SR890 Action Research Project Prospectus

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**Ethical Considerations and Intervention Design**

•Develop a detailed plan for the intervention.

•Link the intervention to sociological and faith-based analyses.

•Discuss and address potential ethical issues related to the intervention.

**Addressing Work Life Balance, Unpaid Care and Domestic Work and Gender Inequality in Jamaican Households using a self-training intervention strategy: An Analytical Autoethnography**

**Intervention Design Plan**

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. Post-intervention is a multilayered narrative of reflective experience of interacting and working with couples and developing the manual (Hughes, S., & Pennington, J., 2017). This will formulate the auto ethnography as a composite of thoughts, feelings and cultural reflections of engagement and developing the manual.

## Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of this project 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.

Goal

Develop a critical and credible *gender and care work self-training sensitization manual and workbook* for couples.

The objectives of the action research intervention are:

1. To unpack the challenges around the philosophy, definition, conception, and hegemonic construction of work in public and private (home) spheres through a situational analysis.

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 an open dialogue around the mental load and emotional labor 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 explore work-life balance policy and practice that has been adopted 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.

## Sociological Theory

A research paradigm highlights the worldview of research and is endorsed by the particular research community. It highlights particular principles, beliefs and practices that the research community has adopted to guide research methods and analysis (Creswell, 2009).

The critical feminist paragraph informs my intervention approach. The governing research paradigm that guided the research is that of a critical research approach that explores and emphasizes power, inequality and social change. The critical research approach is derived from critical theory which empowers human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender. Critical paradigm is a philosophical ideology forged in critique often used in minority discourse such as women’s studies. It politicizes research and emphasizes power analysis, social justice and call to action (Hesse-Biber &Leavy, 2010; Leavy 2022). This worldview is an appropriate approach for engaging with feminist research methodology and scholarship that is transformative and promotes social change and social action. “Feminist paradigms reflect both a concern for the unequal treatment of women but also an epistemological recognition that men and women overall perceive and understand society differently” (Babbie, 2010 p. 40). Because of this, co- education is key, so that men and women (couples) can begin to learn together through a critical self-training manual for couples.

A critical feminist paradigm and methodology is a most appropriate way to conceptualize and think about the problem of gender inequality and unpaid care and domestic work based on my own philosophical beliefs that drive research decisions (Mertens, 2017). This type of reflexivity that is interwoven in this research is a feature of feminist research. Using this analytical lens to challenge paradigmatic assumptions and critique the ‘problematic’ of work and women’s work through gendered division of labour is akin to the revolutionary and emancipatory praxis and advocacy milieu of critical paradigm. The covert power, inequality and difference discourse will be analyzed within postmodernist feminist ideologies that illuminate concerns around work. Coupled with my emerging feminist stance/standpoint, I will use my social work and sociological understanding to bolster the call to advocacy and critical logic. This approach to enquiry often uses a dialogic and dialectical approach (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) often aligned with qualitative methodology through interviewing and observation. In particular, in this research there will be observation and interrogation of the data. The dialogic and dialectical approach to the part of the research will not engage with study participants but will instead, as a form of analysis, engage in a critique, examination and discussion of the nuances of power and inequality inherent in the discourse around the structure, meaning and valuing of work.

## Faith-Based Considerations

Power and justice as human longings will be intertwined into the intervention approach. In exploring this critical research and writing the manual, aspects of gender justice and power are key themes throughout. In examining care work in the household, justice will be explored through particular care activities, for example assisting with homework, making meals among other activities will utilize gender equitable approaches in the home. Power is about the ability to influence and lead. Within the discourse on care work and gender inequality, power will be explored as a topic of contention in the household based on gender roles. This will be contextualized in the manual and give couples a chance to explore power dynamics together from within the cultural nuances of their family and the wider society. The dynamics of power within couple relations will be explored from a biblical perspective.

## Target Group or Issue

My intervention targets heterosexual couples with gender role challenges based on traditional gender norms that create challenges of work imbalance and mental load for women in the home who disproportionately carry out unpaid care and domestic work. The target issue is the unpaid care and domestic work challenges that have invaded contemporary dual income households. The intervention seeks to educate couples around the invisible work around care of children, elderly and others in need of care.

## Strategies and Activities

The intervention strategy will be the creation of a self-training manual for couples to help with gender justice within the household and impact gender roles to balance the disproportionate weighting of care work and mental load. Activities include conducting a situational analysis, this forms part of the introduction to the manual and researching interventions that exist that can be manualized. Situational analysis forms an important part of sociological research. Additionally, self-training tools will be developed for use throughout daily living as a couple. The manual will contain self-use material that will establish the expected outcomes from use and will use educational material, gamification, and other activities (such as puzzles, completing tasks and others) for learning the material.

