

FEBRUARY  
**2020**  
QUARTER 1 REPORT

CORPORATE STAFFING  
SERVICES LIMITED



# INSIDE THE WORLD OF WORK SPOUSES IN KENYAN ORGANIZATIONS

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## Who we are

Corporate Staffing Services Ltd is a leading HR consultancy firm in Kenya accredited by the Ministry of Labour and a member of the Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM). With ten years of concrete experience in the field, we pride ourselves in providing complete recruitment solutions, training, sourcing and supplying quality staff as well as human resource consultancy services.

Corporate Staffing Services Ltd commissioned the study to find out the extent of work spouse relationships in Kenyan organizations and their influence in personal, corporate as well as social lives of employees. The survey was also aimed at finding how human resource professionals view work spouse relationships and their effects.

# Introduction

Do you have a go-to person of the opposite gender in the office with whom you've formed a tight friendship? Then you most likely have a "work spouse."

A work spouse is a colleague of the opposite gender with whom you have a strong friendship with and who meets your emotional needs in the workplace. They offer a close connection, support and advice on both work and personal issues. The relationship is ideally platonic.

So how exactly is a work spouse relationship beneficial?

First of all they get someone they can confide in and be more honest with. They develop an easy rapport that can be a soothing antidote to the more stressful interactions they may have with other colleagues. They also have a co-worker who understands their preferred work style and tries to accommodate this as best as they can.

*Our survey sought to understand:*

- The prevalence of work spouse relationships in Kenyan organizations
- Characteristics of the work spouses relationships
- Their effects at the work place and personal lives



# 1. Executive summary

Human beings are driven by the natural urge to be social. In the work environment, work spouses play a key role in fulfilling this urge.

Work spouses make employees feel safe and supported because they have someone to bounce their ideas off of without feeling shy. They also help employees get more done faster because they work more seamless rather than if either of them had to work with someone less in synch with them.

On the flipside, work spouse relationships have adverse effect on work productivity. They can lead to hurt feelings, divisiveness, tarnished reputations, and even attrition if employees feel they are in an unhealthy work environment. Additionally, just like in a real relationship, fallouts can be very messy.

“

***Human beings are driven by the natural urge to be social. In the work environment, work spouses play a key role in fulfilling this urge.***

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## Some interesting work spouse facts from the survey

- Work spouse relationships are quite common in Kenyan organizations. Overall, 70% of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of work spouse relationships going on within their organization
- About 64.1% of the respondents have had or are currently in a work spouse relationship.
- Of these respondents who have had or are currently in a work spouse relationship, 61.1% are married, 13.8% are in a romantic relationship. 24.3% are single while 0.8% are divorced or widowed.
- Slightly more than half 52.2% have been in work spouse relationships for between 1 to 4 years, 37.8% have been in a work spouse relationship for less than one year and the rest 10% have been on a work spouse relationship for over 5 years.
- The most talked about topic of discussion amongst work spouses is workload and tasks. Other topics include home issues, current affairs & news etc.
- About 41% of the work spouses like to stay in touch even beyond the office hours.
- Slightly more than half, 53.8% either have kept their work spouse partners as a secret or are single and they don't have a significant other in their lives at the moment.
- 66.5% of the respondents have had their work spouse influence their career decisions.
- 78.7% of the respondents would continue with their work spouse relationships even if the work spouse left the workplace/ organization.
- In the upcoming Valentine's Day, only 15.1% of the respondents will gift their work spouses. The majority 63.1% will only wish their work spouses a happy Valentine's Day while the rest 21.8% will do nothing for their work spouses.
- 76.7% of the HR professionals do not encourage work spouse relationships.
- Only 48.3% of the organizations have a policy on relationships in place.

