# Influence of Role Conflict on Social Work Practice of Selected Hospitals in Port Harcourt

Sylvaline Mbata

*M. Sc. Student, Department of Psychology, Rivers State University, Nigeria*

*Abstract:* **This study examined the influence of role conflict on social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt. Role conflict (role ambiguity) has been examined as the independent/predictor variable in this paper. Also, social work practice served as the key dependent variable or criterion variable under which the measures such as employee burnout and employee job performance have been appraised. The population of the study consisted of 350 administration and middle administrative social workers from the selected hospitals. The study sampled 350 respondents out of which 331 of them were found useful and valid for the study analysis. The study used a mixed methods approach, utilized structured questionnaire consisting of open-ended, closed- ended questions and multiple-choice questions with the Likert scale measurement. Thematic content analysis, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were used to analyse the data. The study used Pearson Products Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses with the aid of SPSS 25.0. The reliability of the research instrument was tested using the Cronbach alpha to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The study revealed that social work job roles and responsibilities are very clear. The study found that directives and instructions given within the department are vague. Also, the study found that no information is provided on how social workers are being appraised for promotion. The study revealed that a negative relationship between role conflict and employee burnout exists. The study revealed that role conflict directly influences employee job performance. It was revealed from the study that the role conflict reduces the level of employee job performance. The study revealed that hospital social workers are developers, educators, advocates, case managers, coordinators, counselors, and many more things but they are overall built to address needs and serve the marginalized. They are of a great resource to communities, hospitals and other organisations. These findings suggest that individuals may be able to reduce the negative individual impact of role conflict in their environment by adopting positive behavioural styles while avoiding negative ones. Understanding how a hospital social worker's number of years of experience in their field can have a moderating effect on how role conflict impacts on social work practice. It is important to consider harmonizing/synchronizing various roles when hiring an individual for a hospital social work practice**

*Keywords*: **Role Conflict, Employee Burnout, Employee Job Performance, Social Work Practice**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Role conflict reflects a contradictory attitude among workers and the demands of the organization and work that creates psychological pressure for employees. (Vesty et al., 2018; Urien et al. 2017, Sana & Aslam, 2018; Ryu, Yang & Choi, 2020; Xu, 2019). There is disagreement among members of the organization about the contents of the task being carried out by one or more of them (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). Role conflict leads to a psychological conflict where employees will not be able to fulfill every role expected at the same time (Schmidt et al., 2014). Yang et al. (2017). Role conflict occurs when someone with conflicting demands performs a different role.

Thus, neglecting role conflict in an organization can result in low job satisfaction, psychological stress, poor mental and physical well-being, poor job performance, high absenteeism, rates of change and intentions to quit, accidents and errors, and burnout. All of these, will consequently, impact on the overall functioning and profitability of the organization (Afifah et al., 2015). Through efficient coping mechanism with role conflict, it does not only improve employee's quality of life, but also decreases the cost of health care and productivity of the organization (EU-OSHA, 2012).

(Grobelna, 2015), because the work conditions for social workers are unbearable and characterised by stress (Huang, Van der Veen & Song, 2018). In Zimbabwe, social workers working under stringent circumstances despite being underpaid left the profession for industrialised countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand because the ratio of social workers to children who were dependent on their services was uneven and detrimental to their well-being (Moss, 2015; Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). In Hong Kong an alarming number of social workers reported working long hours (Mendoza, Jr. 2019). Because social workers should ensure that maltreated children are protected from abusive caregivers and should manage children' court proceedings (Xu (2019), it is not surprising that a disproportionate number of Nigerian social workers experience secondary traumatic stress.

From the eco-social approach, social workers are concerned about the structures of the society and how people relate to their social problems as social work practice is founded on the holistic model (Sana & Aslam, 2018). Social work refers to an educational discipline that is responsible for bringing social change and development, promoting social cohesion, involving community participation as well as empowering and giving freedom to the people (Moss, 2015). Because social workers generally provide care in health and home settings (Sana & Aslam, 2018), a majority of them experience work-related stress, thereby leading to poor mental health as a result of burnout.

According to Park and Nam (2020), a good employer should design and manage work in a way that avoids common risk factors for stress and prevents problems as much as possible. This will allow employees to be more productive at all times as they will feel appreciated and cared for. There are basically three ways of managing stress. Grobelna (2015) insinuates that the first way is primary prevention where stress is reduced through ergonomics, work and environmental design, organizational and management development.

Also, a plethora of empirical evidences depict the negative impact of role conflict on social workers' performance and how this impacts on a wide range of organisational factors such as employee performance, job satisfaction, employee productivity, employee burnouts and other organisational outcomes (Urien et al. 2017; Mendoza, Jr. 2019).

Role conflict transcends merely impacting organisational outcome negatively but also poses a threat on the health of employees and has been linked to causing diseases such as cardiovascular heart disease, depression, alcoholism, and anxiety amongst others (Su, Liang & Wong, 2020).

It is well recognised that role conflict is more prevalent amongst social workers as compared to employees in other sectors (Park & Nam, 2020). Ultimately, such social workers may lose interest in showing compassion to the clients. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of role conflict on social workers of selected hospitals in Port Harcourt.

*Objectives of the Study*

The study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives;

1. To assess how role conflict affects employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt.
2. To ascertain the relationship between role conflict and employee job performance in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt

*Research questions*

The following research questions will be answered in this study:

i. What is the relationship between role conflict employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt?
ii. What is the relationship between role conflict and employee job performance in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section deals with the review of literature related to the study under the following subheadings: Theoretical framework, conceptual review, empirical studies and summary of literature review.

