017).

Coping strategies may be understood as cognitive or behavioural efforts to manage situations that are perceived as demanding or exceeding one's personal resources (Pulvirenti, 2011). Riley et al. (2005) claim that *"there is a dearth of UK-specific literature that focuses on a more complex picture of working mothers' adaptation, coping and resilience in the context of forced migration."* Key authors who have specifically sought to identify coping strategies utilised by UASCs include Rosenfeld(2010) and Stephens (2017) and their findings are summarised in Table 2.1. Whilst there is some overlap in their findings, there are also differences. This may in part be due to the subjective nature of qualitative research; dependent on the researchers' analysis and interpretation of interview data. However, it is also likely to be a reflection (and further evidence) of resilience as a context-dependent process.

Table 2.1: Coping strategies utilised by UASC settling in 'safe' countries.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Coping strategies identified</b>
<b>Rosenfeld (2010)</b>	32 UASC in Ireland aged 14-19 years old.	Maintaining continuity in a changed context; Adjusting by learning and changing; Adopting a positive outlook; Acting independently; Distrusting; Religion.
<b>Stephens</b>	14 male Sudanese UASC in the US aged 16-18 years old.	Collectivity and the communal self; Suppression and distraction; Making meaning; Emerging from hopelessness to hope.

Working mothers face challenges in their efforts to achieve work-life balance. A balanced work and family life incorporates all aspects of wellness, including mental, physical, social, emotional, financial, and spiritual health. Challenges to work-life balance for working mothers include, but are not limited to, household labor demands, child-rearing responsibilities, child care, inflexible work schedules, and an overall lack of support both inside and outside of the home (Riley & Masten, 2005).

Studies on working mothers highlighted childcare as the key stress factor at home, articulated especially by working mothers on low incomes (Rosenfeld et al., 2010). Studies on working mothers reveal that, regardless of family structure, various groups of women function similarly at work. However, working mothers were more likely to express symptoms of depression, reduced satisfaction with life and lower self-esteem in comparison to not working mothers (Stephens, 2017). They were also less likely to seek help when addressing work-related stress (Quaye, 2011).

Similar to all nations in general and developing countries in particular, working mothers have been facing different interdependent problems in Ethiopia. In response to the problems working mothers have been facing, the Ethiopian government encourages affirmative actions and has enacted and formulated different laws and policies that address work environment issues (Betamariam, 2000).

Ethiopian working mothers remain among the most vulnerable of all working population in government organization. The current work condition operating in government offices was considered as having great contribution for the stressful life of working mothers. According to the report from the Ministry of Women's Affairs (2008), the current working condition in different offices is very challenging for working mothers as they experience

challenges both at paid work and unpaid household tasks (Mulatu, 1997) .On the other hand, working mothers in government organization are heard complaining that different factors created pressure on them and forced them to work highly under stressful conditions as compared to men counterparts (Feleke, 2006). Although encouraging efforts have been made by Ethiopia to enhance resiliency of employees, working mothers face stressful events at work place (Tatek & Kjorholt, 2009).

According to Bacha (2008) women perform multiple roles normally which involve preparing family meals, taking care of children, cleaning the house, taking care of other social responsibilities such as church or any other group that the individual may belong to, as well as having to take care of the work roles.

A study reported that the stress that results from an attempt to balance family and work causes health problems, results in less efficient parenting and reduced life satisfaction( Helen, 2016). Concerning the resilience of working mothers, like in other parts of Ethiopia , most of Adama city municipality working mothers undergo extreme stress. Following distressing life experiences in the office, the working mothers engaged in determined efforts to cope with stressors and develop their own coping strategies( Natnael, 2015).

The identification of coping strategies and role of resilience has significant implications for how the mental health needs of working mothers can be managed.

Many difficulties accompany working mothers. As a result, working mothers are at risk for the development of emotional or psychological distress and disturbances. Researchers often noted this vulnerable situation of the working mothers. There is the need for knowledge of working mothers' challenges and strengths. While reading the research literature related to

Ethiopian working mothers, the researcher noticed that the focus is mainly on challenges only. This dominating tone overlooks the strength that presents itself in times of suffering. To present only the challenge is to miss an extraordinary opportunity to understand those aspects of personal and environmental resource that not only allow them to survive the challenges that confront them daily but to succeed in attaining their goals of work-life balance.

