SR890, Action Research Prospectus

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Due Date

September 1, 2024

Professor

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Introduction and Problem Statement

Draft the Introduction and Statement of the Problem sections.

Introduce the topic, define the scope, and clearly articulate the issue.

Addressing Work Life Conflict, Unpaid Care and Domestic Work and Gender Inequality in Jamaican Households using a self-training intervention strategy: A Collective Auto Ethnography

**Introduction**

“In Latin America and the Caribbean, women work three times more than men per day, considering the domestic tasks and the unpaid care activities…” (Ximienes et al, 2021, p. 1). This data is in alignment with global statistics that reflect women’s challenge with work life balance (Haupt & Gelbgiser, 2023; Reich-Stiebert et al, 2023; UN Women, 2018; ILO/Gallup, 2017). Though it is an important factor, the challenge is not just about who is doing more work and how many hours but how societies continue to define, organize and structure productive work [without consideration for care work and appreciation of various intersectional vulnerabilities] that creates, perpetuates and promotes systems of inequality and inequity.

The family is an important part of God’s plan for human existence. Though paid work has become a large part of our existence it was never meant to be an end in itself but a means to an end. Within a system of capitalism, the need for the “worker” has become the focus of our lives, as consumers of goods and services. Within this research, and beyond the work life balance discourse lies a notion of reclaiming families.

Society’s socialized gender roles stand as a core challenge in a postmodern society of dual income households. What is uniquely a man’s role and a woman’s role within the gender role socialization and gendered division of labour discourse is a thing of the past. When compared to their male counterparts, women’s labour force participation continues to be interrupted by unpaid care work. The implications for women’s career advancement and promotion, income status and overall security is a major concern for Jamaican women trying to balance their lives, livelihood given their responsibility for bearing, rearing and raising the next generation often singly.

The way work has been constructed creates a dissonance with “life” and the negotiation of life priorities in particular lives of women with children given the rigid nature of paid market work as an employee. Critical to this study therefore is the continued legitimatization of this core responsibility and the inordinate challenges faced by women in paid work outside the home and unpaid care work in their own home.

There has been data that shows that men are increasingly helping out around the home ( Aumann, Galinsky & Matos, 2011). Notwithstanding this, the problem goes beyond men “helping out” around the household and “sharing the burden” of managing the family to a greater nuanced view of who owns the role of carer, nurturer, household management and to what degree does this role expand? Is it task specific or do men share the mental load and emotional labour that is carer and household manager? Where does gender equality/gender justice reside within the household?

Though there is a notable macro component to gender inequality around household and care work that looks at policy and build out of care infrastructure for the preservation of families and workers, the scope of the research will be at the micro and mezzo level focusing on individuals and families. The action research will take the form of a *gender and care work self-training intervention* via development of a sensitization manual and workbook for couples and families. The Post-intervention is a co-constructed multilayered narrative of couples’ reflective experience of using the manual. This will formulate the collective auto ethnography as a composite of thoughts, feelings and cultural reflections of engagement developing (author) and using the manual. The aim is to empower couples and families holistically through a self-training intervention that can foster good couple and family relationships, gender equity and equality in care, improve cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes while fostering positive work life balance practices. This will enable them to gain insight into their attitudes and decision-making around care and household management. Therefore, the objectives of the action research intervention are:

1. To unpack the challenges around the philosophy, definition, conception and hegemonic construction of work, which have been at odds with the advancement of Jamaican women and discuss and explore work life balance ideologies, factors and situational analysis in Jamaica

2. To equip couples with a “holistic” toolbox of work life balance strategies, with the aim of promoting healthy values and attitudes, responsible decision-making skills and overall psychosocial wellness.

3. To promote inclusivity that considers intersecting identities connected to gender, class status and family status to increase awareness and engagement with diversity issues. This will focus on the lived experiences and realities of the family and promote open dialogue around mental load and emotional labour within the household.

3. To critically unpack policies around work life management that exist in Jamaica and how they have impacted women’s ability to thrive and advance.

4. To expose participants to work life balance policy and practice that has been adapted globally.

5. To bring awareness to the challenges faced by women and families and gender inequality within unpaid care and household work.

6. To educate couples and families on the invisible mental load and emotional and cognitive labor in managing and caring for families

7. To provide insight into the potential strategies to address gender inequality and promote shared roles in the home.

Conflict Theories and feminist theories are useful to explore gender inequalities that exist when examining unpaid household and care work. Conflict theory helps us to expose inequalities and injustice in society, it explicates challenges in social structures including families, dissects unequal distribution of power and material relations of gender. Feminist theories dissects the gender inequality debate and advocates for a disruption of injustice against women and vulnerable groups.

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# Statement of the Problem

***Diagram 1- Problem Tree***



Though women are major players in the workforce, the problem is that they continue to disproportionately carry the burden of unpaid care and domestic work (Dean, Churchill and Ruppanner, 2022). The problem is compounded by a lack of understanding of the real issues that exacerbates the problem that of the mental and emotional labour involved in care and household management. Women experience the mental load of caring for children, their husbands, (sometimes elderly and disabled) and others in the household while continuing to manage the household and plan for the family. The challenge remains not just in the physicality of the labour but the problem is compounded in the mental strain of planning and implementation of care. “The mental load is the combination of the cognitive labor of family life – the thinking, planning, scheduling and organizing of family members –and the emotional labor associated with this work, including the feelings of caring and being responsible for family members but also the emotional impact of this work” (Dean, Churchill and Ruppanner, 2022, p. 13). Even in households with a paid carer and household worker, the burden remains with the wife/mother to think and organize for everyone. The research has shown that men have increasingly been helping with doing dishes, bathing children, reading bedtime stories, taking children to school (though not to the extent to maintain equity or equality with women). Additionally, the mental preparation that goes into planning for these activities, scheduling and organizing and sequencing is often not undertaken by men. This mental load requires the woman to be ‘on at all times’.This creates a challenge not just for the woman who has to balance her workload while maintaining her sanity and physical health through self-management; it also creates a challenge at the mezzo and macro scale for the family and society. The family is an essential part of maintaining and sustaining life, workers and continuity. The burden of this situation often rests on the shoulders of the wife and mother in the household and societies continuing to consider this a challenge for only women, will yield negative outcomes in communities, organizations, churches, governments and general erosion of society. Failure to address these factors and social problems will have a negative impact on women and families which can result in lost opportunities for the national human capital development. Additionally, the ill effects of the mental load promotes erosion of family structures and family systems which have long terms impacts on society (diagram 1). This challenge is often seen as a woman’s/family’s issue (private troubles) but it becomes a public issue when there is no infrastructure to support the needs of the household and the family and there are spillover effects on work, government, economics and other human capital factors.

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