

SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF OFF-CAMPUS RESIDENT FEMALE STUDENTS OF JIMMA TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE (JTTC) IN FOCUS, OROMIA

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Abstract

This study examined the living-and-learning environment of off-campus resident female students in Jimma TTC, Oromia. The study attempted to identify major challenges, coping mechanisms and implications of off-campus resident college female students. Mixed research approach, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed. Eighteen (18) interviews, 4 focus group discussions and survey were used to collect the data. Forty nine (49) randomly selected female students have filled questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis was used. Female students have been facing personal/psychological, emotional, social, economic, and academic problems. Economic, attitudinal and academic problems are found the most pervasive facing 90, 69 and 60 percent of the students respectively. Students could not meet their basic needs including food, clothing and housing and special needs of hygiene materials. Increasing living cost and expectation of family support from a payment they receive worsen their conditions. The community also negatively perceives off-campus students as sources of price inflation, crime and sexual misbehaviors. Lack of access to house rent, unsuitability and insecurity are among pressing problems. Absence of dormitory facility is perceived to be the root cause for their vulnerability to sexual harassment including rape, theft and robbery. They are forced to seek males' assistance of security and/or income which in turn increases their sexual vulnerability. They also engage in multiple sexual practice and even prostitution mainly as income generating means. As male and female students share a single living room, their vulnerability to pre-marital sexuality and its complicated unforeseen consequences such as unwanted pregnancy and STIs including HIV/AIDS are potential risks. Jimma TTC students were among the top hospital visitors due to pregnancy complications and abortion. Lack of life

skills, unsafe social and physical environment, community's and self negative perception towards female students, additional responsibilities, and lack of educational materials severely affect their educational performances. Postponing recreation, reducing consumption items, forced saving, depending on families or parents for financial support, engaging in income generating activities, patience and hoping better future, credit, frequently changing residence places and sharing resources are among the coping mechanisms they uses. Off-campus female students' problems are very impressive, multidimensional and complicated. Its implication may extend beyond their current life to their future academic and professional careers, personal, social and economic life courses. Short and long term solutions are commendable to curtail residence related problems. Generally, collaborative efforts by all stakeholders are recommended. Discussion with community to raise their awareness and make them part of the solution is also strongly suggested. Engaging male students in problem solving efforts is another potential remedy. Given lack of dormitory (off campus housing) is the primary force beyond almost all problems faced by female college students, availing dormitory and related facilities is begging for immediate action of government.

Keywords: Female student, off-campus, Challenges, Coping strategies, Implications

Introduction

Educational performance has connection with the nature and quality of school environment. As a result, successfully managing a school environment is a necessary and essential educational investment (Berry, 2002, p.2; Coon H., 1993). Residence life has a significant role in the academic success, security concern and future life of students at all level of education. Therefore, the issue of students' residence should not be undermined or neglected by students, teachers, parents, policy makers and administrators of educational systems. This is because residence place is part of their social and learning environment. Students may opt for on-campus or off-campus residence place for different reasons each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages about which a student should make an informed decision.

Students' off-campus residence and particularly their comings and goings may disturb neighbors. This is worsening in case the students are alcohol or other drugs addicts. This in turn leads to rough or negative college-community relationships. Therefore, when deciding whether to design on-campus or off-campus residence strategy for students, the potential pros and cons need to be considered. Researchers in the field also believe

that the college administrators and policy designers should take it into account when they allow their students to live outside campus. Otherwise, if the cons outweigh the pros, students should not be left for unsuitable living condition that will have multifaceted problems on educational performance, personal and professional development as well as on the mission and objectives of the colleges. Lack of security is a crucial issue that worries parents when students live outside campus because they assume that if they live in dormitory with their friends, they are less likely to be attacked ([http://voices.yahoo.com/deciding-live-off-campus-4461.html?cat=32 /](http://voices.yahoo.com/deciding-live-off-campus-4461.html?cat=32/)).