In general, despite those recent attempt to describe such phenomena as vulnerability, hardships and adjustment difficulties, and the mental health problems, research on the working mothers' resistance resources ( i.e., coping behaviors and resilience) in the adaptation process is lacking. This study, therefore, was undertaken to address this significant gap in research.

### **1.1. Research Questions**

1. What are the resilience strategies employed by working mothers'?
2. What is the role that resilience plays to reduce stress among working mothers'?
3. What are the challenges that affect working mothers' ability to obtain work-life balance?
4. What are the ways that could improve resilience of working mothers' and that could help to attain work-life balance in the future?

There is paucity of research literature to inform us about the resiliency and coping strategies of Ethiopian working mothers to deal with their work hardships and family issues. As a result, little is known about factors that contribute to stress reduction among these working mothers and thus make them less vulnerable to development of mental health problems. Therefore, the present study is designed to *explore the role of psychological resilience in managing stress based on the experiences of working mothers in Adama city Municipality.*

## **1.2.Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to explore the role of psychological resilience in managing stress based on the experiences of working mothers' in Adama city municipality.

### **1.2.1. Specific Objectives of the study:**

- ☞ Identify the resilience strategies employed by working mothers' in dealing with stressful experiences
- ☞ Investigate the role resilience plays in reducing stress among working mothers'
- ☞ Pinpoint the challenges that affect working mothers' ability to obtain work-life balance
- ☞ Indicate the ways that could improve resilience of working mothers' to attain work-life balance in the future.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design**

A cross- sectional descriptive research design was adopted using qualitative data collection methods. This qualitative study has applied the approaches of thematic content analysis that involves the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data (Creswell, 2003). Thematic content analysis is a coherent way of organizing the research data in relation to the specific research question (Tuckett, 2005). It is a process of encoding qualitative data in a way that identifies and analyses patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme can be defined as a pattern in the data that at the very least describes and organizes and at the very most interprets aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, 1998). Accordingly, data was collected using semi-structured interviews and case narratives. The unit of analysis was the individual working mothers.

**2.2. Sampling Techniques**

Adama city Municipality is selected by purposive sampling technique in order to exploit data from well experienced office as working mothers' in them are assumed to have clear perception towards psychological resilience and work – life balance. In addition, it minimizes accessibility problems due to its proximity to the researcher. This makes it more likely for the variables under study to be investigated in it.

The study population was comprised of 20 working mothers at Adama city Municipality. From 20 working mothers, 6 sample members were taken as respondents in the study. Convenience sampling technique made it possible for the right people who are suitable for the study to be selected. Again since the study is interested in mothers' working in the office with at least one child living with them, this sampling technique was appropriate. Thus, in the municipality, participants who are qualified for the study were first identified after which those who gave their consent to participate in the study were involved in the interview.

**2.3. Data Collection Instruments**

Required data were collected from primary sources. To gather primary data; key information interview was used. Thus, interview of Adama city municipality working mothers was conducted.

**2.4. Methods of Data Analysis**

In the qualitative data collected, all interviews were classified and organized in to specifics patterns, categories and units on the basis of similarities and differences in opinions, values attitudes and perceptions. The content analysis is conducted by classification, evaluations and comparison of content information.



### **3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1. Participants' Profiles**

Participant one is working in Adama city municipality. She has four children ( three girls and one adopted boy). From the interview with her, she gave the researcher an impression that she depended on the extended family for support in taking care of the children. In her work, her sisters, her mother and father give her support to take care of the children. Her sister prepares breakfast for her children and sends it to them in school. She does not have time to do that in the mornings. The school is about 10 minutes of driving from the children's home. Her work place is about 10 minutes drive from home but when there is traffic, it can take about 20 minutes to get there. She normally gets home by 6.30 pm and she explains that she is always tired when she gets home.

Participant two is a 33-year old employee at Adama city municipality. She lives with her mother as well as her nieces and nephews in her apartment . Some of her sisters and cousins live in a different apartment. She has just one child; a 12 year old boy. In addition she has taken two of her sister's children to be dependent on her. Although they get support from the family, they also provide help to her.

The grand mother takes care of the children when they come back from school. In addition, she has made provision for the children with a part-time teacher. Her occupation entails a lot of work such that she sometimes goes on a field work and leaves the children with her mother. The children's school is a bit far from their house, about 10 minutes drive. She normally drops them before going to work and for this reason, they leave home as early as 6: 15 am. The children return home by themselves because the mother is at work when the child is released from school. The location of their house is in the city centre and that makes it easy to get transportation

back home. The mother's office is also about 20 minutes drive from where they live.

