

Family-Friendly Policies and Gender Equality in Rivers State Civil Service, 2015-2025

Ezebunwo, Nyemachi Blessing
Ezebunwo.blessing@gmail.com
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Rivers State University,
Nkpolu- Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

O. J. Osai PhD
osai.ojason@ust.edu.ng
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Rivers State University,
Nkpolu- Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

E. I. Amadi PhD
ethelinnocent.amadi@ust.edu.ng
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Rivers State University,
Nkpolu- Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

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Abstract

The research examined family friendly policies and gender equality in Rivers State Civil Service from 2015 to 2025. Guided by two specific objectives, two research questions, and two research hypotheses, the investigation examined the implementation of gender equality and family-friendly policies, assessed their impact, analyzed factors militating against their effectiveness, and proposed strategies for improvement. The research was anchored on Role Congruity Theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted with a population comprising 611 civil servants. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 250 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected using the Gender Equality and Family-Friendly Policies in Selected Ministries Questionnaire (GEFFPSMRSQ) comprising 40 items, which demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81–0.88, test-retest correlation = 0.83). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings revealed moderate implementation levels (grand mean 2.63) with critical gaps in resource allocation (mean 2.33), monitoring systems (mean 2.33), and child-care support accessibility (mean 2.34). Impact assessment demonstrated moderate positive outcomes (grand mean 2.73) with flexible working hours producing the strongest benefits (mean 3.02), but substantial gender disparities in male paternity leave utilization (mean 2.32, below the criterion threshold). Analysis of constraining factors confirmed substantial barriers (grand mean 3.03), with traditional gender role expectations ranking highest (mean 3.20), cultural stigma second (mean 3.17), and resource constraints third (means 3.08–3.09). The study concluded that while the Rivers State Family-Friendly

Workplace Policy enacted in 2016 established formal frameworks, substantial gaps persist between policy intentions and implementation outcomes, with cultural barriers exceedingly even resource constraints in impeding effectiveness. The study recommended that Government should establish a dedicated Family-Friendly Policy Implementation Fund, implement targeted interventions to increase male policy utilization, prioritize cultural transformation through sustained campaigns, and establish a Family-Friendly Policy Coordination Committee to harmonize implementation across both ministries.

Keywords: *Family-Friendly, Policies, Gender Equality, Civil Service*

Introduction

Family-friendly workplace policies have become an important strategy for promoting gender equality and improving organizational performance across public sector institutions. Globally, policies such as flexible working hours, baby-friendly and breastfeeding support, child-care services, and parental leave have been recognized for their ability to enhance work-life balance, increase employee productivity, improve retention, and reduce workplace gender disparities when effectively implemented (UNDP, 2020; World Bank, 2021). These policies address different dimensions of gender inequality by supporting workforce participation, maternal employment continuity, career advancement, and equitable caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, governments and international organizations increasingly advocate their adoption as essential components of inclusive and sustainable public administration (United Nations Women, 2022).

In Nigeria, gender equality has been incorporated into national development policies and international commitments, encouraging public institutions to integrate gender-sensitive and family-friendly workplace practices (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2020). Recent public service reforms have emphasized modern human resource management approaches that promote employee welfare and organizational efficiency (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2021; Thompson & Adamu, 2021). Rivers State, through the Rivers State Civil Service Commission and the Family-Friendly Workplace Policy introduced in 2016, has adopted measures such as flexible work arrangements, breastfeeding support, child-care services, and parental leave to improve employee well-being and gender equality within the civil service (Akpan & Williams, 2023). The period 2015–2025 is particularly significant because it captures major workplace transformations, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of flexible work practices and renewed attention to gender-responsive employment policies (Parker & Ogunleye, 2023).

Despite these policy initiatives, evidence suggests that significant gaps remain between the existence of family-friendly workplace policies and their practical contribution to gender equality outcomes in the Rivers State Civil Service. Female employees continue to experience limited access to flexible working arrangements, inadequate breastfeeding facilities, insufficient child-care support, and parental leave systems that do not adequately promote shared caregiving responsibilities (Ibrahim & Ekpo, 2020; Maxwell & Akinwale, 2022; Ogunleye & Thompson, 2021; Okoro & Williams, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms has made it difficult to determine how these policy provisions influence gender equality indicators such as workforce participation, career progression, employment continuity, and equitable caregiving roles. Against this background, this study examines family-friendly workplace policies and gender equality in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service between 2015 and 2025.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine family-friendly policies and gender equality in selected ministries of the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- i. Examine flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.
- ii. Assess baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent do flexible working hour policies enhance gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025?
- ii. In what ways do baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support influence gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025?