## 2. Survey Methodology

### Data Collection

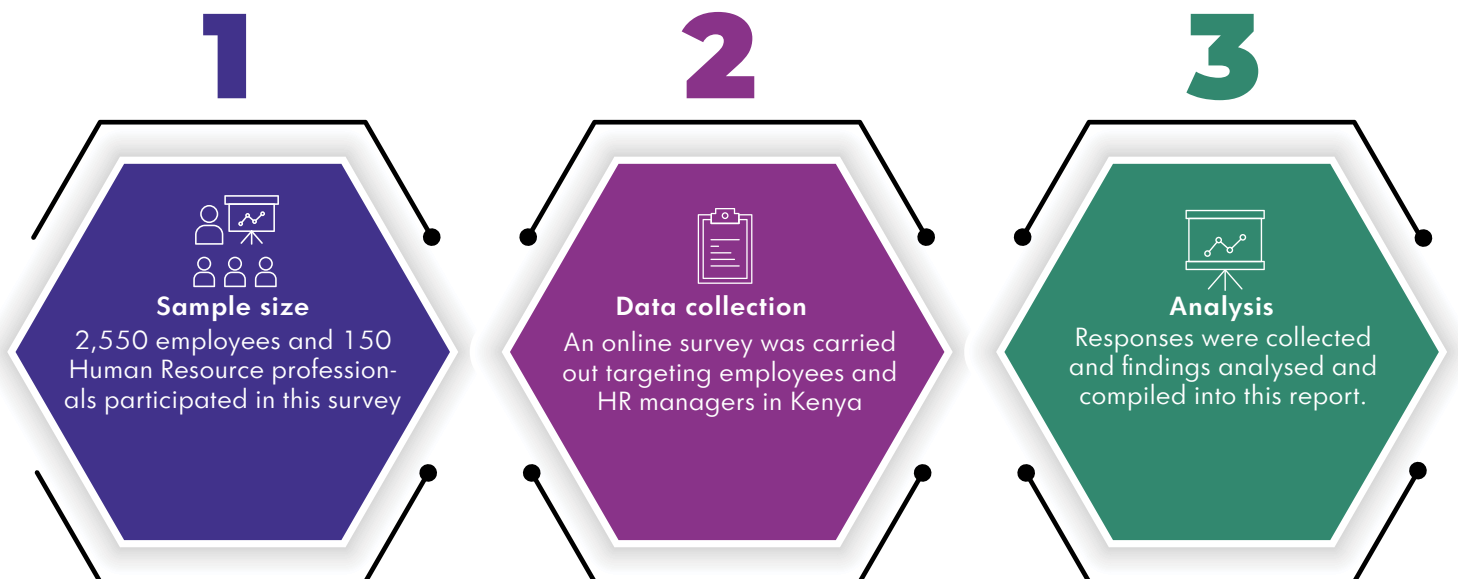
The request to participate was delivered to all the employees and HR professionals through online means. A total of 2,550 employees and 150 human resource professionals participated in this survey.

### Data Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of the survey participants and their responses, all submissions were anonymous. Further, raw data was strictly viewed by an external consultant with the intent to be used for the detailed analysis, trending and content for this report.

### Limitations

All of the information reported in our analysis was dependent on self-reported data, which means there are inherent issues, including exaggeration, forgetfulness, minimization, and more. Additionally, none of our findings have been weighted or statistically tested.



