International Journal of Commerce and Management Research
www.managejournal.com
ISSN: 2455-1627
Received: 23-08-2026, Accepted: 22-09-2026, Published: 07-10-2026
Volume 12, Issue 4, 2026, Page No. 79-88

When autonomy becomes a burden: Testing the flexibility paradox in a high-family-obligation context: Evidence from ACCRA'S banking and fintech sector

Adam Harper
Department of School of Business and Management, Texila American University, Guyana

Abstract
Background: Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are increasingly used to retain talent in Ghana's banking and FinTech sector, yet their effects remain unclear. Conservation of Resources theory assumes autonomy is universally beneficial, but the flexibility paradox suggests FWAs may also intensify work-family conflict. This tension is particularly relevant in Ghana, where extended family obligations are structurally embedded.
Methodology/Design: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 272 employees of licensed banks and registered FinTech firms in Accra. Hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling with bootstrapping in SmartPLS 4.
Findings/Results: FWAs were positively associated with intention to remain ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived autonomy and perceived obligation fulfillment mediated this relationship positively, while work-family conflict mediated it negatively. The obligation fulfillment pathway ($\beta = 0.15$) was significantly stronger than the autonomy pathway ($\beta = 0.11$). Perceived alternative employment opportunities weakened the negative effect of work-family conflict on retention.
Implications: Organisations should design flexibility around family needs rather than work control alone, implement boundary management support, and monitor whether retention reflects attachment or constraint.
Contribution/Originality: The study suggests a potential boundary condition for COR theory by showing that obligation fulfillment, not autonomy, is the stronger retention mechanism in a high-family-obligation context. It also offers preliminary evidence consistent with a lock-in mechanism competing with resource-based explanations for retention.

Keywords: Flexible work arrangements, intention to remain, perceived autonomy, obligation fulfillment, work-family conflict, Ghana, banking, FinTech, PLS-SEM

Introduction

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have become a defining feature of contemporary employment relations, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors such as banking and financial technology (FinTech). The global shift toward hybrid and remote work, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has prompted organizations to reconfigure how, when, and where work is performed. In Ghana's banking and FinTech sector, this shift has been accompanied by a competitive talent landscape. The banking sector clean-up between 2017 and 2019 reduced the number of universal banks from thirty-four to twenty-three, reshaping professional career trajectories and intensifying competition for experienced talent across banks, FinTechs, and technology firms (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19]. In response, Ghanaian banks have explicitly cited flexible work models as a retention strategy, with industry reports indicating that such arrangements contribute to higher engagement and improved retention (Osei-Gyasi, 2024) [14]. Research on Ghanaian banks similarly documents that flexible working hours and remote options are perceived by employees as significant factors in their decision to remain with their organizations (Osei-Gyasi, 2024) [14].

The theoretical promise of FWAs for retention is grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals seek to acquire and protect resources that are valued in their work and personal lives (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11]. FWAs are conceptualized as resource-supplying arrangements that provide employees with autonomy, discretion over time, and the capacity to manage competing demands. Meta-analytic evidence based on 68 studies and 52,738 employees confirms that flexible work practices increase organizational attachment and decrease turnover intention, with perceived autonomy serving as a partial mediator of these effects (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. In the Ghanaian context, research drawing on COR theory has demonstrated that psychological resources such as self-efficacy mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and turnover intentions, highlighting the relevance of resource-based explanations for understanding employee withdrawal (Amankwah *et al*., 2025) [1].

However, a growing body of research reveals a more troubling dimension of FWAs. Chung's (2022) [2] flexibility paradox demonstrates that greater control over work does not automatically translate into improved work-life balance; instead, it frequently leads to intensified work effort, boundary blurring, and self-exploitation. This paradox arises because flexible working is introduced into a work-centric societal context where expectations of availability and performance remain unchanged, and where traditional gender norms continue to shape the division of domestic labor (Chung, 2022) [2]. Recent systematic review and meta-analytic evidence confirms that FWAs can both support and undermine work-life balance, depending on how they are designed, implemented, and managed (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Siu *et al*., 2023) [11, 17]. In the absence of clear boundary management strategies and supportive organizational norms, temporal and spatial flexibility may intensify role overload and increase work-family conflict by extending work into non-standard hours and private spaces (Siu *et al*., 2023) [17]. These dynamics suggest that FWAs may simultaneously generate autonomy, a resource that promotes attachment and

work-family conflict, a strain that depletes resources and fosters withdrawal.

The Ghanaian context presents a theoretically strategic setting for examining this tension. Ghanaian employees operate within social structures characterized by strong extended family obligations, communal expectations, and, in many households, pronounced gendered divisions of domestic labor. Research on work-family conflict in Ghana has documented that employees face substantial pressure to meet family responsibilities alongside demanding work roles, and that this conflict is positively associated with turnover intentions (Amankwah *et al*., 2025) [1]. At the same time, the Ghanaian labor market is characterized by limited high-quality alternative employment, a factor that may suppress the translation of work-family conflict into actual turnover (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. These conditions create a paradox: employees may experience heightened work-family conflict from FWAs, yet may feel constrained from leaving due to labor market conditions. The intention to remain, therefore, may reflect a complex negotiation between resource gain (autonomy) and resource loss (work-family conflict), moderated by the strength of family obligations.