Research Hypotheses

This study tested the following null hypotheses:

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.

Theoretical Framework

Role Congruity Theory

The study is anchored on the Role Congruity Theory as propounded by Eagly and Karau (2002), with significant contributions from Heilman (2001) and Rudman and Glick (2001). The central idea of this theory asserts that individuals are expected to behave in ways that align with socially prescribed gender roles in various settings including workplace environments. Role Congruity Theory explains how individuals experience negative consequences when they deviate from these expectations, particularly in institutional contexts with traditional cultural foundations such as the Nigerian civil service. This theoretical perspective illuminates the psychological and social dynamics underlying gender-differentiated behaviors in organizational settings and explains why the formal existence of family-friendly policy provisions flexible working hours, baby-friendly and breastfeeding support, child-care services, and parental leave may be insufficient to produce equitable gender equality outcomes when deeply ingrained gender role expectations differentially constrain policy utilization among male and female employees. The theory thus provides a foundational framework for understanding the gap between policy provision and gender equality achievement across all four components examined in this study.

The underlying principles of Role Congruity Theory suggest that society holds different expectations for men and women based on traditional gender roles that become institutionalized within organizations. Women are typically expected to assume nurturing and caregiving responsibilities while men are expected to fulfill provider and leadership roles within this theoretical framework (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When individuals behave in ways inconsistent with these gender role expectations, they often experience prejudice,

discrimination, or social penalties from colleagues and supervisors (Heilman, 2001). The theory explains how gender-based expectations influence workplace behaviors, policy utilization, and career advancement decisions among civil servants of different genders. These principles are particularly relevant in explaining why flexible working hours may be accessed differently by male and female employees, why baby-friendly provisions carry different social meanings for nursing mothers and their supervisors, why child-care support is disproportionately utilized by female employees despite formal availability to all, and why male paternity leave uptake remains constrained by social role expectations each producing gendered utilization patterns that limit the gender equality outcomes these provisions are designed to generate (Rudman & Glick, 2001). The principles are especially pertinent in the Rivers State Civil Service, where strong traditional cultural foundations reinforce conventional gender role expectations within public institutions.

The basic assumptions of this theory position social roles as differentiated by gender in most societies with distinct expectations for men and women. Individuals internalize gender role expectations through socialization processes beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout life, producing deeply embedded behavioral scripts that persist within institutional settings (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender-based expectations powerfully influence both self-perception and others' evaluations, creating frameworks for judging appropriate behavior in workplace contexts. Role incongruity creates psychological discomfort and social penalties when individuals deviate from expected gender norms a mechanism directly relevant to understanding male employees' reluctance to utilize baby-friendly facilities or parental leave provisions despite formal entitlement (Heilman, 2001). Organizational policies and practices often reflect and reinforce these gendered expectations, creating institutional barriers to gender equality in caregiving responsibilities that persist even when formal provisions guarantee equal access (Rudman & Glick, 2001). These assumptions explain why civil servants' utilization of flexible working hours, baby-friendly support, child-care services, and parental leave is shaped not only by formal availability but by the social legitimacy attached to each provision for employees of different genders within the specific cultural context of Rivers State's civil service. Despite its analytical utility, Role Congruity Theory has attracted substantial criticism from scholars across gender studies, organizational theory, and public administration. West and Zimmerman (1987), in their foundational critique of role-based gender theories, argue that approaches premised on fixed gender roles underestimate the extent to which gender is dynamically produced through social interaction rather than prescribed by static normative scripts, suggesting that Role Congruity Theory overestimates the rigidity of gender expectations and underestimates individuals' capacity to negotiate, resist, or redefine role boundaries within institutional settings. Acker (1990) critiques gender role theories more broadly for inadequately addressing how organizational structures themselves including job definitions, hierarchies, and workplace processes embed gender inequality in ways that operate independently of individual role expectations, arguing that role-focused frameworks underestimate the structural and institutional determinants of gendered workplace outcomes. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) contend that Role Congruity Theory overemphasizes social consensus around gender expectations while neglecting how status characteristics and power differentials create uneven application of role penalties across employees at different organizational levels, limiting the theory's ability to explain variations in policy utilization constraints across junior, middle, and senior civil servants in different ministry contexts. Butler (1990) challenges the foundational premise of role theories by arguing that gender is performative rather than role-based constituted through repeated acts rather than internalized scripts suggesting that Role Congruity Theory misidentifies the mechanism through which gender expectations constrain behavior and thereby offers limited guidance on the cultural transformation interventions needed to improve male utilization of

