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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, Kerpelmen & 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 constrain 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

be very complex and tasking. Ultimately, the struggling and juggling inherent in this may create tension and health - related problems for the individuals' concerned (Ross, Neibling, & Heckert, 1999).

When female students find time to do schoolwork, they often do not have a quiet, private space in which to do so. Finding adequate time to do homework without interruption was identified as a major challenge student, with family responsibilities, face (Aronson, 1998). Another study that examined stress in non -traditional students found that returning to school creates significant stress within the student's family and home life (Kohler Giancola, Grawitch & Borchert, 2009). Working-class women may be perceived as moving beyond the social class to which the family belongs, making them outsiders in their own home (Gardner, 1993). Partners and children of female students may also feel neglected when time is devoted to schoolwork rather than family, causing conflict for the entire family.

In addition to the responsibility of jobs, bills, families, and community obligations, non-traditional women must learn to navigate through a patriarchal institution in which they feel invisible because of their gender, age, or circumstance. Academic institutions have upheld patriarchal values even since their inception, when women were excluded from rigorous study because of their fragile temperament and inferior intelligence. A hidden curriculum exists, one that is not stated in any course syllabus, which rewards those who reinforce the value of the patriarchy and punishes those who dissent (Kimmel, 2008), creating a hostile environment for many women. In fact, this hostile environment can act as a silencing factor for women, beginning as early as grade (upper basic) school. Girls see that their teachers call on the boys more often, spend more time with them, and give them more praise for academic achievement. When girls reach adolescence, they have learned that they are more valued for their appearance than their intelligence and begin to undervalue their academic abilities (Kimmel, 2008). These young women's voice are lost as they begin to perceive words as weapons, "words were used to separate and diminish people, not to connect and empower them" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986)

Another issue for non-traditional students is that the students are parents (Benshoff, 1991). In order to attend courses; they must first secure reliable childcare which is an additional expense. The issue of childcare is also a particular stumbling block for women trying to re-enter the realm which is why women in graduate schools are often older and less likely to be enrolled fulltime than their non -married counterpart (Van Meter & Agronow, 1982).

Benshoff (1993) cites a study that found that women guilt over the school role is higher for women who have more traditional orientation towards marriage. However another study found that a woman in a marriage based on more traditional marriage expectations will experience less strain if she and her husband are both in agreement that her family role is the primary role (Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Therefore, prioritization was important in managing stress.

Some of the challenges that mature women students face include: process of socialization and gender roles; lack of encouragement by spouse; low self-confidence, and the under valuing of the benefits of higher education. The challenges they face could be classified as emotional, psychological, and financial (Carney – Crompton & Tan, 2002). Adult students may take a longer period of time to develop a sense of autonomy and self efficacy than it takes younger students (Macari, Maples & D'Andrea, 2005). Responsibilities outside of school limit the amount of time students are left with to participate in the college environment or interact with peers and faculty. If students arrive on campus immediately before class and leave right after class, they will be excluded from mutual understanding and support that adult student can provide each other and may experience feeling of social isolation (Macari, Maples & D'Andrea, 2005).

Married students and those responsible for the care of children have family responsibilities before enrolling in higher institution and the responsibilities are not lessened after enrolment. The pressure to provide for families and concentrate on coursework overwhelms some students often laden with a disproportionate burden of household task and caregiver responsibilities when enrolled in university (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Managing multiple roles is a source of stress for female students and parents feel guilty about being unavailable when their children need them, with mothers of children under thirteen reporting the most conflict (Terrell, 1990). Women with older children may persist to graduation, where as those with younger children may interrupt their education to fulfil family responsibilities (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home, 1998). Unsuccessfully managed stress factors may result in premature withdrawal from school (Scott, Burns &

Cooney, 1996). Work schedules and family responsibilities prevent most adult student from attending college full time.

Other researchers suggest that conflict management might always be a problem for married female students because the institution of marriage is inherently constraining for women. In his study, Feldman (1973) tried to

control for factors that he believed could contribute to role strain such as work and children by comparing married students and their divorced counterparts. He found that although they had similar non-academic obligation divorced women were still more academically successful as graduate students. Although this study was in 1973, it is interesting because it raises the question that perhaps there might be something endemic to the institution of marriage that makes it an academic liability for these women within it. However, married men performed better academically than their divorced counterparts suggesting that marriage benefits men academically (Feldman, 1973).

Research has shown that undergraduates face a lot of challenges such as the problem of burnout, stress, and school obligations, with their accompanying psychological side effects. These students are not married, yet they face several challenges. Hence, married undergraduate female students are used for this study since they are expected to face more challenges.

### *1.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY*

There is a need to obtain empirical information on the challenges faced by female undergraduate students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria and the effects on them. The purpose of this study is to also find out the factors leading to the challenges faced by married undergraduate female students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria and the effects these have on them.

### *1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

The following research questions were addressed by the study.

