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# **‘In this job, you cannot have time for family’: Work–family conflict among prison officers in Ghana**

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## **Biography**

Thomas Akoensi is a Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice at the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, UK. His research interests are in the fields of penology, legitimacy and criminal justice, comparative criminology and organizational behaviour.

### **Abstract**

This paper documents the experience of work-family conflict (WFC) among prison officers in Ghana. Although the term WFC has been used in relation to prison officers in the UK (Crawley, 2002) and the US (Triplett et al., 1999), the context of WFC in Ghana is unusual. In this predominantly collectivist culture, family responsibilities include obligations to the extended family. WFC is mainly unidirectional, with interference running from work to the family. Officers are thus impaired in fulfilling their family responsibilities, which consequently impairs their daily work and mental well-being. The ‘crisis controlling’ or ‘paramilitary’ organisational structure of the Ghana Prisons Service (GPS) makes it very difficult for the work domain of prison officers to accommodate family responsibilities. Female officers appear to bear a heavier WFC burden than male officers, mainly on account of their traditionally unpaid housekeeping role in addition to their paid employment in a masculine organisational culture. The findings are significant, as they show that the promulgation of family-friendly policies to alleviate WFC-associated stress lies in the hands of the GPS, since WFC emanates solely from the work domain.

### **Keywords**

work-family conflict and facilitation, prison officers, job stress, Ghana,

## **Introduction**

Prison officers represent a key institutional resource.<sup>i</sup> They perform essential roles in keeping prisons safe, secure and humane. The prison officer pursues one of the most stressful occupations (Brodsky 1985; Johnson 2005), and the difficulty associated with combining work with family responsibilities—the work-family conflict (WFC)—is a key precursor to stress (Triplett et al. 1999; Lambert et al. 2002). Yet balancing work roles with family roles and responsibilities poses serious difficulties for many officers. The concept of WFC is embedded in the notion that individuals have finite psychological and physiological resources, and that work and family domains are in competition for those resources (Goode, 1960; Carlson and Grzywacz, 2008). WFC negatively affects job satisfaction, organisational commitment, support for offender rehabilitation, turnover intent and voluntary turnover in various prisons and secure institutions (Woodruff, 1993; Camp, 1994; Lambert et al 2002). This finding endorses the view that “most roles are greedy consumers” because of their competing demands for finite resources (Archer, 2000: 293). Participation in one role thus diminishes personal resources, and hinders participation in another role (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal, 1964). A further complication of WFC is that stress can be transferred from one role or domain to the other.

Little is known about the nature, antecedents and impact of WFC among prison officers. The literature originates in England and North America, which limits our understanding of the scale and nature of WFC among prison officers in other parts of the world. In Africa, and particularly in Ghana, the traditional division of labour in the family has been eroded by the increasing presence of women in all occupations, including prison establishments (International Labour Office, 2009; GSS, 2008). The

change renders interference between work and family roles inevitable; however, no studies have yet investigated WFC among prison officers in Sub-Saharan Africa. This exclusion is important, because studying WFC from a different socio-cultural and economic standpoint would enable the development of “concepts and generalizations at a level between what is true of all societies and what is true of one society at one point in time and space” (Bendix, 1963: 532). It is also important because “new ideas or policy innovations uncovered in one society may have applicability in others” (LaFree, 2007:16). The present study is an attempt to address the gap in our knowledge by investigating WFC among prison officers in Ghana.

### **Previous research on work-family conflict**

WFC has evolved from its early conceptualization as a unidirectional construct, with the direction of interference running from work to family (e.g. Kopelman et al., 1983), to a bidirectional construct associated with unique domain-specific antecedents (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Frone et al., 1992; Frone et al., 1997). WFC may thus take two forms: work-interference with family (WIF) and family-interference with work (FIW). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argue that WFC is inherently non-directional and becomes directional only when the individual makes a conscious effort to resolve the conflict. WIF and FIW are thus “distinct but related constructs that form the overall concept of work-family conflict” (Lambert et al., 2002: 37; see also Byron, 2005).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985: 81) propose that WFC may take three forms: (a) time-based – in which excessive time-demands in the work (family) domain make participation in family (work) activities difficult; (b) strain-based – in which tension,

anxiety, or frustration in one's work (family) frustrate successful participation in family (work) activities; and (c) behaviour-based—in which “specific patterns of in-role behaviour may be incompatible with expectations regarding behaviour in another role”. Behaviour-based WFC thus occurs when there is conflict between work and family roles. For instance, Crawley (2002) found that as a result of their jobs some prison officers became suspicious and introduced routine and orderliness into their home. Since suspiciousness and routine are expected at work (i.e. prison) but not at home, this is a typical case of behaviour-based WFC.