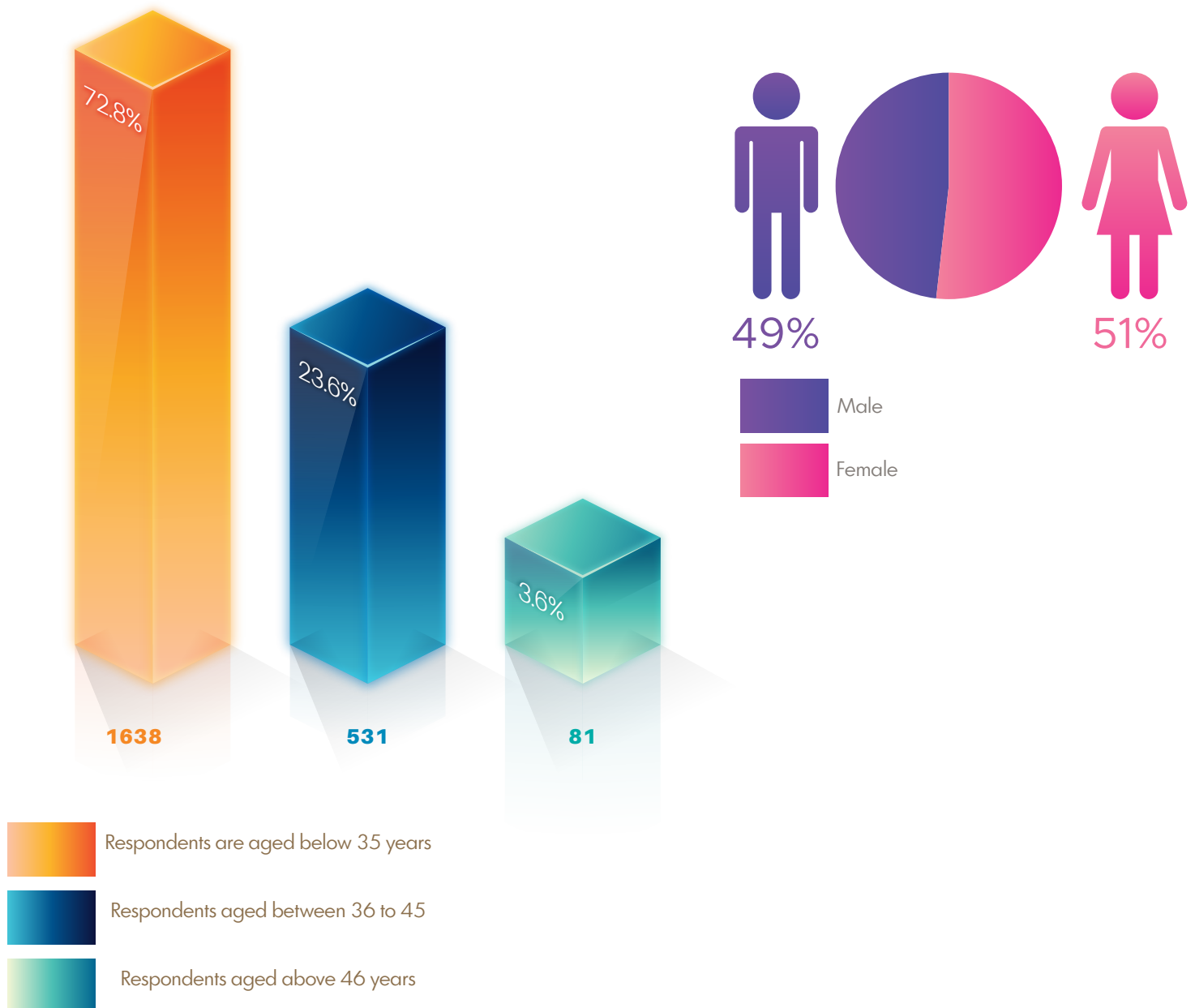
*\*Survey Period: December 2019 to January 2020*

# 3. Work Spouse Survey Findings

## a) Characteristics of the Survey Participants

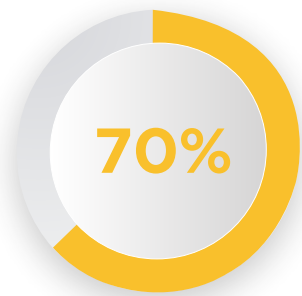
The survey participation in regards to gender comprised of 49% (1,103) male and 51% (1,148) female.

Results for the survey indicate that majority, 72.8% (1,638) of the respondents are aged below 35 years, 23.6% (531) are aged between 36 to 45 years and only 3.6% (81) are aged above 46 years.



## b) How common are work spouse relationships in Kenyan organizations?

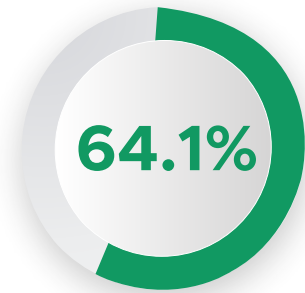
1442 of the respondents have had or are currently in a work spouse relationship.