*Theoretical Framework*

*Organizational Role Theory*

Organizational stress can also result from employees' roles within an organization. Role theory represents a bridge between the organizational environment and the individual (Katz & Kahn, 1978) The concept of a role, according to Biddle and Thomas (1966) is the central idea in role theory. Individuals occupy societal positions; their role performance in these positions follows social norms, demands, and rules, by the role performances of others in their respective positions, and by the individual's capabilities and personality. Roles serve as the boundary between the individual and the organization, while also representing expectations for both. They serve as a means to link organizations with individuals (Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Organizational roles are the structural elements that define an individual's behavior when occupying a position (Getzels & Guba, 1957). A role describes a set of behavioral expectations relative to a position within a specific social construct or structure (Rizzo et al., 1970). Expectations define the behaviors required of a person filling a role, or by others who relate to the role (Rizzo et al., 1970). In the workplace, professional roles develop via job requirements, written communications from supervisors, or verbal discussions.

According to Kahn et al. (1964), role theory suggests that individuals in work organizations occupy offices. Office, or status, is a relational concept defining an individual's position relative to others in an organization or social system. The position's activities make up the role of the individual occupying the office (focal person). Since the organization is a system of interdependent actions, the person performing a given role, or focal person, interacts with a group of people within or outside his social system, known as his role-set. The roles of the focal person and his role-set are interdependent, meaning that the performance of the focal person is dependent on the performance of his role-set, and vice versa.

Members of the role-set have role expectations, the appropriate behaviors expected of the focal person in their role. The expectations of the role-set are communicated (sent) to the focal person. The focal person is the target of the role-sending process, intended to bring about alignment with the expectations of the role-set.

Along with the sent role, there is a received role, which includes the focal person's perception of the message. The pressure associated with the received role will influence the role behavior and role performance of the focal person.

Kahn and Kahn (1978) propose a model identifying factors affecting organizational roles. The model suggests that organizational factors (circle E) affect the individual's expectation regarding the role behavior of themselves and others. These expectations determine the nature and content of the sent role. The role-set conveys its expectations to the focal person in the form of norms, or pressures, to act in a certain way. The focal person receives these sent role pressures, interprets them, and reacts. If the focal person perceives the sent role pressures as clear, there may be few problems.

However, if the focal person perceives the pressures to be conflicting or ambiguous, they may act in a manner not expected by their role-set. Personal attributes (circle F) and interpersonal relationships (circle G) also have an impact on how the received role differs from sent roles (Kahn & Katz, 1978). Personal attributes refer to the person's motives, values, fears, and propensity to act in specific ways. These personal attributes affect the sent role by influencing the role sender's selection of the sent role and the focal person's perception of the sent role. Interpersonal relationships within the environment affect the communication of the sent role and its interpretation by the focal person.

Organizational role theory suggests that social organizations can place difficult, conflicting, or impossible demands on role incumbents (Kahn & Katz, 1978). These demands can be functional or dysfunctional and can result in role stress. Organizational theorists have conceptualized role conflict and role ambiguity as forms of role stress.

As indicated by Rizzo et al. (1970), inconsistency between professional and organizational standards can cause an individual to find irregularities in the behaviors expected of them. Jackson and Shuler (1985; 2014), suggest that commitment may partially determine the experienced levels of ambiguity and conflict. Those who have a desire to succeed within an organization are adept at determining others' expectations of them and thereby reducing role ambiguity. They are also less susceptible to person-role conflict because they are more likely to conform to the values of the organization in order to meet professional goals.

Organizational role theory shall be applied in this study because organizational role theory conceptualizes role conflict and role ambiguity as forms of role stress. In this study role conflict and role ambiguity are regarded as separate constructs because they impact on individuals and organizations differently. In applying the organizational role theory, role conflict is seen as a separate dimension. The study distinguishes among the various types of role conflict empirically and theoretically identified in the process of investigations as each type of role conflict might possess a unique relationship to the variables and outcomes.

*Conceptual Review*

This section reviews the key concepts used in the study under the following subheadings: role conflict, social work practice, employee burnout and employee job performance.
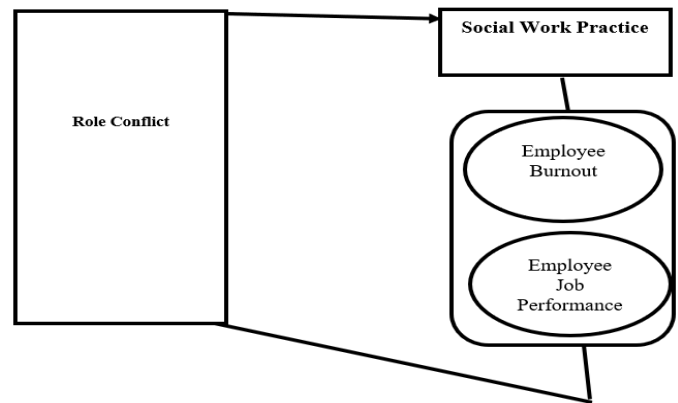


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Influence of Role Conflict on Social Work Practice of Selected Hospitals in Port Harcourt

Source: Ryu, G. W., Yang, Y. S., & Choi, M. (2020).

*Role Conflict*

Researchers investigating work environment variables consistently identify role conflict and role ambiguity as top stressors within organizations (Schmidt et al., 2014). Park and Nam (2020), offer an organizational stress construct to quantify role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict refers to incompatible role demands, experienced concurrently, such that the individual cannot reconcile inconsistencies among them. Role ambiguity describes the absence of well-defined and reliable directions regarding one's job duties and responsibilities. Katz and Kahn also note that organizational stress occurs at all levels of an organization's hierarchy, (Grobelna, 2015).

In a similar vein, Yaacob and Long (2015), suggest that humanitarian work is characterised by a high degree of uncertainty because of the dynamic situations and contexts present in aid work. Therefore, defining clear roles and job requirements is a challenge for humanitarian organisations. This can contribute to the confusion experienced by aid workers, which, in turn, may contribute to the development of stress. Also, Amilin (2017) submits that, among aid workers, high uncertainty and role ambiguity are associated with elevated levels of anticipatory anxiety and distress.