In spite of this theoretical richness, the existing literature exhibits a significant gap. First, most FWA research has been conducted in Western, individualist contexts where the flexibility paradox has been documented (Chung, 2022; Kossek *et al*., 2023) [2, 11]. The mechanisms through which FWAs affect retention in collectivist, high-family-obligation contexts remain underexplored. Second, while COR theory predicts that resource gain should universally enhance retention, the flexibility paradox suggests that this prediction may not hold when the resource gain (autonomy) is accompanied by resource loss (boundary dissolution and family conflict). Third, and most critically, existing research assumes that "autonomy" is a culturally universal resource. In collectivist, high-power-distance contexts, however, autonomy may be experienced not as empowerment but as isolation or responsibility transfer. What matters for Ghanaian employees may not be control over work, but the capacity to fulfill family obligations, a distinct resource that Western FWA research does not measure. Whether obligation fulfillment operates as a more powerful mediator than autonomy in predicting retention is an empirical question that has not been tested in the Ghanaian banking and FinTech sector. Fourth, existing Ghanaian research on turnover intentions has examined work-family conflict as a predictor (Amankwah *et al*., 2025; Duffour *et al*., 2026) [1, 4] or organisational trust and commitment as antecedents (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19], but has not integrated these insights into a model that examines FWAs as a dual-pathway mechanism alongside competing explanations for retention.

This study therefore addresses the following questions: To what extent do flexible work arrangements influence intention to remain among banking and FinTech employees in Accra? Does perceived obligation fulfillment mediate this relationship more strongly than perceived autonomy? Does work-family conflict mediate in the opposite direction? And does perceived alternative employment opportunity moderate these relationships, revealing a lock-in effect that competes with both resource-based mechanisms? Thus, in testing a moderated mediation model using structural equation modeling, the study aims to contribute to COR theory by identifying the boundary conditions under which autonomy resources become burdens rather than benefits, to challenge the universalist assumption embedded in FWA research by introducing a culturally grounded mediator, and to provide evidence-based guidance for retention strategies in Ghana's financial services sector.

Literature Review: Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three theoretical perspectives. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory explains how flexible work arrangements (FWAs) supply valued resources that promote attachment (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Rosemarino, 2026) [11, 16]. The Flexibility Paradox identifies conditions under which those resources become burdens (Chung, 2022) [2]. Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains reciprocity mechanisms and why structural constraints may suppress turnover behaviour (Duffour *et al*., 2026; Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [4, 19].

Conservation of Resources Theory

COR theory holds that individuals seek to obtain and protect valued resources; resource gain enhances attachment while resource loss produces stress (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Rosemarino, 2026) [11, 16]. FWAs supply such resources through temporal and spatial flexibility, enhancing perceived autonomy and protecting time and energy (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. Meta analytic evidence from 68 studies and 52,738 employees confirms that flexible work practices increase organizational attachment and reduce turnover intention, with autonomy as a partial mediator (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. However, COR assumes resource gain is universally beneficial (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11]. This assumption is challenged by evidence that cultural and structural conditions shape how resources are perceived, particularly where non-work obligations are demanding and non-negotiable (Amankwah *et al*., 2025; Chung, 2022) [1, 2].

The Flexibility Paradox

Chung's (2022) [2] flexibility paradox demonstrates that greater work control does not automatically improve work life balance; it often produces intensified effort, boundary blurring, and self-exploitation. This occurs because flexibility is introduced into work centric contexts where availability expectations and gendered domestic norms remain unchanged (Chung, 2022) [2]. Three implications follow. First, FWAs may simultaneously generate autonomy, which promotes attachment, and work family conflict, which fosters withdrawal (Haines *et al*., 2024) [6]. Second, the paradox is context dependent, shaped by cultural norms, family policies, and worker bargaining power (Chung, 2022; Kossek *et al*., 2023) [2, 11]. Third, resource gain and loss operate simultaneously, producing a net effect contingent on context (Siu *et al*., 2023) [17].

Social Exchange Theory and the Lock in Mechanism

SET holds that employees reciprocate organizational support with loyalty and retention (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19]. Yet when few alternatives exist, retention may reflect constraint rather than attachment (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. Research in Ghanaian banking shows that labour market constraints suppress the translation of negative experiences into turnover behaviour; employees enduring work family conflict and exhaustion remain because they need to survive

(Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. Career advancement likewise fails to predict turnover intention in Ghana because high unemployment makes current employment an asset regardless of prospects (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19]. This lock in mechanism competes with resource-based explanations because employees may stay not from attachment but from inability to leave (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4].

Hypothesis Development

Flexible Work Arrangements and Intention to Remain

The direct relationship between FWAs and retention is supported by both theoretical logic and empirical evidence. COR theory predicts that FWAs supply valued resources such as autonomy, time control, and the capacity to manage competing demands, all of which enhance organizational attachment (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Rosemarino, 2026) [11, 16]. Meta analytic evidence confirms that all three major forms of FWAs, namely flexible schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals, decrease turnover intention (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. In the Ghanaian context, research on bank employees has documented that flexible working hours and work life balance practices are perceived as significant factors in retention decisions (Osei-Gyasi, 2024) [14]. Based on this evidence, it was hypothesized that:

H1: Flexible work arrangements are positively associated with intention to remain among banking and FinTech employees in Accra.

Perceived Autonomy as a Mediator

The mediating role of perceived autonomy is the central mechanism in COR theory's explanation of FWA effects. FWAs increase perceived autonomy by giving employees control over when, where, and how they work (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11]. This autonomy helps protect valuable resources such as time and energy, enabling employees to manage competing demands more effectively (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. Empirical research confirms that perceived autonomy mediates the relationship between FWAs and organizational attachment (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. Additionally, recent research demonstrates that job autonomy has a positive association with intention to stay, serially mediated by psychological capital and work life balance (Rosemarino, 2026) [16]. Therefore, it was proposed that:

H2: Perceived autonomy mediates the positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and intention to remain.