764 are not aware of any work spouse relationships in their organization

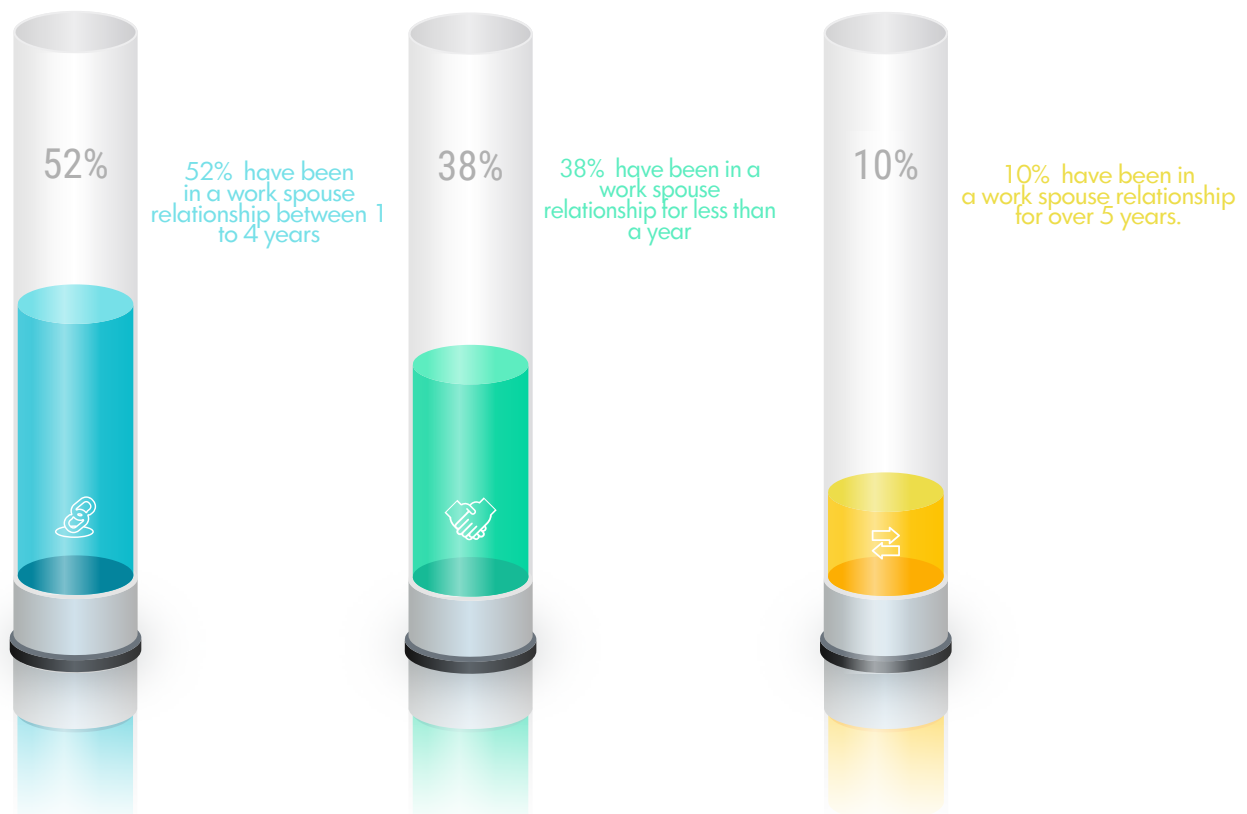


1786 of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of work spouse relationships going on within their organization



Of the 64.1% of the respondents who have had or are currently in a work spouse relationship, 61.1% (882) are married, 13.8% (198) are in a romantic relationship. 24.3% (350) are single while 0.8% (12) are divorced or widowed.

## c) What is the length of work spouse relationships?



## d) Who are involved in work spouse relationships?

- 90% of the respondents with a work spouse mentioned that their work spouse relationship was with a person on their level in terms of company hierarchy i.e. a colleague either in the same department or in another department.
- About 8% of respondents with a work spouse reached outside of their level to forge a work-spouse relationship with a subordinate or boss/supervisor.