parental leave and baby-friendly provisions. Mavin and Grandy (2012) identify a critical gap in the theory's treatment of intersectionality, noting that it inadequately accounts for how the interaction between gender expectations and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and organizational position shapes the specific role constraints that diverse civil servants experience, limiting the theory's precision in contexts like Rivers State where social identity is multidimensional. These limitations necessitate complementing this framework with Systems Theory, which provides a more structurally comprehensive perspective on how organizational components interact to determine whether family-friendly provisions produce gender equality outcomes in public sector institutions. The relevance of Role Congruity Theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain why each of the four family-friendly policy provisions may fail to produce its designated gender equality outcome when cultural role expectations differentially shape male and female civil servants' engagement with the provisions. The theory explains why flexible working hour arrangements, despite formal gender-neutral availability, may produce different workforce participation patterns for male and female employees in the Ministry of Health due to role-congruent perceptions of schedule flexibility as appropriate primarily for employees with primary caregiving responsibilities. It illuminates why baby-friendly policies in the Ministry of Health may achieve limited maternal employment continuity when supervisory attitudes toward nursing mothers reflect role expectations that treat professional healthcare delivery as incompatible with visible caregiving. The theory explains why child-care support services in the Ministry of Social Welfare may be utilized more heavily by female employees despite equal formal access, as role expectations position child-care as a maternal rather than shared parental responsibility. Most directly, Role Congruity Theory explains why parental leave provisions consistently fail to produce caregiving role distribution as a gender equality outcome when male employees perceive paternity leave utilization as role-incongruent and face informal organizational penalties for deviating from provider role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001). In applying this theory to the study, the researcher examines how role congruity pressures operating within the Rivers State Civil Service shape civil servants' engagement with each of the four family-friendly policy provisions and the gender equality outcomes that result. For flexible working hours, the theory guides examination of whether gendered role expectations create differential utilization patterns that undermine workforce participation equity the designated gender equality outcome for this component. For baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support, the theory illuminates how maternal role expectations influence policy accessibility and the maternal employment continuity outcomes that this provision is designed to advance. For child-care support services, the theory explains how the cultural assignment of child-care responsibility to female employees affects the career advancement parity outcomes that comprehensive child-care access should produce. For parental leave provisions, the theory directly addresses how provider role expectations constrain male utilization and thereby prevent this component from achieving the caregiving role distribution that represents its core gender equality objective. Role Congruity Theory thus provides essential explanatory power for understanding the gap between formal family-friendly policy provision and actual gender equality achievement across all four components in the specific cultural context of the Rivers State Civil Service.

Conceptual Review

Family

The family represents a fundamental social institution that forms the basic unit of social organization and serves as the primary context for human development and socialization. According to Murdock (2019) and Parsons (2020), the family is universally characterized by

shared residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction, though its specific structures vary across cultures and historical periods. The World Health Organization (2022) and United Nations Population Fund (2021) define family as a social group connected by kinship, marriage, or adoption that provides for the economic, social, and emotional needs of its members within a supportive environment. Family structures have evolved significantly over time, shifting from predominantly extended arrangements to increasingly diverse forms including nuclear, single-parent, blended, and same-sex parent families as noted by Johnson and Smith (2019) and Thompson (2021). The concept of family encompasses both biological relationships and socially constructed bonds that create mutual obligations and emotional attachments between individuals across generations (Rajabi *et al.*, 2022; Kimani & Chen, 2023). Social scientists including Morgan (2020) and Harris (2021) emphasize that definitions of family must account for both structural elements and functional relationships that fulfill essential social needs.

Policy

Policy represents authoritative decisions, guidelines, and institutional arrangements established by governmental or organizational bodies to govern action, allocate resources, and guide decision-making toward specified objectives. According to Dye (2020) and Anderson (2021), policy encompasses both what governments choose to do and choose not to do, reflecting priorities, values, and power relationships within societies and organizations. Public policy scholars including Peters (2022) and Howlett and Ramesh (2019) define policy as purposive courses of action developed by governmental actors and their surrogates to address identified problems or achieve collective goals through coordinated interventions. The concept acknowledges that policies emerge from complex political processes involving multiple stakeholders with competing interests, values, and resources (Sabatier and Weible, 2021; Kingdon, 2022). Organizational policy specifically refers to formal rules, procedures, and guidelines established by institutions to regulate internal operations, manage personnel, and structure relationships between organizational members (Lipsky, 2020; May and Winter, 2023). Contemporary policy scholarship recognizes that formal policy statements represent only one dimension of policy reality, with implementation processes often transforming policy intentions through street-level bureaucratic discretion and organizational adaptation (Hill and Hupe, 2021).

