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Home By Choice? A qualitative analysis of the experiences and decisions of being a stay-at-home mother in Nigeria.

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Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

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Department of Social and Organisational Psychology

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study sheds light on how integrated mothering shapes Nigerian's women's decision to become stay-at-home mothers, and how cultural expectations and beliefs impact mothering ideologies and experiences. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 participants based on their education, motherhood, and status as a stay-at-home mother. The study aimed to further the understanding of the experiences of African and Nigerian stay-at-home mothers as prior studies have largely featured the perspectives of Western, middle-class women, providing a limited view of motherhood. Through semi-structural in-depth interviews, the study provides a first-hand account of educated stay-at-home mothers and their perspectives on why they chose to remain at home. While there is plentiful research on working mothers and women balancing their roles as full-time mothers and labour force workers, there is inadequate research on educated stay-at-home mothers. Therefore, this study will fill this research gap by exploring how Nigerian women experience being stay-at-home mothers, the factors that influenced the decision and the cultural effects on their daily lived experiences. To assess the extent of cultural impact on the daily lived experiences of stay-at-home mothers, we utilized a variety of sources including academic research studies, and quantitative methodology. The data was transcribed with Google and analysed through thematic analysis using MAXQDA. The findings suggest that the participants did not initially plan to be stay-at-home mothers; however, social, economic, and individual factors influenced their choice. These influencing factors include childhood experiences, interpersonal dynamics, and intrapersonal beliefs.

Keywords: Stay-at-home mothers (SAHM), cultural expectations, discrimination, Motivators, gender norms, patriarchy.

APA PsycINFO Classification Codes:

    2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

- *2910 Social Structure & Organization*
- *2950 Marriage and Family*
- *2956 Childrearing and Childcare*

Resumo

Este estudo descritivo qualitativo esclarece como a maternidade integrada molda a decisão das mulheres nigerianas de se tornarem mães que ficam em casa e como as expectativas e crenças culturais impactam as ideologias e experiências maternas. Amostragem proposital foi usada para selecionar 10 participantes com base em sua escolaridade, maternidade e status de mãe que fica em casa. O estudo teve como objectivo aprofundar a compreensão das experiências das mães africanas e nigerianas que ficam em casa, uma vez que estudos anteriores apresentaram em grande parte as perspectivas das mulheres ocidentais de classe média, proporcionando uma visão limitada da maternidade. Através de entrevistas semiestruturais aprofundadas, o estudo fornece um relato em primeira mão de mães instruídas que ficam em casa e as suas perspectivas sobre a razão pela qual escolheram permanecer em casa. Embora haja muita investigação sobre mães trabalhadoras e mulheres que equilibram os seus papéis como mães a tempo inteiro e trabalhadoras no mercado de trabalho, há investigação inadequada sobre mães instruídas que ficam em casa. Portanto, este estudo preencherá esta lacuna de investigação, explorando como as mulheres nigerianas vivenciam o facto de serem mães que ficam em casa, os factores que influenciaram a decisão e os efeitos culturais nas suas experiências diárias. Para avaliar a extensão do impacto cultural nas experiências cotidianas das mães que ficam em casa, utilizamos uma variedade de fontes, incluindo estudos de pesquisa acadêmica e metodologia quantitativa. Os dados foram transcritos com o Google e analisados por meio de análise temática por meio do MAXQDA. Os resultados sugerem que as participantes não planeavam inicialmente ser mães que ficavam em casa; entretanto, fatores sociais, econômicos e individuais influenciaram sua escolha. Esses fatores de influência incluem experiências de infância, dinâmica interpessoal e crenças intrapessoais.

Palavras-chave: *Mães que ficam em casa (SAHM), expectativas culturais, discriminação, motivadores, normas de gênero, patriarcado.*

Table of Contents

Index of Tables

Introduction

Since the end of WWII, people have argued over the correct way to be a mother, who should judge the many versions of motherhood that are played out and this notion has transcended many generations and continents (Vavrus, 2007, p. 2). With a population of over 250 million, Nigeria has nearly half of its workforce made up of women (NPC, 2004). NPC reports approximately 110 million Nigerians are employed, of which nearly half are females making up to 46% of the national workforce (NPC, 2017). In recent years, women, especially those of the middle class, have had greater access to education and employment as a result of the Second Wave Feminism and Women's Liberation Movements (Banet-Weiser, et.al., 2020, pp. 3-5). Significant political, legal, economic, and social changes have been seen, thereby allowing for a rise in female participation in the workforce. Notwithstanding recent years have seen a resurgence of the "housewife or stay-at-home mother" position (Anyama, 2012, p. 21). It was the norm for many traditional societies to posit that all mothers adhered to the dominant culture of childbearing and that actively participating in labour conflicted with motherhood (Florian, 2018 pp. 136-138). Nevertheless, Dow (2016) research contested the notion of intensive mothering ideology, contending that the expectations imposed upon African mothers were culturally distinct. The culture in Africa is to prioritise employment and labour in conjunction with parenting and family life. Consequently, the perception of Nigerian mothers was predominantly that of productive and reproductive beings, which placed equal emphasis on their financial or economic livelihood as well as their maternal duties. As a result, Nigerian mothers were perceived predominantly as productive and reproductive commodities that prioritized employment over being a mother. Therefore, the cultural expectations are that both middle and upper-middle-class working mothers swiftly return to work after childbirth while at the same time perfectly fulfilling full-time motherhood responsibilities. According to Dow (2016), the cultural and community expectations of African mothers are different from other cultures as they are looked down upon if they choose to opt out of employment after having children.

Consequently, there is a rising phenomenon of women who, despite being educated, chose to leave professional careers to become "stay-at-home mothers", being stereotyped and marginalised (Evans, 2012, p. 7). Therefore, there was a need to explore the experiences that

influenced their decision to be stay-at-home mothers and their daily experiences while emphasizing how they prioritize their life choices according to their values, goals, and life experiences (Zimmerman, 2000, pp. 337-338). In addition to that, there is a focus on how discrimination affects the well-being of stay-at-home mothers (SAHM), their relationships, and their experiences.

Traditional gender roles in Nigerian society have immensely impacted individuals, particularly women, by marginalizing and subjecting them to inferior positions compared to men. This has limited their socio-economic and socio-political opportunities and has led to a perception of women as being helpless, oppressed, and marginalized (Rowland, 2019, pp. 1-2). However, in recent times, there have been some positive changes in the role of women in Nigeria, but the gender role gap between men and women still falls short of the expectations of gender equality and human rights (Rowland, 2019, pp. 4-5). Research in Nigeria largely centres on domestic violence, female labour force participation, reconciling work and family life, and the "supermom" ideology (Jaumotte, 2003, pp. 6-8). However, little is known about educated women who chose to stay home and care for their children. This qualitative study aims to expand this research field by providing insight and focusing on these groups of women.

Motherhood is highly connected to womanhood, with traditional and cultural expectations shaping both roles. Therefore, most women are perceived as "bad women" or a "bad mothers" if they fail to conform to these expectations (Steiner, 2007, pp. 54-58). In Nigerian society, it is practically inconceivable that a woman chooses to be something other than a worker, wife and mother. Most childless women are viewed as "incomplete" or "not woman enough" which suggests that motherhood is a vital aspect of womanhood. Women are obligated to be mothers and their value is judged by how much time they devote to raising their children while at the same time being full-time workers. As a result, those without children feel they have failed to fulfil their duty as women. The "good mother" syndrome imposed by motherhood in Nigeria has manifested itself in the form of the "supermom" persona (Anyama, 2012, pp. 179-180). According to Odenweller et.al. (2020), mothers often struggle to balance societal expectations of both success as workers and in mothering. This struggle often manifests in the form of the "mommy wars" where women stereotype one another and create in-groups and out-groups between each other. There are two

distinct categories of mothers, the ideal mother, who earns prestige for intensive mothering. And the supermom, who is lauded for success in family, career, and life.

Although many women now have access to many job and educational opportunities, maintaining a work-family balance is often more challenging for them than for men (Fannin, 2013, pp. 18-20). Over the years, women's educational and economic pursuits have been essential for women's liberation, and it's now mandatory for married women to pursue professional careers and engage in economic activities as a form of support for their husbands and external families. In the current economic climate where many married women are employed outside the home, what are the challenges that educated married women encounter when they make the decision to leave their careers in favour of raising children at home? What are their experiences while making this choice? Do Nigerian women experience the internal conflict when making the choice either to stay at home or pursue a career. Desimone (2001) observed that some women feel guilt and shame when they prioritize family over a career, creating a conflict between maternal and professional roles. To better relate to these educated stay-at-home mothers and reduce social stigma and discrimination, it is essential to gain insights into any potential conflicts and difficulties associated with the role. Faludi (2020) posits that the internal conflicts women experience as stay-at-home mothers are profoundly influenced by external and societal forces. Considering the societal perception of the "super mom" and all that she can bring to the table, that is, the perfect wife, worker, and mother, it is important to ask: What are the experiences of women who reject the "supermom" ideology and instead choose to devote all their energy to their children and family?

According to Redrick Mia in her HuffPost article in 2012, there are prevalent societal ideologies concerning SAHM, namely that they do not contribute to the growth of society as they do not benefit anyone outside of their family circle. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to bring to the fore some of the impact of cultural expectations on the experiences of stay-at-home mothers and to create awareness of their daily lived experiences. Resultantly, we sought to answer the following questions:

1. *What are the factors perceived as determining the decision to become stay-at-home mothers?*

2. *Are cultural and societal expectations perceived as influencing the experiences of stay-at-home mothers?*

3. *How do possible negative attitudes and stereotypes affect SAHMs' well-being in Nigerian society?*

Ten educated, married stay-at-home mothers were interviewed. The interviews aimed to gather detailed descriptions of their experiences. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The study investigated relational, social, and psychological effects of prejudice and discrimination against SAHM. Each subsections explored the perceptions and reactions and effects of experiences of their well-being.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

1.1. Gender Roles

Gender roles are accepted behaviours determined by societal expectations while considering biological sex and social needs. Gender roles are determined by culture and expectations from a target group of people (Ekong, 2010, p. 60). Similarly, another study by Lipman-Blumen et.al. (1975) posits that gender roles are shaped by culture and dictate how people should act in society. Subsequent scholars have tried to further explain the concept of gender roles. To gain a better understanding of these roles, an exploration of gender is necessary. Sweetnam (1996) suggested that gender is formed through unconscious identification with a particular gender, thus viewing gender as a fixed part of our nature. In contrast, feminist theories suggest that gender is fluid, not fixed, and can shift depending on external influences (Inaterama, 2006, p. 7). For example, norms in a given society may vary over time due to globalisation, industrialisation, and technological advancement.

As a consequence of social, cultural, and political alterations that constantly affect its meaning, sociologists predict gender will keep changing. According to Cockburn's (2013) definition, gender is a collection of distinct attributes that culture establishes for both men and women to maintain the social structure of society. West and Zimmerman (1987) posit that people are judged based on the successful execution of their gender roles. Moreover, Inaterama (2006) suggests that gender roles are continuous, and men and women are constantly reinforcing their identities and ensuring their conformity to assigned expectations. This performance of gender is essential in every aspect of life. Butler (2004) emphasises the importance of conforming to expected gender norms as a failure to do that has social repercussions while adherence has benefits. It provides a further understanding of how we conceptualize gender by outlining some perspectives; first, the culture of patriarchy equates to placing men in positions of superiority over women (Rothman, 1994); secondly, advocating for complete gender separation in all aspects, that is the fact that women are perceived as distinct in behaviour, and emotions, thoughts of life; thirdly, biology is considered to be responsible for the disparities between males and females. The far-reaching impact of these three perspectives on an individual's perception and comprehension of reality is significant. These assumptions are deeply embedded within societal norms, cultural

expectations, as well as institutional frameworks which effectively encourage and reinforce existing paradigms (Inaterama, 2006, pp. 11-13).

1.2 Cultural Expectations towards African Mothers

It is widely assumed that mothers conform to traditional parenting roles and that being in paid employment conflicts with being a good mother (Florian, 2018, p. 135). However, studies questioned the ideal of mothering, revealing that black women had distinct expectations stemming from their culture. Mothers in patriarchal cultures had the role of being both productive and reproductive and were expected to balance labour with motherhood. This idea reflects in the expectations of black mothers from the upper-middle classes, who are expected to be financially independent, work outside the home, and simultaneously raise their children (Dow, 2015, pp. 37-38). Consequently, the Nigerian culture typically expects parents to concurrently work and care for young children, leading to less time for parenting during childhood which indicated that being in the workforce took precedence over parenthood. According to Maqubela (2016), African mothers often face significant cultural pressures, which can be quite different from those experienced by mothers from other cultures. That is, cultural and social constructions highly disapprove of mothers who opt to remain at home to raise their children instead of returning to work after childbirth. Studies on the employment of mothers have largely focused on differences between racial or ethnic groups, but with little information on why minority women keep working after giving birth, and if they are doing so due to cultural expectations (Dow, 2015, p. 39).