Time-based WFC has a high prevalence among prison employees. Triplett et al. (1999) claim that excessive working hours, frequent overtime and irregular shift-work contribute to the experience of work–family conflict among prison officers (see also Lambert et al. 2006). In the US and Israel, prison officers experience more time- and strain-based WFC than correctional staff with non-custodial roles in education, medical, business, industry, and administration (Keinan and Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert et al., 2004).

WFC may also cause work stress. In a medium-security correctional facility in the US, Triplett et al. (1999) found that WFC, in its behavioural form, was significantly correlated with work stress. By contrast, Lambert et al (2006) found no evidence of behaviour-based WIF and FIW effects on stress. Nor was time-based WFC associated with stress. Only strain-based WIF was significantly related to job stress. However, in a subsequent analysis of the same data, Lambert et al. (2007) found that after collapsing the time and strain sub-types into a single variable, WIF was the second most important correlate of work stress. This finding is thus an artefact of the measurement strategy. In a survey of correctional staff, Griffin (2006) found that, when operationalized by both WIF and FIW subscales, WFC was

positively related to work stress. Also, correctional officers experiencing both WIF and FIW have been found to suffer depression (Obidoa et al, 2011) but Shamir and Drory (1982) found no relationship between WFC and stress among Israeli prison personnel.

Owing to the detrimental nature of WFC on both prison staff and the organisation itself, and in order to understand how WFC affects correctional staff, a small but growing number of studies has focused on the antecedents of WFC, identifying a number of personal characteristics and job-related variables. Triplett et al. (1999) found that WFC was a major issue for female staff, who experienced more stress than male staff. Griffin (2006) found that WFC was a more significant issue for female staff than for male staff. Lambert et al. (2004) found that employees with limited tenure and lower levels of education experienced more time-based WFC. Also, staff in supervisory roles experienced more time- and strain-based WFC (Lambert and Hogan, 2006). Young prison staff experience more time-based WFC than their older colleagues (Lambert, Hogan, Kelley, Kim and Garland, 2013; Lambert et al. 2014). On work-related antecedents, Lambert and Hogan (2006) found that the perceived dangerousness of prison work and role conflict was positively correlated with WFC while organisational justice (a composite measure of procedural and distributive justice) was negatively correlated with WFC. Similarly, Obidoa et al. (2011) found that, while supervisory support reduced WFC, the perceived psychological demands of the job increased it. A recent replication of the Lambert and Hogan (2006) study by Lambert et al. (2014) found that the perceived dangerousness of prison work, role conflict and role overload contributed to the overall staff experience of WFC.

These studies are not without limitations. There has been an overrepresentation of White prison staff, precluding generalization to other minority ethnic groups such as Blacks and Hispanics (e.g. 81% Whites and 19% non-White samples in the Lambert et al. (2011) study). The study samples have included ‘correctional staff’, a term embracing both custodial and non-custodial staff, despite differences in tasks and routines. For instance, while custody officers work 24-hour shifts, non-custody staff do not. The empirical literature shows that correctional/prison staff experience higher levels of WFC than non-correctional staff (Lambert and Hogan, 2006). It may be argued that our understanding of WFC among prison officers as a distinct group of prison staff is limited. Moreover, the small number of empirical studies is mainly English or North American in origin. Without similar studies in African prisons, we cannot know whether African officers experience similar WFC and adopt similar coping strategies. It is far from clear whether policies based on the current literature will work in different contexts. Only through replication studies in under-researched contexts can prison managers be dissuaded from adopting ‘best’ practice from other countries without first taking local factors into consideration.

Conspicuously missing from the literature is an exploration of specifically why, how and when work and family roles interfere with each other among prison officers in other cultures where ‘work’ and ‘family’ domains suggest different meanings and have broader and more nuanced implications (see Yang, 2005). The present study attempts to address this challenge by focusing on Ghana. By the nature of the job of prison officers in Ghana, WFC assumes mainly a unidirectional fashion from work to family (WIF) with very little interference from family to work (FIW). Thus, while the family ‘domain’ or ‘boundary’ of Ghanaian prison officers is easily



permeable, that is not the case with the structure and nature of prison work. The cultural endorsement of work commitment as a sacrifice for the family and a means of family survival via income, security, and prestige provide the enabling environment for WFC to flourish. This therefore intensifies female officers' experience of WFC, compared to their male counterparts.

### **The societal context of Ghana**

Ghana has diverse ethnic groups, each divided into different clans (Sarpong, 1974). Ghanaian families are "male-headed units of extended families consisting of one or several wives and their children and often extended with unmarried or elderly relatives" (Brown, 1996:21). With high sex segregation in the typical Ghanaian family structure, men are primarily breadwinners while women are tasked with housework and child-rearing. In traditional Ghanaian society, marriage indicates completeness of life. Unmarried adults are treated as second-class citizens. It is Akan practice, during family gatherings, to serve bachelors half-glasses of drinks as a depiction of society's disapproval of the single state, while married men are served with full glasses (Pobee, 1976). The primary aim of marriage in Ghanaian society is procreation, and marriage is the only state in which sexual intercourse is sanctioned (Pobee, 1976).