### e) What work spouses talk about

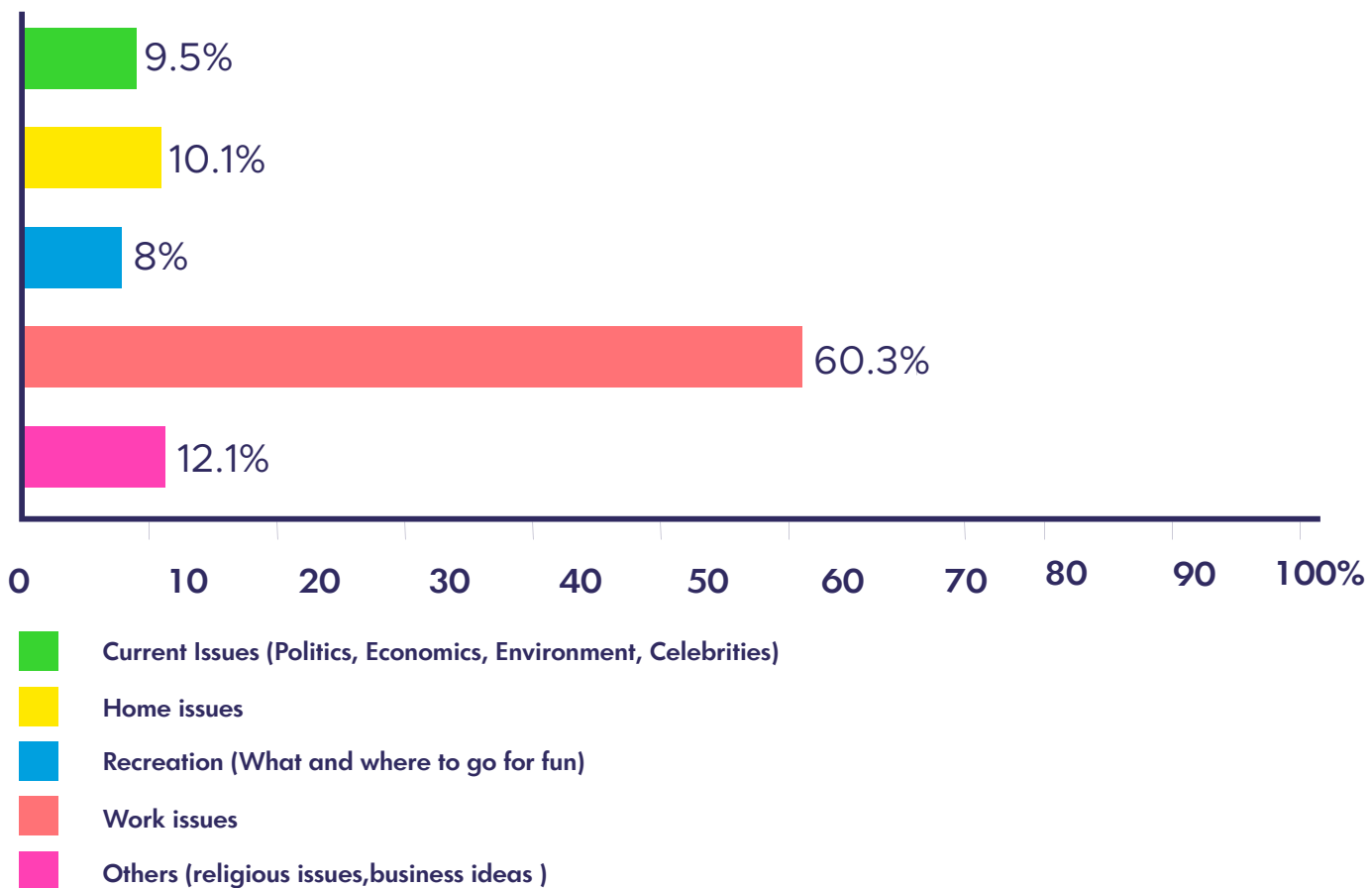
59% of the respondents keep their interaction with the work spouse confined to the office, about 41% communicate even on weekends and weeknights.

Work is the main topic work spouses discuss this comprise of topics like colleagues, work problems, and projects followed by home issues, current issues like politics, recreational related.

Other topics discussed include religious issues, business ideas etc.

Everyone loves a little workplace gossip now and then, and with so many people packed into a single space for five (or more) days a week, it is nearly impossible to avoid.