African mothers had to join the workforce because it was pertinent to work due to the economic climate and as a result those who stayed home were perceived as having a lack of education or drive (Lyles, 2021, p. 1). Most women felt that opting to stay at home was a selfish decision that didn't allow them to fulfil their economic responsibilities. This created the concept of the Black middle-class mother as one who puts employment before her maternal duties (Dow, 2016, p. 181). Due to societal expectations, women with high educational attainment often prioritize their careers, so for many mothers, re-entering the workforce is the norm (Giele, 2008, p. 395). Throughout history and according to cultural norms, patriarchy, and economic power, African mothers are encouraged or pressured to maintain employment in order to achieve financial independence and meet their welfare needs by taking on a large amount of responsibility. This has

had a substantial effect on the job options of women and the perception of women as capable of carrying out the dual responsibility of motherhood and financial independence (Florian, 2018).

Most recently, mothers often use "opting out" to balance their career and family commitments (Lovejoy & Stone, 2012, p. 634) but for most African upper-class women, having a successful career is an essential part of their identity (Maqubela, 2016, pp. 7227-7229). Previous studies examine how women manage expectations between labour and parenting (Dow, 2015, p. 39; Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 23). Although Nigeria meets the International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards for maternity leave, its duration is usually short, sometimes less than 2 months and not exceeding 3 months (Convention C183; Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 No. 183). As a result, many families consider having two incomes a necessity due to the high living costs. Choosing not to work temporarily is seen as an irresponsible way to handle the conflict between paid work and motherhood for women (Rowland et.al. 2019, p. 3). Nevertheless, Nigerian mothers with managerial or professional occupations, and high educational levels, are increasingly opting out of work so they can care for their children. This "mommy elite" status as Kuperberg and Stone (2008) posit is defined by their advanced qualifications, past high-status professions, and their husbands' current employment.

1.3 Nigeria's Family Dynamics

Western civilization, urbanization, legal reforms, human rights activities, and globalization have increasingly led to changes in the social constructions of women in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Women are increasingly taking advantage of economic opportunities in government establishments, and the private/industrial sector due to the changing waves of globalization (Ekong, 2010). Traditionally, Nigerian society and religion view men as the sole decision-maker and the head of the household, whereas women are the helpmate whose sole purpose is to "submit to the head". The concept of patriarchy is deeply prevalent in Nigeria where men are generally considered "superior" to women based on physiological and physical differences between them (Dogo, 2014, p. 264). As a result, most men are opposed to participating in domestic activities, due to the notion that it is beneath them as lords and heads of the home, and they are often looked down upon by friends and family (Ejukonemu, 2015, pp. 1090-1092). Adeyokunu (1981) draws

attention to the fact that even though they are predominantly accountable for household tasks, females participate in the labour force more frequently compared to males. Notwithstanding this fact, the perception remains prevalent that women hold secondary status within society's hierarchy. Despite persistent gender discrimination against women in the labour market, policymaking, education, and childcare sector, through feminist ideologies, a growing number of women are utilizing educational opportunities to improve their socioeconomic standing and empower themselves.

Contemporary industrial society values productivity, efficiency, and financial competence. Therefore, to demonstrate one's worth, adults often rely on their ability to earn money and compete with others in their field which fuels the patriarchal hierarchy. This supports the gender dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles, where the masculine stands out (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008). As a result of the harsh economic situation in Nigeria, it is believed that men may not be adequately equipped to provide for the entire household, and women are inclined to enter the workforce to improve the family's economic situation. Due to the increasing need to fulfil economic demands, it is expected that every woman takes on the "working mother" position. Due to their ability to balance work and motherhood, this group of mothers are viewed as "good mothers". They work around 40 hours a week engaging in professional work while at the same time expected to fully meet the demands of the full-time wife and mother and any deviations from this standard are met with criticism and judgement (Isamah & Okunola, 2002).

1.4. Challenging Patriarchal Values- The Emergence of Feminism

According to the SAGE Encyclopaedia of Feminism and Gender, "feminism is the belief in the political, social, cultural, economic, and educational movement to establish equal rights and legal protections for women. Its ideologies and theories are concerned with differences based on sex and gender and the inequalities and inequities due to these differences, including but not limited to issues such as family roles, sexual harassment and assault, violence against women, human trafficking, exploitation, equal pay, employment opportunities, equality in the workplace, education, childcare, contraception" (The SAGE, p. 549). The feminist movement has fought for women's rights, including that of paid employment, for decades. It is important to consider the movement's history and the relevance of feminism to motherhood and employment.

The ideal of femininity was rooted in a patriarchal system that used the sexual division of labour to give men authority and control over women which introduced different eras of feminism (Friedan, 1963, p, 199). Women's liberation is believed to have been at the centre of the first era of feminism nineteenth century and its focus was solely on the pursuit of women's right to own property, vote, access to education, work and earn fair pay, and the pursuit of their own happiness; whereas, the second era which came to the fore in America in the 1960s was about women advocating for gender equality in terms of sexual liberation, an end to discrimination against women, financial liberation, and reproductive rights (National Women's History Alliance, 1998). This highlights the genuine purpose of feminism which was to create equal professional opportunities, and financial independence and to champion the cause for the freedom to choose and seek equality for women. It began as a cause to change the perception of society that women were inferior, inadequate beings to being fully independent competent beings (McLaughlin & Aikman, 2020, pp. 93-94).

After the post-feminist wave in the 1970s, feminist women sought to be valued for more than just being homemakers as it promoted the idea that women should have an equal chance in the workplace, and opportunities in the workforce, as well as promoting the standard that women could have it all with a wonderful marriage, raising well-behaved children. At the same time, women must also realise that they do not need to do all of that to be valuable (Banet-Weiser et.al., 2020, p. 9). Over the last twenty years, most feminist studies find increasing numbers of mothers entering the workforce due to economic necessity and, in many cases, wanting more independence, creativity and cognitive interaction. Nevertheless, few accept the fact that some women actively choose to stay at home with their children and have a hard time supporting women who make fundamental choices such as the decision to be stay-at-home mothers (Marks & Houston, 2004, p. 73).

1.5. Feminist Perspectives Towards Stay-at-Home Mothers and Working Mothers

A previous study by Swank and Fahs (2017) argued that the stay-at-home mother status is undermined and marginalized by the feminist movement since most SAHMs do not participate in the movement, and their decisions are perceived to promote gender inequality. A major objective of the feminist movement was to create equal opportunities for women, including equal rights to

work, equal rights to vote, equal rights to education, and political and economic rights. In an article published in 2022, Aishwarya Pradhan highlighted some positions of feminist scholars. In the words of Aishwarya:

"Women's empowerment, to a large extent, has given such women a voice to speak out against the injustices and biases they face because of their gender. On the other hand, housewives, or homemakers- a better term, belong to a category of women, who, unfortunately, do not receive the respect and attention they deserve. Even when a woman herself chooses to devote her life to her family, who are we to judge her? While efforts are made to give women the freedom of choice, they are looked down upon if they choose their family over their careers." (para 3).

There is a complicated and sometimes troubled relationship between feminism and motherhood. First-wave feminists believed they represent all women, rich and poor, black, and white, and present solutions that work for all women and mothers. Despite current feminist recognition of diversity among women, there is little acceptance of diversity in motherhood (Marks, 2004, p. 74). However, several feminist theories support motherhood but the debate on whether women should stay at home or pursue careers has been ongoing for decades - from Simone de Beauvoir advocating against the choice of women to be stay-at-home mothers to Sharon Greenthal arguing for feminists to support each woman's decision regardless of whether it conforms to traditional norms. Feminist movements, like radical feminism, constantly focus on mothering/stay-at-home mothers as a consequence of women's oppression and patriarchy. According to Schlafly (2003), the psychological and emotional well-being of stay-at-home mothers is worse in practically every aspect than that of working mothers. Women who choose to be SAHMs are wasting their lives away and the feminist movement has failed in its mission to transform women since it has provided leeway to opt out of working. As Hirshman (2006) argues *"Bounding home is not good for women and it's not good for society. The women aren't using their capacities fully; their so-called free choice makes them unfree dependents on their husbands. Whether they leave the workplace altogether or just cut back their commitment, their talent and education are lost from the public world to the private world of laundry and kissing boo-boos"* *(para 1).*

The opposition to women staying at home is evident but it also portrays that this stance is not obtainable for every woman, but rather a position attainable to only women with a high degree of education. Many studies have contradicted this stance positing that women who choose to be stay-at-home mothers are wasting their lives away due to feminism (Stone, 2008; Lovejoy, 2004). These postulated that the decision is based on preference, therefore, the feminist movement needs to begin working at placing mothers at the core of its ideologies of choice. According to Evans (2012), the desire for independence among women has grown to an unhealthy level because of feminism's encouragement to "have it all". However, the goal of many second-wave feminists was to liberate women from the primary responsibility of childcare and domestic duties and to encourage men to participate in domestic duties (Friedan, 1963, p. 199). Though many women have decided to pursue a career and engage in economic responsibilities, men have not increased their involvement in the home front in the same way. Hence, fatherhood should be redefined to include full-time nurturing of children and domestic responsibilities, which feminists promote as a key element of women's equality and liberation. (Medved, 2016, pp. 16-18).

According to a recent review by the New York Times that offers anecdotal and journalistic research evidence, the decision to become stay-at-home mothers was borne out of personal choices and preferences. The women interviewed expressed their willingness to choose to stay home to raise their children, another described the joys she derives from being a stay-at-home mother and the sense of fulfilment she feels. In their words:

Participant 1: "*I knew there would always be wrecks and fires, but there wouldn't always be his childhood.*"

Participant 2: *"This is what I was meant to do, I hate to say that because it sounds like I could have skipped college. But I mean this is what I was meant to do at this time. I know that's very un-p.c., but I like life's rhythms when I'm nurturing a child. I've had people tell me that it's women like me that are ruining the workplace because it makes employers suspicious"* (The New York Times, The Opt-Out Revolution, 2003.)

England, (2010) conceptualised the social and cultural changes that have occurred in relation to gender roles and expectations in recent decades. While some progress has been made in terms of greater equality for women and greater acceptance of diversity in gender identities and

expressions, the overall progress of the gender revolution has been uneven and has stalled in certain areas. Furthermore, various factors have contributed to the uneven and stalled progress, including resistance to change and the persistence of traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Despite some progress in terms of greater equality for women in the context of choice and greater acceptance of diversity in gender identities and expressions, traditional gender norms and stereotypes continue to shape people's attitudes and behaviours, making it difficult to achieve true gender equality and acceptance for the choices of groups who do not conform to certain ideologies (Gaunt, 2013, p. 402).

The trend of high-achieving women leaving their careers to stay home and raise children challenges the idea that staying at home to raise children reflects a rejection of radical feminist ideologies in favour of traditional and cultural gender roles. This is due to a return to traditional methods of childcare and a heightened focus on the significance of maternal nurturing (Stone, 2007, p. 62). She also highlights the constraints faced by the majority of women as society needs to better support professional women who choose to interrupt their careers to raise children.

1.6. Balancing Family and Career

Nigeria is an environment that despite being highly traditional, greatly considers labour force participation from all genders (Ifechukwu, 2013, p. 6). However, there is an increasing number of women who feel they have choices on how to balance work and family commitments and the option of staying at home is one of them (Rowland, 2019, p. 5). The increasing involvement of women in education and the labour force, however, has led to the emergence of adopting feminist ideologies from women, therefore these institutionalised gender stereotypes and roles are beginning to be questioned. In the same vein, the decision to have children has steered many women towards adopting the balanced option of staying home to take care of the children and family in general while pursuing a business or taking up a work-from-home job (Boehnke, 2011, p. 10, 15).

There is still a large disparity between women's participation in government, strategic corporate positions, family and employment policies such as "equal pay" which has driven more women towards feminism, and the fight for equality in gender roles and attitudes are now rife, especially among the younger generation (Boehnke, 2011, p. 11). Although attitudes toward

gender roles and stereotypes have evolved among men, their tasks at home are less significant than those of women. It has been observed that while many men of this generation support women who choose to work and build careers, they still have a difficult time taking on a fair share of the childcare and household chores. Therefore, it is believed that the financial contribution of women to families is merely a supplement for most Nigerian men (Rowland, 2019, p. 6).