Participant three is a 38-year old employee at Adama city Municipality. She has two children. The eldest boy is 11 years and the little one is a girl of 8 years old. They have a house-help who assists them with house chores. When the children return from school the house-help attends to them and provides them with food. There is also a part-time teacher for the elder child. The father is supportive when it comes to taking care of the children and both mother and father share responsibilities in this family. Sometimes he drops the children at school and sometimes the mother does that. He also bathes the children in the mornings before they go to school. The school is not close to their house but there is a school bus that comes around to pick them up and take them to school every morning. The mother's work place is also not close to their house.

Participant four is 36- year old employee at Adama city municipality and mother of one 10 year old boy. The nephew assists her in taking care of the child and also taking care of house chores. When the child returns from school, it is the nephew (or brother) who takes care of him and provides him with food. Her work is very involving; so she comes home very tired and she is not able to have dinner with her family. She sometimes does not eat dinner at all as she narrates in her interview. They live in a developing area which is neither close to her work place nor the child's school. Sometimes she drives to work and so she normally drops the child in school. When she does not feel like driving, she and her son joins the work (staff) bus which drops the child on the way to his school.

Participant five is a 33- year old employee at Adama city municipality and mother of two girls. The first girl is about 15 years and the second girl turned

13 years the same month I interviewed her. When the children are at home alone, the elder sister acts as an overseer. She once lived with a house help who took her private affairs out to the neighborhood so she vowed not to trust anyone in the neighborhood. That notwithstanding, she relies on other people who are not relatives to help her clean and perform other house chores. The husband is also supportive and they share responsibilities together. They enjoy a good social life together as a family by travelling far (outside the city) to spend their vacations. The family is close to one another and has a good relationship together. Mother is still in school reading for her master's degree in weekends but because of the way the family life is structured, her study does not affect the family life. The parents are academically focused in that they have two private teachers for the child. Their house is neither close to the children's school nor the mother's work. It takes approximately 20 minutes drive to reach the child's school and about 35 minutes to reach the mother's work.

Participant six is a 42-year old employee at Adama city municipality. She is a mother of three children. The boy is 11 years and he happens to be the last born, so the older siblings help the mother to care for him. His sister (2<sup>nd</sup> child) is around 14 years. The oldest child is also a girl. The family has no help from outsiders; the mother manages everything at home with the support of her children. They are a religious family in the sense that, they attend church and also practice the religion at home together with the children. Both parents share the responsibility in helping the children with their studies. Also, the older sibling sometimes plays the role of the parents by attending to the little brother's school meetings. The family members do things together and are close to each other since they spend much time together in the father's car.

### 3.2. MAIN FINDINGS

#### 3.2.1. Work-family Stress

The theme stress came about from the responses given when the mothers described their experiences in combining their work and family roles. The kind of stress mothers experienced can be categorized into sub theme, that is, work-family stress. The mothers in the study had different experiences in trying to combine their work and family roles as they all perceived their responsibilities as mothers to be very important to them.

This theme basically discusses how the mothers perceived their work and family life. When some of the mothers were asked about their experiences of mothering and their career, they described it as very stressful and tiring. These expressions were due to the routines of their everyday life because they are supposed to wake up latest by 4:30 am and get the children ready for school so that they can also get to work on time. Adama is a very busy place with heavy traffic in the mornings. If a person is not able to leave home early for work, that person is likely to be late and that is why most of the mothers have to leave home by 6:15/6:30 am. The above Mothers attested to the fact that work and family life was stressful. This is what participant one says:

*“very stressful, very stressful, right from the time I get into that office ... till the time I decide to take my bag, I work throughout, work, work, ..... ”*

This response was in relation to her experience as a mother and a career woman. From what she says, it implies that her work is demanding and that is why she works throughout till it is time for her to go home. Also, her experience as a career woman is stressful. As a mother, she also has some responsibilities at home and that is why she perceives some form of stress as she combines the two roles. Due to the double burden of employment and domestic responsibilities, working mothers have to have a well-organized

structure to facilitate those roles to reduce their stress (Fine et al., 2004). Even with the change in time in getting home, she still perceives her work and family life to be stressful. For participant four, the magnitude of her stress was heavier compared to what other mothers experienced. She illustrated:

*“I can say it’s not easy at all, because sometimes you need to give the child the necessary attention all the time but because you work in the municipality and you don’t close early, you get home tired and you go to meet the child sleeping..., this schedule everybody will go and leave you here because I hold the key the last voucher”*

This mother feels her work does not allow her to fully play her role as a mother. She values the importance of having more time with the child but she is unable to do that because her schedule at work does not permit her to get home early enough to be with the child before he sleeps. As it has been identified by Daud (2008), the wellbeing of children depends on their access to their mother and that could explain why the mother wants to give the child the needed attention. Moreover, in Ethiopian society, children are the business of mothers (Betelhem, 2009) and that is why the mother sees the combination of her work and family roles as difficult. She is a data entry clerk and that was the nature of her work. Moreover, it was evident from the mother’s response that her eating habit was affected with the nature of her work. For instance, she says:

*“Normally when I get home, I don’t even eat because sometimes I get home late and the day I feel I want to eat, I take my lunch here and that will be all”*

The earliest time offices close in Ethiopia is around 5pm. From 5pm, there is normally huge traffic situation since a lot of people may have also closed and they are going home. Because of the stress some of these mothers go

through, they forfeit their supper and most importantly, they are not able to eat dinner with their families. The mother affirms this point from the earlier response she gave' she cannot get full time for her family. This few quotes points out some effect of the mothers' employment on their family life and themselves.

In addition, participant two and six also saw the combination of their work and family roles to be difficult especially if there is no help from anywhere. Participant two also added by saying:

*"basically it is tiresome if you don't have any one to help you, had it not been my mum, then I would have to find a house help to help taking care of them since I will be in the office when they come home "*

This mother also perceives her dual responsibility to be strenuous but for her, she gets a lot of support from her mother. This tells the importance of social support in families where the mother is part of the work force because her mother relieves her of some of her duties and responsibilities. In the same light, participant six also expresses that work and family roles without support is difficult. She voices:

*"It's very difficult, especially when you don't have a house help and I have never been with a house help"*

This mother also emphasizes the need for support in combining her work and family responsibilities. Although she speaks of not having a helper, she sees the experience to be difficult without support with house work. The traffic situation in Adama is mostly heavy after work and that could also contribute to the stress working mothers go through.

### 3.2.2. Resilience strategies

Participants identified seven coping strategies that were used to manage stress. The data on adaptive coping patterns indicated themes concerning use of religion or religious coping, positive emotional engagement during stressful experiences, use of emotional social support from friends, use of instrumental social support from friends, and active coping.

With the aim to explore the coping strategies of the participants in more depth, interviews were held with 6 working mothers. They were asked the questions: “What did you usually do when you experienced a great deal of stress ?” “What did you usually do when you felt stressed, unhappy or lonely?” Clarification and elaboration probes were used to ensure an in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences. Participants’ interview responses regarding their dealing with stress or ways to manage problems and issues faced indicated use of coping patterns. These coping patterns identified specific themes. The thematic findings and representative quotations are presented .

#### **Religious Coping**

One of the salient themes that emerged from the data as a coping strategy was religious coping (finding strength in religion). For example, a participant expressed how her strong faith in God helped her to think positively and to become hopeful and to cope: My belief that only He [God] could take me out of difficulties kept me hopeful and to cope with my challenges. I was able to keep thinking positively because of my strong faith in God’s blessings (Participant Two).

The participants considered their deep connection with the Supreme Being through prayers. This deep connection helped to uplift their moods and to be hopeful for their future. For example, in her narratives, one respondent

said, When I feel sad, fear, and helplessness, I sang religious songs softly to calm my mind and lighten my feelings because I felt that God listened to my songs (Participant One).

Overall, six of the interview participants expressed that their strong faith in God/Allah helped them to develop a deeper relationship with the Supreme Being in order to cope with their acculturation challenges and depression.

Religious coping: Participants turned to their religious beliefs as a source of emotional support. They highlighted a connection between their strong faith in the Supreme Being and emergence of abilities to cope with their adversities, which eventually reduced their feelings of loneliness, stress, and depression and prevented further experiences of depression.