Work Family Conflict as a Competing Mediator

The flexibility paradox predicts that FWAs may also increase work family conflict, which in turn reduces retention (Chung, 2022) [2]. When work encroaches on family time and boundaries dissolve, employees experience resource depletion and strain (Siu *et al*., 2023) [17]. Research demonstrates that FWAs can increase turnover intention through heightened work family conflicts, supporting the border theory perspective (Haines *et al*., 2024) [6]. In Ghana, work family conflict is positively associated with turnover intentions, although structural constraints may suppress the translation of these intentions into actual behavior (Amankwah *et al*., 2025; Duffour *et al*., 2026) [1, 4]. As a result, it was proposed that:

H3: Work family conflict mediates a negative indirect relationship between flexible work arrangements and intention to remain.

Perceived Obligation Fulfillment as a Culturally Grounded Mediator

This hypothesis introduces the study's key theoretical innovation. While Western FWA research assumes that autonomy is the primary resource derived from flexibility, this assumption may not hold in collectivist, high family obligation contexts (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11]. In Ghana, where extended family obligations are structurally embedded and non-negotiable, the value of FWAs may lie not in control over work, but in the capacity to fulfill family duties (Amankwah *et al*., 2025) [1]. If this is the case, perceived obligation fulfillment, which is the extent to which employees perceive that their work arrangement enables them to meet family responsibilities, may operate as a more powerful mediator than autonomy. This represents a challenge to the universalist assumption embedded in COR theory because the resource that matters most may not be autonomy, but obligation fulfillment (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11]. Based on the empirical and theoretical reasoning, it was hypothesized that:

H4: Perceived obligation fulfillment mediates the positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and intention to remain, with a stronger indirect effect than perceived autonomy.

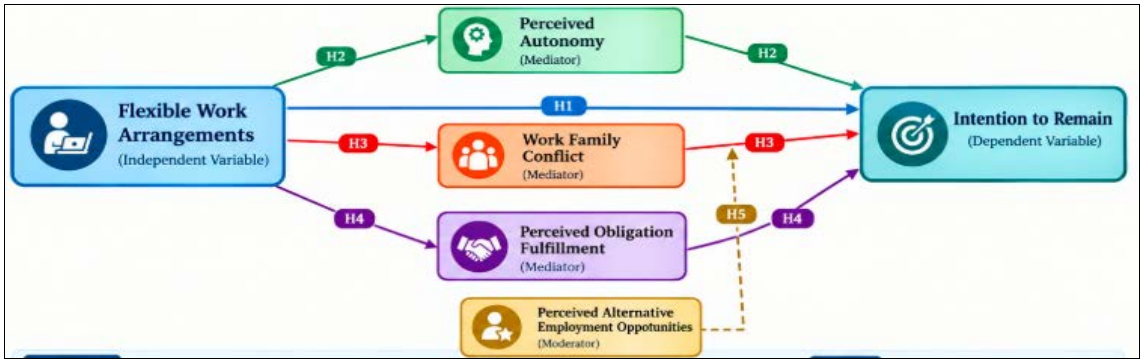
The Moderating Role of Perceived Alternative Employment Opportunities

The lock in mechanism suggests that retention may reflect constraint rather than attachment (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. When employees perceive limited alternative employment opportunities, they may remain even when experiencing work family conflict and resource depletion (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. This creates a competing explanation for the FWA retention relationship because FWAs may appear to retain employees not because they enhance attachment, but because they coexist with structural constraints that suppress turnover (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19]. Testing this moderation is essential to distinguish between attachment based and constraint-based retention (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. Hence, it was proposed that:

H5: Perceived alternative employment opportunities moderate the negative indirect relationship between flexible work arrangements and intention to remain through work family conflict, such that the negative indirect effect is weaker when perceived alternatives are low.

Conceptual Framework

The study proposes a moderated mediation model in which flexible work arrangements (FWAs) influence intention to remain through three competing mediators, with one moderated pathway. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory, the Flexibility Paradox, and Social Exchange Theory, the model tests whether FWAs retain employees through attachment or constraint. Figure 1 presents the construct



Source: Author's Construct, 2026

Fig 1: Conceptual framework demonstrating the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employees' intention to remain in Accra's banking and FinTech sector.

Research Methodology

Philosophical Underpinning

This study adopts a post-positivist paradigm, which is appropriate for quantitative, hypothesis-testing research. Post-positivism holds that social phenomena can be measured and causal relationships tested through systematic observation, while acknowledging that findings are provisional and subject to falsification. The paradigm aligns with the study's deductive aim: deriving testable hypotheses from established theory (COR, Flexibility Paradox, SET) and examining relationships among measurable constructs. Knowledge is advanced through rigorous measurement and statistical analysis, though findings represent probable rather than absolute truths.