De Marneffe (2004) suggested that despite having access to education and professional achievement, the integration of family and career roles remains a challenge for women, thereby confirming that even highly educated and professionally successful women experience family and career conflicts. This explains why there is a rise in highly educated Nigerian women who have opted to be stay-at-home mothers. In Nigeria, despite the increasing participation of women in all spheres of labour and politics, their roles as primary caregivers remain highly maintained and reiterated in society and government policies and the responsibility of raising the children is widely regarded as solely the responsibility of women.

In patriarchal Nigeria, the fundamental role of women is to become home builders whose major responsibility is to nurture children and build the home. Nevertheless, the current socio-economic crisis and educational enlightenment demands that everyone, both men and women obtain formal education that prepares them to be self-sufficient and financially independent. Through their pursuit of careers and education at the highest level, women have become higher-status citizens in society beyond the confines of motherhood, improving their quality of life personally and professionally while also contributing to family income (Bianchi, 2000, pp. 403-406). As a result, with each passing day, many more Nigerian women, especially married ones, have chosen to pursue professional careers while raising children and families with love and care. According to Onwuchekwa (1990), the rise of women in pursuing professional careers is a result of feminism, women's emancipation, the fight for gender equality, greater educational opportunities, and a rise and decrease in income and expenditures. Consequently, women are not expected to depend on their partners for income and livelihood but are not supported by their male spouses in their simultaneous roles as mothers and workers.

In addition to the huge contribution women make to the overall development of the nation, obtaining an education is no longer a serious issue for women since they now pursue professions

previously dominated by men. Despite this, women must combine work and parenting and therefore may find it challenging due to the conflict involved in taking up dual roles. Due to this conflict between motherhood and professional duties, some women would rather stay at home and raise their families rather than pursue professional careers in a bid to find balance (Chassin, et. al., 1985, pp. 301-302). As posited by Rubin and Wooten (2007), educated mothers may stay at home for a variety of reasons, lack of favourable employment structures for working mothers, childhood experiences, the lack of child support, the high cost of childcare, the desire to support a partner to achieve more income, the difficulty in finding a job with adequate flexibility, and the desire to maintain balance in a hectic family and career schedule. Despite their desire to provide the best for their families, these educated stay-at-home mothers often deal with internal conflicts, such as low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, a sense of loss of identity, and social alienation which can affect their psychological well-being. In addition to social isolation, they faced a lack of intellectual stimulation and financial dependence.

Zimmerman (2000) also uncovered some of the harsh realities of stay-at-home mothers: discrimination, societal disapproval and lack of support, social exclusion, loneliness, boredom, fear of losing intellectual skills, psychological distress and isolation, internal guilt, economic insecurity, a loss of identity, low self-esteem, and external validation. These effects can lead to social and emotional conflicts and a lack of personal growth, as a result, it was determined that society does not widely accept stay-at-home parenting by either gender. In the absence of such recognition from society for their work, stay-at-home mothers have to work harder to feel satisfied with their choices.

However, unlike Zimmerman (2000) who highlighted the challenges and negative attitudes towards stay-at-home mothers, new findings on stay-at-home mothers in the work of Desimone (2001) posited that although staying at home can have negative effects on mothers, there are also positive effects that should be considered. Many mothers report feeling more satisfied and content when they can focus their time and effort on their families. Additionally, staying at home can provide mothers with the unique opportunity to pursue hobbies and interests that may have gone undiscovered if they were working outside the home. Furthermore, it can give mothers a sense of purpose and self-fulfilment, as they are able to actively contribute to the well-being of their families in a meaningful way. By considering the positive aspects of staying at home, mothers feel

empowered to make the best decision for themselves and their families. Though the psychological well-being of educated stay-at-home mothers is affected by role conflict and spousal support, it is also impacted by the different aspects of parenting. The factors that led women to decide to be stay-at-home mothers rather than pursue careers are also linked to this relationship. Although leaving a career was accompanied by guilt, it was much more satisfying and fulfilling to stay at home to raise their kids (Desimone, 2001, pp. 10-12).

1.6.1. Rejecting the "Supermom" Ideology

Nigerian women face the challenge of balancing their work and family responsibilities, which is not an easy task. It is difficult to find employers who recognize the importance of this balance, so women have to rely on their own strength and courage to become successful in both their personal and professional lives. The term "superwoman" refers to a woman who can balance her family and career responsibilities successfully (Daum, 2017, p. 4). The idea that women are capable of multitasking and managing diverse responsibilities simultaneously fuels the "supermom" narrative. Similarly, Faludi (1991) argues that the internal conflicts experienced by stay-at-home mothers are heavily influenced by societal pressures and expectations and as a result, the concept of the "superwoman", a woman who successfully juggles the roles of mother, wife, and career professional can exacerbate the guilt and shame felt by women who choose to dedicate their time and energy solely to their families. It is important to recognize the impact that these external factors have on the decision-making process and mental well-being of educated stay-at-home mothers.

Research on educated stay-at-home mothers focuses on the difficulties women encounter in balancing work and family life, and the conflict between being an ideal parent and a working mother (Stone, 2007, p. 62). The decision to leave the workforce is often a difficult one, rarely based on a desire to adhere to traditional roles. Many women feel that their career aspirations are thwarted, yet some find it to be a liberating experience. Work choices are limited by the amount and pace of work, lack of flexibility, and lack of reduced-hours options. Furthermore, many organisational professionals existing in the middle and lower economic classes have lagged behind in adapting to shifting family dynamics (Coltrane, 2004, p, 794). In a study conducted by Marks and Houston (2002), they posit that stay-at-home mothers often accept pre-given roles and the

male bread-winner model where their husband provides material resources regardless of their socio-economic background. According to Desimone (2001), women often experience internal role conflict when deciding between focusing solely on their families or attempting to balance a professional career alongside their maternal responsibilities. This role conflict can be both emotionally and psychologically challenging for women, as they navigate societal expectations, personal desires, and the best interests of their children. (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005, p. 601).

According to Okafor and Amayo (2006), women do not work just for self-fulfilment, but it is expected that women used their educational qualifications for the benefit of both as single or married women, first to mitigate economic hardships in their families and be a source of economic support to their husband's income in the face of persistent economic inflation. Therefore, if they choose to quit, it violates societal expectations and results in prejudice or microaggressions (Odejide, 1998; Isamah & Okunola, 2002). Peters (1997) argues that working mothers don't abandon their homes when they join the workforce, but rather adjust balance both functions. This contradicts the widespread belief of past decades that working mothers are relinquishing their roles. Women who worked full-time and had their own households mainly relied on family, neighbours, and daycare centres for support. Those who felt their family life was unaffected, positive, or negative, credited the help of relatives, children, and external childcare agencies.

Okafor and Amayo (2006) argued that, for women, family duties are the highest priority, with duties as a wife and mother primary, and other role obligations perceived as secondary. For men, occupational demands supersede all else and childcare is still considered the primary obligation of women. He further asserted that the working woman faces the challenge of fulfilling both work and family obligations concurrently, which can result in conflicting methods of combining these roles. Although women are no longer expected to be dependent on a male breadwinner, they are not supported in their dual roles of mothering and working (Nwaogwugwu, 2020, p. 4). Therefore, working mothers in Nigeria are under a heavy burden due to the patriarchal society and profit-driven economic climate. There is the pressure on women to become economically independent which had a significant influence as many female graduates prioritized their careers or jobs, leading to criticism from society (Emihen, 1996). Many argued that these women had failed to embrace motherhood and had become overly money or career-conscious- and that this disinterest in motherhood equated to a loss of their femininity. Additionally, working

mothers experience a complex and demanding set of roles as wives, mothers, and workers. They experience pressure from almost every sphere of their lives and consistently feel guilty that they are neglecting their families as they struggle to perform their duties at work effectively, despite that, domestic expectations of them as wives and mothers remain intact (Okafor & Amayo, 2006, pp. 88-91). Similarly, in a society that views motherhood as an intrinsic part of being a "good woman", stay-at-home mothers face judgment due to their choice to prioritize their families, and stereotypes abound that portray them as unqualified or incompetent while working mothers are subjected to negative assumptions regarding balancing work and family (Fannin, 2013). Consequently, both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers face societal pressures and struggles with mental health issues and self-esteem issues due to judgments (Gaunt, 2013, p. 406).

A broader perspective was analysed by Odenweller et.al. (2020) on how gender stereotypes can influence attitudes about stay-at-home and working parents. They note that stay-at-home mothers are often stereotyped as being more nurturing and warmer than working mothers while working mothers are often stereotyped as being less competent in the home and less warm and nurturing than stay-at-home mothers. These stereotypes can contribute to the pressures of idealized motherhood, which can affect mothers' intergroup and interpersonal dynamics. For example, stay-at-home mothers may feel pressure to conform to the idealized image of the perfect mother, while working mothers may feel pressure to prove their competence both at work and at home. Lamar and Forbes (2020) found that both SAHMs and working mothers experience pressure to conform to idealized motherhood standards, but that these pressures manifest differently depending on whether a mother holds a stay-at-home status or a working status.

Factors such as the high cost of childcare, the gender wage gap, discrimination against women, lack of maternity leave, and lack of family policies heavily impact women's ability to function economically and psychologically. This suggests that society is heavily involved in shaping and constructing conditions that may leave mothers no choice but to remain at home. Therefore, mothers performing domestic duties and familial care, but also unemployed mothers who can't find a job, have a disability or are students and the majority of SAHMs stay home out of necessity and not necessarily by choice (Tanzila, 2006, pp. 10-12).

1.7. Present Study

The Nigerian familial environment is one where gender inequality, patriarchy, and sexist inadequacies are highly prevalent (Alabi & Olonade, 2022, p. 100). This research on the experiences of stay-at-home mothers is significant to Nigerian society as it addresses the specificities of stay-at-home mothers and brings attention to their often-overlooked experiences of social exclusion and discrimination. The aim of this paper investigates how intensive motherhood is experienced by stay-at-home mothers in Nigeria, where competing logics, expectations and pressures exist. This research helps to shed light on the challenges of the target group and provides insight into the attitudes and perceptions of others and how they affect stay-at-home mothers. Basically, the goal of this study is to expand our knowledge about the experiences of stay-at-home mothers based on cultural and societal expectations in contemporary Nigeria. The challenges stay-at-home mothers might encounter as they settle into full-time motherhood and the factors that influenced the decision to be a stay-at-home mother. This study hopes to build an understanding of how these women make meaning of the experience and its effects on their overall physical and psychological well-being, move above stereotypes, and discrimination, and ultimately improve their well-being and that of their families. In addition to that, the study will create a link between motherhood, feminism, gender norms and the thematic classification of working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. Finally, the study will focus on exploring how women's choices are determined by their values, goals, and life experiences, and how they differ and to investigate how intensive mothering is practised in African countries like Nigeria, where different societal forces and pressures shape the way different mothers perform their responsibility.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1. Research Questions and Methodological Approach

To obtain a nuanced and detailed insight into the lived experiences of stay-at-home mothers in Nigeria, qualitative analysis was chosen as the methodological approach. Qualitative research allows to obtain highly contextualized and descriptive data (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 26). Furthermore, to understand experiences of perceived discrimination and coping strategies, contextual data, descriptions, and details are required. Furthermore, to generate an in-depth understanding of the context and conditions within which the decisions were made, and to explore their emotions, feelings, and opinions, a semi-structured/open-ended interview was conducted (Esin, 2011, pp. 92-94). Data was collected and analysed to answer the following research questions:

1. *What are the factors perceived as determining the decision to become stay-at-home mothers?*
2. *Are cultural and societal expectations perceived as influencing the experiences of stay-at-home mothers?*
3. *How do possible negative attitudes and stereotypes affect SAHM well-being in Nigerian society?*

From these questions, we gain insight into emotions, prejudices, and social constraints as a result of participants experiences.