Higher learning institutions should share the responsibility for creating learning environments for off-campus students to help them learn effectively and maintain their personal development. Off-campus students should not be left alone rather there should be follow up of their living and learning conditions.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to assess the living and academic conditions of off-campus resident college female students of Jimma Teacher Training College (JTTC). The specific objectives of the study include: to identify major challenges of off-campus resident college female students; to pin point mechanisms of female students to cope with their residence related challenges; to assess implications of off-campus living on educational career of the students; to investigate community perception towards off-campus female students; and to examine residence policies of higher learning institutions in Ethiopia

Methods and Materials

Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used in the study. Qualitative research approach was used to explore the lived experience of off-campus resident female students and examine their living conditions in the community. The opportunities enjoyed and challenges faced by the students were understood in this way. Community response towards the off-campus students were also understood using qualitative research approach. Quantitative research approach was used to identify the type and magnitude of socio-economic, academic and other personal problems faced by students. Their coping mechanisms were studied using both approaches.

Under the qualitative approach a combination of key informant interview, informant interview, focus group discussion (FGD), observation of students' residence and individual case studies were used to collect qualitative information. The key informant interview was used to collect information from college administrators and teachers whereas the rest were

used for students and community members as resources of information. Under the quantitative research, survey and secondary document were used to collect information from students and college records respectively. Interview guide, checklist, structured and unstructured questionnaire were utilized to collect information/data.

The study population comprises Jimma TTC female students, college administrators, and community where the students live. The target study population is female JTTC students. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed. Non-probability sampling was utilized to select key informant and informant interviews among school students, teachers, community members and administrators. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques was used in this regard. Their perceived knowledge and experiences as well as their relationship with the students were the criteria of selection. Accordingly, four teachers, 5 community members, 3 officers and 10 female students were selected for interview. In addition, a total of 40 students were selected for FGD in which 4 FGDs were conducted, one for male and three for female off-campus residents. Moreover, 49 randomly selected female students' filled questionnaire.

Qualitative information was thematically analyzed. Information collected through interview, observation, FGD, and case studies were transcribed, organized and classified (re-classified) into thematic topics and then analyzed to generate meanings. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. In conducting this study, the following ethical considerations and safety measures were made. Administrative ethical procedures were followed; the purposes and importance of the study were explained for the participants of the study; and willingness of participation and confidentiality were secured.

Results and Discussions

The study showed that female students of the college have been facing complicated and multifaceted personal/psychological, social, economic, and educational problems. Although personal factors such as lack of preparedness, less endurance, and poor life skills contribute to these problems, most of the challenges are set by structural problems which are beyond the control of the students. The low economic status of the country, male dominated (patriarchal) system, negative perception towards females, poor family back grounds, weak legal enforcement, and other socio-cultural and economic forces seem to operate beyond these problems.

Table 1: Major problems female students have faced

Problems faced by students	YES		NO	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Economic Problems	42	89.4%	5	10.6%
Social/inter-relational problems	18	43.9%	23	56.1%
Academic problems	25	59.5%	17	40.5%
Gender related problems	21	53.8%	18	46.2%
Lack of guidance and counseling	21	50%	21	50%
Attitudinal/perceptual related problems (self, teacher's, community's, student's)	25	69.4%	11	30.6%

Except for social/inter-relational problems (excluding gender relationship which is treated separately), more than half of the students who responded to the question have been facing all types of problems. Among all, economic related problems are found the most pervasive over others facing nearly 90 percent of the students followed by attitudinal and academic problems which are faced by about 69 and 59.5 percent of students. Generally, it is understandable that the students are not in a situation of meeting their very basic needs including food, clothing and shelter all which have direct effect on their health and educational performance. Information obtained from the open-ended part of the question in which they were asked to specify if they have any other problem facing them is summarized as follows.

Economic Problems

Shortage of financial support resulted into a number of interrelated consequences on students' academic, social and physical needs. Inadequate clothing, lack of water, lack of school materials such as pen/pencil and exercise books are few among others.

Housing Problems

Female students lack access to house for rent mainly because of community's negative perception towards them and owners prefer males instead. Lack of suitability and security are another pressing problems related to getting house. Increasing cost of housing rent to live in a more secured compound is another limiting factor. The students raise absence of dormitory service in the college as the root cause for the problem mainly for their exposure to sexual harassment including rape, theft and robbery of their property. One of the student interviewee put the condition as, "... because of the negative perception that the community has for female students, we suffer much from lacking access to house rent." And the other one mentioned, "As we receive very small amount of money from the college, we are facing a lot of problems. We cannot afford housing rent in a secured compound

because the price is as large as 200 Birr per individual; then we resort to low cost housing rent where we are vulnerable to those who recklessly harm us; they do not allow us to live, they are murderers.”