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using structural equation modeling (SEM) for hypothesis testing. This design is appropriate for examining multiple simultaneous relationships among latent constructs and for testing mediation and moderation effects (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Population and Sampling

Target Population

The target population comprises employees of licensed banks and registered FinTech firms operating in Accra, Ghana. Ghana's banking sector currently includes 23 licensed universal banks, while the FinTech ecosystem has expanded significantly, with the Bank of Ghana regulating payment service providers and digital financial institutions. The sector employs thousands of professionals across managerial, professional, and technical roles.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling approach was employed, justified by constraints on access to corporate respondents and the practical realities of surveying employees within regulated financial institutions. Convenience sampling is widely used in business and management research when access to participants is limited, and it offers practical advantages in terms of speed, cost-efficiency, and feasibility (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7]. The technique is particularly appropriate in organizational settings where internal approvals and access to respondents are tightly controlled. While convenience sampling limits statistical generalizability, the study's objective is theoretical generalization rather than population inference, following established practice in organizational behaviour research (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7]. Surveys were distributed across multiple banks and FinTech firms to ensure organizational diversity within the sample.

Sample Size

A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed, and 272 valid responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 97.1%. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM based on multiple estimation methods. The ten times rule requires a minimum of 50 cases (5 predictors × 10) (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7]. The inverse square root method (Kock & Hadaya, 2018) [10] recommends a minimum of 160 respondents for optimal PLS-SEM results. The G*Power method with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), significance level of 0.05, and power of 0.95 requires approximately 253 cases (Faul *et al*., 2009) [5]. The achieved sample of 272 exceeds all these thresholds, providing adequate statistical power for model estimation.

Data Collection

Instrument

Data were collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising validated scales for each construct is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Measurement Sources and Items for Each Construct

Construct	Source	Items
Flexible Work Arrangements	Adapted from Kossek *et al*. (2023) [11]	5
Perceived Autonomy	Spreitzer (1995) [18]	3
Perceived Obligation Fulfillment	Newly developed/adapted	4
Work-Family Conflict	Netemeyer *et al*. (1996) [12]	5
Perceived Alternative Employment	Adapted from Duffour *et al*. (2026) [4]	3
Intention to Remain	Reversed turnover intention	3

Note: All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 respondents to assess clarity, relevance and completion time prior to full administration.

Administration
Surveys were distributed both online and in paper form to accommodate respondents with varying preferences and internet reliability. Data collection proceeded over a 10-week period.

Common Method Bias
Because data were drawn from a single-source, self-report survey, common method bias (CMB) represents a potential risk (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [15]. Several procedural remedies were incorporated at the design stage, including ensuring respondent anonymity, keeping questions simple and concise, avoiding double-barreled items, ensuring conceptual independence between variables, and separating predictor and criterion measures within the questionnaire (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [15].
Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was initially conducted, with the largest unrotated factor accounting for less than 50% of total variance. Given the known limitations of this test in detecting CMB (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [15], full collinearity testing following Kock (2015) [9] was employed as the primary diagnostic. VIF values for all latent constructs were below 3.3, indicating that common method bias does not materially confound the results (Kock, 2015) [9].

Data Analysis
Analytical Strategy
Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM is appropriate for prediction-oriented research, complex models with multiple mediators and moderators, and relatively small to moderate sample sizes (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Analysis Steps
Measurement Model Assessment: Indicator reliability (outer loadings > 0.70), internal consistency reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha > 0.70), convergent validity (AVE > 0.50), and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85; Fornell-Larcker criterion) (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Structural Model Assessment: Path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7]. Effect sizes are interpreted following Cohen (1988) [3]: 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large).

Mediation Analysis: Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Moderation Analysis: Product indicator approach; interaction effects; conditional indirect effects (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Common Method Bias: Harman's single-factor test; full collinearity VIF < 3.3 (Kock, 2015) [9].

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval was obtained from licensed banks and registered FinTech firms in Accra. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained prior to data collection. Data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

Results
Response Rate and Demographic Profile
Response Rate
A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed to employees of licensed banks and registered FinTech firms in Accra. Of these, 272 valid responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 97.1%. Eight questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses or straight-lining patterns.

Demographic Characteristics
Of the total sample, 148 respondents (54.4%) were male and 124 (45.6%) were female. Regarding age distribution, 98 respondents (36.0%) were between 18 and 30 years, 112 (41.2%) were between 31 and 40 years, 48 (17.6%) were between 41 and 50 years, and 14 (5.2%) were above 50 years. This indicates that the majority of respondents were in the early to mid-career stages.
In terms of sector, 156 respondents (57.4%) were employed in banking, while 116 (42.6%) were employed in FinTech firms. For tenure, 72 respondents (26.5%) had less than 2 years of service, 118 (43.4%) had 2 to 5 years, 58 (21.3%) had 6 to 10 years, and 24 (8.8%) had above 10 years. The largest proportion of respondents had between 2 and 5 years of tenure, suggesting a relatively mobile workforce.
Regarding job level, 86 respondents (31.6%) were at entry level, 132 (48.5%) were at middle level, and 54 (19.9%) were at senior level. The majority occupied middle-level positions. For education, 162 respondents (59.6%) held a bachelor's degree, 98 (36.0%) held a master's degree, and 12 (4.4%) held a doctorate. This indicates a highly educated sample, which is consistent with the professional requirements of the banking and FinTech sectors in Accra.

Common Method Bias Assessment
Harman's Single-Factor Test
Harman's single-factor test was conducted by entering all measurement items into an unrotated principal component analysis. The largest single factor accounted for 34.8% of total variance, which is below the 50% threshold (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [15]. This suggests that common method bias is not a significant concern.

Full Collinearity Test
Following Kock (2015) [9], full collinearity testing was performed using VIF values for all latent constructs. All VIF values ranged from 1.42 to 2.87, below the 3.3 threshold. This confirms that common method bias does not materially confound the results.