**Focusing on the Positives (Positive Emotional Engagement)**

Focusing on the positives (positive emotional engagement under stressful conditions), which is similar with the concept of positive reinterpretation and growth, is another theme that is characterized as a coping resource in regard to the stress-coping among participants. Rather than considering stress and negative feelings, keeping positive really helped me a lot, (Participant Five)

I stayed focused on positive mindsets even though being working mother is not easy at all, (Participant two) and

I realized that I had the ability to deal with all challenging situations with the positive mindsets. (Participant One)

Such statements indicate that participants attempted to create positive emotions with positive thoughts. Some participants believed that challenges associated with adjustment provided new opportunities to facilitate their personal growth and enhance a sense of positive feeling, which helped reduce levels of life stress. Such positive emotions and attitudes served as important coping strategies for participants because they believed that



through stressful life events they developed their positive emotions as a buffer against them.

Focusing on the positives or positive emotional engagement /positive reinterpretation and growth: In spite of negative emotions associated with the adaptation process, some participants developed positive emotions and feelings as a coping strategy for dealing with challenges associated with adaptation in the new environment (i.e. they looked for something good in what is happening and they had learnt something from the experience). Their positive emotions facilitated their abilities to cope with a variety of stressors.

### **Use of Emotional and Instrumental Social Support**

#### **Emotional Support**

Social support from friends and family members was another salient theme that emerged from the data. The analysis of the interview data suggested that participants received social support from their friends, neighbors and relatives .The data also suggested that participants received social support from family members.

It was discovered that the participants inform their real stressful life events to their relatives. They believed that if they shared their difficulties with relatives, their relatives would have become very helpful. They mentioned that their relatives had sacrificed a great deal in their lives. For example, a participant said,

During my stay at office, I used to tell my relatives about what my real life looked like there. Whatever problems I had experienced and whatever bad feelings I had, during phone conversations with my relatives, I always acted as though I am living comfortably and feeling happy. (Participant Three)

Use of emotional social support: when they become stressed, the working mothers had been getting emotional support from friends or relatives and they had been sharing their feelings with them.

**Instrumental/ Informational social support**

When they experienced problems and felt stressed, participants had opportunities to share various work place experiences and got advice or information from those who had similar experiences about what to do.

In terms of social support from friends, participants had opportunities to share various work place experiences and got advice or information from those who had similar experiences about what to do when they had experienced problems (i.e., use of instrumental social support).

Maintaining and developing social relationships with friends provided participants with positive feelings and connectedness with them. Participants thought that they had similar work place experiences associated with adaptation challenges. By providing a social support system for each other, they were more likely to react to various challenging situations in a collective way. For example, one participant said,

Whenever I am stressed out, I usually ask permission from my boss to meet my friend who had been working in the same office. Sometimes we shared lots of things together and those conversations with her really helped me out to deal with lots of stress. (Participant Five)

**Active Coping**

The interview data also revealed participants' use of active coping. Active coping is the process of taking active steps to try to remove the stressor or to ameliorate its effects. For example, learning and developing communication skills reduces the resulting feelings of distress. A participant said: "*I worked hard to improve my communication skill and remove the negotiation barrier with my boss and other staffs* " (Participant One).

Participants explained that they gained self-confidence and felt themselves empowered by improving communication skills.

The qualitative results revealed that there were five most commonly employed adaptive coping strategies by the working mothers. These coping strategies employed by participants of the present study lead them to improved adaptation following significant stressors.

As a result, they experienced positive social and psychological changes and enhanced mental strength. Despite all the hardships they experienced, many of the participants displayed resilience and developed competencies in acculturating themselves to a work environment, minimizing the impact of consequent psychological distress.

The analysis of the interview data obtained from six working mothers suggested some potential sources of resilience. These were: 1) experiences of enjoyable activities which include having day off and holidays, hobbies (listening to music, watching TV, using the internet), and 2) women's own personal strengths or characteristics which include having dream or goals for the future, strong determination in purpose of work, patience, flexibility, and being a good person regardless of how managers treated them.

Participants demonstrated how these positive experiences and their inner strengths helped them to overcome their suffering. Moreover, their spirituality and religiosity; thinking of their families, communicating with them and receiving emotional support from them; the presence of supportive friends; and thinking about their children's welfare and their education seem to provide the women with strength to face their challenges.

### **3.2.3. Role of Resilience**

The study also examined the relationship between resilience and work-family conflict among women.

In the formal sector, rules and laid down procedures are what govern each institution. Employees do not have the luxury of exempting themselves from

work as they please. At all times, there are tasks to be attended to and deadlines to meet. With such procedures, employees need acquired resilience to cope within the competitive job environment since one's ineffectiveness could lead to being queried or even dismissal.

Women in the formal sector therefore have attained resilience to manage workloads. However, this acquired resilience can enable them cope with their excessive workloads, but does not necessarily translate into being able to successfully balance their work and family roles adequately.

