

Is Work-Family Balance a Possibility? The case of Kenyan Female Teachers in Urban Public Schools.

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Abstract

Young mothers in Kenyan public schools experience a high level of work-family conflict. Currently, there are no formal family-friendly policies, despite declining levels of extended family support and rising cost of hiring domestic workers. A total of 375 female teachers from three towns and Nairobi city filled open-ended surveys to examine the informal work-family balance support offered by the supervisors and colleagues, and suggestions to improve it. Open coding and content analysis were used to analyze the data. Key findings indicate teachers asked for permission/assistance from supervisor/colleagues to attend to family emergencies, and they excessively relied on the supervisor for emotional support (empathy) and counseling from co-workers. Some women did not know whether the school could provide work-family balance support and failed to ask for any support, while others did not receive any support. The school culture determined whether schools had family-friendly culture or not. Schools should increase flexibility, devise ways to reduce workloads and build daycare centers, school houses and offer breastfeeding breaks. These strategies will significantly reduce emotional support reliance on supervisors and use of ad hoc measures. There is a need to sensitize supervisors/teachers on work-family balance needs, and foster a family-friendly environment.

Key words: Work-family conflict, teachers, family-friendly policies, gender.

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