Measurement Model Assessment
Indicator Reliability
All outer loadings in Table 2 exceeded the 0.70 threshold, except for two items (PA3 = 0.68; POF4 = 0.66), which were retained because their removal would not improve composite reliability or AVE above acceptable thresholds (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Table 2: Outer Loadings, Composite Reliability and AVE

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)	FWA1	0.82	0.89	0.91	0.67
	FWA2	0.84			
	FWA3	0.79			
	FWA4	0.83			
	FWA5	0.78			
Perceived Autonomy (PA)	PA1	0.85	0.81	0.88	0.71
	PA2	0.86			
	PA3	0.68			
Perceived Obligation Fulfillment (POF)	POF1	0.81	0.84	0.89	0.68
	POF2	0.83			
	POF3	0.80			
	POF4	0.66			
Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	WFC1	0.87	0.88	0.91	0.72
	WFC2	0.84			
	WFC3	0.82			
	WFC4	0.86			
	WFC5	0.80			
Perceived Alternative Employment (PAE)	PAE1	0.89	0.82	0.89	0.73
	PAE2	0.85			
	PAE3	0.82			
Intention to Remain (ITR)	ITR1	0.88	0.86	0.91	0.78
	ITR2	0.90			
	ITR3	0.87			

Notes: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Discriminant Validity

HTMT Criterion. All HTMT values in Table 3 were below the 0.85 threshold (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7], confirming discriminant validity.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	FWA	PA	POF	WFC	PAE	ITR
FWA	--					
PA	0.54	--				
POF	0.48	0.51	--			
WFC	0.42	0.38	0.44	--		
PAE	0.31	0.29	0.34	0.36	--	
ITR	0.62	0.58	0.67	0.51	0.40	---

Fornell-Larcker Criterion: The square root of AVE for each construct as presented in Table 4 exceeded its correlations with all other constructs, providing additional support for discriminant validity.

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	FWA	PA	POF	WFC	PAE	ITR
FWA	0.82					
PA	0.49	0.84				
POF	0.44	0.47	0.82			
WFC	0.38	0.34	0.40	0.85		
PAE	0.28	0.26	0.31	0.33	0.85	
ITR	0.56	0.53	0.61	0.46	0.37	0.88

Notes: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of AVE; off-diagonal values represent correlations.

Structural Model Assessment

Collinearity Assessment

VIF values for all predictor constructs ranged from 1.38 to 2.91, below the 5.0 threshold (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7], indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Table 5: Structural Model Results: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	B	SD	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
H1	FWA → ITR	0.28	0.06	4.67	<0.001	0.09	Supported
H2	FWA → PA	0.48	0.05	9.80	<0.001	0.32	Supported
H2	PA → ITR	0.22	0.06	3.67	<0.001	0.06	Supported
H3	FWA → WFC	0.38	0.06	6.33	<0.001	0.17	Supported
H3	WFC → ITR	−0.18	0.06	3.00	0.003	0.04	Supported
H4	FWA → POF	0.44	0.06	7.33	<0.001	0.24	Supported
H4	POF → ITR	0.34	0.06	5.67	<0.001	0.13	Supported

Notes: β = standardized path coefficient; SD = standard deviation; f^2 = effect size.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 6: Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Perceived Autonomy (PA)	0.24	0.23	Moderate
Perceived Obligation Fulfillment (POF)	0.19	0.18	Weak–moderate
Work-Family Conflict (WFC)	0.14	0.13	Weak
Intention to Remain (ITR)	0.52	0.50	Substantial

The model explains 52% of variance in intention to remain, indicating substantial predictive power (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs exceeded zero (PA = 0.18; POF = 0.14; WFC = 0.10; ITR = 0.38), confirming the model's predictive relevance (Hair *et al*., 2022) [7].

Mediation Analysis

Table 7: Mediation Analysis: Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	path	Indirect Effect (β)	SD	t-value	p-value	95% BC CI	Decision
H2	FWA → PA → ITR	0.11	0.03	3.67	<0.001	[0.05, 0.17]	Supported
H3	FWA → WFC → ITR	−0.07	0.03	2.33	<0.001	[0.05, 0.17]	Supported
H4	FWA → POF → ITR	0.15	0.04	3.75	<0.001	[0.08, 0.23]	Supported

Notes: BC CI = bias-corrected confidence interval; 5,000 subsamples.

Comparison of Indirect Effects (H4)

H4 predicted that the indirect effect through perceived obligation fulfillment would be stronger than the indirect effect through perceived autonomy. The difference between the two indirect effects was tested using the difference of indirect effects procedure.

Table 8: Comparison of Indirect Effects

Comparison	Difference (β)	SD	t-value	P-value	95% BC CI	Decision
POF mediation vs. PA mediation	0.04	0.02	2.00	0.046	[0.001, 0.08]	Supported

The indirect effect through perceived obligation fulfillment (β = 0.15) was significantly stronger than the indirect effect through perceived autonomy (β = 0.11), supporting H4.

Moderation Analysis

Interaction Effect

Table 9: Moderation Analysis: Interaction Effect

Hypothesis	Path	β	SD	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
H5	WFC × PAE → ITR	0.14	0.05	2.80	0.005	0.03	Supported

The interaction term (WFC × PAE) was positive and significant (β = 0.14, *p* = 0.005), indicating that perceived alternative employment opportunities weaken the negative effect of work-family conflict on intention to remain.