Occupational health literature reports evidence in support of the notion that role ambiguity, conflict, and overload are major causes of stress among workers (Schmidt et al., 2014; Ren et al., 2017). Park and Nam (2020), investigated how role ambiguity factors influences employee outcomes such as uncertainty about what is required to perform a role; role conflict, such as conflicting information about the same role; and role overload, such as too much work to complete. Role ambiguity was related to a reduction in psychological health, and lower commitment to the organisation (Yim et al., 2017). In addition, role ambiguity was found to be related to burnout indicators, such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, low personal accomplishment, and less favourable levels of job-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover (Morris, Steers & Koch, 2017).

Grobelna (2015), suggests that *role conflict* and *role ambiguity* are often used interchangeably to refer to unclear work responsibilities among employees who work in related departments and divisions of an organization. According to Al-Kahtani and Allam (2016), role conflict arises when work expectations do not align with the job description assigned to an employee, or when structured work processes and expectations are inconsistent and lead to unrealistic expectations (Mañas et al., 2018). Individuals performing more than one role within an organization often experience high levels of role conflict, making it difficult to produce work assignments effectively. Conversely, role ambiguity occurs when the expectations for employees are not clearly defined, compounded by a lack of the organizational processes necessary to achieve anticipated outcomes (Mañas et al., 2018).

Role conflict entails employees being involved in multiple roles such that demands and responsibilities of one job role affect the performance of the other (Afifah et al., 2015). The employee's attention and strengths will be divided in between two or more roles thereby leading to employee's abilities being competed for. It also occurs when there is an incompatibility in the various roles or tasks that has been assigned to an employee either by their managers, supervisors or even customers and whomever the focal person is rendering services to ((Amilin, 2017).

Role conflict can also be objective or subjective in nature (Yaacob & Long, 2015). Beaton (2017) further categorised role conflict into four major types; person-role conflict, intra-sender conflict, inter-role conflict and inter-sender conflict. The inter-sender role conflict and the intrasender role conflict have been categorised under the sent role conflict (Yim et al., 2017).

Akkoç, Okun and Türe (2020) indicated that role conflict and ambiguity is when an employee does not have adequate information that enables him/her to carry out his/her tasks more effectively. They further argued that role conflict and ambiguity relate to the amount of stress experienced by an individual due to unclear specifications regarding the performance expectations, duties, responsibility and constraints that define the individual's job. Bahari, Tan and Wider (2016) added that role ambiguity leads to dissatisfaction, lack of self-esteem, feelings of uselessness, depression, increased blood pressure, stress and intention to leave the organization.

The concept of role conflict relates to a collision between two or more roles or conflicting characteristics of an individual in the same role. Such misunderstandings may involve specific desires, needs, beliefs and attitudes. There can be two different types of role conflict: intra role conflict, associated with incompatible specifications in the same role. Inter role conflict, referring to conflicting interests within the same person from separate roles (Park & Nam, 2020). Ideally, Society is structured such that people and organizations have roles in all social structures, as well as social workers. A role is said to be a set of behaviors, expectations, and relationships based on the position that a person occupies. It is important for a person to learn to work as a member of a multidisciplinary team and to know the limits and requirements of the role. A professional requires not only to obtain qualifications and skills, but also to recognize his colleagues from other professions. Role theory emphasizes how people learn the roles attributed to them and understand the role attribute as well as the behaviors associated with it (Mendoza, Jr. 2019). Due to external forces and the different roles people held with different expectation, interest leads to conflicts with other professionals in the same working environment.

*Social Work Practice*

The social work profession is a practice-based and academic discipline that promotes social change, the empowerment of people and communities, and the acceptance and understanding of diverse populations (Ren et al., 2017). Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and the respect for diversity are central to social work practice (Malik, Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 2017). Social work practice is rooted in critical social theory, which challenges the belief that people's difficulties are isolated by one causal factor, and asserts that much of society's pain and suffering are caused by systemic and structural problems related to historical contexts (Mendoza, Jr. 2019).

Critical theory helps social workers to understand the broader macro-level structures that perpetuate oppression. Social workers have a professional responsibility to identify and respond to social inequities. Similar to other professions, social workers are informed by a value system that gives purpose and direction to their practice. Social workers strive to make social institutions more humane and responsive to human need, and assists clients to obtain needed resources (Grobelna, 2015). Social work scope of practice holds strong beliefs about the rights of people for self-determination and that every individual in has the right to make independent decisions and participate actively in their own helping process.

Theory emerges from ordering facts in a meaningful way (Choi, Mohammad & Kim, 2019). It evolves from finding relationships with facts, through the process of observation, deduction, induction, assumptions, and inspiration (Duli, 2016). This process of developing theory helps social workers understand social phenomena for individuals and communities.

Theory also helps social workers transfer knowledge and understanding from one human experience to another (Beaton, 2017). Individuals and communities present a broad array of challenges and difficulties; therefore, no single practice model is effective.

In order to integrate the many theoretical practice models and interventions, social work practice uses the ecological systems

model. It helps social workers understand how people interact with their environment to the extent of the broader socio-political orders. Ecological model proposes that individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other people or systems in their environment and that these various persons and systems reciprocally influence one another (Amilin, 2017). Therefore, adequate assessments of human problems and plans of interventions should consider the reciprocal impact of people and environmental systems. It directs social workers to understand how individuals interact and related to their environment (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017).

*Employee Burnout*

Burnout is widely recognized in many industries and can have numerous adverse workplace effects, including low morale, decreased work performance, weakening of personal and professional relationships, and physical and mental illness (Mendoza, Jr. 2019). According to Duli (2016) burnout within the helping professions is an issue of great concern globally. Burnout is said to be as a result of continued unattended stress (Malik, Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 2017).