Children are valued in Ghanaian society for their high economic, social, psychological and spiritual worth, as they ensure the continuation of the family lineage. For parents, children are a further source of social security in old age. Care of the elderly, entailing feeding, bathing, changing clothes, remittance, surveillance, healthcare and companionship, and organising funerals is a traditional responsibility for older children. It indicates respect and reciprocity towards elders. The inability of

older children to provide such care attracts social disapproval and insults from family members, friends and society in general (Van der Geest, 2002). Adult children's willingness to provide ongoing care for their elderly parents is not guaranteed but is contingent upon the quality of care those children received from their parents when they were young (Van der Geest, 2002). In line with cultural norms, women undertake most care of the elderly.

By contrast with Western individualism, this collectivist cultural ethos, the endorsement of marriage and procreation as the culturally dominant family arrangement (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi, 2006), and the virtual absence of family-friendly policies in government and private organizations, make it difficult for employees to balance work and family (Aryee, 2005). The result is further gendered, with greater difficulty for women in balancing paid work and family responsibilities (Oppong, 2001). Furthermore, despite weakening traditional patterns of family-related assistance owing partly to migration of kinsfolk and modernity, and with reduced observance of norms and values (Nukunya, 2003), cultural expectations and responsibilities remain entrenched. Support for extended family members and care for the elderly as culturally-mandated responsibilities are burdensome for working adults, because of the absence of care homes and limited welfare provisions (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi, 2006). Thus, a prison officer need not be married in order to experience WFC in Ghana. Obligations towards the extended family take their toll on every officer's time, attention and energy.

### **The work context of the Ghana Prisons Service**

Since 1993, the female officer contingent in the Ghana Prison Service (GPS) has increased steadily from 19.9% (724) to 31.7% (1,869) in 2012. The increase in the

female workforce has occurred mainly in the lower ranks. Of the 610 superior officers in 2012, female officers constituted 19.7% (120), compared to the subordinate officer corps where females constituted 33% (1,749). Thus, female officers are vertically and horizontally segregated in the GPS at both managerial and non-managerial levels, and this contributes to their greater experience of WFC-related stressors such as lack of autonomy, lower pay, and fewer incentives and privileges.

At higher levels of the Ghana civil service, discrimination against women has its roots in the British colonial administration (Baden, Green, Otoo-Oyortey and Peasgood, 1994). It was not until 1967, a decade post-independence, that Ghana promulgated the Labour Decree granting women full employment rights.

In the GPS paramilitary management structure, a consequence of its British colonial history, autonomy is key to balancing work and family demands. Owing to their subordinate status, female officers are more likely than their male counterparts to be transferred from one prison to another and to be allocated less living-space. Furthermore, with females in subordinate positions, their incomes are low, making it difficult to obtain help with housework, which is unpaid despite a long-standing discussion about unpaid housework and care work in Africa (e.g. Prah, 2013). By combining prison employment with unpaid household work, female officers appear to work twice as many hours as their male counterparts, and to experience more intense stress. To become eligible for maternity leave, female prison officers and their civil service counterparts are also required to have been in post for at least two years. Breaching this requirement by becoming pregnant during that period incurs repercussions such as suspension without pay and, at worst, dismissal from the service. Nevertheless, there are no paternity leave provisions for male prison officers.

## **Methods**

Mainly qualitative methods, with interviews, observations and a survey, were employed to address the research questions. This ethnographic-led approach, involving sustained periods in prisons, helps with building trust, actively engaging with and participating in officers' working lives and helping to understand individual officers and institutional practices.

The interview sample involved 78 officers, although only 59 responded directly to cues and prompts about WFC. The survey comprised a cross-sectional sample, with 1,062 officers submitting analysable data. Male and female officers comprised 65.4% and 34.6% respectively of the interview sample. This corresponds with the gender composition of the GPS, which out of a total of 5,898 officers in 2012 comprised 68.3% male officers and 31.7% female officers (Ghana Prisons Service, 2012). Officers were based at 31 of the 43 establishments in all ten regions of Ghana (except the Western region, which had previously hosted a pilot study for this research). The interview sample was also representative of the officer hierarchy of the GPS (see Table 1.0). Interviews were recorded with the express consent of participants. Subsequently, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were analysed following a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

[Insert Table 1.0 about here]

In most prisons, surveys were administered and collected after a brief staff presentation by the researcher to all prison officers at a full staff meeting. Efforts were also made to distribute surveys to officers at their various duty posts if they were unable to attend the meetings. Out of 1,490 surveys distributed, 1,117 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 74.9%. However, only 1,062 surveys were analysable, representing 18% of the total officer workforce of the GPS.