Robbery and theft because of their unsecured dwelling environment commonly affected their lives in the community as it is reported by a student as,

“It is not my experience rather it is of my friends with whom I share same compound. When we rented the houses, the owners told us that they are responsible for day time security of the rooms and we took responsibility to protect our rooms during the night. On one of the days, when we came back to home from classes, all properties of my friends were stolen; the owners responded that it is not their responsibility and declared that similar case may happen even to themselves once in time.”

Social Problems

Missing significant people in their life who advise them to develop life skills are left at home land and lack of persons or institution that adequately replace their role in the college settings and in the town put them at risk. Lack of quick adaptation to the new social environment both in college and in neighborhood is also another problem that negatively affected their interpersonal relationships with the new communities. This left them alone because there is no effective orientation program that could facilitate their interaction with people in the community. Forming sexual partnership with male students and others in the community has been causing unwanted pregnancy and the consequent health and emotional problems related to abortion or child bearing has become very common among college students. A student summarized it as,

“Due to the financial shortage I face, I force my families to send money because the college’s monthly payment covers housing cost only. ... Because of lack of guidance and counseling on life skills, we are facing problems. Regarding the social problems, we are in problem as we could not adapt to the life styles and patterns of the new community to us.”

Academic Problems

The general condition of the college, inflation, lack of life skills, unsafe social and physical environment, community’s and self negative perception towards female students, additional responsibilities, lack of educational materials, and poor educational backgrounds severely affect their educational performances. One of the interviewee described how the economic problem has negatively affected her academic performance like,

I am attending the evening/extension class; I cannot fulfill educational materials because my families are poor to support me. As a

result, I am always in conflict with my teachers when I fail to meet what is expected from me as a student. Most of the time, I am in serious problems as I do not get enough food and cannot pay house rent, I usually think about these issues, not education. Hence, I cannot exploit my potential to the maximum level for learning.”

Facility Related Problems

Students strongly associate their overall problems to lack of dormitory and related facilities. Exposure to rape and other sexual harassment, theft and robbery, and difficulty of library use are mainly due to absence of dormitory.

Special Needs Related Problems

Students complain that lack of consideration of female special needs facilities and assistance in the college. They believe that female students deserve special treatment compared to their male counter parts given certain sex and gender specific differences. They have pointed that there are times for female students where they are forced to miss classes during their menstrual periods just lacking hygiene materials needed during this time. Failure to purchase cleaning and beauty materials for their body and hair affected their physical appearances and consequently psychological conditions. One of the study participant stated that, “... *as the cost of house rent and purchased materials is increasing, there are times when we lack money even to buy a soap.”*

Table 2: Rank of problems faced by students in terms of perceived seriousness

S. No	List of problems potentially faced	Rank of problems faced as perceived by respondents					
		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
1	Economic Problems	31	3	1			
2	Social/inter-relational problems	5	7	5	3	1	1
3	Educational problems	2	6	7	4	1	2
4	Gender related problems	2	6	9	1	3	
5	Lack of guidance and counseling		8	4	2	2	2
6	Attitudinal/perception related problems (self, teacher's, community's, student's)	4	3	5	4	5	

The rank distribution in Table 2 roughly shows that all the problems are interlinked having economic related problem at the center. A problem emanates from one problem but at the same time cause another and the cycle goes on in similar fashion. This indicates that by solving some of the pressing problems, the rest can be eliminated or at least minimized. Therefore, prioritization of the problems is quite important if the problems are to be effectively resolved. Hence, lack of dormitory can be seen at the

center of almost all problems facing female students as perceived by the students themselves.

Students' Coping Mechanisms

The students a range of coping mechanisms to withstand different problems they face. Most of the coping strategies involve compromising quality of life. Even if some of the strategies are appropriate for future healthy life, they significantly undermine their current wellbeing. Withdrawing from current material consumption comprise their major response to the economic challenges. An interviewee stated it as, *“For economic problem, sometimes I cancel breakfast from the meal; I search for low price housing; I omit vegetables and fruits from my meals and limit myself to local bread (“budena” or “injera”); and I convince myself I cannot get those lacking items at my disposal, etc..”* Postponing recreation, reducing purchased items and forced saving are the most frequently used strategies by the students as these terms repeatedly reported by many interviewees. Asking parents or relatives for financial support is also used though many of them cannot enjoy this privilege as they are from poor families, families that are in need of sharing the minimum money the students gain from college. Patience and hoping better future, giving tutorial services for children at night, frequently changing residence places, sharing rooms and experiences with friends are also commonly used by the students.