2.2. Participants

SAHMs will be homogeneous in terms of age, education level, geographic location, relationship status, and gender. A homogenous sample was chosen to allow for a detailed evaluation of social processes and requires only a small sample size. The study was conducted in suburban areas of Lagos and Ibadan, two of the largest cities in Western Africa, which is home to many educated and modern Nigerians. Its intellectual and professional population made it an ideal location for our study to ensure a representative sample as it aims to investigate the factors that drove the decision, the daily lived experiences of educated stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs) in Nigerian society with regard to cultural expectation and social constructions, as well as its effect on their decisions. All participants had a college diploma or a university degree in fields like

Statistics, Economics, Teaching Education, Banking and Finance, Psychology, Law, Marketing, Human Resources, and Physics at either the bachelor's or master's level. Participants' age ranged from 25 to 45 years (mean age: 32). They all identified with the feminine gender and had Nigerian nationality while two of them also had dual nationality. All participants were married stay-at-home mothers with a university degree, whose husbands worked 40+ hours/week. Additionally, we used purposive sampling (Robinson, 2014, pp. 139-140) to recruit participants, beginning with existing contacts of the researcher. Though selection criteria were primarily based on their positions as stay-at-home mothers, participants could engage in other businesses.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	No. of kids	Educational level	Previous Occupation	Relationship Status	Main Income status
B01	37	3	Bachelors - Statistics	Statistician	Married	Husband & Previous Investments
T02	26	2	Masters- Economics	Investment Banker	Married	Husband & Previous Investment
M03	33	3	Bachelors- Law	Lawyer	Married	Husband & Side Business
T04	32	3	Bachelors- Teaching Education	Teaching	Married	Husband
D05	28	2	Masters- Banking and Finance	Financial Analyst	Married	Husband
K06	30	1	Masters- Psychology	Counselling Officer	Married	Husband
M07	28	2	Higher Diploma- Marketing	Communications Expert	Married	Husband & Family Support
A08	35	4	Masters- Physics	Cloud Engineer	Married	Husband & Side business
A09	33	3	M.B.A- Business Administration	Entrepreneur	Married	Husband
S10	42	4	Masters- Human Resources	Human Resource Specialist	Married	Husband & Previous Investment
Mean Age	32.4					

2.2.1. Interview Guide

We developed interview evaluation questions relevant to our research objectives. The interview guide consisted of twelve questions to assess respondents' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs about stay-at-home mothers. Questions based on theories of choice, decision-making factors, and gender roles were used to guide the interviews and explore participants' childhood experiences. Questions were in relation to their childhood experiences, families, relationships with their partners and children, extended families, and demographic characteristics (such as age, education level, and employment status). Additionally, personal factors and motivations that influenced the decision to become stay-at-home mothers will be explored. Data will be collected on current perceptions and experiences based on decision, as well as their relationships with family, friends and colleagues, feminists, and the opposite sex. Responses will be used to analyse and interpret the data and focus on the individual, social and cultural forces that led to the decision to stay at home.

For example ("How did you come about the decision to stay home to take care of the children?) Other questions were in relation to the relationship with children, partners, childhood background, etc. (e.g., Can you start by introducing yourself and your growing years and family background?") as well as open questions about their daily activities and responsibilities expected of the participants (e.g., What's your life today like on a day-to-day basis, what daily activities do you engage in?"). The second part of the script aimed to explore participants' perception of discrimination or prejudice in questions like ("Can you narrate some attitudes perceived when people learn about your decision to stay home to take care of the kids?" "How does it make you feel?"). Furthermore, the study aimed to explore perceptions, inspired by research that has shown the importance of such cognitive processes in influencing the views of target groups about the larger society (Nemeth, 1986). For example, questions like "Are there other groups that might support or oppose your decision?" were included. Another section of the script aimed to get to know the participants' views, opinions and feelings about their choice and its effects on overall well-being. Previous research on feminist ideologies (Case, 2006, pp. 59-61; Bennetts, 2007; Hefferman & Stone, 2021) was used to develop questions like "What pops into your mind when you hear the word feminism?" A final set of questions was asked to determine how participants felt about the interview process, e.g. "Is there anything you would like to add or ask that was not

addressed?". Several demographic questions were asked at the end of the interview (like age, education, number of children, etc. (see Appendix B).

The interviewer highlighted the risks and benefits of participating in the study, thereby reiterating the option to opt out if participants felt uncomfortable at any point. The ten participants selected for the current study were individually interviewed via a virtual meeting website (Zoom) and some via phone calls to ensure confidentiality, comfortability, and convenience. The interviews followed the interview guide along with some follow-up questions to ensure clarity of answers. To ensure credibility all interviews were conducted in English, recorded, and transcribed verbatim Google Speech to Text.

2.2.2. Pilot Interview

To ensure a successful interviewing process for all participants, a pilot interview was conducted to identify potential barriers, determine beneficial directions for the interviews, and determine the ideal interview length. One married Nigerian woman with 3 children was interviewed via Zoom. At the start of the interview, the researcher reiterated the aims, advantages, and risks of the study. Afterwards, the participant was probed to discuss her family background and experiences as a stay-at-home parent. The researcher re-read the introduction text, the duration of the interviews was between 30-45 minutes, then thanked the participant for their time and provided contact information for follow-up questions or concerns. The researcher debriefed the participant about the purpose of the study. To ensure the participant was enlightened on the study goals, an introductory text was read before the interview to help them remember details about their experiences. We were also able to clarify several unclarified questions about religion and spouse's support. The results of the pilot study provided us with valuable insights into how our project should be structured and what needs to be addressed.

2.2.3. Procedure

The inclusion criteria for participants were self-identification as a SAHM with primary caretaking responsibility for at least one child aged 0-10. Before the interview, participants were asked if they were satisfied with the text they read and if they wanted to review it with the interviewer. After identifying potential participants, 10 participants (N=10) were

recruited;participants were contacted via phone calls and private messages. The recruitment text included an introduction to the researcher and the research, the criteria for sample selection, an estimated interview duration (30-45 mins), and an invitation to schedule a meeting at their convenience. We provided a link to a Google Consent form. After clicking, participants read it and agreed to the terms and scheduled interviews with respondents who agreed. At the end of the recruitment phase, we had 10 participants as against the initial 12 participants because 2 women opted out of the study due to unforeseen circumstances.

Before the interviews began, all participants were sent a consent form via Google Forms which outlined the purpose and context of the research. Researcher reiterated that participants could end their involvement at any time during the interview and stop the recording. Participants could also withdraw consent by emailing either the researcher or the supervisor - both email addresses were provided in the consent form. The consent form ensured anonymity and non-disclosure of participant names in the transcription. Emotionally loaded semantics such as "struggles" and "challenges" were avoided in the interview script and addressed with follow-up questions only when mentioned by the participant. Before asking sensitive questions, the participant was reminded of their right to decline responses.

Chapter 3. Results

This chapter aims to expand discussions on the analysed data and observations. As earlier stated, it focuses on educated stay-at-home mothers in Nigeria and the aim is to gain insight into their decision-making process and experiences of full-time motherhood, as well as the social experiences and concerns related to family and work. The study sought to investigate the factors that impact the decision to stay at home with their children, as well as the influence of social norms and expectations on that decision. It further explores the impact of this choice on the perceived self-worth and well-being of the mothers by answering these research questions.

1. What are the factors perceived as determining the decision to become stay-at-home mothers?

2. Are cultural and societal expectations perceived as influencing the experiences of stay-at-home mothers?

3. How do possible negative attitudes and stereotypes affect SAHMs' well-being in Nigerian society?

After an overview of the participant's profiles, this section discusses the factors influencing the decision to become a stay-at-home mother and the associated experiences of full-time motherhood. To better understand the factors that influenced participants' initial choice to opt out of work and their indefinite decision to stay at home, several questions regarding the process by which they decided to stay at home, their husband's role in the decision-making process, and the challenges experienced from their experience was analysed. Participants' responses centred around three distinct themes and sub-themes - a) Subjective motivations to stay at home- most participants did not set out at the beginning to stay home, many of them made the decision based on critical life choices like role-modelling or childhood experiences, religious orientation, difficulty balancing work and family, unfavourable work conditions that led to loss of job; b) Cultural Expectations and Societal Perceptions with sub-themes encompassing social irrelevance, financial perception, and lack of social support; c) Self-perception and Impact on well-being including sub-themes – feelings of inadequacy, emotional ambivalence, and justification of choices.

3.1. Data Analysis

The methodological approach used for analysis is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach using categories to quantify and code data and frequencies to determine any meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2015, pp. 222-224). It is a highly descriptive method used to identify any trends or patterns that may be present in the data. It is an effective and reliable technique for consolidating large amounts of text into a smaller number of categories. Coding is the process of organizing qualitative data to recognize the connections between them. Labels are assigned to words or phrases that represent major, repeated topics present in each response (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 85-88). Following data collection, transcripts of the data were compiled into one document. MAXQDA software was used to code the data, with the unit of analysis being participants' experiences and was transcribed word-for-word. The researcher used bracketing to make sure responses were gathered objectively. Responses were then coded, and irrelevant responses removed. The process of coding included reading each interview, listing topics that emerged, clustering them together, truncating clusters to codes, and eliminating identical codes or clusters.

Hays and Singh (2012) outlined similar processes for data analysis and asserted a four-step approach: data collection, the initial analysis that involves organizing the data, summarizing key points, and coding passages to discover patterns, secondary analysis categorizing information, the codes are analysed to identify common themes and patterns, and verification allows the researcher to apply identified themes to new data, adding further codes and themes until all data has been analysed. Once confident that all themes have been accurately identified, the researcher may opt to replace an established theme with one that is clearer and more comprehensive. Hays and Singh (2012) refer to this as the switch from "exploratory to confirmatory" data analysis. After completing these steps, the findings are reported and discussed. We collected narratives during the interview process, and analysed the data using data collection, transcription, and coding to determine if one theme led to other subthemes. After coding transcripts from 10 interviews, common experiences expressed were conceptualized as codes. Coding is essential for whole-text analysis; it requires researchers to make interpretations and judgments to identify themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 86).

Table 2: *Main Themes and Sub-themes*

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                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │     Themes      │
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                                  │
        ┌─────────────────────────┼─────────────────────────┐
        │                         │                         │
┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────────┐
│  Subjective   │        │               │        │ Self-perceptions/ │
│ Motivations to│        │   Social      │        │ Impact on Well-   │
│ Stay at Home  │        │  Perceptions  │        │     being         │
└───────────────┘        └───────────────┘        └───────────────────┘

┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────────┐
│   Childhood   │        │    Social     │        │   Feelings of     │
│  Experiences  │        │  Irrelevance  │        │   inadequacy/     │
│               │        │               │        │   Unproductivty   │
└───────────────┘        └───────────────┘        └───────────────────┘

┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────────┐
│Work-life balance/│     │    Financial  │        │    Emotional      │
│  Unfavourable │        │   Perception  │        │   Ambivalence     │
│ Work Conditions│       │               │        │                   │
└───────────────┘        └───────────────┘        └───────────────────┘

┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────┐        ┌───────────────────┐
│Spousal Support│        │ Lack of Social│        │  Justification of │
│               │        │    Support    │        │      Choices      │
└───────────────┘        └───────────────┘        └───────────────────┘
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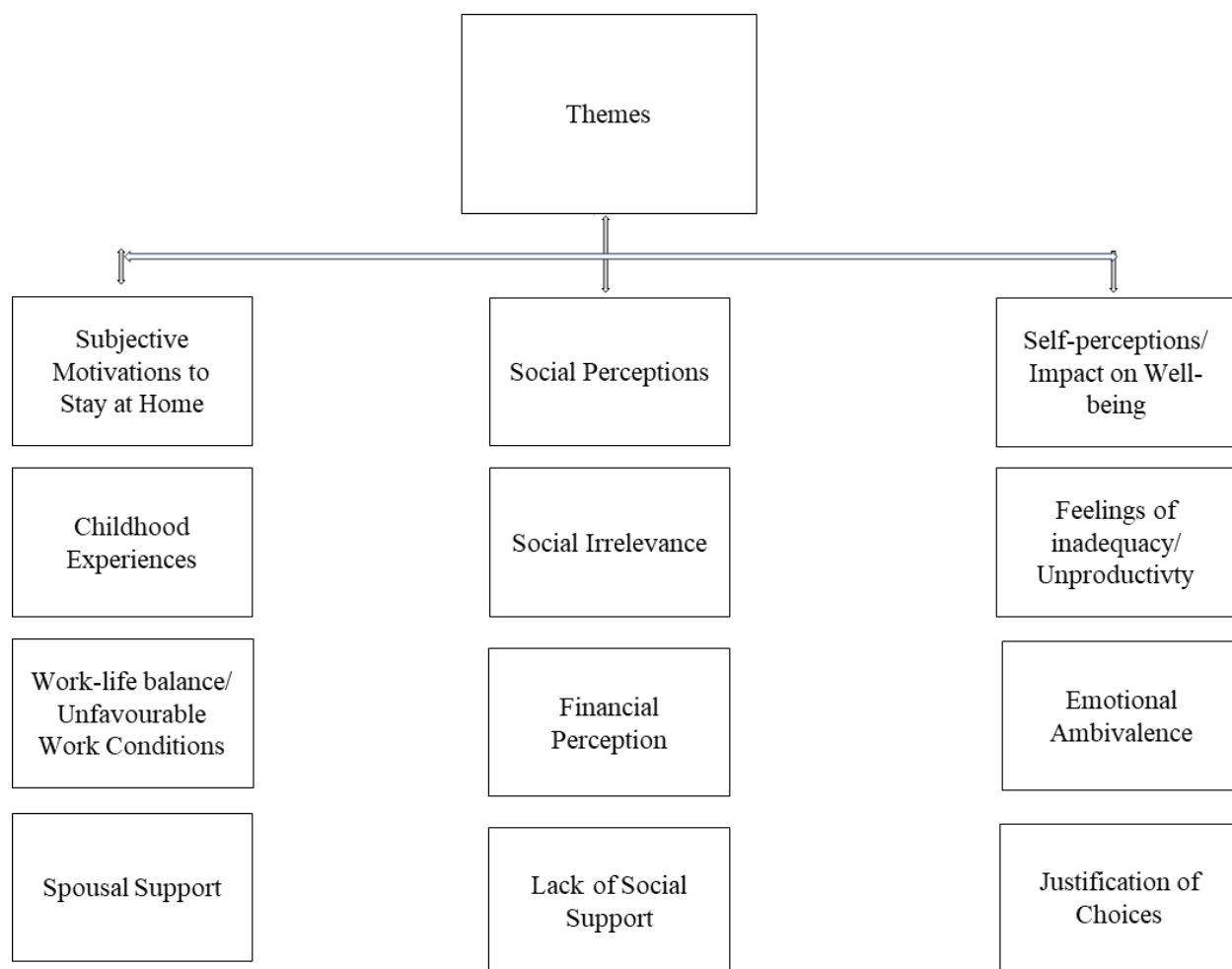
3.2. Factors that subjectively perceived as motivating the decision to stay-at-home

To understand the factors that influenced participants' initial decision to stay home to raise their children and their subsequent decision, several questions were asked regarding the process by which they decided to stay at home, the role of their husband in decision-making, and the challenges they faced. Many of the participants of the study experienced a conventional family dynamic, with both the father and mother as financial providers. They recalled that their mothers had little presence in their lives due to full-time, demanding work and were only available on weekends. One participant, however, had a working mother who was able to balance her career and motherhood, though she was self-employed and ran her own business. To protect the confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms were used to replace their real names.