What challenge is common among married undergraduate female students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria? What are the factors that lead to the challenge they face? What are the effects of the challenges on married undergraduate female students?

## **2. Body**

### *2.1 METHODOLOGY*

The study utilized the survey design. The population of students in the universities under study is about 26,000 with a female population of above 9,800 (about 37% of total population of students). The married undergraduate female student population is estimated to be 980 (10%) following England & Bearak (2012) out of which the sample consisting of one hundred and fifty married undergraduate female students were purposively selected from two (one Federal government-owned and one State government-owned) of the six Universities in Ogun State. A questionnaire designed by the researcher with a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency were used to analyze the data collected.

### *2.2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION*

#### *2.3 RESEARCH QUESTION (RQ1):*

**What challenges are common among married undergraduate female students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria?**

This question was answered with data from respondents’ information on the challenges they face as married female undergraduate students. Summary is given in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the challenges among married undergraduate female students. A total of 88 (67.7%) respondents disagreed that poor academic performance is a challenge they face and this supports the finding of Richardson & King (1998) that most non-traditional students, the category under which married undergraduate female students

fall, perform academically as well or better than younger more traditional students. Other researchers who agree with this finding are Carney-Crompton & Tan (2002) and Donaldson & Graham (1999).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to challenges they face.

Research statement	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%	TOTAL	%
1 Poor academic performance	15	11.5	23	17.7	45	34.6	43	33.1	4	3.1	130	100
2 Inability to relate easily with other student on campus	12	9.2	36	27.7	46	35.4	35	26.9	1	0.8	130	100
3 Finding adequate time to do homework without interruption	20	15.4	57	43.8	17	13.1	32	24.6	4	3.1	130	100
4 I do not have sufficient time for personal activities	11	8.5	49	37.7	42	32.3	25	19.2	3	2.3	130	100
5 Managing multiple roles at a time	37	28.5	42	32.3	23	17.7	21	16.2	7	5.4	130	100
6 My spouse does not give me enough financial support	9	6.9	12	9.2	64	49.2	43	33.1	2	1.5	130	100
7 Minimal individual free time	22	16.9	51	39.2	21	16.2	26	20.0	10	7.7	130	100
8 Insufficient support from family for returning to school	14	10.8	33	25.4	53	40.8	27	20.8	3	2.3	130	100
9 Poor study skills	5	3.8	17	13.1	51	39.2	40	30.8	17	13.1	130	100

It is shown in Table 1 that a total of 77 (59.2%) respondents agreed that finding adequate time to do homework is a challenge they face and this supports the finding by Aronson (2004) that adequate time to do homework without interruption was a major challenge to students with family responsibilities due to the reason that when female students do find time to do schoolwork, they often do not have a quiet, private space in which to do so (Aronson, 2004).

It is observed that 49 (37.7%) respondents agreed with not having sufficient time for personal activities as a challenge that they face. This is in agreement with literature review which shows most of the students who are parents, have school obligations and family responsibilities which leave them with little or no time for personal activities (Benshoff, 1991). Moreover, Table 1 indicates that a total of 79 respondents (60.8%) agreed that to manage multiple roles at a time is a major challenge which agrees with the finding by Terrell (1990) that managing multiple roles as a source of stress for female students. A total of 99 (82.3%) respondents disagreed that they face challenges of lack of financial support from their spouses. This supports the result of Hooper (1979) that men approved the student role of their wives except that the majority did not provide the needed help at home. A total of 73 (56.1%) respondents agreed that they face the challenge of having minimal individual free time and this support the finding by Terrell (1990) that one of the developmental issues for women who return to school is minimal individual free time.

Results indicate that a total of 91 (70.0%) respondents disagreed with poor study skills as a challenge. This support the findings by Richardson & King (1998) that deficits in study skills were dismissed as “meaningless, because there is no one specific set of skills that constitutes effective studying in higher education”. As far as time management is concerned they concluded, “...adult students seem to make more use of time management strategies than younger students”.

From Table 1, it is observed that the most common challenges observed among married undergraduate female students is managing multiple roles as it has the highest number of respondents that agreed that is a challenge.

#### 2.4 RESEARCH QUESTION (RQ2)

##### What are the factors that lead to the challenge they face?

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on the factors that lead to the challenges they face as married female undergraduate students. Summary is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents with factors that lead to their challenges

Research statement	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%	Total	%
1 Pre-occupation with one role while performing another	22	16.9	60	46.2	17	13.1	16	12.3	15	11.5	130	100
2 I face challenges because there are no provisions for adequate child care.	14	10.8	21	16.2	53	40.8	40	30.8	2	1.5	130	100
3 I am overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over school work	23	17.7	45	34.6	23	17.7	36	27.7	3	2.3	130	100
4 Incompatible demands from two or more roles	10	7.7	44	33.8	42	32.3	27	20.8	7	5.4	130	100
5 Face challenges because the institution does not give any special	41	31.5	43	33.1	17	13.1	21	16.2	8	6.2	130	100