Furthermore, Mere Morris, Steers and Koch (2017), points out that burnout in the social work profession occurs when the social service practitioner is psychologically disengaged from their duties as a result of work related stress. Burnout on its own has a tremendous impact on service delivery to the clients and the organization as a whole (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017).

Burnout is characterized by three main components, namely: work related, client related and personal or individual burnout (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017) argued that personal burnout is associated with the extent to which an individual experiences psychological and physical exhaustion. The on job and client related burnout on the other hand entail the extent to which an individual's work environment is perceived to be linked to the individual's psychological and physical fatigue.

During 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) formalized researchers' conclusions that burnout is an occupation phenomenon caused by persistent stress in the workplace (Ryu, Yang and Choi, 2020). The WHO's International Classification of Diseases defined burnout as a distinct syndrome, rather than a form of exhaustion (World Health Organization, 2019). Burnout describes an individual employee's negative and extreme response to work-related stress (Beaton, 2017). Park and Nam (2020) describe burnout as the physical and psychological reaction to overwhelming work-related stressors that may occur when an employee cannot effectively deal with stress. Stressors that lead to burnout are often frequent, intense, ongoing, and unmanageable. Unaddressed, burnout can result in serious psychological and physiological problems, such as depression and high blood pressure (Ren et al., 2017). Burnout can also negatively affect the output and productivity of individuals, teams, and entire organizations (Duli, 2016), impeding performance at all organizational levels (Mendoza, Jr. 2019).

Burnout is consistently related to negative outcomes at individual and 31organizational levels. These outcomes include anxiety, depression, disturbed mood (Beaton, 2017), reduced job performance (Choi, Mohammad & Kim, 2019), and increased absenteeism (Ren et al., 2017). Burnout can also have detrimental mental consequences. Beaton's (2017) systematic review reveals that the psychological effects of burnout include insomnia, depression, use of psychotropic or antidepressant medications, and hospitalization for mental disorders. Burnout correlates with several affective consequences, as well. For example, an association exists between burnout and reduced job satisfaction (Beaton, 2017), which can contribute to reduced organizational commitment (Ren et al., 2017), and increased turnover intentions.

The effects of burnout are not just mental and emotional; burnout can also have profound physical effects on the body (Ren et al., 2017).. Burnout can result in poor physical outcomes. The emotional exhaustion component of burnout more strongly relates to the physical effects than the other two components. This is likely because the physiological effects of emotional exhaustion mirror those of prolonged stress (Xu, 2019). In addition, the link between exhaustion and physical symptoms is due to sleeplessness, headaches, and gastrointestinal issues that undermine rest and recovery (Akkoç, Okun & Türe, 2020).

*Employee Job Performance*

The concept of employee job performance has been regarded as one of the most important and widely researched variables within the domain of work and organisational studies (Malik, Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 2017; Akkoç, Okun & Türe, 2020), this can be attributed to the role of employees as being imperative to the success of any organisational establishment (Duli, 2016). The desire of every business organisation is to get the best out of their employees because of the crucial role employee's play in the overall success of the organisation (Xu, 2019). Job performance is also said to be a multi-dimensional concept (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017) and "very subjective depending on how, why and for whom it's being measured (Akkoç, Okun & Türe, 2020).

Several researchers have identified certain factors that influence employee job performance such as availability of employee training opportunities (Liu & Liu, 2017), organizational climate (Ryu, Yang & Choi, 2020)), Managerial support (Duli, 2016), dynamic work environment (Belias et al., 2015), years of experience and time, (Mendoza, Jr. 2019) and presence of job control/autonomy (Ren et al., 2017)). As a result of doing the same thing overtime that is the longer an employee works on a job the better they get in most instances but could also decline with time which explains the instability and dynamic characteristics of performance (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017). According to Ren et al. (2017), the dynamic characteristics of job performance can be categorized into two main stages which are; the transition and maintenance stage, the transition stage is the stage when employees are new on a job and still familiarising themselves

with the skills required for their new role and at this stage ''performance is error-prone (Choi, Mohammad & Kim, 2019).

Nuri, Demirok and Direktör (2017), in their definition of employee job performance described it within the context of "job time, job quality and job quantity" (p. 37). The time factor looks into measuring and comparing the allotted time to the total duration it takes employees to produce certain outputs, while the quality aspect focuses on the ability of an employee to carry out tasks and their job roles according to the set guidelines and standards of their respective organisation, finally the quantity dimension focuses on how much output an employee is able to produce given available resources within the workplace such as time, machineries etc.

According to Sabagh, Hall and Saroyan (2018), employee's performance is determined by motivation. Motivation comprises of limits and type of activities that are oriented to the attainment of the target goals. Nonetheless, employee's performance and motivation can be considered as associated concepts. Accomplishment of duties is a motivation and a factor. In this study, the authors allege that employee's performance cannot increase with high levels of motivation particularly if the task is complex (Malik, Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 2017). On the contrary, increased levels of motivation have also been attributed to negative performance. This is purely because as high motivation lowers cognition, motivated employees become afraid of failing, an aspect that eventually contributes to lower performance (Duli, 2016). Furthermore, in organizations, employee's performance is based on different factors including restrictive procedures and workplace environmental aspects such as variability of resources, lighting and noise.

Poor workplace settings can contribute to psychological and physiological effects that could influence job performance. This indicates that in the oil and gas industry, organizations should recognize the impact of potential workplace factors on employee's performance (Mañas et al., 2018). Even though high performance can be attributed to technology advancements, organizational culture and workplace environment play an important role in employee's performance.