Results from Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Students and community members

FGD also found that difficult situations have facing female students of the college. Generally, it was found that all discussants share common understanding of the problem and the felt needs of solution. They reflected on the nature and magnitude of the problem based on their living experience as part of the problem. They agreed that the current female students' living condition is a pressing issue that needs immediate solution. The participants suggested that the problem is very impressive, multidimensional and complicated. They also forwarded suggestive solutions to the problem that begs for the collaboration of stakeholders such as the brooder community, the college community, the local government, humanitarian organizations and individual citizens.

The Nature and Magnitude of the Problem

The participants reported that paired male and female students share a single room which increases their vulnerability to pre-marital sexuality and its complicated and unforeseen consequences such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Pattern of their

relationship is mainly temporary cohabitation than planned and permanent marital partnership; induced by social and economic factors such as sharing limited resources and fear of the hostile environment by female students. In the latter case, female students being vulnerable to different forms of sexual harassment in and outside their homes, approach to males in order to use them as protectors from other abusers in the community. However, those who were assumed protective role for the female gradually changed to be sexual partners. Hence, any male approaches to or approached by female students for any type of support are potential abusers directly or indirectly. As indicated in the discussion, many of the male partners of JTTC female students come from Jimma University. They also shared that TTC female students represent the largest number of females receiving abortion services in Jimma town; some found pregnant while they are virgin. Female students also engage in multiple sexual partner relationship mainly as income generating activity not only with male students but people from other sections of the community. Some also extend to act like prostitute to get economic support.

One of the participants shared information from his experience stating, *“There was a female student who came from Western Wollega. She has no family at home land. Someone had supported her at high school level who could not keep on helping after she joined college. Now she changed her mind and planned to engage in commercial sex activity just to get income.”* There are female students who establish sexual relations with shoe shiners just to share resources. Other participant are eye witnesses of observing significant number of JTTC students those attended hospital for health problems related with pregnancy complication (abortion) in a single night. A participant who conducted research on unwanted pregnancy found that 23 out of 153 JTTC female students were pregnant at the time of the study. According to this participant, among 7 female students admitted to hospital for abortion, one suffered uterus perforation. These and other information indicate that female students are at risk of HIV/AIDS and there are female students living with HIV/AIDS but receiving minimum or no care and support. Many more HIV cases might be found but there is low disclosure among students. The participants also reflected the possibility of higher HIV prevalence as students are noticed to have greater fear of pregnancy than HIV infection.

Economic problem and dependency of female students is suggested as a primary cause of the problems at hand which is in turn rooted in absence dormitory and food services from the college. In the first place, the students are forced to share room and food with other students, whether they are males or females, to share the increasing cost because of inflation on their 300 Birr monthly income they receive from the college. Some students even

support their poor families from the 300 Birr while others receive financial support from their families or relatives.

It was also implied that not only sharing rooms with male students that negatively affect them but female home mate who have male sexual partner can also, directly or indirectly, forcefully or willingly, affect the behavior of the other. The discussants are also aware of the problems female students face in finding rent houses in the town which the students claimed that the people refuse to rent rooms for them.

The participants pointed some reasons why renters refuse renting room for females in general and female students in particular. First, they are aware of that females utilize kitchen more; consume more water; and visited by many people than males. Second, females invite more than male sexual partner to home which is not appreciated by the community's values. One of the participants stated that "people are heard saying that 'it is better to rent house for five males than a female'". Hence, economic interest and socio-cultural values underpin their tendency preferring males for renting rooms. Yet the community has very low awareness about different forcing factors that are beyond the control of the student and whether the issue is common social problems that requires their engagement to curb them. The students also suffer from insecurity problems as they are robbed or their properties are stolen. Pointing that it is common problem to everybody in the town, FGD discussants suggested the importance of dealing with the concerned bodies including the police.