3.2.1. Childhood Experiences

One of the participants B01, was a successful actuary working with a big insurance firm in Lagos, but her work schedule was stressful, and she always got home late, she quit her job after becoming pregnant with her third child. Citing her childhood experiences, it became harder to entrust the children with the nanny. Participant D05's decision was based on prioritising her involvement in her children's lives as her mother was rarely home to cater to their needs.

> **B01:** "I'm *an actuary (statistician) by profession, and it is quite a demanding job…My mother worked throughout my growing up years and due to the heavy traffic experienced because we lived in Lagos at the time, she sometimes got home between 9 pm and 10 pm every day. On some days when it rains, she gets home at 11 pm and till today that's what most working mothers experience. I just knew that I didn't want my children to experience the same cos I missed her so much in my growing-up years…"*

> **D05:** *"… I grew up in an average Nigerian family of both parents working professionally for the government, so I grew up not having my parents around, they both were more focused on their careers. We were brought up by mostly housemaids and I vowed never to allow my children to have the experience as I did, I was always so worried about my home and not being there for my husband and children…".*

In contrast to B01's experience, T02 a 26-year-old economist and investment banker, attributed her choice to the availability of at least one stay-at-home parent. Her beliefs about staying home to raise her kids were shaped by her upbringing, ultimately leading them to their decision to quit work.

> **T02:** *"...my mum running her own business gave her time to look after the children and the home front. I remember looking forward to meeting my mum at home after school….I looked up to my mum and admired her strength in raising four children, it was not easy but she did it…"*

Other practical reasons accounted for most participants' exit from the workforce. Only two participants indicated wanting to stay at home immediately after birthing their children. M07, a

28-year-old former Marketing and Communications Expert, clearly shares her thoughts that reflect her decision-making process:

> **M07:** *"...I really did not have a choice. We discovered early that my daughter had the sickle cell gene, so she needed extra attention and care, I had to stay at home and care for her...however, I have always wanted to be a stay-at-home mum because I felt it would give me ample time to serve God and run a godly home. Lol…"*

> **T04:** *"...My husband and I discussed our plans for raising our kids, the type of family we wanted, and our individual roles before we got married. We chose to homeschool our kids - since I have a teaching degree, it was a logical choice - to give them a strong foundation…"*

M03, was a 33-year-old Law graduate with 3 kids who left her job after having 3 children and expressed that she had not thought about staying home until the children were born.

> **M03:** *"...My job was extremely demanding and I had to travel almost 3 hours back and forth every day in traffic due to the severity of Lagos traffic; this is what many Nigerian mothers experience on a daily basis, it's the norm but it is extremely frustrating…It began to take a toll on my health and my employers were not so considerate as to allow me to work from home. Basically, the stress had an adverse effect both on me and my children as they lacked the adequate attention needed to thrive morally, educationally, and spiritually…"*

3.2.2. Importance of Spousal Support

What motivates educated women to become stay-at-home mothers despite the challenging economic conditions and dual employment? All participants indicated that their choice to remain at home was possible due to their husbands' earning power but their reasons for resigning from work were not exhaustive. That is, their husband's consent enabled them to stay at home, which supported and majorly contributed to the decision-making process. Basically, their husband's disposition and attitude towards what was perceived as the best childcare arrangement also influenced the decision to stay at home.

M07: "..._No, the decision was solely mine and my husband's. My husband is wealthy, and I come from a wealthy background and saved up well while I was working so we could afford the life that we want..._"

M03: "..._My husband's consent was paramount in making the ultimate decision..._"

T02: _"...I'll just like to add that it is very important that such a decision should be made with one's partner. Because if you have a husband that does not agree with your decision, he can make life hell for both you and the children especially because of the kind of society we live in where women are not fully appreciated for the sole position of being a mother..._"

Contrary to the narratives of participants whose decision was supported by their husbands, two participants. K06, a 30-year-old graduate of Psychology and a mother of one revealed that most Nigerian men are averse to the concept of SAHM while M03 stated that her husband objected to the idea at the beginning but later consented to the idea.

M03: _"...My husband totally disagreed when I told him I intended to resign from work and focus on the children because I was constantly tired and ill and needed extra support... I think he was worried about the increasing financial burden on him... which is why I currently run a side business at home to help augment the income..._"

K06: "..._There's always the pressure of being a super mom. Most men these days don't want a full-time housewife, especially because of the economic consequences, things keep getting expensive by the day and it's taking a toll on the quality of life I can give my kids...I thought about getting another job but I wasn't getting good offers and hiring a house help is also very risky and expensive, so my husband and I made the decision to go with the option that had fewer risks..._"

T04: _"...Many people find it hard to understand, but my choice was based solely on what God wanted me to do. I used to work as a teacher and though I was doing pretty well for myself, I knew that my first assignment was building my home. It was hard but God commands women to be home-keepers and I felt like I was failing in my assignment..._"

M07: *"...My daughter was the biggest factor, but like I said I have always wanted to stay home, raise my kids, and tend to my husband just like the "Proverbs 31" virtuous woman while running a side business. It's part of the reason why I started content creation, to encourage other women like me who are interested and let them know they don't have to follow the norms as long as it pleases God..."*

One of the participants, a 40-year-old with 4 kids mentioned her reluctance to be a stay-at-home mother but had to make the sacrifice because her husband was never around.

S10: *"...I became a stay-at-home mother not really by choice. I'm really not one that loves to stay in a place for a long time, I'm too restless for that ...(smiles). When I was pregnant, I was certain I'd continue working. I was extremely afraid of being totally dependent on my husband for the finances, honestly...I'm still afraid but my husband makes the effort to support me..."*

3.2.3. Work-Life Balance/Unfavourable Work Conditions

Previous research indicates that stay-at-home mothers value their increased involvement in children's care in ways that reduce guilt from being unemployed. (Drebin, (2011). One of the participants, a 26-year-old former investment banker quit her career after she had her second child. Despite being heavily pregnant, she kept working; her job had no favourable maternity leave provisions. The position was demanding and performance-based, and the firm was not empathetic towards the "excuses" of working mothers. She expressed her thoughts on the subject:

T2: *"...I felt guilty leaving my 12-week baby at the.... daycare centre...In my job, I was entitled to just 12 weeks, but you can't afford to spend an extra day as you might not have a job anymore...my baby cried all through the first day. Sometimes she came back home sick, and I just knew that I couldn't do that anymore..."*

Another sub-theme derived from what most participants expressed was a strong desire to stay at home because of the social and overall well-being of their children. Even though most participants did not set out to become stay-at-home mothers, they expressed satisfaction at their decision given the quality of time they spent with their children which far outweighed the financial cost.

T2: *"...I want my children to be healthy and be the best version of themselves and that takes sacrifice. I am happy I get to give my kids the attention they deserve, and I just don't trust a daycare to spend the time that it takes to teach them these early important life skills…"*

S10: *"...My 5-year-old started nursery school and is doing extremely well and ahead of his class. I want to give my children every opportunity to succeed and reach their potential…."*

More women cited the high cost of childcare as one of the factors in making their decision. As well as the lack of extended familial support, costs, and childcare arrangements such as "daycare" was also questioned for their ability to provide the best care, which led most women to emphasize that staying at home was an unbiased choice based on explicit consideration of the advantages and disadvantages. In other words, their decision was mutually agreed upon with their partners, and other factors such as the husband's attitude and support played a crucial role in the decision-making process.

T2: *"...Nigerian men are very traditional and would not assist in the household duties. I will go to work, go to the market, go pick up the kids from school, and still get back home to make dinner, yet I'm expected to sexually satisfy my husband at night. It was so crazy that sometimes, I'll just break down and cry... but then, that's what you're expected to do as a woman, be a superwoman…"*

M7: *"...If you look at the current cost of daycare, it is so expensive and costs more monthly than some people's 3 months' salary, that is the good ones though…. I really would love to work but it didn't make financial sense and the jobs I was getting were not paying much..."*

3.3. Societal Perception

To understand how participants were experiencing societal acceptance of their decisions and how they were perceived by society, we asked the second research question and identified common themes to answer our research questions.

RQ 2: Are cultural and societal expectations perceived as influencing the experiences of stay-at-home mothers?

3.3.1. Institutionalised Stereotypes: Social Irrelevance

According to Anyama (2012), the expectation of Nigerian society is that women are the primary caretakers of children, even when they provide financial support to their families. This advancement has largely been achieved through increased access to education, which has not always been available to women in traditional societies, who prioritised domestic and nurturing roles. The pressure to live up to expectations being both a mother and a professional can be difficult to manage and may affect a mother's daily life experiences. In addition to that, it creates a greater gap between societal expectations and reality that impacts their perceptions of themselves and their experiences, creating greater psychological pressure. When participants were asked to narrate some attitudes perceived when people learnt of their position, many had negative reactions from society and admitted that they felt under-appreciated, stigmatised, and disrespected.

As one participant stated that she had been labelled as "wasting away" because she had chosen not to continue her career, despite holding a master's degree in human resources. She had already been promoted to a C-management-level position prior to leaving her job to raise her children. As she reiterated, she was perceived as someone who did not appreciate the "golden" opportunity she had gotten in her professional career. K06 also expressed some of the condescending questions people or strangers asked her from time to time.

> **K06:** *"...I don't think the Nigerian society respects full-time housewives...sometimes the constant questions of "what are you doing now?" can be very silly and annoying...Many people think we just sit at home and do nothing, probably just eating and watching Africa Magic..."*

> **S10:** *"...I really loved my job, and it was like...it was fulfilling but extremely demanding. I have four children under the age of 10, my husband was a businessman who was always travelling. Even though I had people come in from time to time to help with the chores, my children needed one of their parents to be around. It was my choice to resign from work and I think feminism gave me that power of choice, but my friends told me I was wasting*

away my education and I'll forever be under my husband's control...I still get a lot of passive-aggressive attitudes, especially amongst my professional friends…"

Interestingly, most women who chose not to work after becoming mothers once held the same stereotypical views about stay-at-home mothers before becoming mothers, therefore acknowledging that the stigma exists. It is likely that many would have dismissed this as an insecurity among stay-at-home mothers without any basis, which creates a double perspective in which women experienced both the attitudes against stay-at-home mothers and a change in attitude after becoming stay-at-home mothers.

S10: *"...I had over a 7-year career in H.R., and I used to judge women for abandoning their careers or not pursuing any careers and throwing their education away. Now I'm like…I know better, being a stay-at-home mother is much more demanding and harder than working full-time…"*

M03: *"...I am a full-time housewife, and the word triggers some form of condescending attitude in Nigerians, they feel women like that are lazy, and lack ambition, funnily enough, I used to think the same too…"*

When participants were asked if they believed that other groups existed that might endorse or oppose their decision, many indicated that it was difficult to find individuals or groups that might support their stance towards stay-at-home mothers.

T2*: "…Honestly, I think many women would say no, they don't. The way people look down on a stay-at-mother's contribution to the home once she doesn't go out to work is appalling, even by fellow women who you would think would understand…"*

M07: *"...These days, most churches would outrightly oppose women choosing to be stay-at-home mothers and then there are feminists too who want to shove their own beliefs down your throat…"*

One of the women discussed her parent's role in the context of her mother's reaction when she learned of her decision to stay home with the children.