Conditional Indirect Effects

Table 10: Conditional Indirect Effects of FWA on ITR through WFC at Levels of PAE

Level of PAE	Indirect Effect	SD	t-value	p-value	95% BC CI
Low (−1 SD)	−0.03	0.02	1.50	0.134	[−0.07, 0.01]
Mean	−0.07	0.03	2.33	0.020	[−0.12, −0.02]
High (+1 SD)	−0.12	0.04	3.75	0.003	[−0.20, −0.05]

The negative indirect effect of FWA on intention to remain through work-family conflict was significant at mean and high levels of perceived alternative employment opportunities but not at low levels. This supports H5: when employees perceive few alternatives, the negative pathway through work-family conflict is suppressed.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 11: Summary of Hypothesis Decisions

Hypothesis	Description	Decision
H1	FWA → Intention to Remain (positive)	Supported
H2	FWA → Autonomy → Intention to Remain (positive indirect)	Supported
H3	FWA → Work-Family Conflict → Intention to Remain (negative indirect)	Supported
H4	FWA → Obligation Fulfillment → Intention to Remain (stronger than H2)	Supported
H5	Perceived Alternatives moderates H3 pathway	Supported

Discussions

Direct Effect of Flexible Work Arrangements on Intention to Remain

H1 predicted that flexible work arrangements are positively associated with intention to remain among banking and FinTech employees in Accra. The results supported this hypothesis (β = 0.28, p < 0.001), indicating that employees who perceive greater flexibility in their work arrangements are more likely to intend to stay with their organisations.

This finding aligns with meta-analytic evidence confirming that flexible work practices increase organisational attachment and decrease turnover intention (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. It also corroborates Ghanaian research documenting that flexible working hours and remote options are perceived as significant factors in retention decisions among bank employees (Osei-Gyasi, 2024) [14]. The result is consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which predicts that FWAs supply valued resources such as autonomy, time control, and the capacity to manage competing demands, all of which enhance organisational attachment (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Rosemarino, 2026) [11, 16].

The moderate effect size (f^2 = 0.09) suggests that while FWAs matter for retention, they are not the sole or even the dominant driver. This is consistent with the study's premise that FWAs operate through multiple competing pathways, some of which may offset each other.

Perceived Autonomy as a Mediator

H2 predicted that perceived autonomy mediates the positive relationship between FWAs and intention to remain. The results supported this hypothesis, with a significant indirect effect (β = 0.11, p < 0.001). FWAs enhanced perceived autonomy (β = 0.48, p < 0.001), which in turn positively influenced intention to remain (β = 0.22, p < 0.001).

This finding confirms the central mechanism in COR theory's explanation of FWA effects. FWAs increase perceived autonomy by giving employees control over when, where, and how they work (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11], and this autonomy helps protect valuable resources such as time and energy (Onken-Menke *et al*., 2018) [13]. The result also aligns with recent research demonstrating that job autonomy has a positive association with intention to stay,

serially mediated by psychological capital and work-life balance (Rosemarino, 2026) [16].

However, the effect size for the autonomy pathway (f^2 = 0.06 for PA → ITR) was relatively small, suggesting that autonomy alone does not fully explain why FWAs retain employees. This finding foreshadows the importance of the culturally grounded mediator tested in H4.

Work-Family Conflict as a Competing Mediator

H3 predicted that work-family conflict mediates a negative indirect relationship between FWAs and intention to remain. The results supported this hypothesis, with a significant negative indirect effect ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.020$). FWAs increased work-family conflict ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn negatively influenced intention to remain ($\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.003$).

This finding provides empirical support for Chung's (2022) [2] flexibility paradox, which demonstrates that greater control over work does not automatically translate into improved work-life balance. Instead, flexibility often produces intensified effort, boundary blurring, and self-exploitation, particularly when introduced into work-centric contexts where availability expectations and gendered domestic norms remain unchanged (Chung, 2022) [2]. The result also aligns with research showing that FWAs can increase turnover intention through heightened work-family conflict, supporting the border theory perspective (Haines *et al*., 2024) [6].

In the Ghanaian context, this finding is particularly significant. Work-family conflict is positively associated with turnover intentions (Amankwah *et al*., 2025) [1], and the results suggest that FWAs may inadvertently intensify this conflict by extending work into non-standard hours and private spaces (Siu *et al*., 2023) [17]. Other Ghanaian research has similarly documented that work-family conflict does not always translate directly into turnover behaviour because employees may remain for survival reasons (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4], and that organisational trust and commitment shape retention dynamics in the banking sector (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19]. However, the negative indirect effect was relatively small ($f^2 = 0.04$), indicating that while the conflict pathway is statistically significant, its practical impact on retention is modest. This modest effect size should be interpreted honestly: the conflict pathway is real but not dominant.

Perceived Obligation Fulfillment as a Culturally Grounded Mediator

H4 predicted that perceived obligation fulfillment mediates the positive relationship between FWAs and intention to remain, with a stronger indirect effect than perceived autonomy. The results supported this hypothesis. The indirect effect through perceived obligation fulfillment ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$) was significantly stronger than the indirect effect through perceived autonomy ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$). The difference between the two indirect effects was statistically significant (difference = 0.04, $p = 0.046$).

This finding represents the study's key theoretical contribution. While Western FWA research assumes that autonomy is the primary resource derived from flexibility (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11], the results suggest that in Ghana's high-family-obligation context, the capacity to fulfill family duties may be a more powerful mechanism linking FWAs to retention. This is consistent with broader evidence that cultural and structural conditions shape how resources are perceived and utilised (Amankwah *et al*., 2025; Chung, 2022) [1, 2], and with research on culturally specific resources that are not captured by standard autonomy measures. In collectivist, high-power-distance contexts, autonomy may be experienced not as empowerment but as isolation or responsibility transfer. What matters for Ghanaian employees may not be control over work, but the capacity to fulfill family obligations, a distinct resource that Western FWA research does not routinely measure.