Male and female officers constituted respectively 65.9% and 34.1% of the survey sample. WFC was measured with six target statements (shown in Table 2.0), five of which were adapted from Netemeyer et al. (1996). The sixth item was developed for the present study based on findings from a pilot study. The WFC scale proved to be highly reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .86). In addition, the researcher was allowed to freely move around the prison, observe management meetings, officers at their duty posts, and prisoner-staff interactions. The ensuing sections outline the emerging themes from the qualitative data under two broad categories: time- and strain-based WFC. Findings from the survey are also presented.

### **Time-based WFC**

#### Time-based job demands

Twenty-four of 59 officers (40.6%) said that their work produced time-based conflicts which made it difficult to discharge their family duties satisfactorily. Officers specified the nature of the job, involving long hours on weekdays, weekends and holidays, and unpaid overtime, as interfering with family life:

The work is so tedious and stressful that all your time is for the work. Even if you are on leave, you can be called upon at anytime. You have little or no time for your family. (Male, Sergeant)

Recall from leave is stipulated in Section 25 of the Ghana Labour Act 651 (2003), which allows "an employer, in case of urgent necessity ... [to] require a worker to interrupt his or her leave and return to work". The interpretation of 'urgent necessity' was left to the discretion of the employer.

The extended family, an important form of social security among Ghanaians (Nukunya 2003; Assimeng 1986), also suffers from work demands. This affects both married and single officers. One unmarried officer was distressed because:

This job greatly interferes with my family. My father is bedridden for 11 years now due to stroke. I can't help. I have to go and help but I can't go due to the nature of this job. I am stuck and watch helplessly. (Male, Deputy Superintendent)

Officers complained about their inability to participate in extended family activities such as out-dooring,<sup>ii</sup> or wedding and funeral ceremonies at weekends. These activities were important for people to learn of developments in the family, and to strengthen their bonds with the extended family and clan:

As I speak to you now, I have lost my younger brother. Of course, I ought to be there but I can't. I have to give excuses in the sense that my job is so demanding that if I leave, what will happen next? Because anything that happens in this prison will affect me. (Male, Chief Superintendent)

For another senior officer, the time demands of his work interfered not only with performing family duties but also with discharging his traditional leadership role as a chief<sup>iii</sup>:

Yes, it interferes with my family. It even goes beyond my family because, as I am speaking with you now, I am a Chief. But because of the work, I cannot go and perform the customary roles as required of me – prison duties before anything else. The prison takes every bit of my time so my duty at this prison does not allow me to perform my customary duties as expected. (Male, Chief Superintendent of Prisons)

Female officers, in particular, appeared to be much more distressed by the interference of work with their family duties. The Ghana Living Standards Survey (1995; 2000; 2008) found majority female participation in household chores, although with a gradual, steady percentage increase in men contributing to household tasks in urban settings.

Thus, increased female officers' participation in the work domain, and the absence of family-friendly policies in the GPS, significantly hindered their participation in family-related duties. They were allowed only three months' statutory paid maternity leave and an unpaid extension. This provision pales in comparison with the 26-week ordinary maternity leave (OML) and a further 26-week additional maternity leave (AML) available to prison officers in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice [PSI 18], 2011). As a coping strategy, therefore, female officers combined their maternity leave with their annual leave.

Although three female officers in three different prisons were seen breastfeeding their babies while at work, they did not bring babies to work: the children were brought in by friends or neighbours to be breastfed during lunch breaks, as the prison barracks were located nearby. These were the only observed instances of family directly interfering with work (FIW). It may be argued that breastfeeding did not conflict with the job, since the officers used their legitimate lunch breaks for this purpose; rather, it was a vital coping strategy.

Female officers also engaged in informal unpaid care provided by family, friends and neighbours – a very common strategy in Ghana and the rest of the world (Date-Bah, 1986; Hein, 2005). In the UK, for example, the Office of National Statistics estimated informal childcare to constitute between 19-25% of GDP in 1999 (Holloway and Tamplin, 2001). Despite the high rate of informal unpaid care, it sometimes comes at very great cost to female officers:

I was a nursing mother and my baby was only 7 months old. He had just started crawling and I left him in the house to be taken care of by a neighbour. [...] When I returned from work, the woman I left the child with was nowhere to be found. A neighbour told me that my child has fallen into a pot of hot water and has been rushed to the hospital [by the informal caregiver]. If I were in the house to take care of my own child, this wouldn't have happened. This was my worst day. (Female, Assistant Chief Officer)

