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Challenges faced by married university undergraduate female students in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The question as to whether marriage is an asset or liability especially to female undergraduate is yet to be answered satisfactorily. This study seeks to find out common challenges faced by married undergraduate female students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, factors responsible and the effects these have on them. The study utilized the survey design with sample consisting of 150 married undergraduate female students purposively selected from two of the six Universities in Ogun State. Combining work with family responsibilities and school obligations lead to stress among 108(83.1%) respondents and these have the greatest effect on their general life.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, the undergraduate years are thought of as a time of self discovery, exploration and independence but what happens to those values when the college students are married? People typically do not define marriage in individual terms but rather consider it a partnership in which each member sacrifices some of his or her autonomy (McQuillan, 2005).

Adebayo (2006) observed that students generally are faced with a number of stressors. These include continuous evaluation, pressure to earn good grades, time pressures, unclear assignments, heavy workload, uncomfortable classrooms, and relationship with family and friends. In a more recent study, found students reported the greatest stressors were school-family conflict. Low incomes, course work, and children were all factors in role strain in female students (Home, 1992, 1997, 1998; Home & Hinds, 2000). Role strain from increased roles and their demands and from time conflicts was associated with high stress, depression, and anxiety in women students (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Darab, 2004)

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Having to study poses challenges for women due to their family responsibilities and several challenges arise when individuals tend to negotiate the role of university students with their role inside of marriage and the family. Women from time immemorial have been saddled with many family responsibilities and are traditionally assigned many roles including custody of children, maintenance of the home, feeding and preservation of the family health. The female married undergraduate students are also expected to perform duties as wife and mother, in addition to fulfilling their academic responsibilities. Within marriages, the strain faced can include, but are not limited to quarrels between spouses, feelings of exhaustion and resentment over inequitable divisions of household labour (McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Pittman, Kerpelman & Solheim, 2001). Researchers studying the academic side of the conflict between school and marriage demands from students have examined how outside influences such as family and work impact academic achievement and retention rates among adult students (Benshoff, 1991; Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985). Women occupying seemingly incompatible role positions, particularly women juggling the demands of family, studies and career experience the problem of family/school conflict. Family/school conflict refers to the demands faced by students in higher education who are married and who may or may not have children (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998).

One study conducted in the 1970's found that lack of networking ability pose a particular problem for married undergraduates' women students. These women were less able to engage in the after class socializing and networking that allowed their male counterpart to make the connections that would serve to further their career (Feldman, 1973).

Another constraint faced by the married undergraduate female student as revealed in a literature review by Benshoff (1993) is that women expressed guilt over their role as a student, over not being available for their children, over the quality and the expense of childcare, and over compromising their responsibility in the family as well as in the career world.

Non-traditional female student is defined as any female student who does not fit the typical schema of a university student. In other words, she is a member of the working-class, has obligations outside of her school work, she has many roles such as mother, wife, caretaker, employee, and finally student. According to the National Centre for Education Statistics of the United States America (USA) (Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996), non-traditional students have one or more of the following characteristics; delayed enrolment in college, part-time attendance, full-time employment, may have or not have spouses, children and other dependents.

Adjusting to an academic setting can be difficult for all students, no matter what stage of life they are in. The rigorous demand of the university-level courses coupled with the patriarchal values of the institution can be overwhelming for even the most studious students. Instructors expect more with less guidance and may seem unapproachable to new students who have questions. Unlike a typical college student who moves from one dependent realm to another, however, non-traditional female students experience dramatic life-transitions when entering the higher institution. They often struggle with this transition because they feel insecure in their new role and anxious about the perceived loss of structure in their lives (Haynes-Burton, 2008). To be clear, not all non-traditional women feel uncomfortable entering university. Because of their life experiences, some women feel adequately prepared for university and find themselves contributing more frequently in classroom discussions than their classmates. While traditional students often go to college because their parents expect them to, non-traditional women choose to go to school to improve themselves or their quality of life, and they may exhibit an eagerness to learn that other students do not display. In fact some women find it empowering to seek higher education while working and sustaining a family, no matter how difficult it may be.

Along with possible personal feelings of inadequacy, non-traditional women may feel overwhelmed by their numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over school work. The number of hours Americans work each week has increased over the last 20 years, essentially adding an extra month of work to each year. Working mothers, many of whom are also students, work an average of 65 hours per week, including paid work for an employer and unpaid work in the home (Aronson, 1998). When hours for sleeping, commuting, and eating are also factored in, few hours are left which the student may devote to study.

In addition to these, non-traditional students are faced with employment demands and social and family responsibilities. No doubt, combining work commitment, family responsibilities, and school obligations may

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