Perceived Solutions Recommended by the Study Participant

Participants recalled previous attempts to reduce the problem by college community though they agree that what have been done so far was satisfactory. For example, when dormitory life was stopped, the staff showed their concern what will be likely happen to female students in particular. And they dealt the issue with the city administration though not translated into practice. Gender office and teachers of the college have made attempts to solve the multifaceted problems of the students in less organized ways. Yet they agree that further internal strength of the college community is quite necessary to support female students academically and other aspects of life.

Participants suggested a range of solutions to curtail the problem classifying them into two: short term and long term solving mechanisms. The short term problem solving devices are implied to reduce the immediate needs of the students where as the long term mechanisms will important instruments to solve the problems from their roots. Generally, collaborative efforts by all stakeholders are recommended as possible ways of solutions.

Short Term Solutions

Relying on Research based Evidences

Participants strongly suggested the need of conducting comprehensive research to assess the overall problems of female students of Jimma Teachers Training College (JTTC) to identify the major causes and effects of the problem, understand the nature of the problem and come up with applicable recommendations. This need is underlined by the participants for other steps to be taken in the future, be it short term or long term interventions. In so doing, they suggest that detail information should be generated from different relevant sources (students, community, police, health settings, and others) to come up with dependable findings and evidence based recommendations.

Providing Awareness Creation Programs

Students are admitted to TTC at very early age after completion of grade ten at their 16-19. They have very limited or no awareness about adolescent reproductive and sexual health. Hence, they need quick and continuous awareness creation programs.

Designing Projects

The participants also suggested that intervention projects need to be designed based on the pre-assessment research results to be undertaken. NGOs should be requested to engage into intervention projects whose intervention is quite important in fulfilling the immediate and basic needs of the students in problem.

Searching Relief Residences/Places

Discussants recommended the urgent need of searching places where by at least some of students in serious problems have to be temporarily placed and supervised. In this regard, using closer elementary school to the college as residence for those who are in more difficult conditions, temporary access to condominium, construction of temporary halls even from iron sheets, and initiation of investors to construct off campus dormitories were suggested as means of temporary solution of housing and related problems. They pointed that there is open space nearby the college for dormitory construction either by inviting investors or by cost of the city administration. Participants also proposed that in making the services available, selective approach should be employed to recruit beneficiaries if the available spaces will be limited. Hence, setting need based selection criteria should be an important criteria. Then as the service becomes expanding and sufficient it will be made inclusive.

Undertaking Community Conversation

As it is mentioned above, the community members have less awareness about the nature and extent of female students' problems as well as whether their problems are also the community's problem. The community also negatively perceives off campus students as a source of inflation, females' education, and as if students share rooms mainly for sexual affairs. As a result, discussion with community to raise their awareness and make them part of the solution is also strongly suggested during the discussion. The city administration and municipality have to involve in the discussion.

Engaging Male Students in Problem Solving

Being males are the other face of the problem; they also need to be part of the solution. Males do not only create problems in gender relation but they can solve them if they are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and values of gender equality. Participants of the discussion raised the importance of involving male students in all efforts that tend to solve problems of the female students. Hence, awareness creation programs on the nature and magnitude as well as males' roles in reducing the challenges faced by female students.

Other Suggested Solutions include availing contraceptive services for students in the college (but faced opposition from some students), gender education, provision of hygiene materials, provision of condoms; organizing students (male and females) to protect themselves and one another; ensuring security

Long term Solutions

Dormitory Construction

Participants shared a belief that lack of dormitory (off campus housing) is the primary force beyond almost all of the problems faced by female as well as male college students. They also reminded that understanding the multifaceted problems of off campus resident college students; the government has planned to build dormitories in the future. However, the problem is begging for immediate actions until dormitory and food services will be provided in the long run passing through long procedures.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Off-campus female students' problems are very impressive, multidimensional, complicated and their implications may extend beyond their current life to their future academic and professional careers, personal, social and economic life courses. Residence environment is also security

concern during their stay in college. Educational performance has connection with the nature and quality of not only learning but living environment. Hence, successfully managing a learning environment is a necessary and essential educational investment. Creating a suitable environment for living and learning for female students can reduce their vulnerability for most of the problems they are facing. Community partnership and discussion is quite important to solve those problems. Involving students (including male students) in designing strategies of solution is valuable. Therefore, students' residence needs a due attention of students, teachers, parents, policy makers and administrators of educational systems.

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