*Role conflict and Social Work Practice*

Social work practice uses a broader systems approach, whereas role conflict offers intervention once a problem is identified. An article by Wu, Hu and Zheng (2019) convey that role conflict in the psychosocial profession focuses on addressing problems using interventions to resolve problems and requires client to provide their input.

in other professions, foundational knowledge underpins social work practice. The social work profession uses five categories of knowledge to direct social work practice. The first three categories are: social workers are to understand the bio-psycho-social development of human beings in the context of

social systems; they should understand and contribute to analyzing social policies in connection with social and economic justice; and they should use mutuality, collaboration, and respect for clients in the process of implementing practice methods at three levels of client systems (micro, mezzo, and macro) (Xu, 2019). The fourth category is to use research and evaluation to build knowledge and service delivery in all areas of social work practice, and the fifth category is to integrate field practice in social work education (Al-Kahtani & Allam, 2016).

Social workers are also expected to participate actively in research and in guiding research design. An article by Dyrbye et al. (2018), indicates that social workers have an ethical obligation to create and spread evidence that will inform social work practice. If social workers are involved in research, they can also critically analyze the research before they apply it to their practice. Therefore, social workers are expected to be aware and to understand the research behind practice. They can then decide which intervention may suit the needs of clients.

In explaining the link between stress and the nature of the social work profession, Al-Kahtani and Allam (2016) refer to the social work profession as the "emotional labor" because in executing their duties social workers have to tap into their own feelings, understanding and perceptions in order to use them as tools in their work. According to Ryu, Yang and Choi (2020), emotional issues within the social work profession are the order of the day. The emotional dimensions in social work practice are said to have an impact in increasing the possibilities of work-related stress to occur (Morris, Steers & Koch, 2017**).**

Another area of shared aims between Role conflict and social work practice is the consideration of what clients agree to do when presented with information for their problems and difficulties. As part of role conflict, patients' value and preferences are considerations in the process of role conflict (Pratiwi et al., 2019). For social workers, understanding the self-determination of clients is an integral part to help clients navigate complex systems. The client's participation, preferences, and decisions in the helping process are how social workers believe change and progress happens for individuals when faced with challenges and difficulties. Some of the social work literature discusses the tensions experienced by social workers who are trying to apply role conflict within their professional practice. New cost measures put in place by governments for hospitals and social agencies require social workers to use empirical research-based interventions and to implement standardized and directive approaches when delivering services.

*Role conflict and Employee Burnout*

The most common negative consequence of role ambiguity is burnout (Sabagh, Hall & Saroyan, 2018.; Rogalsky, Doherty & Paradis, 2016). Burnout is made up of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, or

diminished personal accomplishment. Many of the negative consequences mentioned previously exist or can overwhelmingly lead to burnout. For example, burnout tends to coexist within high role stress, conflict, overload (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016; Nuri, Demirok & Direktör, 2017), lack of support, lack of self-regulatory activity, and clientrelated demands (Morris, Steers & Koch, 2017). It shows the comparison of varying organizational factors that impact the role of professionals depending on if they have recently started serving or have been there for years. In addition, the organizational factors that impact a hospital social worker role range considerably and can reside within the complexities of worksite relationships to the simplicity of the number of resources within a hospital's location. Overall, the consistent experience, for hospital social workers is the missing guidance and support to take on difficult tasks each day and the overall misunderstanding of the skill sets and beneficial services they provide when serving a hospital (Mendoza, Jr. 2019).

Role-conflict is especially damaging to hospital social workers. Wu, Hu and Zheng's (2019) study found that social workers reported "pressure to conform to beliefs of other professionals about the proper way to behave or about the manner in which their role should be carried out, as well as faced incompatible demands from other workers. With hospital social workers working alongside (and often being supervised by) non-social workers, this effect is especially relevant in the public hospital setting, where "demands from the system of public education have often trumped social work theory, confining the practice of social work to individual interventions (Weinberg, Sutherland & Cooper, 2015). Widajati (2018), argues that even though social work theory endorses an ecological, or systems-based understanding of students' problems. These challenges may be related to the fact that Administrators, colleagues, and the community all had different perceptions of the roles hospital social workers were to perform and found a general confusion among the colleagues of hospital social workers regarding the difference between hospital social worker, hospital psychologist, and education consultant roles (Yim, 2017).

Ryu, Yang and Choi (2020), maintain that while the role of the boundary spanning social work professional is probably one of the most complex from an organisational behaviour perspective, it has received comparatively little attention in the management literature. One would also naturally expect that there would be considerable attention from researchers regarding the complexity of the issues service employees face in their jobs. Unfortunately, to date, there has been both little management attention and little empirical research on service employees and human resource practices in service firms (Ryu, Yang & Choi, 2020).

*Role conflict and Employee Job Performance*

Research demonstrates the association between work-related stress and its far-reaching consequences on the health and safety of workers, their families and also for the employers (CUPA-HR, 2020). Based on the literature from various researchers, the effects of stress could be broadly covered under the domains of effects on the individual, effects on the organisation (Dyrbye et al., 2018), and societal effects. The impact on organisations can affect company performance, while the individual effects are closely related to the health of individuals, while societal effects are felt by the associates and family of the stressed individual. According to Erasmus, Grobler and Van Niekerk (2015), effects of stress on the organisation would include increasing absenteeism, decreasing commitment to work, increasing staff turnover, impaired performance and productivity, and increasing unsafe working practices and accident rates in the workplace. In retrospect, the employees who are (Gabel, 2016), stressed most of the time pass the effect of their stress to others in the organisation (Frone, 2016).

In relation to performance, stress has led to the outcomes that threaten organisational success. These include low morale and burnout (Belias et al., 2015), as well as physical injuries at work, absenteeism, turnover, reduced productivity, and diminished job satisfaction (Al-Kahtani & Allam, 2016). Although there is a close link between individual causes and the success of the organisation, effects that impact the effectiveness of the organisation could be accrued to organisational consequences.