#### **3.2.4. Challenges**

The working mothers faced some form of challenges. Working in government organizations entails making a lot of sacrifices to yourself and your family and this is why most of the mothers saw time to their family and children as a challenge. From the interview with the working mothers, it was obvious that some of the mothers saw time to their children as their challenge. Mothers 1, 2, 4 and 6 explain why time was a challenge but for mothers 3 and 5, they were used to their everyday routine. For instance, mother 1 says:

*“Time, time, time for my children is one of the things I am not getting”*

She complains here about not making time for her children. From the description the mother made concerning their weekend routines, it was clear that she is able to take a walk sometimes with the children and also sit together with them to watch television. But in spite of this, she still feels she needed more time for the children.

Mother 2 also responded to the question about the challenges she faces in combining office work and domestic work by saying:

*“Not having much time for the children....so most of the time, I am out of the house ”*

This mother also saw the importance of making time to her children. In her further explanation to this point, she added that the office work took away some of her time to her children.

Likewise, mother 4 says:

*“Challenges, challenges, ahaha (laughs) they are many. As I told you, you can’t have time for your family, full time for your family, they don’t have much of you. You also don’t have time to be checking them when something is going wrong”*

This mother laughed at the question before she responded. It could mean that she laughed because her challenges were many. She feels she does not have much time to supervise the child since she is most of the time at work. From her initial quotation under the heading ‘work-family stress’, she sometimes do not eat when she gets home. This point could explain why she said she cannot have full time for her family. Probably, they are not able to eat together as a family in the evenings. Her work keeps her from performing some of her motherly tasks such as supervising and controlling her children.

The next mother, mother 6 also answers to the question about her challenges:

*“In fact, I would have wished to have more time for them, especially when it comes to their books and things like that but the challenges are that, it is not possible to get time for them”*

From her statement, she needed more time to teach her children. She thinks it is not possible because she normally comes from work tired. Before the mother accounted for her challenges, she made this earlier quote:

*“That is not often done because of the nature of my job. You see they get so tired that even they sleep before doing their home works ”*

This was in response to whether she makes time to teach the children. She already described her experience as difficult and that is why she considers

her time for her children to be less. In addition to the challenge of time the mothers expresses, the children in family 6 were affected with the nature of their mother's job.

From the mother's response, they get stressed out because of the everyday routine. Although this arrangement did not help the children, especially with the time they get back home, it was also a very good means for the family to stay together. This togetherness will possibly contribute to the parent-child relationship.

One theme with two subthemes emerged from the data and was interpreted to be challenges that working mothers encounter that affect their ability to obtain work-life balance.

That is, the theme, entitled sacrificial mothering, Sacrificial mothering included the two subthemes financial concerns and time constraints.

Financial concerns were the most anticipated challenge that participants in this study articulated in their work-life balance efforts, confirming the findings from previous research.

As a second challenge and component of sacrificial mothering, the women described additional sacrifices with time limitations, school deadlines, health issues, and relational difficulties with the fathers of their children and their teenagers.

In this study, the types of work-life challenges varied from individual to individual; however, the participants highlighted the most common sacrifices were surrounding financial concerns and time constraints.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Overview**

The main objective of this study is to explore the role of psychological resilience in managing stress based on the experiences of working mothers in Adama city municipality.

#### **4.1.1. Perceived Stress**

It was also evident that most of the mothers perceived the combination of their work and family roles as being stressful and tiring. Except for adding to the family income which indisputably benefited the children, it was also disadvantageous regarding the quality of time children got from their mothers. The stress some of the mothers engaged in resulted in a kind of conflict which is time based. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), time based conflict arises when time pressure associated with ones membership in one role makes it difficult to comply with expectations arising from another role.

In this study, mother 1 was unable to meet her children's expectation because her demands at work seem huge and that could be the reason why she is sometimes forgetful. The research finding shows that she even displaces her stress on her children sometimes. It is a fact that the time mothers spent on their work role could not be spent on the activities within the home. Even with the magnitude of the mothers' stress, the responses from both the mothers showed that they were able to care for their children as it was their duty. They took responsibility in their children's feeding, clothing and in their general well-being as mothers are expected to do in society.

The main purpose of this study was to study about working mothers in government organizations regarding their resilience strategies employed to

reduce stress, role that resilience plays to reduce stress and challenges that affect working mothers'. The study was based on the experiences of working mothers.