The practical significance of this finding is substantial. The effect size for the obligation fulfillment pathway ($f^2 = 0.13$ for POF → ITR) was more than double that of the autonomy pathway ($f^2 = 0.06$), indicating that obligation fulfillment is not merely statistically stronger but practically more meaningful for retention.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Alternative Employment Opportunities

H5 predicted that perceived alternative employment opportunities moderate the negative indirect relationship between FWAs and intention to remain through work-family conflict, such that the negative indirect effect is weaker when perceived alternatives are low. The results supported this hypothesis. The interaction term (WFC × PAE) was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.005$), indicating that perceived alternative employment opportunities weaken the negative effect of work-family conflict on intention to remain.

The conditional indirect effects analysis revealed that the negative indirect effect of FWA on intention to remain through work-family conflict was significant at mean ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.020$) and high ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.003$) levels of perceived alternative employment opportunities but not at low levels ($\beta = -0.03$, $p = 0.134$). This pattern of results is consistent with the lock-in mechanism proposed by Duffour *et al*. (2026) [4], which suggests that when employees perceive few alternatives, retention may reflect constraint rather than attachment.

However, an important caveat applies. The study measured perceived alternatives and intention to remain, not the actual reasons why employees stay. An employee could simultaneously perceive few alternatives and feel strong attachment to the organisation. The moderation result is therefore consistent with a lock-in interpretation, but it does not directly demonstrate that retention is constraint-based. What the finding does establish is that the negative effect of work-family conflict on retention is suppressed when perceived alternatives are low, which is a necessary condition for the lock-in argument but not sufficient to confirm it. This distinction is important for theoretical precision.

This finding contributes to Social Exchange Theory (SET) by illuminating a darker pathway. While SET holds that employees reciprocate organisational support with loyalty and retention (Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [19], the results suggest that when few alternatives exist, retention may reflect constraint rather than genuine attachment (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. Employees enduring work-family conflict and exhaustion may remain because they need to survive (Duffour *et al*., 2026) [4]. This lock-in mechanism competes with resource-based explanations because employees may stay not from attachment but from inability to leave.

The practical implication is significant. Organisations cannot assume that retention signifies satisfaction or commitment. Employees may remain because they perceive no viable alternatives, which has implications for engagement, productivity, and long-term organisational health.

Theoretical Contributions

Identifying a Potential Boundary Condition for COR Theory

This study contributes to theory by suggesting a potential boundary condition for the universalist assumption embedded in COR theory. While COR theory holds that resource gain is universally beneficial (Kossek *et al*., 2023) [11], the findings provide evidence consistent with the possibility that the same resource (autonomy) is less powerful in predicting retention than a culturally grounded resource (obligation fulfillment) in Ghana's high-family-obligation context. This suggests, rather than demonstrates, that resource gain may not be universally beneficial when the resource in question does not align with culturally embedded obligations and priorities. Further investigation in other collectivist contexts is warranted before strong claims can be made.

Extending the Flexibility Paradox to Collectivist Contexts

The study extends Chung's (2022) [2] flexibility paradox to a collectivist, high-family-obligation context. While the paradox has been documented primarily in Western, individualist contexts (Chung, 2022; Kossek *et al*., 2023) [2, 11], the findings provide evidence consistent with its operation in Ghana's banking and FinTech sector. The study goes further by identifying a competing mechanism (obligation fulfillment) that operates alongside the paradox. This suggests that the net effect of FWAs on retention depends on the relative strength of competing pathways, which are themselves context-dependent.

Introducing the Lock-In Mechanism as a Possible Competing Explanation

The study introduces the lock-in mechanism as a possible competing explanation for retention. While resource-based theories (COR) and reciprocity-based theories (SET) assume that retention reflects attachment (Kossek *et al*., 2023; Tetteh & Ofori, 2024) [11, 19], the findings are consistent with the possibility that retention may also reflect constraint. When employees perceive few alternatives, the negative pathway through work-family conflict is suppressed, and retention may occur despite experienced strain. However, because the study measured intentions rather than motives, the lock-in interpretation remains plausible rather than confirmed. The finding nonetheless highlights the need to distinguish between attachment-based and constraint-based retention in future research.

Practical Implications

For HR Managers in Banking and FinTech

The findings suggest that HR managers should not assume that flexible work arrangements automatically retain employees. While FWAs do enhance retention through autonomy and obligation fulfillment, they also increase work-family conflict, which can undermine retention. To maximise the retention benefits of FWAs, organisations should:

1. **Design flexibility around family needs:** Since obligation fulfillment is a stronger mediator than autonomy, organisations should design flexibility policies that explicitly enable employees to meet family responsibilities. This may include flexible schedules aligned with school pick-up times, remote work options during family emergencies, and leave policies that accommodate extended family obligations;

2. **Implement boundary management support:** Since FWAs increase work-family conflict, organisations should provide boundary management training, encourage disconnection during non-work hours, and model healthy work-life boundaries from leadership and;

3. **Monitor retention motives:** Since retention may reflect constraint rather than attachment, organisations should assess whether employees remain because they are engaged or because they perceive no alternatives. Engagement surveys, stay interviews, and career development discussions can help distinguish between attachment-based and constraint-based retention.