Apart from requiring assistance from informal caregivers from neighbours and extended family members for child support, female officers also believed that having understanding and supportive husbands was imperative for balancing work and family. Despite societal disapproval of the single estate, some female officers remained unmarried in order to avoid serious interference between their work and family lives:

As for me, the interference is minimal because my husband is the understanding type. But we have had situations where officers had to divorce because of this work. That is why most female officers are not married. (Female, Deputy Superintendent)

More often, it was noted that most female officers were married to members of other security service organisations such as the Fire, Immigration, Police and Customs services. It was widely acknowledged that such officers understood the demands of the job and understood the plight of women working in prisons. Nevertheless, WFC for female officers had a significant impact on marriage and relationships, owing mainly to the dominant Ghanaian traditional cultural role expectations of women. Although unsocial working hours are paid for in allowances, they have also been documented as disruptive of family life among prison officers in England and the US (Kaufman, 1988; Crawley 2004; Liebling, Price and Shefer, 2011). However, women officers in Ghana face a cultural imperative in the form of guilt and extended family and clan affiliation risks associated with their inability to fulfil kinship demands such as elderly care and participation in the family members' rites of passage, owing to work demands and unpaid overtime.

#### Lack of autonomy

Job autonomy is the degree of freedom, independence and discretion that employees have in accomplishing their tasks or making job-related decisions (Agho, Mueller and



Price, 1993). It helps employees to maintain a balance between work and family demands and to reduce work-stress (Johnson et al., 2005). Prison officers claimed that, owing to lack of autonomy over their job demands and schedules, they were often restrained from participating in family activities as they wished. They reported that they often required permission to leave work in order to spend time with their families (both nuclear and extended) but were often turned down with the excuse of 'security first'. This was the case for male and female officers, and for junior and senior officers. Thus, officers lacked control over their ability to decide when, how, and over what periods to work, or to leave work when it was necessary to attend to family duties. This was stressful for these officers who felt disempowered or handicapped in making meaningful contributions to their family lives:

In this job we don't have time for our families. I am here as the regional commander and anywhere I want to go, I have to seek permission from headquarters before I move and this is a bit worrying at times. My husband has always been complaining that 'it seems you are married to the work' and you don't have time to come home because there is always something to be done. So I can say confidently that this work is taking too much of my time.  
(Female, Deputy Director)

Officers relied on their superiors for permission but owing to staff shortages and other prison priorities such as security, even their entitlement to days off was denied. Similarly, despite officers' entitlement to 30 working days paid annual leave, how (discrete or continuous) and when (period of the year) this statutory provision is to be taken or enjoyed is subject to the approval of superior prison officers. This was stressful and frustrating for the officers. The inconvenience was not limited to their participation in the nuclear family alone; it also affected the extended family during periods of crisis. Kaufman (1988) observed similar autonomy-related issues among her sample of prison officers, who were unable to negotiate their shift patterns and days off. As a result, officers' ability to socialize with their family and friends outside

working hours was impaired. Moreover, since female officers predominantly occupied mainly subordinate positions they often lacked the autonomy to make flexibility decisions for their work schedules, although this strain was experienced by both men and women:

You cannot always be with your family because at the time they need you, you must be at work. I remember that early this year, my grandfather who was so very kind to me died. I asked permission to go and it was denied. My uncle went to explain things to the prison boss in Kumasi Central that, as a result of the situation, the family wanted me to be there and I was still not allowed permission to go. I wept bitterly here while at work and it was a very difficult situation. (Female, Lance Corporal).

Although officers complained of sickness, it was difficult to get time off for rest and recuperation. They had to come to the prison in person and submit a doctor's note to a Governor before being granted time off work. If this rule were to be applied in England, absence by prison officers who feel entitled to sick leave would fall significantly. In 2012-13, the national average rate for sickness absence among prison staff in England and Wales stood at 10.5 days per person (Ministry of Justice, 2013). High sickness levels were significantly related to staff attendance warnings and poor quality of life (Gadd et al., 1997).

### **Strain-based WFC**

#### Accommodation-based conflict

Narratives of stress, and themes of frustration, fatigue, and sometimes anxiety dominated officers' accounts of their accommodation. Many officers described the barracks accommodation as 'small', 'tiny', 'cubicle', 'not fit for purpose' and 'overcrowded', which impaired their ability to contribute meaningfully to their family lives. This is mainly because barracks accommodation (remnants of colonial prison service) are built mainly to accommodate single officers and at best small nuclear

families of a husband, wife and a child. This official expectation is at variance with the cultural preferences and pressures for marriage and large families associated with social approval and spiritual blessings. This reflects in the high fertility rates for Ghana compared to its western counterparts.<sup>iv</sup> The accommodation situation is thus, a strong source of strain and frustration for prison officers who feel a sense of ‘collective squeeze’ in their residential living space. Fourteen of 59 prison officers (24%) made this point:

Our place of residence is very appalling. We are living in cubicle rooms with our families. Sometimes a family of seven will be sharing just a single room, which may be compared to someone’s bathroom. Yet, it houses all these people. I would prefer that we get better accommodation because a sound mind thrives in a sound body. (Female, Sergeant)

It is a common feature at the barracks to see officers’ valuables such as freezers left outside their rooms at the mercy of the weather and at night, furniture rearranged with some brought outside to make room for sleeping spaces. Officers argued that they were unable to participate in family activities given the small size of their accommodation, to the extent that sex with one’s partner is sometimes scarce. At a meeting at the Nsawam prison between the Prison Officers’ Wives Association (PROWA)<sup>v</sup> and the Director of Prisons in charge of welfare, the prison officers’ wives complained that, due to the size of their rooms, their husbands denied them prolonged sexual encounters for fear that a child might be observing secretly or that a child might wake up suddenly to use the bathroom. This situation, the women argued, starved them of sex and made child upbringing and discipline difficult (Field notes, 1 November).

In officers' residential accommodation, amenities such as kitchens, bathrooms and toilets were also shared among families in the barracks. This was another area of tension, conflict and quarrel among some families residing in prison barracks.<sup>vi</sup> Furthermore, directives from management that only nuclear family members should occupy official accommodation precluded prison officers from receiving support from extended family relations or from house-helpers who were readily available and willing to assist with household chores. Such directives particularly disadvantage female officers who have to combine unpaid housework without assistance with prison work:

Our rules are also such that you cannot even get anybody to stay with you and help you with household chores. Even if the person comes, where would the person sleep? So this job makes combining work with family life difficult.  
(Female, Sergeant)

Since extended families are a strong feature of Ghanaian social life owing to the social, cultural and psychological security it provides based mainly on the belief of collective responsibility (Abotchie, 1997), there is the expectation that those who travel to the city to find employment will offer support to their kin. This often involves the expectation of accommodating extended family members who travel to the city to search for jobs. Refusal by officers to accommodate their kin who often see the barracks as a transition zone to city life attracts opprobrium and social rejection. Thus officers are often caught between official prohibition to accommodate visitors and kin, and cultural pressures to fulfil such demands.

Officers' prison barracks accommodation can best be understood through the notion of carceral collectivism – a system of penal governance involving peer surveillance among prisoners housed en-masse in dormitories in post USSR penal establishments

(Piacentini and Slade, 2015). Through a system of ‘mutual peer surveillance’, some form of carceral collectivism via the spatial and temporal structuring of the life of prison officers is manifested in officers' barracks. Through this mechanism, the GPS instils certain formal values and norms - such as respect for hierarchy and power, discipline, camaraderie, encouraging long working hours and unpaid overtime, observance of barracks rules and regulations, flexibility for easier and effective deployment - which tend to be incompatible with family values. It is not far fetched to think that some officers ‘snitch’ on colleagues who violate barracks rules such as accommodating extended family members and make life difficult for other officers, especially female officers who are often desperate for assistance with household chores post-partum. Thus, informal mechanisms through gossips and disapproval are employed to control life in the barracks. It is important to note that this form of mutual surveillance is not alien to Ghanaian culture. Indeed social control in ‘traditional’ Ghana was founded on mutual surveillance arising from the belief in collective responsibility for social (dis)order (see Abotchie, 1997).

#### Deployment-based conflict

Officers noted that frequent transfers from one prison to another, and especially between different regions, disrupted family lives. They complained that frequent changes of school and location inhibited child development:

Yes, this job interferes with my family. I was transferred from my previous station to this place. I realized that moving my family to this place would adversely affect the family and myself so I decided to leave them there. So the effect is that we are absent from each other. The children are missing me. We talk on phone and it’s always ‘daddy when are you coming?’ (Male, Corporal).

On transfer, officers had to move to their new station immediately, leaving their families behind. When, owing to the unavailability of staff accommodation, a senior

male officer was put up in a hotel at his new station, he relied on female officers for his meals while his family still lived at his previous station in a different region. At weekends, he drove home to spend time with his family while they were waiting for official staff accommodation at his new posting. Other prison officers complained about their frustration with transfers:

At times when you are transferred, you have to leave your family and depart for your new station immediately in case you are a senior officer. As a result, you would have to live as a single man in your new station for a very long time before your family is finally conveyed to your new station. (Male, Chief Superintendent)

Wives and female officers who had engaged in some form of trade or business to supplement the family's income also found their businesses disrupted by transfer:

The most difficult experience in this job occurred when I persistently pleaded with my [Governor] and the transport unit at the Prisons headquarters to give me two weeks for my wife to dispose of her fermented corn dough for kenkey and fish at the barracks. This was turned down. Simply put, I should pack my belongings after a day's notice to my new station. (Male, Chief Officer)

Transfers were not merely distressing to an officer's family; they also impacted on spouse's incomes, and their living and business arrangements suffered significantly for a while, further adding to the strain of relationships. On the whole, subordinate officers were transferred frequently from one prison to the other. With many female officers occupying subordinate officer positions, deployment-based conflict was more burdensome. One in five officers identified this as a problem.