In their recent published meta-analysis, De Paiva et al. (2017), demonstrate that critical incidents are positively related to post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, and depression in hospital-based health professionals. An explanation to this report shows that previous research highlighted the relationship between chronic stressors and burnout (Alessandri et al. 2018). hence the effect of these stressors on the performance and effectiveness of the health professional. Although this is arguably indirectly related, the effect is directly felt by the organisation. The organisation suffers as it loses productivity due to the stressed individuals.

At an individual level, (Chan, Wan and Kuok (2015), have provided evidence that workplace stress contributes to high blood pressure and increased cholesterol levels. In the areas of workplace stress and well-being, Chang's (2008) presents literature supporting stress-strain relationships, workplace stress and stressful occupations. Physiologists have also enumerated effects of stress on the body to include gastric diseases, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, allergies, reduced immunity and cancer (Choi, Mohammad & Kim, 2019). This further explains the effects of stress on an individual's health. Role conflict affects organizational performance by reducing productivity and efficiency which affect the organization negatively (Bahari et al., 2016). Blom et al. (2016), found a negative correlation between stress and job performance i.e. as the stress increase the job performance goes down and vice-versa. Baseman et al. (2018), stated that work-related stress has become a challenge for the employer organizations as it results in low productivity, increased absenteeism and collection of other employee problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, hypertension and host of cardiovascular problems.

Curran and Prottas (2017), suggested that different aspects of employee job performance that are likely to be affected by stress include productivity, job satisfaction / morale, absenteeism, decision making abilities, accuracy, creativity, attention to personal appearance, organizational skills, courtesy cooperation, initiative, reliability, alertness, perseverance and tardiness. Yaacob and Long (2015), are of the view that When work-related stress upsurges, it reaches optimal level where the output is higher thus there will be a positive impact of stress, but if stress increases further it reduces output thus negative impact of stress.

Role conflict, also affects the quality of work of employees and that of the organizations they work for. Ahola et al. (2017) and Alam et al. (2015), submit that not all stress is harmful to an organism; at moderate level it is an asset but at a higher level it is a liability to an individual. Stress can help in growth and development of human potential; thus necessary in our daily activities. Akar (2018), noted that persistent stress is likely to cause serious organic and mental disorder. In the light of the above exposition it is obvious to state that: $Ho_2$: There is no significant relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt.
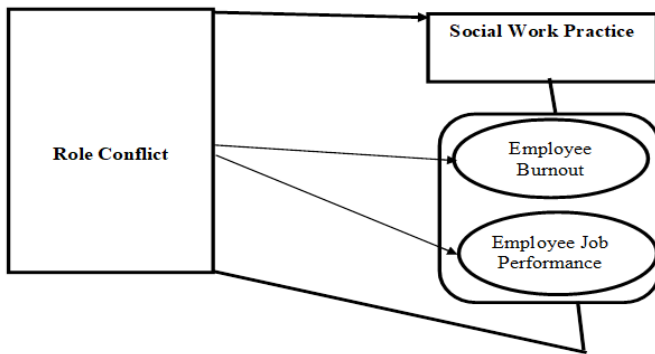


Figure 2: Operationalized Framework of the Influence of Role Conflict on Social Work Practice of Selected Hospitals in Port Harcourt

Source: Ryu, G. W., Yang, Y. S., & Choi, M. (2020).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study consisted of 350 administration and middle administrative social workers from the selected hospitals. The study sampled 350 respondents out of which 331 of them were found useful and valid for the study analysis. The study used a mixed method approach, utilized structured likert-scale questionnaire,

Thematic content analysis, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were used to analyse the data. The study used Pearson Products Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses with the aid of SPSS 25.0. The reliability of the research instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha to ascertain the reliability of the instrument.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved two major variables - namely the predictor variable and criterion variables. The predictor (independent) variable in this study is role conflict (role ambiguity). The criterion variable (dependent) is social work practice which has employee burnout and employee job performance as its measures. The univariate analysis on each of the operationalized variables is presented. In this study the data were measured using a 5-point Likert Scale on the basis of; "strongly agree" (5); "Agree" (4); "disagree" (3); "strongly agree" (2); "undecided" (1). On the basis of the scale; options, responses and associated rating points, the mean, standard deviation, variances and responses to issues raised in the research have been presented below, using the SPSS software package window output, version 25.0. The analysis commenced with the Table on role conflict (role ambiguity):

*Role conflict (role ambiguity) as a Dimension of Work-Related Stress*

Table 1 gives the detailed analysis on how role conflict (role ambiguity) as a dimension of work-related stress has been examined to determine its effect on social work practice and to show its descriptive statistical outcome based on the questions deposed.

Table 1: Role conflict (role ambiguity) as a Dimension of Work-Related Stress

| S/N | Question Items on Role conflict (role ambiguity) | N | $\overline{X}$ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I know exactly what I should be doing at any given time | 331 | 3.658 | 1.392 |
| 2 | My line manager/Head of Department (HOD) Sometimes designates tasks without adequate information on how they should be carried out | 331 | 3.455 | 1.337 |
| 3 | My job roles and responsibilities are very clear | 331 | 4.143 | 0.933 |
| 4 | Directives and instructions Given within the department are vague | 331 | 3.199 | 1.304 |
| 5 | No Information is provided on how I am being appraised for promotion | 331 | 3.312 | 1.334 |

Source: Survey Data, 2022, and IBM SPSS Statistics 25 Window Output

Table 1 shows that five statement items represent a dimension in the 5-point scale. The data revealed that with the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.658±1.392, the respondents agreed they know exactly what they should be doing at any given time even as it is obvious that role conflicts is prevalent in social work practice and is a dimension of work-related stress. Also, with the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.455±1.337, the respondents agreed that their line managers/head of department (HODs) sometimes designates tasks without adequate information on how they should be carried out. The data also revealed that social workers' job roles and responsibilities are very clear with the mean and standard deviation scores of 4.143±0.933. With the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.199±1.304 the respondents indicated that directives and instructions given within the

department are vague. Finally, the data in Table 1 revealed that with the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.312±1.334, the respondents agreed that no information is provided on how social workers are being appraised for promotion.