B01: *"…Hmm…she plainly asked me if I was crazy. My mother was a workaholic and a career woman and for so long she refused to accept the fact that it was a decision I had made with my husband…"*

When participants were asked their thoughts on feminism, two participants believe in the power of choice feminism has given to women. They narrated that feminists view stay-at-home mothers as valuable contributors to society, not just women who are not in the workforce. Others expressed their disagreement with feminism, arguing that it contradicted the true purpose of womanhood. In response to the question regarding feminism, some participants believe that feminism contributes to stigmatizing stay-at-home mothers in Nigerian society, whereas others disagreed stating that feminism gave them the freedom to choose. Three participants expressed worry that it perpetuated the false notion that women can 'have it all' by working and raising a family simultaneously.

S10: *"…I believe in equality of rights and equity of women, so I believe in feminism…not everyone can be a stay-at-home mother, and that's what the feminist movement was about. It gives women a choice. However, I feel like society has tried to rob us of that gift but telling us that using our talents at home is not enough…."*

M07: *"…Well, as a Christian believer, it's not a concept I believe in. My beliefs are totally centred on the bible and the instructions for women to submit to their husbands and I think feminist ideologies negate those beliefs…"*

Several women indicated they were subjected to discrimination based on their decision to prioritise motherhood over their careers. Basically, society has the notion that staying at home was a sign of mediocrity i.e., stay-at-home mothers were not smart enough to do anything else.

K06: *"…Basically, people don't understand why a woman would choose to limit her role to wife and mother in a country where feminism is just beginning to be accepted.. They are always like: "Why don't you want to work and make money? I mean many women are doing it, so why can't you do it, do they have two heads...?"*

M07: *"...Sadly, some people think they're better than others because of they seem to be making more money than you. Even those who understand why you stay at home feel the need to pressure you into making money. Anytime stay-at-home mothers are mentioned in the news, it's usually in the context of making her do something that provides money, which can sometimes be demeaning..."*

The implication of this question is to imply that staying at home requires no mental capacity. Why, then, would a highly talented woman accept such a role? One participant spoke of the snide remarks or questions she got from her people and family about her future, she also confessed to having struggled with her decision and asked herself some pertinent questions, such as: *"What was more important, was it building my marriage and raising my children to know God or conforming to what was expected of me by society...?"* In her view, her relationship with God and family takes precedence over her career goals.

3.3.2. Financial Perception

A number of participants described the pushback they experienced with acquaintances, and many seemed to have made assumptions about their family's financial position because they stayed at home. One woman narrated how she felt when someone told her that *"...given the rate of inflation and the state of the economy, it does not make sense for women not to work..."* which made her feel like she was being a financial burden on her husband by not contributing to the family income. Some participants' narratives were more explicit as they discussed their perception of society towards their position as a SAHM.

S10: *"...The widespread misunderstanding is that stay-at-home mums are choosing an effortless life while their partners work so hard. But these people don't realize how much effort goes into raising a family. Some people just decide to put a lot of pressure on stay-at-home mums to make money, which is incredibly unfair and insensitive considering how difficult the economy is..."*

B01: *"... People at first used to make me feel that I was not doing enough, and I had wasted my education because... you know.... I was quite intellectual, so you see...they were like, I wasn't contributing financially and not doing enough for your husband.... Like I'm not*

adding any economic value according to them…. Being a SAHM is hard work…it's not been easy, but God has been my greatest strength and I feel like I'm doing the right thing raising my children in the way that God wants me to…"

From these findings, it is clear that whenever these women reveal their status as stay-at-home mothers, they often feel that their intellectual capacity, abilities, and financial contributions to the family and society are being questioned. Consequently, society values mothers who choose to work over stay-at-home mothers.

3.3.3. Lack of Social Support

Interestingly, all participants admitted that having time to parent their children was one benefit they all enjoyed, but it was also a challenge based on the daily mental and physical struggles of raising children. The fact that it was time-consuming leaving little time for themselves, their roles being seldom appreciated or recognized by society was also a concern. While some said they had difficulty adjusting to their roles initially and felt lacking mental and intellectual stimulation. One participant particularly reported experiencing feelings of isolation due to a lack of external recognition not just by receiving an award from an employer but by being accepted by society for their sacrifices and roles at home.

S10: *"…I miss the relationship with my colleagues, I miss the banter and intellectual discussions we have. I kinda miss the corporate life, sometimes I'm like... I want to go back. I wish it's possible to get a part-time job but then this is Nigeria, it's either full-time or nothing..."*

B01: *"…For me, I think motherhood is a full-time job. Being a full-time housewife can be emotionally difficult…it's not easy at all, and it's definitely not for the faint-hearted. Sometimes, it leaves me physically and mentally drained, I can't think of anything else and all I want to do is sleep at the end of the day cos I have to be up again at 5.00 am to make meals and get my children ready for school…"*

A09: *"...I think the biggest challenge is the emotional highs and lows that come with being a full-time housewife. You worry a lot about what the future will be like, like the what ifs never ends…What if your husband loses his source of income, what if he falls ill and can't work anymore...?" And of course, the pride that comes from making your own money, though I take pride in being able to raise my children myself but that is rarely appreciated, though I used to care what people thought but not anymore…"*

Most participants struggled with societal stereotypes of "lazing around" the whole day without financially contributing to the household. Despite feeling judged by others for being stay-at-home mothers, most of them recognized the importance of their role in shaping their children's lives and providing them with a stable and nurturing environment.

B01: *"...It always amazes me when people think a stay-at-home parent could be lazy. I mean, have these people never watched a small child for a couple of hours, or even just spent a few hours in a house with a small child in it...anything to do with parenting is way too harshly judged! There is no right method, to each his own…"*

M03: *"...People always think after giving birth to kids, how to manage a home should come naturally to a woman and they expect us to be superwomen. I praise women who after giving birth go back to work because they have it double work stress and home stress are still waiting for them…"*

One mother worried about being a positive role model for her 5-year-old daughter. though she reluctantly chose to be a stay-at-home mother since her husband was rarely around, she loves the time she spends with them.

S10: *"...I also teach them that they can be whatever they want to be. I don't want them to think that this is the only life for them just because its what mummy does at the moment…basically, I want to give my children every opportunity to succeed and reach their potential…"*

A closer look at these conflicting themes reveals some of the research questions addressed in this thesis i.e., in choosing to be a stay-at-home mother, she automatically violates the expectation that a woman can work and raise children simultaneously. In the same vein, in meeting the societal demands of motherhood (raising the kids, going to hospital appointments, attending school PTA meetings), she automatically violates the expectation that she should be contributing economically to building her household by working or running a thriving business.

3.4. Self-perceptions and Impact on Well-being

In response to the third research question about how the negative perceptions impacted the overall well-being of SAHM. We discovered two themes from these research questions, a) Justification of choices b) Self-perceptions.

RQ 3: How do possible negative attitudes and stereotypes affect SAHMs' well-being in Nigerian society?

3.4.1. Justification of Choices

As a result of the perception society has of them, some women chose to take a defensive position and tried to justify their decision. They justified their choice to stay at home by saying that they made sacrifices no one else could make and they should be appreciated for it. The participants shared their thoughts on their struggles with acceptance.

> **K06: "***...It always amazes me when people think I'm lazy because I'm home all day. I mean, I'm practically cooking, washing, taking lunch to the kid's school and all other things that need to be done. It's very risky and expensive to hire house helps these days… but people don't understand that you are making a sacrifice, and they harshly judge me…"*

> **M03: "***...I think I'm a good mother and I think that I'm doing the best that I can give the present situation and I should be applauded for that…"*

> **A09: "***...Being a full-time housewife is a full-time job and one of the most important jobs in the world but most people especially in this part of the world understand or view it that way….many times the loneliness and constant self-reassurance are what I never envisaged*

but at the end of the day, I am so grateful for the life I have built and time spent with my kids….”

While some mothers admit that having a one-income household has its downsides, they maintain that their time spent taking care of their children trumps any financial guilt they might have experienced.

A09: “...people are constantly like, oh, your kids are so well taken care of, respectful and smart. I wonder what they were expecting…… I don't have a housemaid, so this was the best decision my husband and I could have made for our family and there have been no regrets so far…”

3.4.2. Emotional Ambivalence/Positive Feelings

The participants discussed how societal expectations and experiences impacted their well-being and shaped their views of themselves. Many of the participants view themselves as good mothers making the necessary sacrifices for their families.

D05: “...I struggled with "the shame" of being a wife and stay-at-home mother for a while. After that, I realized it originated from societal narratives and stereotypes that had been inculcated over time that for women to be powerful, they must engage in professional work and full-time housewives lacked ambition and hated professional work. But over time, the daily challenges of having to raise and care for three children took over the overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. I am proud to be a stay-at-home mother raising godly children. Sometimes, I feel like that is what I've been called to do, it's highly purposeful for me…”

T02: “...Most of my daily activities are centred around caring for the children and managing the home front. Many people don't know that stay-at-home mothers are also managers…”

M03: “...To be very honest, I have mixed feelings….there are times I am so proud of myself for being able to take a stand against what society thinks should be the norm and at times I feel inadequate and irrelevant, to being extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise my

children by myself and instil the needed values for them to thrive in this crazy world. So, it's like a never-ending cycle of emotions and self-motivation....".

According to another stay-at-home mother who earned a distinction in Psychology, she dislikes the term "stay-at-home-mother" because she does much more than simply stay home.:

T04: *"...I really dislike the term stay-at-home mother; I feel like what we do is so beyond staying at home. I'll prefer the word "homemaker…"*

Positive Feelings

(T2): *"…That's a good question…my kids are still very young though, but I see the joy in their eyes when we get to spend quality time together playing and watching educational cartoons and all that…I believe that the first 4 years are the most important in setting the stage for their futures. I get great satisfaction from knowing that my 3-year-old is starting to count, her alphabet, identify colours, and say her name and sight words…"*

S10: *"…Sincerely speaking, the motherhood ride has been a wonderful experience albeit with its own ups and downs but ultimately, I am grateful for the experience. My children are doing well in school too, my first started secondary school a while ago and she's matured, she sometimes helps me with her younger siblings…"*

3.4.3. Feelings of Unproductivity and Isolation

It is evident that individual experiences have both positive and negative impacts. Women often felt lonely, socially isolated, inadequate, and unproductive, despite feeling fulfilled by being stay-at-home mothers. On days when they felt unproductive, their self-worth also declined.

T04: *"...There are times I feel undermotivated and I don't think I am doing enough, to even get up from the bed is sometimes a hassle and I have to remind myself that my children need me…"*

(M3): *"…Some days are good, and some days are…there are days I feel unproductive, like... What am I doing with my life? One thing I can say is that women should take time out to really care for themselves, like going to the beauty salon, or the spa, having a*

massage and trying to look and stay beautiful no matter the pressure… it really helps build one's self-esteem…"

Several factors, including limited social interaction, caused feelings of inadequacy among many mothers. Most women admitted to feeling insecure when comparing themselves to working mothers, especially after receiving unfair comments and criticism. Additionally, some women found it difficult to balance self-care and personal goals with being sole caretakers of the home front. Most of the mothers expressed great pride as stay-at-home which is premised on how well their children function. They believed they are good mothers because they provided the safety and the security their children needed to feel safe and thrive. They succinctly expresses pride in her role as a stay-at-home mother.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This study aimed at exploring Nigerian women discourse and subjective perceptions of the factors influencing their decision to become stay-at-home mothers, as well as their daily experiences, and their perceived well-being. Recent studies show that nearly half of Nigeria's workforce consists of the female gender, with 67% of women employed in the workforce (NPC, 2017). This leaves about 30%-35% of stay-at-home mothers who now seem to constitute a minority thereby putting them at risk of discrimination (NPC, 2017). The research included married participants with one to four children all under ten years old. We provided detailed demographic information as well as results of the effects of predominant social forces, and cultural expectations on their experiences, well-being, motivations, and overall satisfaction. In addition to that, we set out to gain insights into the factors and motivations behind the decision to become stay-at-home mothers thereby analysing the significance of their lived experiences and examining the concept of stay-at-home mothers through the lenses of Nigerian mothers.

An analysis of major themes narrated by participants yielded a vast amount of valuable information regarding cultural norms and motherhood. While women in this study attributed their decision to stay at home to "choice". This finding is consistent with Hakim (2000) Preference Theory which states that educated women or upper-middle-class women voluntarily choose between family and work, and that their motivations are based on their preference for a particular style of living. The theory emphasizes the importance of individual choice and rejects the idea that women's decisions are solely influenced by societal or structural factors. However, participants' narratives indicate that several external factors and influences like their husband's demanding careers, unfavourable work cultures, childcare, health concerns, lack of societal support, societal structures and personal experiences did play a significant role in the decision-making process. A major implication of the study is that it revealed the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes on family roles and dynamics in Nigeria as regards the division of labour and child-raising responsibilities.