### **Work-family facilitation**

Despite the pervasiveness of WFC among prison officers in Ghana, three male officers and one female officer argued that the job made family life easier. Work improved overall quality of life and provided an income and other benefits (e.g. accommodation) which enabled them to discharge their primary responsibilities as breadwinners, and so their families had to adjust to their job demands:

There is not much interference between my work and family. That is my daily work and that is what I do to fend for the family. That is where I earn my income. (Male, Senior Chief Officer)

As for me, it has helped me to take care of my children because it is the salary that I use to pay my children's school fees. (Female, Chief Officer)

This female officer was the breadwinner as her husband had lost his job. Her work did not conflict with her family role, as she had effectively exchanged places with her husband. That notwithstanding, officers' assertions provide further evidence that participation in paid employment is construed as a sacrifice for the family rather than a sacrifice of the family, as is the case in other collectivist cultures of Asia (see Aryee et al., 1999; Yang, et al., 2000).

### **Prevalence of work-family conflict among prison officers**

[Insert Table 2.0 about here]

One of this study's main aims was to assess the prevalence of work-family conflict among officers. As shown in Table 2.0, the prevalence of WFC among officers was high. A minimum of 53.6% (N=569) and maximum of 85% (N=903) of responding officers endorsed the statements identifying WFC. The 85% who agreed with statement 6, that "I often miss important family or social activities [e.g. spending time with the family, out-doorings, funerals, etc] because of my job", shows this item as the most frequently-experienced form of WFC. It further indicates the importance of such social activities in the socio-cultural lives of Ghanaian prison officers. Their inability to take part in such activities owing to job demands was frustrating. The above-neutral mean scores and narrow standard deviation values for all the WFC statements indicate a high prevalence of WFC. The survey findings are consistent with interviewees' accounts of WFC (M=21.35; SD=5.58).

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to explore WFC, its prevalence and manifestations among prison officers in Ghana. It examined contextual influences of WFC in a country where the interface between ‘work’ and ‘family’ is construed differently from the West. It was found that officers’ conceptualization of WFC was mainly unidirectional, with the direction of influence from the work domain to the family, i.e. WIF. Employment demands stretched officers’ resources, making it impossible for them to integrate work and family responsibilities. The finding in Ghana contrasts with the prevailing bi-directional thesis, informed mainly by quantitative research from the West, which compels respondents to make a distinction between WFC and FWC (e.g. Frone et al., 1992; 1997; Lambert et al., 2006; Obidoa et al., 2011).

This situation is reminiscent of the police organizations that “commit members to the occupational organization, to the occupational community, and to its norms of subordination and service to a degree where these commitments take precedence over extra-occupational ones to family and community” (Bordua and Reiss, 1966: 68). The GPS is thus equivalent to Coser’s (1974: 4) “greedy institution”, which makes “total claims” on officers for their “exclusive and undivided loyalty” in a quest to “reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries”. In being a greedy institution, it mostly affects female officers. The study found that, owing mainly to heavy demands of the unpaid domestic duties imposed by the dominant traditional or patriarchal gender roles entrenched in Ghanaian society, female officers experience more intense stress associated with WFC. The minority status of female officers, experienced at both lower and higher ranks in the masculinized organizational



environment of the GPS, combined with unfavourable working policies (e.g. limited maternity leave, lack of parental or temporary leave and to request flexible working) and gender-specific societal expectations of marriage and large family size, overburden female officers and strain their ability to cope.

The study found that while WFC permeates cultural boundaries its nature differs. WFC as experienced by prison officers in Ghana was mainly attributable to the absence of family-friendly policies in the GPS, beyond the constitutionally-mandated maternity leave for female officers. Although taking part in extended family activities was stressful, it was also the sole support for officers adapting to competing work and family demands. There was no social support from the employer, exposing officers' family lives to interference through time-based work demands including both lack of autonomy and strain-based conflicts arising from inadequate residential accommodation and deployment-based interruptions.

Gender was an important moderator of WFC. In the qualitative data, in line with previous research, female officers reported more intense stress than their male counterparts experienced from combining work and family duties (Triplett, et al., 1999; Griffin, 2006). Again, the traditional gender roles emphasised by Ghana's collectivist ethos partly accounts for this phenomenon.