*Employee burnout as a Measure of Social work practice*

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistical results of employee burnout which is measured with five question items on the 5-point scale. The response distribution as shown by the results is indicative that employee burnout affects social work practice.

Table 2: Employee burnout as a Measure of Social work practice

| S/N | Question Items on Employee burnout | N | $\overline{X}$ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I have physical exhaustion at the end of the work day | 331 | 3.870 | 1.299 |
| 2 | I am characterized by cynicism and detachment from coworkers and customers in the work place | 331 | 4.468 | 0.664 |
| 3 | I have extreme dissatisfaction with my work, and uncertainty about how to improve and progress in my career | 331 | 3.437 | 1.372 |
| 4 | I am giving a lot of my energy and time to work, my personal life suffers, which leads me to resent time at the office | 331 | 3.784 | 1.267 |
| 5 | I am over-engaged with my job and leads me to feel a constant need to overwork and be involved with projects | 331 | 4.429 | 0.687 |

Source: Survey Data, 2022, and IBM SPSS Statistics 25 Window Output

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.870±1.299 indicating that the consensus opinion of the respondents revealed an agreement that employee burnout relates to having physical exhaustion at the end of the work day. Also, the mean and standard deviation scores of 4.468±0.664 imply the respondents agreed that social workers are characterized by cynicism and detachment from coworkers and customers in the work place. The statistical result of 3.437±1.372 (mean and standard deviation scores) show that the respondents agreed that social workers have extreme dissatisfaction with their work, and uncertainty about how to improve and progress in their career. Table 4.10 also reveals the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.784±1.103 implying that the respondents agreed that social workers give a lot of energy and time to work, their personal life suffers, which leads them to resent time at the office. Finally, the mean and standard deviation scores of 4.429±0.687 show that the respondents agreed that social workers are over-engaged with their job and that leads them to feel a constant need to overwork and be involved with projects.

*Employee job performance as a Measure of Social work practice*

Table 3 shows how employee job performance as a measure of social work practice was examined and empirically expressed through the raising of descriptive statistical analysis of 5 question items.

Table 3: Employee job performance as a Measure of Social work practice

| S/N | Question Items on Employee job performance | N | $\overline{X}$ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I am able to my duties effectively and efficiently for the achievement of my organisation's objectives | 331 | 3.792 | 1.150 |
| 2 | I am satisfied with my job performance | 331 | 3.407 | 1.370 |
| 3 | My organization motivates workers for commitment and optimal performance | 331 | 3.004 | 1.410 |
| 4 | I find my working environment comfortable | 331 | 2.870 | 1.424 |
| 5 | There is organisational support in my job | 331 | 3.048 | 1.424 |

Source: Survey Data, 2022, and IBM SPSS Statistics 25 Window Output

As shown in Table 3 above, the responses of the respondents have indicated the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.792±1.150 showing that social workers are able to perform their duties effectively and efficiently for the achievement of their organisation's objectives. Also, the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.407±1.370 imply that the respondents agreed that social workers are satisfied with their job performance.

With the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.004±1.370, the respondents have indicated that hospitals motivate social workers for commitment and optimal job performance. Table 4.10 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of 2.870±1.424 proving that the respondents indicated that social workers find their working environment comfortable. Finally, the data revealed the mean and standard deviation scores of 3.048±1.424 indicating that there is organisational support in social work job.

*Test of Hypotheses*

The research hypotheses formulated have been tested and interpreted based on the results of the study for the understanding of the users of the information. All these have been done in line with the purpose and specific objectives of the study which were stated from the beginning of this study. However, considering the nature of the study, which involved the test of relationship, the variables concerned and the data measurement scale used, the study adopted and applied the descriptive statistical method for the bivariate analysis.

In order to have a deep insight into the study's outcomes on the basis of the research questions posed and the multi question items in the questionnaire, the study had first and foremost presented and analyzed the data in a detailed manner that captured all operationalized variables of the study. The next stage of the analysis was to examine the data to

determine the nature of the relationships between the predictor and criterion variables. The study has done this through the application of SPSS window output, version 25.0.

*Role conflict (role ambiguity) and Employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt*

A research question and a hypothesis have earlier been raised to determine the nature of relationship that exists between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt

Table 4: Results of role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee burnout of social workers

| | | Role Conflict (Role Ambiguity) | Employee Burnout |
|---|---|---|---|
| Role conflict (role ambiguity) | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .789** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 331 | 331 |
| Employee Burnout | Pearson Correlation | .789** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 331 | 331 |

Source: SPSS version 25 Output window and Survey Data, 2022.
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of the role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee burnout of hypothesis ($H_{O1}$) shows that rho is 0.789 @ p0.000 <0.05, denoting that a strong positive relationship exists between the examined variables and it is also significant. This entails that the null hypothesis 1 ($H_{o1}$) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis 1 ($H_{i1}$) accepted, therefore; "there is significant relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt".

*Role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance of social workers*

A research question and a hypothesis have earlier been raised to determine the relationship that exists between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance

Table 5: Results of role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance of social workers

| | | Role conflict (role ambiguity) | Employee job performance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Role conflict (role ambiguity) | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.807** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 331 | 331 |
| Employee job performance | Pearson Correlation | 0.807** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 331 | 331 |

Source: SPSS version 25 Output window and Survey Data, 2022.
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 above shows the results of the test of hypothesis 2 (Ho2). The results of the hypothesis tested show strong positive relationship. Hypothesis 2 ($H_{O2}$) - role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance The rho outcome of 0.807 @ p0.000 <0.05 reveals that there is a strong positive relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance and it is also significant; which means that the null hypothesis 2 ($H_{o2}$) is rejected and alternate hypothesis 2 ($H_{i2}$) accepted signifying that; "there is significant relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance in Nigeria".