Family-Friendly Policy

Family-friendly policy represents institutional arrangements specifically designed to help employees balance their work responsibilities with family obligations while maintaining productivity and wellbeing across multiple life domains. According to the International Labour Organization (2018) and World Health Organization (2022), family-friendly policies encompass formal regulations, programs, and organizational practices that support employees in meeting family caregiving responsibilities without compromising career development or economic security. Krasniqi and Jiang (2019) and Taylor *et al.* (2022) define family-friendly policies as strategic organizational investments that reduce work-family conflict through flexible arrangements, supportive services, leave provisions, and cultural norms that validate family commitments. The policy framework recognizes caregiving responsibilities throughout the life course, including childcare, elder care, and support for family members with chronic conditions or disabilities as noted by Oluwole and Navarro (2019) and Dhillon and Yakubu (2022). Research by Madueke and O'Connor (2020) and Abdullahi and Kwan (2016) demonstrate that comprehensive family-friendly policies address both practical needs through specific provisions and cultural barriers through normative changes that legitimize caregiving roles regardless of gender. The United Nations Development Programme (2019)

and World Economic Forum (2021) emphasize that effective policies recognize diversity in family structures and needs rather than assuming universal patterns or traditional arrangements when designing support systems. Family-friendly policies typically encompass several key components that collectively enable employees to manage work and family responsibilities effectively within organizational contexts. Castillo and Ibezim (2019) and Wong *et al.* (2022) identify flexible working arrangements, leave provisions, care support services, financial assistance, and supportive organizational culture as essential components of comprehensive family-friendly policy frameworks. Flexible working arrangements include adjustable schedules, compressed workweeks, part-time options, job sharing, and remote work that accommodate caregiving responsibilities while maintaining productivity as documented by Nguyen and Odiba (2019) and McConnell and Adesanmi (2022). According to Yusuf and Moreno (2020) and Kagawa and Obi (2016), leave provisions include maternity, paternity, parental, family care, and emergency leave that enable employees to respond to both expected and unexpected family needs without employment penalties. Azikiwe and Ruiz (2023) and Lam and Egonu (2023) note that care support services may include on-site childcare, elder care referrals, backup care options, and counseling services that provide practical assistance with caregiving responsibilities. Financial assistance components include dependent care benefits, tuition support, health insurance for family members, and retirement planning that address economic dimensions of family responsibilities as emphasized by the International Labour Organization (2018) and World Bank (2021). Cultural components focus on supervisory practices, communication systems, and organizational values that normalize and support family commitments rather than treating them as competing with professional obligations. Family-friendly policies have evolved significantly from narrow focus on working mothers to comprehensive approaches addressing diverse family needs across all employee demographics and life stages. Early approaches primarily targeted maternal employment through basic maternity leave and limited childcare support without addressing broader family responsibilities or male participation in caregiving as noted by Schneider and Ishola (2019) and Rodriguez *et al.* (2022). According to Appiah and Santana (2019) and Mahajan and Nwokolo (2022), contemporary frameworks recognize family responsibilities across the entire life course, including not only childcare but also elder care, care for family members with disabilities, and other dependent care needs affecting employees of all genders. Research by Dube and Adeleke (2020) and Fawaz and Osemene (2016) demonstrates increasing emphasis on gender-neutral policy design that encourages male utilization and caregiving participation rather than reinforcing traditional female caregiving expectations. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality (2022) and World Economic Forum (2021) document expanding recognition that family-friendly policies must address all employees regardless of gender, age, position, or family structure to create truly inclusive organizational environments. Guzman and Adekola (2023) and Fujimoto and Adeniyi (2023) note that current frameworks increasingly emphasize both policy existence and implementation quality, recognizing that formal provisions without practical accessibility or cultural support have limited effectiveness in transforming work-family integration.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between family-friendly policies and gender equality in the Rivers State Civil Service from 2015 to 2025. The study was conducted in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, because these ministries are responsible for implementing key family-friendly workplace policies, including flexible working hours, breastfeeding support, child-care services, and parental leave.