This study is not without limitations. The mainly purposive and convenience sampling techniques employed for the interview and survey samples respectively do not permit the findings to be generalised. Despite the importance of qualitative methods in illuminating work-family conflict, a cause-effect relationship could not be established. Thus a longitudinal survey, as opposed to the cross-sectional method employed here, would help to identify the role demands within work and family domains that predict WFC.

The paper could have explored a number of interesting themes that have not been addressed here (e.g. other familial and workplace coping strategies and departmental or functional culture in relation to WFC), but those were not the primary focus of study, as the data were collected as part of a larger project on prison officer stress and well-being in Ghana (see Akoensi, 2014). However, the study lays a foundation for more in-depth research on WFC and how it could be alleviated. It might be worth investigating how the experience of WFC in the GPS is embedded in the history of prison work, prison practices and politics by comparison with the Ghana Police Service, which appears to share similar organisational structures, work policies, employment practices and work- and family- role demands. The current data did not permit an investigation of WFC from a more gendered perspective, which is insufficiently studied and lacking empirical scrutiny in the developing world. Future enquiries might benefit from examining this gendered experience of WFC in greater depth.

Despite these limitations, this paper shows that a predominantly collectivist culture held together via social activities such as birth, marriage and death, as well as the traditional conceptualization of the role of work as sacrifice for the family, makes WFC a widespread occurrence in the GPS. The paper has made an empirical and theoretical contribution to the literature on WFC among prison officers by showing that “work and family issues are intricately related to cultural beliefs, values and norms” (Yang et al., 2000: 113). It has also revealed a spatial dimension of WFC involving accommodation-based and deployment-based conflicts, which lack emphasis in previous studies. The novel finding of some positive spill-over from work to the family has also broadened understanding of the work and family nexus to include work–family facilitation among Ghanaian prison officers. The correctional

literature on WFC has yet to embrace this concept, which merits further exploration and development in various prison and national contexts.

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**Table 1: Table indicating ranks of prison officers interviewed and the corresponding number of participants (N=78)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Subordinate officer corps	Second Class Officer	5
	Lance Corporal	9
	Corporal	2
	Sergeant	2
	Assistant Chief Officer	5
	Chief Officer	10
	Senior Chief Officer	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>
Superior officer corps	Assistant Superintendent of Prisons	6
	Deputy Superintendent of Prisons	7
	Superintendent Chief Superintendent of Prisons	7
		9
	Assistant Director of Prisons	5
	Deputy Director of Prisons	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>

**Table 2.0 Percentage of officers agreeing or disagreeing with statements about work–family conflict (N=1,062)**

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Uncertain %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean SD
1. The demands from my work as a prison officer interfere with my home and family life	7.3 (77)	23.7 (252)	7.1 (75)	37.9 (402)	24.1 (256)	3.48 1.28
2. The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil my family responsibilities.	10.8 (115)	26.6 (283)	6.3 (67)	34.9 (371)	21.3 (226)	3.29 1.35
3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job as a prison officer puts on me.	7.3 (77)	27.9 (296)	6.7 (71)	37.4 (397)	20.8 (221)	3.37 1.28
4. My job as a prison officer produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil my family duties.	7.9 (84)	29.7 (315)	8.8 (93)	36.3 (386)	17.3 (184)	3.26 1.27
5. Due to my work related duties, I often have to make changes to my plans for family activities.	3.8 (40)	11.8 (125)	5.6 (59)	53.9 (572)	25.0 (266)	3.85 1.05
6. I often miss important family or social activities (e.g. spending time with the family, out-doorings, funerals, etc.) because of my job	2.2 (23)	9.0 (96)	3.9 (41)	45.8 (486)	39.2 (416)	4.41 0.99

<sup>i</sup> ‘Prison officers’ and ‘correctional officers’ are used interchangeably in this article.

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<sup>ii</sup> The traditional Ghanaian ceremony usually held eight days after a child's birth. This is to formally recognize the baby as a person and to welcome him/her into the family.

<sup>iii</sup> Chiefs are very highly regarded in Ghana owing to their spiritual, religious, political, moral and judicial authority over their people.

<sup>iv</sup> Ghana's TFR , despite declining from 6.4 children per woman in 1988, to 4.4 in 2003, is still relatively high at 4.0 in 2008 and corresponds to the average household size in Ghana at 4.4 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2009; 2012).

<sup>v</sup> PROWA is a compulsory association for all prison officers' wives. The members offer assistance to one another and organise relevant training and educational programmes.

<sup>vi</sup> A newspaper published an article about an example of such social tensions in officers' barracks in Accra on 7 August 2007.

<http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/200707/6400.php>