The major findings of this study are discussed in relation to the existing literature. Through participants' responses, it was revealed that they had experienced stress from many sources and had experienced feelings of distress, loneliness, and sadness during their stay abroad as domestic workers

Work environment possess new demands and challenges that threaten to disrupt the individual's psychological equilibrium (Bhugra, 2004). In the present study, consistent with other working mothers studies, the results indicated that the participants experienced stress. This result is congruent with the reports of previous studies. Many scholars reported that working mothers' are vulnerable to work-related stress and mental health problems (e.g. Angel & Williams, 2000; IOM, 2004; Zahid, Fido, Razik, Mohsen, & El-Sayed, 2004).

#### **4.1.2. Resilience Strategies employed**

Following distressing and traumatic life experiences in the work environment, participants engaged in determined efforts to cope with stressors and developed their own coping strategies . The analysis of the data from the participants' interview responses regarding their resilience strategies indicated use of adaptive coping strategies.

The most frequently employed adaptive coping strategies were: use of emotional social support from friends and relatives, use of instrumental/informational social support, positive reinterpretation and growth, and active coping. Overall, the data indicated that most participants employed adaptive coping strategies. As a result, they were able to experience positive psychological changes.



Interview data clearly indicated that participants used more than one coping strategy at any one point in time, with the combination of several strategies varying depending on the stressor. This finding is supportive of past research which also found that the combination of resilience strategies used varies according to the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Overall, analyses of the qualitative data revealed that there were five adaptive coping strategies that were frequently employed by the working mothers. These were: (1) use of emotional social support, (2) use of instrumental social support, (3) religious coping, (4) focusing on the positives or development of positive emotions/positive reinterpretation and growth, and (5) active coping.

The adaptive coping strategies employed by the participants of this study are consistent with those pre-stressor characteristics that have been identified in other populations as buffers to the development and maintenance of psychological disturbance. Specifically, past research has suggested that social and family support, spirituality and religious faith (Greef & van der Merwe, 2004) are important factors in promoting resilience. These coping strategies employed by participants of the present study lead them to improved adaptation following significant stressors. They mentioned that through using these coping strategies, they experienced a sense of wellness.

Social support (particularly emotional support), religious coping, and development of positive emotions and feelings were commonly employed resilience strategies among the participants of the present study, and enhancing social support is often recommended as an effective means of reducing stress (Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999; Schonfeld, 2001). Social support has the potential to encourage adaptive coping responses by promoting self-esteem, confidence and a sense of control and also by providing information and guidance (Holahan et al., 1981).

The frequent use of the coping strategy of social support among the participants in the present study is consistent with several cross-cultural studies which suggested that individuals from interdependent and collectivistic cultures are more likely to value interpersonal connections, possess high interdependent self-conceptions, and therefore place greater importance on relational coping strategies when faced with problematic situations (Cross, 1995; Essau & Trommsdorffs, 1996; Olah, 1995; Sinha, Willson, & Watson, 2000).

The relationship between social support and well-being is evidenced by past research. Social support research studies have been largely focused on its beneficial effects on individual wellbeing. Holahan and Moos (1981) found that there was a negative relationship between social support and psychological maladjustment.

The women also turned to their religious beliefs as a source of emotional support with which to cope with uncertainty and difficulties. Beliefs can influence the outcome of events as they foster flexibility in coping and the view that stressful life events are challenges. Previous research findings have consistently shown that religion, spirituality and related practices can have the role of integrating stressful and traumatic experiences into a meaningful context in the life story of the affected person. Braun et al. (2006), when investigating the outcome of psychotherapy for war traumatized refugees resettled in Germany and Sweden, found that those with strongest religious convictions dealt better with their traumas and “new” life.

Focusing on the positives or development of positive emotions (positive reinterpretation and growth) was another most commonly employed resilience strategy by the working mothers'. In spite of negative emotions associated with the adaptation process, they developed the ability to focus on positive traits because they believed that their positive attitudes and emotions

helped them to reduce life challenges and barriers and consequently to deal well with stressful situations. Their positive emotions facilitated their abilities to cope with a variety of stressors.

Past research also supports the close relationship between positive emotions and successful adaptation to adverse circumstances. For example, research studies support the close connection between positive emotion and resilience (Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006) and explain that positive emotions help resilient people construct psychological resources that are necessary for coping successfully with significant adversities like migration, war, natural disasters or terrorist attacks (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010).