The influence of their childhood experiences, their relationship with their mothers and their roles as stay-at-home mothers or career women was a deciding factor in the decision-making process (Boyd, 2002, pp. 463-464; Zimmermann, 2000, p. 338). The decision to stay at home was

viewed as a necessity for raising the next generation to be stable and thrive rather than a luxury. Stone (2007) posited that women's perception of successful parenting was heavily shaped by positive childhood experiences and the availability of their stay-at-home mothers. This sentiment led them to devalue other forms of childcare. Though they embrace all aspects of motherhood, the degree to which it affected/impacted their decisions varied. Mothers in this study opted to be stay-at-home mothers whether consciously or unconsciously due to their positive or negative childhood experiences. SAHM in this study related their childhood experiences as they were raised by stay-at-home mothers which had a huge influence on their self-development and decision-making process. Their childhood experiences also played an important role - many women spoke of their positive experiences growing up with stay-at-home mothers who were consistently present and consistent in caring for their children and some negative experiences of absent working mothers (Stone, 2008).

Zimmerman (2000) asserts that the primary motivators of educated stay-at-home mothers were personal decisions that emphasised the importance of children and family. Stress experienced when balancing work and family, unemployment, and growing up with a mother who stayed at home are among the major reasons women choose to stay at home. Desimone (2001) in a study made observations of women who stayed at home with their children while having graduate degrees in five major criteria: personality, childcare and support, spousal agreement, and family relationships.

Gender norms emphasising women's roles as primary caregivers paired with their husband's demanding careers and absence in the home prevented mothers from balancing work and family. Participants narratives suggest that their husbands had predominant and primary involvement in the decision-making process. The financial and emotional support each woman received from her husband provided confidence and assurance toward her role and allowed comfortable lifestyles comprised of fundamental lifestyle necessities. That is, women who desired to stay at home were able to achieve their desires because of their husband's income, nevertheless, the absence of their husbands and their inability to contribute to household and childcare amplified the pressure of balancing work and family life which consequently sealed the decision (Boyd, 2002; Stone, 2007; Vejar et al., 2006). According to the literature about gender norms in Nigeria, this theme occurs when an individual assumes that a woman must uphold traditional gender norms

of intensive mothering which states that the woman should be the primary caregiver of the child (Rowland, 2019). In this study, this stereotypic theme is related to the ascription of societal roles to natural caregivers, stating that women were naturally responsible for raising children exempting fathers from taking up childcare responsibilities. However, some of the women were unhappy that their husbands lacked involvement in household chores due to cultural expectations of being the "head" whose only role is to financially provide for the home and felt pressure from the shifting dynamics of marriage and parenting. Patriarchy dominates Nigerian society, leading to an unequal division of labour (Dogo, 2014, p. 265). Men are typically viewed as strong and courageous, while women are portrayed as gentle and caring. This reinforces the idea that men should do "heavy labour" and women should take care of the home and children.

In Nigeria, many working mothers resort to leaving their kids with "domestic workers" while they are at work. Career-oriented families, particularly those located in urban areas, are now recruiting domestic help to ensure family stability along the dimension of successful career opportunities (Mbadiwe & Oscar, 2021, pp. 2-3). The number of career women who hire domestic workers is rapidly increasing in Nigeria and Africa, and in some developed countries as well. For family members who are juggling careers with family members, hiring domestic workers may be the only viable option. While domestic help contributes significantly to childcare domestic work, there are concerns about the long-term effects of such work on families, which plays into the decision to become stay-at-home mothers. Nigerian women have been able to reject the idea of the stay-at-home mom by employing different resources, like live-in-house helps, daycare facilities, and help from extended family, allowing them to excel in the workplace. However, there have been several reports of young children being injured or maimed who were left in the care of incompetent daycare centres or violent live-in house helps (George, 2008).

According to Rubin and Wooten (2007), stay-at-home mothers have a better chance of raising healthy, morally upright, confident, and strong children based on their presence required to help shape and form them as much as possible. There are many claims that stay-at-home mothers who stated that they would never look back and that they had a relatively easy transition into staying at home felt less stressed having to juggle work-life balance. Previous studies have established that staying at home to raise kids offers additional advantages, such as ensuring that parents get enough time with their kids, being able to shape their development daily, and having

control over their own schedule (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 341; De Marneffe, 2004). They claimed that the advantages for the rest of the family included a more tranquil home, a sense of security for the kids, less frantic schedules for everyone, and peace of mind knowing that the kids were with their mother and thus safe and content. As a result of staying at home, stay-at-home mothers claim they could have had a harder time influencing their children if they had continued working. Also, they discovered that staying at home was beneficial for time spent with children, personal time, spousal time and extended family time. In addition to that, they contribute to the family's well-being by providing childcare, cooking, housekeeping, and other services that they would normally have been paid for physically, thereby contributing to the family's financial well-being (Rubin & Wooten, 2007, pp. 340-342).

The dwindling economic climate in Nigeria led to dual-income households being the norm while single-income households, with a stay-at-home mother are still prevalent. With the reduction in purchasing power in 2008, many families turned to having one main provider as a cost-effective strategy due to the rising cost of childcare. However, this decision was not without criticism as research has indicated that stay-at-home mothers often face discrimination in the form of unequal access to job opportunities, negative stereotypes, and assumptions, and often, gender-based salary discrepancies. Domestic violence in Nigeria has increased alongside rising patriarchy and narcissism among men, making it seem justifiable for women to work. However, those who choose to stay home to raise their children with their partners should not be judged or discriminated against, as they may have made a decision that works for their family (Rowland et.al., 2019, p. 6). Conflicting values in times of economic hardship can cause "cultural ambivalence" (Pew Research Centre, 2015), meaning existing norms are disputed until new ones are accepted. In recent years, increased economic strain and feminist ideologies fighting for gender equality and independence have made it necessary for many women to work, which has created societal resistance to the idea of a one-income household. The current state of Nigeria's economy creates tension between traditional values of female domesticity and the need for dual incomes.

Furthermore, many participants attributed decisions to a variety of influences like belief in a higher faith, and children's health conditions. As one participant emphasizes *"…When do you have time for your children, monitor their homework and just basically be there for them…, I feel like God intentionally assigned women to be keepers of the home…"*. Girls from their younger years are conditioned to view wifely duties and motherhood as their primary responsibility, and

this mainly stems from a religious standpoint (Rowland et.al., 2019, p. 6). This has caused young women to fit their career aspirations in line with traditional gender roles. The conventional cultural norm in Nigeria required that if any one of the partners was to stay at home to raise the children, it had to be the woman regardless of an individualized desire to do otherwise, and without consideration of her previous career advancements. The results of this study indicate that even when women pursue high-flying careers, their nurturing skills, and the need to prioritize family over all else take precedence. The downside, therefore, becomes that women believe that the only effective way to parent a child is to place their children at the centre of all decisions.

According to Marks (2004), no single model can adequately capture the diverse experiences of women, so examining stay-at-home mothers through a single lens does not adequately address their daily challenges. This recognizes, therefore, that the value of a woman is not only based on her labour but also on the valuable work she does as a stay-at-home mother. These perceptions described by participants, however, are based on the notion that a woman's worth is determined by her job and economic input on the home front.

Participants narratives presented factors that made the experience both satisfying and rewarding as well as limiting factors that constituted psychological and physical stress. Women reported experiencing a lack of productivity resulting from intellectual conversations and engagements in the workplace. That is, they missed the mental stimulation and motivation resulting from workplace engagements. In the same vein, self-imposed standards gave the women comfort in their roles affirming that their roles were fulfilling and would help their children become valuable and responsible members of the community. Each woman had a strong organizational skill set which enabled her to break down her daily tasks (e.g., hospital appointments, school runs) that ensured the family's needs were met. This gave her a sense of worth and confidence in her capability to manage her role as a mother. The participants in this study had a structured, precise lifestyle, evident in the management of their homes, family finances and self-descriptions (e.g., "organized and manager"), and daily routines. Their behaviour may be explained by a need for discipline in a position that lacked corporate structure (e.g., full-time motherhood).

Additionally, participants accounts contained recurring experiences of social stigmas linked to forms of unintelligence, incompetence, laziness, financial incapability, and gross

irresponsibility. The present narrative maintains that given the present state of the Nigerian economy, women ought to exert substantial effort in assisting their husbands. Any situation that discourages mothers from earning an income, particularly during a recession, jeopardizes the security of the entire family, thereby reinforcing the stereotype (Isamah & Okunola, 2002). Furthermore, numerous mothers shared their personal encounters of society perceiving their role as a stay-at-home mother as a hindrance to women. This is due to the growing difficulty for stay-at-home mothers to achieve independence from their spouses, leading to the perception that being a stay-at-home mother is a financial burden. The study indicated that the fact that they believed these stereotypes before becoming stay-at-home mothers suggests that they are prevalent in society. Working mothers and stay-at-home mothers also have different perceptions due to the transitioning of women from one group to another. If the stigmas associated with stay-at-home mothers are a true reflection of the thoughts and opinions of working mothers, this demonstrates that the two groups have distinct perceptions of the world based on their differing experiences.

This result is consistent with Stone and Lovejoy (2004, 2007) who found that women who found difficulty balancing work and family prior to their decision experienced both relief from a stressed work life and a slower more relaxed life. While they had received external validation from employers and colleagues, they felt that their present role as stay-at-home mothers was not adequately acknowledged. They reported feeling judged by predominant stereotypes while at the same time referencing how their full-time commitments as mothers and wives fostered the success of the family and allowed their husbands to succeed in their demanding careers.

This research shows gendered roles continue to be prevalent in both domestic households and childcare, and society still places gender-based expectations on women. To foster greater gender equality in the workplace and at home, more focus should be on the media to change the narrative. Furthermore, gaining an understanding of the factors that drive the decision and recognizing that one choice of a woman to stay at home is not of a lesser impact than the choice of another to be a career or high-flying career woman. In addition to that, discarding the notion that women only have an impact when they take up positions of economic value, that both choices are valid and should be adequately supported by society. It is also a well-known concept that the family has the greatest impact on an individual, therefore, it is essential that society aspires to more

combined, balanced, and nuanced concepts of such freedoms, diversities, inclusion and acceptance of women in such categories.

Though all the women embraced motherhood, there were variations in the strength of the motivations behind their choices. Therefore, the motivations for the 10 study participants to become stay-at-home mothers were not clear-cut or exhaustive. Every individual faced unique challenges in their individual journeys towards motherhood. Finally, the economic climate in Nigeria and the high rate of unemployment at almost 42% according to NPC (2021) caused many women to feel uncertain and financially dependent on their husbands should they lose their jobs. There is no governmental assistance for stay-at-home mothers and many women feared the repercussions in the event of a failed marriage or the death of a spouse. Nevertheless, the rewarding experience of raising their children in a stable environment far outweighed the fear (Stone, 2007, pp. 650-654).

4.1. Limitations of the Study

This study investigates and examines the lived experiences and decisions of educated women who become stay-at-home mothers from a Nigerian cultural standpoint to better understand the unique complexities and challenges they face within their respective contexts. Therefore, based on the findings, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study and possible recommendations for further research.

The first limitation of the study is that the study was conducted on a small sample population of 10 married mothers with graduate degrees, working husbands and 1-4 children. As this was a purposive sample, the results may not be applicable to any other group of mothers. Furthermore, this research focused only on married women while leaving out single mothers. None of the mothers identified as single mothers, divorced, or separated which was another limitation of the study. Incorporating other groups of mothers provides a comparison of the financial dynamics and motivations to become a stay-at-home mother. Further research into the complexities and specificities of becoming a single stay-at-home mother should be considered. Another limitation of this methodological study lies in the weakness to explore the challenges of being a working mother from a Nigerian cultural standpoint. Further research is warranted to explore ways to better support stay-at-home mothers to help them achieve future goals like the choice to re-enter the

labour force and strategies for overcoming barriers to unemployment. Lastly, the study explored how the participant's experiences were affected by their husband's income. Though all women in the study had a graduate education, we could not explore specific income and economic status due to ethical considerations, but some women spoke of being comfortable while others expressed fears of what the future holds if their partners lost their source of income.