Research statement	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%	Total	%
1 Pre-occupation with one role while performing another	22	16.9	60	46.2	17	13.1	16	12.3	15	11.5	130	100
2 I face challenges because there are no provisions for adequate child care.	14	10.8	21	16.2	53	40.8	40	30.8	2	1.5	130	100
3 I am overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over school work	23	17.7	45	34.6	23	17.7	36	27.7	3	2.3	130	100
4 Incompatible demands from two or more roles	10	7.7	44	33.8	42	32.3	27	20.8	7	5.4	130	100
5 Face challenges because the institution does not give any special consideration to married female students	41	31.5	43	33.1	17	13.1	21	16.2	8	6.2	130	100

Table 2 shows the factors that lead to the challenges faced by married female undergraduate students. Table 2 shows that a total of 88 (63.1%) respondents agreed with preoccupation with how to fulfil one role while

performing another, which is called role contagion, is a major factor that leads to the challenges they face. This result is supported by the study that married undergraduate female students experience role contagion which is described as a preoccupation with one role while fulfilling another, such as worrying about a school assignment while at work or home preparing dinner (Coverman, 1989 & Home, 1998).

Table 2 revealed further that a total of 68 (52.3%) respondents agreed that they are overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over school work and this is supported by the study of Aronson (2004) where it was found that non-traditional students may feel overwhelmed by their numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over school work. When hours for sleeping, commuting, and eating are also factored in, few hours are left which the student may devote to study.

**2.5 RESEARCH QUESTION (RQ3)**

**What are the effects of the challenges on married undergraduate female students?**

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on the effects of the challenges they face. Summary is given in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the effects of the challenges on married undergraduate female students.

Table 3 reveals that a total of 82 (63.1%) respondents disagreed that not having enough time leads to their poor academic performance. This supports the finding of Richardson & King (1998) that adult students seem to make use of time management strategies than younger students and they tend to perform as well or better than younger students.

Table 3 also indicates that 64 (49.3%) respondents agreed that they experience guilt for not having enough time for their children which supports the literature review by Benshoff (1993) and Terrell



(1990) who found that women expressed guilt over their role as a student over not being available for their children.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents on the effects of the challenges they face**

Research statement	SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	N	%	Total	%
1 Not having enough time to study leads to my poor academic performance	23	17.7	22	16.9	37	28.5	45	34.6	3	2.3	130	100
2 Feeling guilty about not having adequate time for the children is an effect of the challenge	17	13.1	47	36.2	40	30.8	20	15.4	6	4.6	130	100
3 Having many responsibilities at a time leads to having little or no free time	21	16.2	46	35.4	33	25.4	21	16.2	9	6.9	130	100
4 My feeling inferior to other students is an effect of the challenges	10	7.7	21	16.2	65	50.0	30	23.1	4	3.1	130	100
5 Combining work commitment, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress	56	43.1	52	40.0	10	7.7	9	6.9	3	2.3	130	100

It can be observed from Table 3 that a total of 108 (83.1%) respondents agreed that combining work commitment, family and school obligations lead to role contagion. This result is supported by the findings of Egan (2004) which posited that no doubt, combining work commitment, family responsibilities, and school obligations may be very complex and tasking. Individuals did not have the strength or energy to effectively meet all those demands and, therefore, suffer from stress and other problems (Egan, 2004).

## 2.6 IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

The findings of the study suggest the need for counselling intervention to reduce the effect of the challenges faced by this category of students. Hence the following interventions are proposed to ameliorate the stress of combining family life and study.

The institution should give special consideration to the married undergraduate female students through counselling intervention during orientation programmes when they receive admission into the university .

Counsellors, through the institution's Counselling Centre, should develop strategies for married female students on how to cope with family life. They should also be given training on study skills.

Married female undergraduate students should be trained on how to modify family lifestyle and



learn adjustment principles.

### 3. Conclusion

Schooling for married females can indeed be very tedious and challenging. The challenge that is most common among married undergraduate female students is managing multiple roles and that the major cause of it is role contagion. From the study, it can be concluded that combining work commitment, family responsibilities and school obligations leads to stress among the married undergraduate female students and this has the greatest effect on them.

#### 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the study.

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The spouse should help their wife with some domestic chores and family responsibilities because this will help in relieving them of the multiple roles they are engaged in.

The married undergraduate female students should learn to delegate roles to others around them. Delegation reduced role strain by passing some role demands to someone else. Childcare, for example, could be delegated to a spouse, family member such as parents, or care provider.

Creche and foster parenting for childcare around the universities need to be developed.

Barriers to intrusion which is a common coping mechanism to reduce role strain should be used such as turning off a cell phone when resting.

Undergraduates should try as much as possible to finish their studies before getting married especially the female counterparts because a woman tends to be saddled with many responsibilities in marriage and women often are the primary caregivers in the home, thus they have higher demands from the family role.

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