Active coping strategy had been employed by the participants in connection with managing the communication barriers. One of the main sources of stress, especially during their earlier periods of employment in the office, was the problem of communicating with their bosses and staffs. To solve this problem, they had been trying their best to communicate smoothly with staffs and bosses. They worked hard to know the work environment deeply and remove the communication barriers with their bosses and staffs. After a lot of efforts, they were little bit able to manage the communication barrier. Managing with the communication skill helped them to adapt into the work environment.

#### **4.1.3. Role that Resilience plays**

With regard to the role of psychological resilience for the working mothers', analysis of the study suggested that many of the participant working mothers' experienced a number of adversities and stress and they displayed resilience and developed competencies in acculturating themselves to a work environment, minimizing the impact of consequent psychological distress. Despite adversities, these working mothers continued to thrive, mature and increased their competencies over time (i.e. they stepped back from stressful

situation).

Consistent with the findings of the present study, a number of past studies have found that new competencies and resilience can be developed through exposure to stressful situations. Graham and Thurston (2005) interviewed working mothers in Canada and found that despite experiencing stress, guilt and frustration associated with acculturation, these working mothers' demonstrated resilience which enabled them to develop effective coping strategies.

As argued by Rutter (1987), exposure to stressful situations (e.g., acculturation) may be beneficial for personal growth in that it enabled individuals to develop new competencies and resilience in order to survive. This was particularly important for many working mothers' participated in the current study who shared the belief that they are 'the backbone of the family' and have the responsibility to help their children and family. According to Rutter (1987), psychological toughening can occur through exposure to stress; suggesting the possibility that exposure to stressors may strengthen working mothers' resistance to poor mental health.

#### **4.1.4. CHALLENGES**

As a result of the busy nature of the mothers' work some families were with less interactions. Some of the mothers confirmed that, their work gave them little time to interact and be with their families. Even in the mist of these challenges, they were able to maintain their duties as mothers. It was surprising to know that, despite the mothers' busy schedules, they put their families first.

The researcher got surprised because the researcher thought their busy schedules will not allow them. Some took days off from work to care for their sick children even though they could leave them with their relatives. Others made time to take their children to the hospital themselves. This

caring attitude of the mothers will help the children to develop positively (Hoghughi, 2004).

## **5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **5.1. Summary**

The major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. The overall result obtained from working mothers interview revealed that the resilience strategies employed by them are building connection with colleagues, having organization skills, religious coping, emotional engagement and adjustment.
2. The participants response showed that the role of resilience are exerting motivation and strength to face and overcome obstacles, facilitating adjustment, exerting resistance and guarding against passiveness and abandonment.
3. The findings of the study have revealed many of the challenges that working mothers face such as lack of help at home, a non-friendly work environment and financial strain.
4. The respondents given suggestions to help working mothers develop and maintain a balanced work-life balance are prioritizing life by importance and timelines, sticking to the plan, and creating a supportive network.

### **5.2. Conclusion**

From the overall analysis and discussion made from the responses obtained in the Adama City Municipality, the study disclosed the following points as the major conclusion. Most of the working mothers undergo extreme stress and adversity. Sources of stress or stressors such as exploitative day-to-day living and working conditions severely affected the working mothers.

Many of the working mothers were highly flexible and open to adopting different resilience and coping strategies. The way the working mothers view their ability to change situations was internal (personal) as well as external

(social networks). Certain kinds of resources provided by developmental networks are critical to building resilience among working mothers.

In spite of adaptation challenges and the resulting stress, working mothers mobilized their inner positive personal qualities, which resulted in a sense of happiness and psychological well-being.

The identification of relevant stressors, coping strategies, and significant strength giving factors has significant implications for how the mental health needs of working mothers can be managed.

## **5.2. Recommendation**

The following points are the major recommendations to overcome the problems identified in the study.

1. Providing information, training and capacity building opportunities to intending working mothers enhance their overall resiliency.
2. The organization has to identify strategies that improve resilience such as job sharing.
3. The organization has to adopt work-life balance policies such as flexible work schedules, on-site child care, self-regulation and socialization of home activities in family and improving psycho social support of resilience.
4. Working mothers has to develop self-efficacy, finding mentors, integrating work and family, finding people who can provide emotional support and deal with discrimination.
5. . Working mothers have to be reasonable with what they can do and must be okay with saying ‘no’ to projects and other tasks that will overextend their already tight schedules.

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