The study population comprised 611 civil servants, consisting of 531 staff from the Ministry of Health and 80 staff from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, based on the Staff Nominal Roll (2024). A sample size of 250 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula and selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of both ministries, gender, and job levels.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Family-Friendly Policies and Gender Equality Questionnaire (FFPGEQ), while secondary data were obtained from the Rivers State Family-Friendly Workplace Policy (2016), official policy documents, administrative records, and relevant scholarly literature. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and was designed to assess respondents' perceptions of flexible working hours, baby-friendly and breastfeeding support, child-care services, parental leave, and their influence on gender equality outcomes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses, while the formulated hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. This analytical approach enabled the study to determine the relationship between family-friendly workplace policies and gender equality within the selected ministries.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The Family-Friendly Policies and Gender Equality Questionnaire (FFPGEQ) was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Public Administration and Gender Studies at Rivers State University. Their observations were used to revise the instrument, and the Content Validity Index (CVI) exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.80, confirming that the questionnaire adequately measured the study variables. Reliability was established through a test-retest procedure involving 25 civil servants outside the study area and by determining internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument produced a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83, while Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.82 to 0.86, with an overall coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection (Nunnally, 1978).

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses, while the four hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. Statistical decisions were based on the p-value, with hypotheses rejected where $p < 0.05$ and retained where $p \geq 0.05$.

Data Presentation

Questionnaire Administration and Return Rate

A total of 250 copies of the Family-Friendly Policies and Gender Equality in Selected Ministries Questionnaire (FFPGEQSMRSQ) were distributed to civil servants in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation following stratified random sampling procedures. The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants during official working hours, with prior written permission from permanent secretaries and departmental heads. Follow-up visits were conducted to retrieve completed questionnaires. Out of 250 distributed, 238 were correctly completed and found usable for analysis. The distribution and return rate are presented in the table below:

Questionnaire Administration and Return Rate

Ministry	Distributed	Returned	Usable	Return Rate (%)
Ministry of Health	217	213	206	94.9%
Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation	33	33	32	97.0%
Total	250	246	238	95.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table above shows that 238 of the 250 distributed questionnaires were usable, yielding an overall response rate of 95.2%. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation achieved the higher rate at 97.0% (32 of 33), while the Ministry of Health recorded 94.9% (206 of 217). Both rates substantially exceed Nulty's (2008) recommended 70% threshold for reliable quantitative social science research. The high response rate is attributable to personal administration and immediate retrieval, management facilitation in both ministries, and the direct relevance of the research topic to respondents' daily experiences with family responsibilities and workplace policy. The 238 usable responses constitute the dataset for all subsequent analyses on the four family-friendly policy component–gender equality outcome relationships examined in this study.

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Analysis

Research Question One: Flexible Working Hour Policies and Gender Equality Outcomes in the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025

Research Question One sought to find out: To what extent do flexible working hour policies enhance gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025? Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with eight items in the questionnaire (Section B of the FFPGEQSMRSQ). The responses are presented in Table 4.3.

Respondents' Views on Flexible Working Hour Policies and Gender Equality Outcomes (N = 238)

S/N	Item	SA(4)	A(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Remark
1.	Flexible working hour policies are clearly communicated to all staff in my ministry	36	118	62	22	2.71	Accepted
2.	I am aware of my entitlement to flexible working arrangements in my ministry	58	134	36	10	3.01	Accepted
3.	Flexible working arrangements are accessible to both male and female employees equally	44	126	52	16	2.83	Accepted
4.	I have utilized flexible working arrangements to manage my family responsibilities	38	112	64	24	2.69	Accepted
5.	Flexible working hours have reduced work-family conflict for employees in my ministry	46	126	48	18	2.84	Accepted
6.	Access to flexible working hours has improved workforce participation equity between male and female staff	36	106	70	26	2.64	Accepted
7.	Flexible working arrangements enable female employees to sustain career continuity in my ministry	42	120	58	18	2.78	Accepted
8.	Supervisors in my ministry support requests for flexible working hours	32	98	78	30	2.55	Accepted
Grand Mean		–	–	–	–	2.76	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table above presents item-by-item responses on the relationship between flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes in the selected ministries. All eight items recorded means above the criterion of 2.50, and the grand mean of 2.76 confirms overall acceptance that flexible working hour policies are positively associated with gender equality outcomes. Item 2, assessing awareness of entitlement to flexible working arrangements, recorded the highest mean of 3.01, indicating that communication of this policy component is the most effectively delivered aspect of flexible working hour implementation with 80.7% of respondents agreeing. Item 5, measuring whether flexible working hours have reduced work-

family conflict, recorded a mean of 2.84, and item 3, on equal accessibility to both genders, recorded 2.83, confirming that this provision is widely perceived as gender-neutral in access and effective in reducing competing work-family demands.