## V. DISCUSSION

*Role Conflicts and Employee Burnout*

The study found that role conflict (role ambiguity) was positively and significantly related to employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt (0.789). This finding is in line with the main body of literature in work-related stress theory that suggests that role conflict (role ambiguity) affects social work practice (positively and negatively at both subunit and organizational levels (Xu, 2019; Yaacob & Long, 2015; Widajati, 2018). Therefore, this study buttresses the significance of role conflict (role ambiguity) in reducing employee burnout and work-related stress.

The relationship between role conflict and employee burnout is determined by many studies. Studies indicate that the low job performance in employees/ employee burnout is due to role conflict they experience during performing their jobs (World Health Organization, 2019; Vesty et al., 2018; Urien et al. 2017, Sana & Aslam, 2018; Ryu, Yang & Choi, 2020). Xu (2019), explains that a negative relationship between role conflict and employee burnout. Pratiwi et al. (2019), found that role conflict is negatively correlated to the employee burnout. As Pratiwi et al. (2019), explain that the feeling of lack of control over a work situation and of the inability to

enact a "rightful role" in the workplace may lead to job dissatisfaction in terms of position held by the employee.

Park and Nam (2020), submit that the employee job performance is affected by role conflicts. Patton (2019), in his study found that a negative relation between role conflict and employee burnout. Also, Liu and Liu (2017), etablished negative relationship between role conflict and employee burnout. Konstantinou et al. (2018), revealed in their study that the role conflict directly influenced to the employee job performance. On the bases of above discussion, it was concluded that the relationship between role conflict and employee burnout is more of negative impact.

*Role Conflict and Employee Job Performance*

This study empirically tested the relationship between role conflict (role ambiguity) and employee job performance in social work practice. The study found that role conflict (role ambiguity) significantly and positively affects employee job performance in Nigeria (0.807). These findings are similar and in line with other researches that have investigated and reported how role conflict (role ambiguity) affects employee job performance (Sana & Aslam, 2018; Amilin, 2017; Akkoç, Okun & Türe, 2020; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020).

Ebbers and Wijnberg (2017), said that role conflict occurs when employees were unaware of the role they perform, where to direct the struggle, where to add furthermore and whether his supervisor clean performance result as failure or a success. When an employee does not know his role and duties it may lead to a high level of job tension and high level of job satisfaction (Duli, 2016).

Every formal position should have a clear task to decrease the level of confusion and increase productivity (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2019). The reason of increasing role conflict is lack of training provided to employees, poor communication between employees and their supervisor or coworker and withholding information by coworker or supervisor (Crabtree, 2018). When employees are not clear about the task and not clear about expectation to that task role conflict arises. Individuals have to get incomplete information about the duty. Therefore, it is difficult to provide training in these situations. Pratiwi et al. (2019), found that role conflict and job satisfaction was negatively correlated.

Crabtree (2018), concluded that role conflict and employee job performance have negative correlated with each other. Akkoç, Okun and Türe (2020), determined the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity and job satisfaction in which they conclude that when employees face role stress, they are most likely to produce an unfavorable behavior and most likely they have dissatisfied from their jobs. Beaton (2017), found that role conflict affects the employee job performance. Amilin (2017) concluded that the role conflict reduces the level of employee job performance. All the findings are in consonance with the position of the study.

## VI. SUMMARY

This study examined the influence of role conflict on social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt. Role conflict (role ambiguity) has been examined as the independent/predictor variable in this paper. Also, social work practice served as the key dependent variable or criterion variable under which the measures such as employee burnout and employee job performance have been appraised. The population of the study consisted of 350 administration and middle administrative social workers from the selected hospitals. The study sampled 350 respondents out of which 331 of them were found useful and valid for the study analysis. The study used a mixed methods approach, utilized structured questionnaire consisting of open-ended, closed- ended questions and multiple-choice questions with the Likert scale measurement. Thematic content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the data.

The study used Pearson Products Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses with the aid of SPSS 25.0. The reliability of the research instrument was tested using the Cronbach alpha to ascertain the reliability of the instrument.

The study revealed that social work job roles and responsibilities are very clear. The study found that directives and instructions given within the department are vague. Also, the study found that no information is provided on how social workers are being appraised for promotion.

The study observed that social work is characterized by cynicism and detachment from coworkers and clients. The study revealed that many social workers have extreme dissatisfaction with their work, and uncertainty about how to improve and progress in their career. Also, the study found that social workers give a lot of energy and time to work, their personal life suffers, which leads them to resent time at the office and that social workers are over-engaged with their job and that leads them to feel a constant need to overwork and be involved with projects.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The conclusions of the outcome of the study are as follows:

Role conflict (role ambiguity) has a positive and significant relationship with employee burnout in social work practice of hospitals in Port Harcourt.

Role conflict (role ambiguity) has a positive and significant relationship with employee job performance in social work.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the study proffers the following recommendation:

1. Social workers are known for experiencing burnout, but when provided with an intentional support system, they are able to effectively provide long-term services. Understanding how the internal intricacies

of an organization such as internal communication and supervision of employees can directly impact the clarity or ambiguity of one's role is of great importance when preparing for a hospital social worker.

2. Understanding how a hospital social worker's number of years of experience in their field can have a moderating effect on how role conflict impacts on social work practice. It is important to consider harmonizing/synchronizing various roles when hiring an individual for a hospital social work practice.

3. Responsibilities and job descriptions should be very clear to social workers to avoid or reduce distortions of responsibilities. Distorted responsibility is a major cause of stress of social workers and clear job descriptions will assist social workers to properly arrange and align office and home responsibilities to avoid role conflict.

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