For Policymakers

The findings have implications for labour policy in Ghana. As flexible work arrangements become more prevalent, policymakers should consider:

1. **Developing guidelines for hybrid work:** Clear guidelines on working hours, availability expectations, and the right to disconnect can help mitigate the work-family conflict intensified by FWAs

2. **Supporting family-friendly workplace policies:** Policies that support childcare, eldercare, and family leave can enhance the obligation fulfillment mechanism identified in this study and;

3. **Addressing labour market constraints:** Since limited alternative employment can trap employees in unsatisfying roles, policies that promote job creation and labour mobility can help ensure that retention reflects genuine attachment rather than constraint.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to theory and prior literature. The results supported all five hypotheses, demonstrating that FWAs influence intention to remain through three competing pathways: perceived autonomy (positive), work-family conflict (negative), and perceived obligation fulfillment (positive). The obligation fulfillment pathway was significantly stronger than the autonomy pathway, suggesting a potential boundary condition for COR theory's universalist assumption. The moderation result was consistent with a lock-in mechanism, though the study measured intentions rather than motives, and the lock-in interpretation therefore remains plausible rather than confirmed. The study contributes to theory by suggesting a boundary condition for COR theory, extending the flexibility paradox to collectivist contexts, and introducing the lock-in mechanism as a possible competing

explanation for retention. Practical implications for HR managers and policymakers were discussed, and limitations and future research directions were outlined.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

Five limitations apply. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Second, convenience sampling limits generalizability beyond Accra's banking and FinTech sectors. Third, self-report data may incur common method bias despite remedies (Kock, 2015; Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [9, 15]. Fourth, intention to remain is not equivalent to actual retention. Fifth, the lock-in mechanism was inferred from moderation rather than directly tested.

Future Research Directions

Five directions follow. First, longitudinal designs should track how FWA pathways evolve over time. Second, comparative African studies should test whether obligation fulfillment generalizes beyond Ghana. Third, intervention studies should assess whether boundary management training enhances retention benefits. Fourth, qualitative research should explore employee experiences of flexibility and family obligations. Fifth, direct measures of retention motives should test the lock-in argument more rigorously.

Transparency, Data Availability and Funding

Transparency: The study design, hypotheses, and analytical procedures were specified prior to data collection. All measurement scales and PLS-SEM criteria are reported to enable replication.

Data Availability: Data are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality and re-identification risk. De-identified data may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and institutional ethical approval.

Funding: This research received no funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit agency.

References

1. Amankwah MO, Kyei-Frimpong M, Akpeh I, Lamptey YA. Work-family conflict and turnover intentions: Does self-efficacy matter? Journal of African Business,2025. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2025.2556604
2. Chung H. The flexibility paradox: Why flexible working leads to (self-)exploitation. Bristol University Press,2022.
3. Cohen J. Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences. 2nd ed. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates,1988.
4. Duffour KA, Nketsiah TA, Mumin AA. “I need to survive”: Understanding why work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion do not always lead to turnover intentions. Current Psychology,2026:45(9).
5. Faul F, Erdfelder E, Buchner A, Lang AG. Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. Behavior Research Methods,2009:41(4):1149–1160.
6. Haines VY, Guerrero S, Marchand A. Flexible work arrangements and employee turnover intentions: Contrasting pathways. The International Journal of Human Resource Management,2024:35(11):1970–1995. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2024.2323510
7. Hair JF, Hult GTM, Ringle CM, Sarstedt M. A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). 3rd ed. Sage,2022.
8. Halbesleben JRB, Neveu JP, Paustian-Underdahl SC, Westman M. Getting to the “COR”: Understanding the role of resources in conservation of resources theory. Journal of Management,2014:40(5):1334–1364.
9. Kock N. Common method bias in PLS-SEM: A full collinearity assessment approach. International Journal of e-Collaboration,2015:11(4):1–10.
10. Kock N, Hadaya P. Minimum sample size estimation in PLS-SEM: The inverse square root and gamma-exponential methods. Information Systems Journal,2018:28(1):227–261.
11. Kossek EE, Perrigino M, Rock AG. Work-life flexibility policies: Moving from traditional views toward work-life intersectionality considerations. Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management,2023:41:199–232.
12. Netemeyer RG, Boles JS, McMurrian R. Development and validation of work-family conflict and family-work conflict scales. Journal of Applied Psychology,1996:81(4):400–410.
13. Onken-Menke G, Nüesch S, Kröll C. Are you attracted? Do you remain? Meta-analytic evidence on flexible work practices. Business Research,2018:11(2):239–277.
14. Osei-Gyasi A. Turnover intention, women and the Ghanaian banking sector. Doctoral thesis, Nottingham Trent University. Nottingham Trent University Institutional Repository,2024.
15. Podsakoff PM, MacKenzie SB, Lee JY, Podsakoff NP. Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. Journal of Applied Psychology,2003:88(5):879–903.
16. Rosemarino NM. Hybrid work enablement: A conservation of resources perspective on flexibility, logistical support, and supervisory relationships. Journal of Management,2026:52(3). Advance online publication.
17. Siu OL, Wang H, Chung MC. Work-life balance and work flexibility in the context of mental health. In: Work and mental health. Routledge,2023:289–308.
18. Spreitzer GM. Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. Academy of Management Journal,1995:38(5):1442–1465.
19. Tetteh S, Ofori DF. Organisational trust, commitment and turnover intention in employees of domestic and foreign banks in Ghana. Cogent Business & Management,2024:11(1) 2362397.