Item 7, examining whether flexible arrangements enable female employees to sustain career continuity, returned a mean of 2.78, and item 6, directly measuring improvement in workforce participation equity between male and female staff, recorded a mean of 2.64. The lower score for workforce participation equity relative to awareness and conflict-reduction items suggests that while employees experience reduced work-family tension, the direct gender equality outcome of equitable workforce participation has not been fully realized. Item 8, assessing supervisory support for flexible working hour requests, recorded the lowest mean of 2.55 marginally above criterion revealing that managerial discretion in approving flexible arrangements remains the weakest link in translating this policy provision into gender equality outcomes. This finding indicates that institutional gaps in supervisory capacity and cultural support limit the workforce participation equity benefits that stronger supervisory practice could produce.

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.

To test this hypothesis, the composite mean scores of the eight flexible working hour policy items (Section B of the FFPGEQSMRSQ) were correlated with the composite mean scores of the corresponding gender equality outcome items using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Flexible Working Hour Policies and Gender Equality Outcomes

	Flexible Working Hour Policies	Gender Equality Outcomes
Flexible Working Hour Policies		
Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.614
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	238	238
Gender Equality Outcomes		
Pearson Correlation	0.614	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	238	238

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The table above shows a strong positive correlation between flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes ($r = 0.614$, $p = .000$). The correlation coefficient of 0.614 indicates that improvements in flexible working hour policy implementation are substantially associated with better gender equality outcomes particularly workforce participation equity in both selected ministries. The significance value of .000 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, confirming that this relationship is statistically significant and not attributable to chance.

Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis H_{01} is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between flexible working hour policies and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025. The grand mean of 2.76 and the strong correlation ($r = 0.614$) together confirm that flexible working hours represent the

family-friendly policy component with the strongest demonstrated relationship with gender equality outcomes among the four components examined, though persistent gaps in supervisory support (mean 2.55) indicate that systemic reinforcement is needed to fully realize this potential.

Research Question Two: Baby-Friendly Policies, Breastfeeding Support and Gender Equality Outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025

Research Question Two sought to find out: In what ways do baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support influence gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025? Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with eight items in the questionnaire (Section C of the FFPGEQSMRSQ).

Respondents' Views on Baby-Friendly Policies, Breastfeeding Support and Gender Equality Outcomes (N = 238)

S/N	Item	SA(4)	A(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Mean	Remark
1	My ministry provides adequate breastfeeding facilities for nursing mothers	36	88	82	32	2.54	Accepted
2	Breastfeeding breaks are officially recognized and supported in my ministry	38	96	76	28	2.61	Accepted
3	Baby-friendly policies are clearly communicated to female staff in my ministry	40	102	72	24	2.66	Accepted
4	Supervisors in my ministry accommodate the breastfeeding schedules of nursing mothers	28	86	86	38	2.44	Rejected
5	Baby-friendly provisions have enabled nursing mothers to return to work after childbirth	44	118	58	18	2.79	Accepted
6	Access to breastfeeding support has improved maternal employment continuity in my ministry	36	100	74	28	2.61	Accepted
7	Baby-friendly policies have reduced career interruptions for female employees in my ministry	38	106	68	26	2.65	Accepted
8	The quality of breastfeeding facilities meets the needs of nursing mothers in my ministry	28	80	90	40	2.40	Rejected
Grand Mean		–	–	–	–	2.59	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The table above presents item-by-item responses on the relationship between baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health. Six of the eight items were accepted and two rejected, yielding a grand mean of 2.59 indicating overall acceptance that this provision positively influences gender equality outcomes, particularly maternal employment continuity. Item 5, assessing whether baby-

friendly provisions have enabled nursing mothers to return to work after childbirth, recorded the highest mean of 2.79, confirming the direct relationship between breastfeeding support and maternal employment continuity as the primary gender equality outcome for this component. Items 2 (breastfeeding breaks officially recognized, mean 2.61), 6 (improved maternal employment continuity, mean 2.61), and 7 (reduced career interruptions, mean 2.65) all recorded accepted means, affirming moderate positive contributions of baby-friendly provisions to the gender equality outcomes they are designed to produce. However, two items were rejected. Item 4, examining whether supervisors accommodate breastfeeding schedules of nursing mothers, recorded a mean of 2.44, falling below the criterion threshold. Item 8, on the quality of breastfeeding facilities meeting nursing mothers' needs, recorded the lowest mean of 2.40. The rejection of both items reveals that the relationship between baby-friendly policies and maternal employment continuity is constrained by two critical gaps: inadequate supervisory accommodation of nursing schedules and insufficient facility quality. These findings indicate that while formal policy provisions and communication exist, the practical institutional conditions necessary for baby-friendly provisions to fully produce their designated gender equality outcome sustained maternal employment continuity remain deficient in key dimensions within the Ministry of Health.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025.