4.2. Areas of future research

The first recommendation for future research would be to conduct quantitative integrated research involving both parties (husband and wife) involved in the marriage. It is essential to explore their partner's perspectives of the women's roles, attitudes, and challenges. This will help provide a holistic understanding of the various experiences of each member of the family setting and how the decision impacts them. Research in Nigeria is lacking on the feasibility of men becoming stay-at-home fathers. While stay-at-home motherhood can often be excused and accepted, the concept of stay-at-home fatherhood is rarely discussed or viewed as a viable option. Further research would explore the possibility of men becoming stay-at-home fathers and the factors that might influence the decision. Another aspect open to further research would be a phenomenological analysis of the differences between stay-at-home mothers who voluntarily chose this path and those who were "forced" to stay at home due to unemployment or other external factors. Conclusively, an area of further research would be to examine the role of government in creating policies that provide support and relief programs for stay-at-home mothers such as the provision of affordable childcare, gender-neutral parental leave, monthly stipends for stay-at-home mothers etc. and finally investigate the role of media representations in spreading narratives about stay-at-home mothers. Deconstructing these social norms could lead to greater freedom for women to make choices in their lives (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005, p. 620).

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the daily experiences, challenges, and motivations of educated stay-at-home mothers. Interviews with these mothers provided a valuable understanding of those who make different lifestyle choices. Society values motherhood and as a result, often places pressure on women to balance parenting and work. Those who stay at home are judged, and those who work are expected to excel in both roles. Stay-at-home mothers deal with unique difficulties due to labels and stereotypes, while working mothers face immense pressure to manage family and careers. Whether they remain at home or in the workplace, mothers often face criticism for attempting to juggle both roles in the home and workplace. This work can contribute to further discussions on the struggles they face and avoid reinforcing societal expectations and norms and provide a framework to assist other professionals considering transitioning to full-time childcare. In Nigeria specifically, traditional expectations of women place a severe amount of mental and emotional strain on women. To give mothers the support they need, society and government must come together to provide solutions in the form of informed policies and structural changes. Supporting working mothers is essential to both individual and collective well-being.

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Appendix A
Participants Information Sheet

Hi, my name is Lola and currently running a master's in psychology of intercultural relations. For my dissertation, I am conducting a research project on the experiences of educated stay-at-home mothers in Nigeria. There is a wide gap in research into the experiences of educated women who have decided to stay at home to take care of their children. The thesis aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the motives and factors that influence the decision-making process as well as the daily lived experiences of educated stay-at-home mothers in Nigeria. The interview will be conducted via video conference with Zoom, but only the audio file will be pre-recorded and utilized. The discussion will include questions about your daily life experiences as a stay-at-home mother, childhood experiences, and the roles of others or groups in the decision-making process. That is the relationship with your children and husband, the motives and factors that led to your decision to stay at home, your experiences as a stay-at-home mother and any challenges experienced either by societal norms or from cultural beliefs. I am also interested in any advice you would give other women who are thinking of staying at home in order to take care of their children. Certain questions may concern highly personal topics, making you feel uncomfortable, however, most people who take part enjoy responding to even the challenging questions. You can opt out at any time.

Participating in this study carries no known risks but your participation will help us to gain a better understanding of the experiences and complexities of stay-at-home mothers in contemporary Nigeria, which may be beneficial to society and the target group. Additionally, people who participate in these types of studies often find that answering the questionnaires gives them knowledge about their self-identity and overall purpose. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without a given reason and without any negative consequences. Your identity will be kept confidential, your name and email will not be included in any publication derived from this study. Only the researcher and authorized research staff will have access to the data collected during this study. The audio record of the interview will be deleted after the thesis has been completed.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact the Researcher at +351 961397661; akinsanya_mobolaji@iscte-iul.pt or the Supervising Professor at rfprs@iscte-iul.pt

Consent

I have read the above information and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any reason or penalty. I understand that the data and information I give will be kept confidential and that my name will not be used in any report or publication resulting from this study. I understand that the recorded audio will be treated in total confidentiality. I agree that the data collected during this study may be used for research purposes and will also be incorporated into research publications and presentations.

I have read this consent form completely and have decided that I will participate in this study.

Appendix B

Interview Script

"Hello, my name is Lola. I am an M.Sc. student of Psychology. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am conducting research on stay-at-home mothers, and your experiences and your insight are invaluable in helping us understand your daily lives. Thank you so much for speaking with me today. During this interview, we will discuss a range of issues as it relates to your experiences as a stay-at-home mother, such as the decision to stay at home, your daily routines, and daily responsibilities.

Please share your experiences, opinions, and feelings honestly and openly. Your participation is voluntary, and all your responses will be confidential.

Introductory Questions

1) Can you start by introducing yourself and your growing years and family background?

2) What's your life today like on a day-to-day basis, what daily activities do you engage in?"

3) Would you like to share some insight into the relationship with your children?

4) Can you tell me some of the challenges daily experienced?
   a. How do you cope with those challenges?

Questions on decisions to stay at home.

5) How did you come to the decision to stay home to take care of the children?

   a. What was the most important factor in making this decision (what circumstance had the biggest influence)?

6) How did you feel when you made that decision?

7) Can you tell me if other people were involved in the decision-making process?

      a.   Who were they what role did they play in the process?

8) Can you narrate some attitudes perceived when people learn about your decision to stay home to take care of the kids?

      a.   Why do you think they reacted the way they did?

      b.   Have you ever felt pressure from family, friends, or society to return to paid employment?

9) Do you think other groups might oppose your decision? And what do you feel about that? What do you think about that?

      a.   Do you think other groups might support your decision?

      b.   And how do you feel about that? What do you think about that?

10) How has being a stay-at-home mother affected your overall well-being? "Looking back do you think that was the best choice for you, do you feel satisfied?

11) What pops into your mind when you hear the word feminism?

12) Before we round up, I just want to know how you feel about this interview and if there is anything you would like to add or ask me.

Appendix C: *Participants Structural Narratives*

Themes	Sub-themes	Illustrative Statements
Primary Motivators	Childhood Experiences	*"As I said earlier, I didn't want my children to have the same experience as mine. My mom was unavailable and it kinda affected my growing-up years. Also, when I was pregnant with baby number 3… we were really considering (my husband and I) for me to stay at home because of the stress as I did not have much support…"* *"My top priority was to provide my children with a good upbringing, a childhood free of absent parenthood like mine. I am an actuary (statistician) by profession, and it's quite a demanding job…My mother worked throughout my growing up years and due to the heavy traffic experienced because we lived in Lagos at the time, she sometimes got home between 9pm and 10pm every day…"* *"Although I have always loved the concept of motherhood, I also believed in women making great strides in their careers and being financially independent. However, my mom had business but was also a stay-at-home mom and our relationship was stronger because of it…"*
	Work-life Balance	*"I felt guilty leaving my 12-week baby at the…daycare center…In my job, I was entitled to just 12 weeks, but you can't afford to spend an extra day as you might not have a job anymore…my baby cried all through the first day. My baby cried all through the first day.*

		Sometimes she came back home sick, and I just knew that I couldn't do that anymore…"
		"My job was extremely demanding, and I had to travel almost 3 hours back and forth every day in traffic due to the severity of Lagos traffic; this is what many Nigerian mothers experience on a daily basis, it's the norm but it's extremely frustrating…It began to take a toll on my health and my employers were not so considerate as to allow me to work from home. Basically, the stress affected me and my children as they lacked adequate attention…"
	Childcare	**"…***I really did not have a choice. We discovered early that my daughter had the sickle cell gene, so she needed extra attention and care, I had to stay at home and care for her...however, I have always wanted to be a stay-at-home mum because I felt it would give me ample time to serve God and run a godly home. Lol…"* *"…My husband and I discussed our plans for raising our kids, the type of family we wanted, and our individual roles before we got married. We chose to homeschool our kids - since I have a teaching degree, it was a logical choice - to give them a strong foundation…"* *"…when I was pregnant with baby number 3… we were really considering (my husband and I) for me to stay at home because of the stress as I did not have much support. Then baby number 3 came and of*

		course, higher daycare expenses, feeding costs, picking up the kids... it was like a lot…"
	Importance of Spousal Support	*"...I'll just like to add that it is very important that such a decision should be made with one's partner. Because if you have a husband that does not agree with your decision, he can make life hell for both you and the children especially because of the kind of society we live in where women are not fully appreciated for the sole position of being a mother…"* **"...**My husband's consent was paramount in making the ultimate decision…"* *"...It's important to have an understanding partner before making such a decision. This is not a decision to take lightly, discuss and deliberate with your partner before making such choices…"*
Perception by Society/Cultural Expectations	Social Unacceptance	*"...Nigerian men are very traditional and would not assist in the household duties. I will go to work, go to the market, go pick up the kids from school, and still get back home to make dinner, yet I'm expected to sexually satisfy my husband at night. It was so crazy that sometimes, I'll just break down and cry… but then, that's what you're expected to do as a woman, be a superwoman…"* *"...I don't think the Nigerian society respects full-time housewives...sometimes the constant questions of "what are you doing now?" can be very silly and annoying…Many people think we just sit at home and*

		do nothing, probably just eating and watching AfricaMagic…”
	Social Irrelevance	*“…It was my choice to resign from work and I think feminism gave me that power of choice, but my friends told me I was wasting away my education and I'll forever be under my husband's control…I still get a lot of passive-aggressive attitudes, especially amongst my professional friends…”*
		***“...**I am a full-time housewife and the word triggers some form of condescending attitude in Nigerians, they feel women like that are lazy, and lack ambition, funnily enough, I used to think the same too…”*
		“...Basically, people don't understand why a woman would choose to limit her role to wife and mother in a country where feminism is just beginning to be accepted.. They are always like: “Why don't you want to work and make money? I mean many women are doing it, so why can't you do it, do they have two heads...?”
		“...Honestly, I think many women would say no, they don't. The way people look down on a mother's contribution to the home once she doesn't go out to work is appalling, even by fellow women who you would think would understand…”

	Financial Perception	*"…The widespread misunderstanding is that stay-at-home mums are choosing an effortless life while their partners work so hard. But these people don't realize how much effort goes into raising a family. Some people just decide to put a lot of pressure on stay-at-home mums to make money, which is incredibly unfair and insensitive considering how difficult the economy is…"* *"…They were like, I wasn't contributing financially and not doing enough for your husband…. Like I'm not adding any economic value according to them…"*
Perception of Themselves/ Impact on Well-being	Emotional Ambivalence	*"…For me, I can say it's a mix of emotions. First, it's a rewarding and fulfilling feeling, I get to be there for every milestone but on the other hand, you can begin to second-guess yourself when something happens. But overall, I feel fulfilled doing what God has called me to do…"* *"…You see…there are tons of useful information for stay-at-home mums all over the world but by the content you see in Nigeria you can already tell they are judging you! Lol. I really want to change that which is why I began content creation. I want to change the misconceptions. I have people who were so concerned for me and told me "You have to have something doing" and I totally understand that it is all coming from a place of love but if we don't put out more positive content for stay-at-home moms how will everyone know…"*

		"...Most of my daily activities are centred around caring for the children and managing the home front. Many people don't know that stay-at-home mothers are also managers…"
	Positive Feelings	*"...Sincerely speaking, the motherhood ride has been a wonderful experience albeit with its own ups and downs but ultimately, I am grateful for the experience. My children are doing well in school too, my first started secondary school a while ago and she's matured, she sometimes helps me with her younger siblings…"* *"…That's a good question…my kids are still very young though, but I see the joy in their eyes when we get to spend quality time together playing and watching educational cartoons and all that…I believe that the first 4 years are the most important in setting the stage for their futures. I get great satisfaction from knowing that my 3-year-old is starting to count, her alphabet, identify colours, and say her name and sight words…"*
	Justification of Choices	*"...It always amazes me when people think I'm lazy because I'm home all day. I mean, I'm practically cooking, washing, taking lunch to the kid's school and all other things that need to be done. It's very risky and expensive to hire house helps these days… but*

		people don't understand that you are making a sacrifice and they harshly judge me…" *"…I think I'm a good mother and I think that I'm doing the best that I can given the present situation and I should be applauded for that…"*
	Feelings of Unproductivity/ Inadequacy/ Isolation	*"…I struggled with "the shame" of being a wife and stay-at-home mother for a while. After that, I realized it originated from societal narratives and stereotypes that had been inculcated over time that for women to be powerful, they have to engage in professional work and full-time housewives lacked ambition and hated professional work. But over time, the daily challenges of having to raise and care for three children took over the overwhelming feelings of inadequacy…"* *"…There are times I feel undermotivated and I don't think I am doing enough, to even get up from the bed is sometimes a hassle and I have to remind myself that my children need me…"* *"…To be very honest, I have mixed feelings…. there are times I am so proud of myself for being able to take a stand against what society thinks should be the norm and at times I feel inadequate and irrelevant, to being extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise my children by myself and instil the needed values for them to thrive in this crazy world. So, it's like a never-ending cycle of emotions and self-motivation…"*