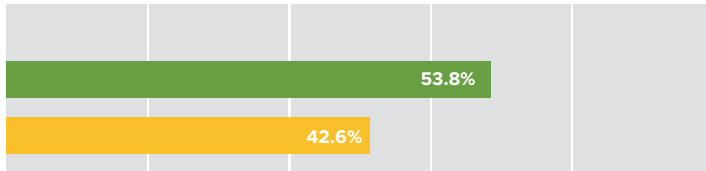
### f) Topics discussed by work spouses are as illustrated in the graph below



## g) When Worlds Collide

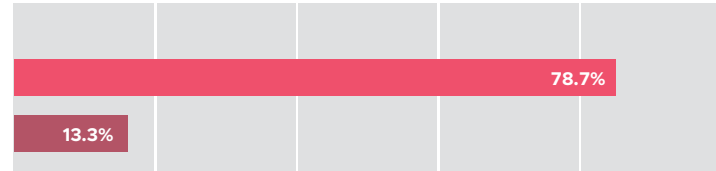
Having a “go to person” to help blow off steam and vent your stresses to is an extremely important part of maintaining a healthy emotional work life, as well as forming deeper and more trustworthy relationships. Our survey sought to establish if work spouse relationships go beyond the workplace.

### h) Disclosing work spouses to significant others



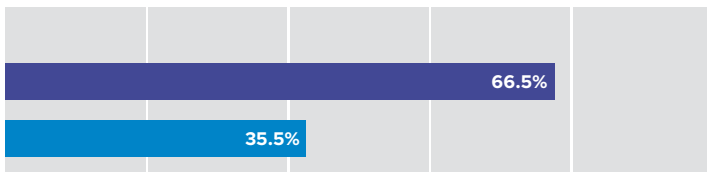
- 46.2% of the respondents in work spouse relationships have mentioned of their work spouses to their significant other.
- 53.8% either have kept their work spouses as a secret or are single.

### i) Would relationships continue if the work spouse left?



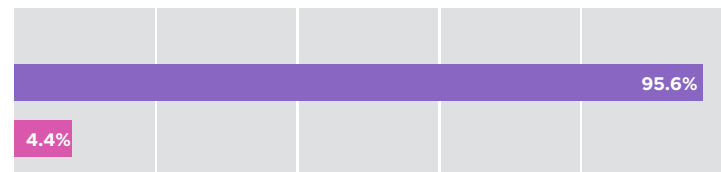
- 78.7% of the respondents their work spouses relationships would continue even if the work spouse left the workplace/ organization
- 13.3% would not keep the relationship going. They see themselves remaining cordial with the work spouse but stop all personal interactions

### j) Influence in decision making



- 66.5% of the respondents have had their work spouse influence their career decisions.
- Only 33.5% of the respondents have never been influenced on a career decision by their work spouses.

### k) When it turns sour



- 4.4% mentioned that they have ever left a job when their work spouse relationship went sour.
- The rest 95.6% have never left a job when their work spouse relationship went sour.

## l) The Valentines Affair

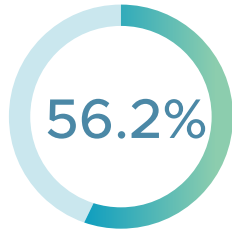


63.1% will only wish their work spouses a happy Valentine's Day

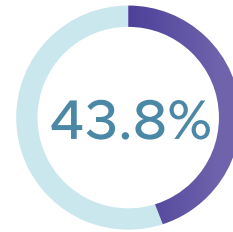
21.8% are likely to do nothing for their work spouses during the approaching Valentine's Day.

15.1% of the respondents will gift their work spouses in the approaching Valentine's Day

## m) Effects of work spouse relationship at the workplace



56.2% mentioned that the work spouse relationships don't have any effect.



43.8% of the respondents mentioned that the work spouse relationship affects the workplace while the rest

Here are some responses on what they think of the benefits of work spouse relationships.

*"Many are the times I felt the urge to resign due to intense work pressure but he kept on motivating and mentoring me."*

*"I'm able to get more information on what is happening in the organization in terms of the plans staff have, any grievances which they employees are afraid of communication openly from my work spouse."*

*"The relationship was of great impact. I gained experience and skills ranging from work relations and ethics, problem solving, stress management, growth mindset, Communication among other things."*



## On the Flipside

Work spouse relationships can lead to hurt feelings, divisiveness, tarnished reputations, and even attrition if employees feel they are in an unhealthy work environment.