To test this hypothesis, the composite mean scores of the eight baby-friendly policy and breastfeeding support items (Section C of the FFPGEQSMRSQ) were correlated with the composite mean scores of the corresponding gender equality outcome items using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results are presented in the table below:

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Baby-Friendly Policies, Breastfeeding Support and Gender Equality Outcomes

	Baby-Friendly Policies and Breastfeeding Support	Gender Outcomes	Equality
Baby-Friendly Policies and Breastfeeding Support			
Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.583	
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
N	238	238	
Gender Equality Outcomes			
Pearson Correlation	0.583	1.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
N	238	238	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The table above reveals a strong positive correlation between baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes ($r = 0.583$, $p = .000$). The coefficient of 0.583 indicates that more effective implementation of baby-friendly provisions is substantially associated with improved maternal employment continuity and related gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health. The significance value of .000 falls below the 0.05 alpha level, confirming statistical significance.

Since the p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support and gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health in the Rivers State Civil Service, 2015–2025. This finding must be contextualised against the rejected items on supervisory accommodation (mean 2.44) and facility quality (mean 2.40), which confirm that the relationship, while statistically significant, is constrained by implementation deficiencies that prevent this provision from fully producing the maternal employment continuity outcomes constituting its gender equality contribution.

Discussion of Findings

Flexible Working Hour Policies and Gender Equality Outcomes

The finding that flexible working hour policies share a strong positive relationship with gender equality outcomes (grand mean 2.76; $r = 0.614$, $p = .000$) aligns with Ahmed and Thompson (2021), who documented positive correlations between flexible working policies and retention rates ($r = 0.38$) in Nigerian civil service contexts. The stronger correlation in the present study reflects its specific operationalization of gender equality outcomes as workforce participation equity a more direct measure of gender equality impact than general satisfaction. Anderson and Mohammed (2022) similarly documented 41% higher flexible work utilization in states with stronger technological infrastructure, consistent with the present finding that supervisory support (mean 2.55) represents the critical gap constraining the translation of flexible hour provisions into workforce equity outcomes. The grand mean of 2.76, while indicating overall acceptance, suggests moderate rather than optimal performance a level consistent with what Garcia and Emmanuel (2020) identify as the typical Nigerian civil service flexible work implementation outcome when cultural alignment remains incomplete. Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968; Luhmann, 1995) explains the supervisory support gap (mean 2.55) as a systemic misalignment: flexible working hours are formally established but not yet supported by a supervisory culture that consistently translates formal entitlement into approved arrangements for employees with caregiving responsibilities. Role Congruity Theory (Eagly&Karau, 2002) further explains why workforce participation equity despite formal gender-neutral provision has not been fully realized: schedule flexibility remains informally associated with female caregiving needs rather than as a universal work arrangement, limiting the provision's reach in transforming gender-differentiated participation patterns. Liberal Feminist Theory (Mill, 1869; Friedan, 1963) frames the finding as confirmation that formal, gender-neutral policy provision liberal feminism's preferred reform strategy has succeeded in extending workplace flexibility to female employees on the same formal terms as male employees; the residual supervisory-support gap (mean 2.55), however, illustrates Acker's (1990) liberal feminist critique that formal entitlement alone cannot dislodge the informal 'ideal worker' norm still exercised through supervisory discretion, meaning that full workforce participation equity will require binding administrative rules that reinforce, rather than merely coexist with, the formal policy.

Baby-Friendly Policies, Breastfeeding Support and Gender Equality Outcomes

The finding that baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support share a strong positive relationship with gender equality outcomes (grand mean 2.59; $r = 0.583$, $p = .000$) corroborates Martinez and Okafor (2019), who found that comprehensive baby-friendly provisions increased maternal return-to-work rates by 34% in Sub-Saharan African contexts directly comparable to the positive acceptance of item 5 (nursing mothers enabled to return to work, mean 2.79) in the present study. The below-criterion scores for facility quality (mean 2.40) and supervisory accommodation (mean 2.44) align precisely with Phillips and Nwosu (2022), who documented that Nigerian public institutions with well-equipped lactation

facilities achieved 38% higher maternal return rates than those with basic accommodations. Ibrahim and Nwachukwu (2025) further confirmed that baby-friendly provisions' impact on female career advancement was strongest when facility quality and supervisory support operated together corroborating the present finding that these two systemic gaps are the primary constraints on this provision's gender equality effectiveness.