As part of the analytical autoethnographic process, the researcher will document the thoughts, feelings and observational perspectives of the cultural experience while researching and writing the manual and experiences of working with and interacting with couples. This process will include using a journal to reflect on and document my experience and that of others who have shared their stories with me. This will be part of the field notes.

The draft manual will be shared with a gender expert and a couples/family therapist as part of the member checking process to gain feedback and provide credibility to the intervention/manual. This peer analysis will help to improve the validity of the intervention and will form part of the post intervention strategy.

## Resources Needed

The resources that will be needed for this action research intervention are a computer, journal, internet, paper, pen and personnel – the researcher and member checker.

## Timeline

**January - June 2025**

January 6- 17, 2025: Conduct and refine situational analysis

January 18 to March 14, 2025: Complete Draft of Self Training Manual

March 15-29, 2025: Share draft manual with experts in the field

Review reflective field notes/journal

March 30, 2025- deadline to receive feedback and reflective analysis

April- May 2025: Incorporate feedback from experts, write reflection and final

report

June 2025: Finalize Action Research

## Anticipated Challenges

In conducting this action research there are potential challenges to consider. Firstly, there are cultural considerations based on the types of tools utilized by the manual. This challenge will be overcome by ensuring that activities found are reviewed and revised for cultural relevance and sensitivity. Additionally, other activities will be developed by the researcher who is a member of the community being researched. The manual will be further scrutinized through member checking. Secondly, another challenge that could arise is around the timing of the intervention activities. Given this factor, the researcher has arranged for leave from work to be able to dedicate time to the project. Additionally, the researcher has also contacted member checkers (therapist and a gender expert) who have committed to providing their expertise to this project in a timely, thorough and critical manner.

## Measuring Success

# Success will be measured based on the reflective process and member checking. The gender expert, couple’s therapist will provide feedback on the content of the self-training manual but will also reflect on the impact it can have on the clients they work with. Additionally, success will be measured based on the initial objectives and goals set for the project.

# Some specific indicators of success include:

* A written *gender and care work self-training* manual for couples
* Feedback and reflections of credibility of the work from therapist and gender expert

# Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles in sociological research range from informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary participation (with the option to withdraw) and at the core of all the principles is respect for the research participants and protecting position as respondents. The first rule of ethical research principle and practice in sociological research is “do no harm” that is avoiding iatrogenic interventions. In this research the potential for harm is minimal given the methodology and methods used for intervention. There will be minimal interaction with the target group. However, this does not take away from the validity or trustworthiness of the research. Notwithstanding this there will be indirect data collection, secondary data collection and observational data analysis. Additionally, the member checking will enhance credibility of the research intervention.

Autoethnographies, though constructed through the lifeworld of the researcher, have been criticized for their use of observational data of others in the community without permission from community members (Sparkes 2024). For example, in this study there could be inferences drawn from my own life experiences that may include others such as my spouse, friends, family, neighbors and former clients. However, this does not become an unethical practice given that there are no identifiers such as names and specific reference to geographical neighborhoods. It therefore preserves confidentiality and anonymity of the observed. Additionally, the perspectives form part of the co-constructed cultural reality of the researcher and therefore is not a breach of ethical research practice and codes of conduct. Consequently, the researcher’s identity is however not concealed and poses real questions about confidentiality and anonymity. This is however part of the reflexive process of autoethnographies, choosing to unpack and share thoughts, feelings and actions around a phenomenon and ensuring levels of comfort around sharing sensitive data in some instances. The data must not just be personal but meaningful to the research and to the community thereby making the personal political. Thereby making personal narratives useful and impactful data that can change the world.

Throughout the action research respect will be shown to the community of women and men impacted by the intervention. Given that I am a member of the community of women experiencing gender inequality and mental load in the home, the subject will be dealt with sensitivity, additionally, the gender expert that will be contacted for review is male and will ensure a balancing of perspectives and gender nuances. Additionally, respect for people is part of the ethical principles of social work which is the professional group which I align with and therefore respect will be paramount to this action research project.

Cultural sensitivity is important in my research given the ethnographical focus of this intervention. Ethnographies are by design studies of culture and cultural practice within a particular group or community. Therefore, culture sensitivity is built into the core of the methodology. For this research, cultural sensitivity will be ensured through engagement with key experts.

In this action research, disclosing and addressing bias is paramount given the autoethnographic methodology which seeks to establish positionality within the research and highlight alignment with the study community. This qualitative approach does not seek to bracket or separate the research but rather incorporate views and experiences within the dual role of researcher and study participant. No site permissions are required for the research.

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