*"Work spouse relationships are complex. Jealousy is common in case a spouse is not treated well by a colleague or boss"*

*"They spend a lot of work time together or chit-chatting thus affecting their work."*

*"Leads to favoritism/ prejudice against other co-workers."*

*"Other colleagues think that they are more than friends. They get jealous when you talk to their 'spouse colleague' so we just leave the two to do things together. We avoid them".*



*"If one party is absent then the other party feels uncomfortable which may result to poor teamwork".*

*"They spill over their home issues to the workplace".*

*"The lady gets into petty fights with other ladies who talk to the guy. This has tainted her image".*

## 4. From The Perspective Of Human Resource Professionals

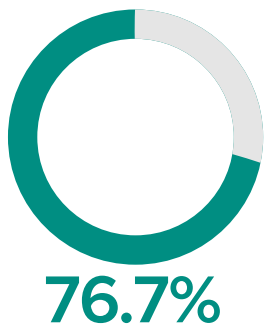
The survey participants comprised of 70% female and 30% male.

### a) Characteristics of the survey participants

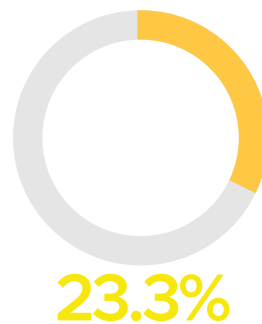
50% of the respondents are aged below 35 years, 30% are aged between 36 to 45 years and only 20% are aged 46 years and above.

AGE	PROPORTION BY PERCENTAGE
Below 35	50%
36-45	30%
Above 46	20%

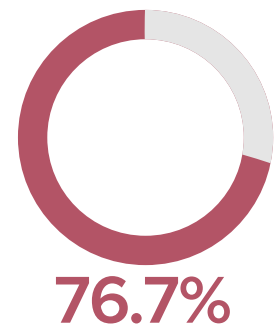
76.7% of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of work spouse relationships going on within their organization



23.3% are not aware of any work spouse relationships in their organization



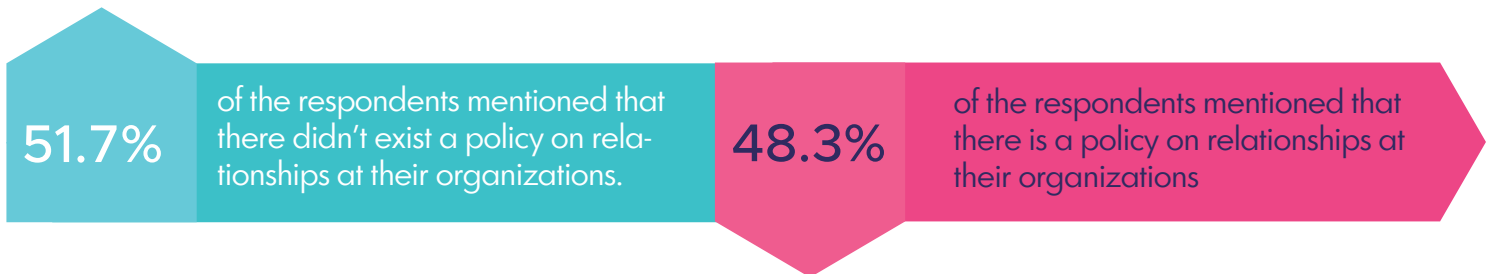
HR professionals who do not encourage work spouse relationships.



### Some of the HR professionals who support work spouse relationships felt that these relationships

- ① Create a balance at work and a harmonious environment.
- ② Encourages sharing of ideas
- ③ Provide a consultative platform for both work related and personal issues.

### b) HR Policies on Work Spouses



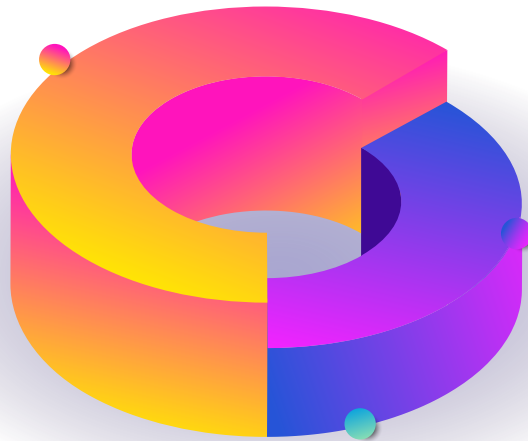
In real life, people's relationships exist on many levels, not all sexual, which complicates the effort to write an office policy about relationships. Even non-sexual behavior can be unwanted or inappropriate. It's often in the eye of the beholder (or the beholder's spouse) whether or not a platonic relationship with a coworker crosses the line.