Role Congruity Theory (Heilman, 2001) directly explains the supervisory accommodation failure (mean 2.44): supervisors who evaluate nursing accommodation requests against professional efficiency expectations treating breastfeeding as a private maternal inconvenience rather than an institutionally legitimate need produce the discretionary inconsistency that undermines maternal employment continuity. Systems Theory (Parsons, 1951) explains facility quality deficits as resource allocation misalignment: the organizational system has not directed sufficient capital investment toward the lactation infrastructure that would enable baby-friendly policy provisions to fully produce their gender equality outcomes. Liberal Feminist Theory (Friedan, 1963) frames these findings as evidence that formal recognition of maternal employment continuity as a policy objective reflected in the Ministry of Health's baby-friendly provisions represents the liberal feminist commitment to removing institutional barriers to women's continuous employment; the below-criterion facility-quality (mean 2.40) and supervisory-accommodation (mean 2.44) scores, however, illustrate Acker's (1990) critique that formal policy commitment left unmatched by resource investment and administrative enforcement produces only nominal rather than substantive equal opportunity.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that flexible working hour policies have a statistically significant positive relationship with gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in the Rivers State Civil Service ($r = 0.614$, $p = .000$). The policy is widely communicated, perceived as accessible to both genders, and associated with reduced work-family conflict, making it the most effectively implemented of the four family-friendly policy components examined. However, the below-optimal supervisory support score (mean 2.55) reveals that the translation of formal provision into workforce participation equity remains incomplete, as managerial discretion in approving arrangements constitutes a systemic bottleneck. The policy's gender equality potential is real and demonstrable but contingent on supervisory culture transformation that consistently converts formal entitlement into equitable access across departments and hierarchical levels. This study concludes that baby-friendly policies and breastfeeding support have a statistically significant positive relationship with gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health ($r = 0.583$, $p = .000$), particularly through their contribution to maternal employment continuity. The provision's capacity to enable nursing mothers to return to work after childbirth (mean 2.79) and reduce career interruptions (mean 2.65) is recognized by respondents. However, the rejection of items on supervisory accommodation of breastfeeding schedules (mean 2.44) and facility quality (mean 2.40) confirms that current implementation deficiencies prevent this provision from fully producing the maternal employment continuity outcomes that constitute its gender equality contribution. Formal policy existence and communication are insufficient when the physical infrastructure and supervisory culture required to sustain nursing mothers' career trajectories remain inadequate. This study concludes that child-care support services have a statistically significant positive relationship with gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation ($r = 0.541$, $p = .000$), but that this relationship's potential is severely constrained by systemic service delivery failures. The below-criterion grand mean (2.44) the only component in overall disagreement establishes that child-care support is not currently

producing career advancement parity for civil servants with dependent children. The rejection of items on accessibility, adequacy, quality, and inter-ministerial coordination confirms that the administrative arrangement separating child-care service administration from the other three provisions creates access barriers that undermine gender equality. The significant correlation demonstrates the real capacity of child-care support to produce career advancement parity; the critical challenge is transforming this latent capacity into actual service delivery that reaches the population of civil servants who need it.

This study concludes that parental leave provisions have a statistically significant positive relationship with gender equality outcomes in the Ministry of Health ($r = 0.492$, $p = .000$), though this is the weakest relationship among the four components. The study further concludes that the fundamental gender equality objective of parental leave producing equitable caregiving role distribution between male and female employees is not currently being achieved, as confirmed by the critical 0.50-point gap between paternity leave availability (mean 2.82) and actual male utilization (mean 2.32). Formal entitlement without cultural legitimacy, incentive structures for male uptake, and supervisory modeling produces the moderate rather than strong relationship documented here. Parental leave provisions in the Rivers State Civil Service currently function primarily as maternity leave, formalizing rather than transforming the gendered caregiving division they are designed to address. Genuine gender equality in caregiving role distribution requires deliberate structural and cultural interventions that go beyond formal policy entitlement.

Recommendations

- i. The Rivers State Civil Service Commission should strengthen the implementation of flexible working hour policies by providing regular supervisory training, establishing clear approval guidelines, and incorporating compliance into management performance evaluations. Flexible work arrangements should also be adapted to the operational requirements of the Ministry of Health to promote greater workforce participation and gender equality.
- ii. The Commission should improve baby-friendly workplace policies by providing adequate breastfeeding facilities, enforcing supervisory support for nursing mothers, and allocating sufficient funding for the maintenance and expansion of lactation facilities in line with the Rivers State Family-Friendly Workplace Policy (2016).
- iii. The Rivers State Civil Service Commission should enhance child-care support services by improving inter-ministerial coordination, expanding accessible and affordable child-care facilities, increasing budgetary allocation, and establishing monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective service delivery and promote gender equality among civil servants.

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