A work spouse "connotes a peculiar kind of emotional monogamy" that is different from a close friendship.

### c) Impact of work spouse relationships fallout

We sought to establish how many of the HR professionals have dealt with a fallout of the work spouses at their organizations.

**58.6%**  
have dealt with a work spouse  
fall-out



**41.1%**  
have never dealt with a  
work spouse fall-out

Experiences such as these are the reasons why many firms opt for Human Resource policies. If and when a policy is in place, then the HR has a guideline on how to deal with or even have an opportunity to discuss with the "couple" what happens if the relationship ends.

## d) Some of the experiences described by the HR professionals who have dealt with a fallout include:



"There is this time where a work spouse relationship ended and the lady involved who was in a managerial position ended up resigning."



"There is a time when one work spouse made attempts to defame her fellow employee alleging that he had been stealing company produce. After investigations we found out it is because they had a squabble out of work. I held a brief meeting with the workers on their conduct and how it affects their image and that of the company."



"A staff member suffered greatly from a work spouse relationship breakup. To make matters worse, the partner moved on and picked up a replacement from within the branch. The new spouse bullied the former spouse and I had to transfer the "divorced spouse" to a different branch."



Asked to describe how work spouse relationships affected the work place, the HR professionals mentioned the following;









### Positive effects

- 👍 It creates a balance at work and a harmonious environment.
- 👍 It encourages sharing of ideas issues
- 👍 Positively provides a consultative platform for both work related and personal issues.

### Negative effects

- 👎 Objectivity of issues at the work place is lost.
- 👎 Waste organization's time discussing gossip, family and personal issues.
- 👎 It may bring about favourism and biasness in staff treatment.
- 👎 Can affect decision making and productivity at the work place.
- 👎 May result to sexual harassment.
- 👎 Chances of collusion to mostly defraud the company can be rampant.
- 👎 Lack of proper supervision for fear of offending the other party.
- 👎 Maybe be a source of cover-ups, unfair decisions in promotions, salary reviews or even work assignments.
- 👎 Misuse of Organization's funds for "work related" trips which is not the case, un-professionalism, bad example to younger employees etc.
- 👎 They create case of conflict of interest and subjectivity in work relationship.
- 👎 Emotion imbalance among spouses depending on their mood which affects the performance.

# Conclusions And Recommendations

-  Relationships are a basic social human need. Whether in our private or work lives, there is a natural urge to meet with others and have pleasant and trusting connections.
-  Even as work spouse relationships have proved to help employees cope in a constantly changing environment, there are quite a few prominent HR risks that can complicate office dynamics, including perceived favoritism, conflicts of interest, outright violations of company policy, and, especially in the modern workplace, the potential for workplace sexual harassment.
-  These risks aren't limited to work spouses, however: Romantic feelings aside, even a simple boss-employee friendship that exists outside of the 9 to 5 can require carefully established boundaries that can very easily lead to a scrambled power dynamic.
-  Sometimes it is easy for relationships to spiral out of control. Those in work spouse relationships should be mindful to keep boundaries of what they discuss and the times they discuss. Such boundaries help make the relationship grounded on professionalism.
-  Given the magnitude of respondents who mentioned they have/had a work spouse, it would be futile for any organization to downplay both their existence and their influence in decisions making. Organizations need to embrace the work spouse phenomena and include training on work spouses
-  Managers in Kenya should understand that creating relationships is a basic human need. They should therefore seek to enhance communication skills, conflict management training and general trainings in their organizations.
-  Workplaces need to establish (and regularly update) their parameters of acceptable behavior. Yes, a firm has legal obligations to protect employees from sexual harassment and hostile work environments. It also has an obligation to protect its clients and itself from conflicts of interest. But beyond fulfilling the letter of the law, it's simply in everyone's interest to create a workplace that feels comfortable and safe.
-  Within the boundaries of the law, every firm should determine its own definition of an office relationship. Even if the office prohibits them, employees need to know what precisely is prohibited. If relationships are allowed, the policies regarding them should reflect each organization's unique makeup. The idea is to create a policy that's realistic enough that it can be enforced in a reasonable, fair manner. So it should suit your firm's culture.



# CORPORATE

*staffing services*



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