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**MOTHERHOOD AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: AN ASSESSMENT
OF FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF UYO.**

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ABSTRACT

Encouragement of the education of women in Nigeria, and indeed Akwa Ibom State means that a steady increasing number of women are finding their way into the classrooms, especially in institutions of higher learning.

The difficulties encountered in combining studies with child-raising and care of the family to be studied. The feelings of mothers when away from home, ideal solutions to baby care difficulties, sharing responsibilities with family planning and general perceptions on the experience of childbearing and academic problems, are among the area surveyed in order to overcome identified obstacles, suggestions are advanced on ways of encouraging women to ensure that their academic potentials are fulfilled despite the marital responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

It is an observed trend in Akwa Ibom State that married women leave their homes to institutions of learning for further studies.

In the University of Uyo, numerous mothers battle with their studies in spite of their age and family responsibilities. Since greater proportion of women achieve little or on the University education before marriage, it is pertinent to encourage them to continue their education after marriage.

As more women manifest the desire for higher education, many questions are usually raised concerning their obligations of motherhood and the complex life of trying to combine studies with raising a family, often, in two location, (in the educational institution and in the marital home or residence with husband). The issue of obligations of motherhood and the ability of such families especially the women to achieve their goals educationally in the face of various odds and changing circumstances has been the focus of this paper.

An old adage says, if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. This is true because an educated woman will understand her children's educational problems better than an uneducated woman, and will be in better position to aid her children overcome these problems. Besides, in these days of inflation, a man hardly earns enough to cater for his family's financial needs with an enhanced educational status, the woman will gain more financial power and this will help her to be of a greater financial assistance to her husband and family.

Furthermore, because women have continued to improve upon their education after marriage, they have been able to help decrease the manpower shortage in the country. If all the teachers, engineers, lawyers, welfare officers, and confidential secretaries, etc. who are in their present position because of the qualifications acquired after marriage, were not working, the shortage of manpower would have been alarming.

There are family planning units for those women who would not wish to add the burden of pregnancy and childbirth to the ordeals of going through their academic courses. According to Kenta (1977), married female undergraduate students have been faced with difficult option of having to choose between starting at home to rear children, especially during the first few years of development – birth to three years old or embracing day-care centers. Learning is an endless process and we become better companions for our educated husbands and children by being educated ourselves. Women also contribute more to public discussions and social developments, and perhaps earn more income into the family if they are better educated.

There is no other way for our women to justify their claims to equality with men than to seize the increasing opportunities for education now available to them. If women acquire more education, they, can exercise more influence in their homes and communities. The married female undergraduate students are usually faced with problems of material health and high rate of mortality. The lying-in or rest period needed for post-natal recovery is often times disrupted by class attendants and examinations. This is coupled with the need for suitable accommodation and supportive service for nursing mothers who are students.

Student mothers are faced with the problem of getting out of bed and moving around too soon within two or three days after child delivery because of the fear of having to accumulate too much academic work.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN A COMPLEX SOCIETY

The rapid rate of social changes and transformation in Nigeria and indeed Akwa Ibom State in particular in the 21st century is rather very complex. This is fueled by the rising tide of social scientists curiosity to seek the fundamental causes. Several factors are considered highly indicative of this process of tremendous social transformation in our society. One of the factors, which is now gathering momentum and renewed emphasis is the education of women, especially at the tertiary level of education. (Kalu, 1989)

Globally, social scientists have observed tremendous changing in the roles of women. The Nigerian woman has not been left out of this change, which has come as result of:

- (a) A desire to move away from the traditional domestic roles
- (b) An increasing awareness of the benefits of education
- (c) A realization of complementary responsibilities by mothers, and
- (d) The need to be an example to their children as a spur towards greater achievements. Olusanya, (1987).

Contributing to this line of thought, Awe, (1990) argued that for a female person to successfully combine whatever responsibility she has, she must have been so trained right from her primary education. In a situation whereby the primary and secondary school syllabi do not take the peculiar role of women into consideration, the female child is still expected to serve as domestic help to the mother. She must be able to manage the younger sibling and must cook for them. Thus, initial apprenticeship, in a way, prepares the female child for the envisaged challenges should she becomes a student-mother in future.

As education is the heartbeat of a people's development, the artist of a people's way of life, perception, action and growth, a student-mother is faced with some cardinal problems.

Awe, (1990) listed the demands as:

- (a) **Time allocation:** There should be proper time allocation between domestic and academic responsibilities.
- (b) **Human organization:** The activities of the home should be organized in such a way that the schoolwork and domestic responsibilities are not allowed to unduly interfere.

Many career mothers acknowledge the fact that they simply do not have enough time in their lives to accommodate both career and family responsibilities as they would have liked to, but most say, they are happier going to school because they will help in taking care of the family later in terms of better

pay. Others have the opinions that they are willing to make the sacrifice and compromise, not only that they can "have it all" but also that they can lead "whole fulfilling lives".

Sociologists, however, have examined the consequences of women's child roles in terms of role strain of overload. The personal basis upon which individuals choose to allocate time and other personal resources between school and family spheres have received far less attention, (David 1958). As individuals allocate time and energy to school and family roles, they come to identify with their roles. Academic and family behaviour build commitments, provide the person basis for attributing meaning to dual roles, identify conflict between them and form intention regarding future role behaviour. (Spirithall and Richard, 1980).

A woman may have a number of status position and roles, as wife, mother, student, club woman and/or corporate executive. The variety of roles may create conflicts and a feeling of frustration and despair if she feels of frustration and despair if she feels that she cannot continue to go to school and fulfill the role of a good wife and mother. Yet if she does not go to school, she may feel frustrated and perhaps even guilty over the fact that she is not living up to her full potentials as a woman.

Although, people's belief affects the way they organize their activities, family structure is not a summary of personal choice. The extent to which family life can represent family interest depends on the control that family members can maintain over their responsibility to each other.

Family life is based on paid work, which is done outside the family, generally, by the father. The home centered work of the family is much less visible, hidden by walls and by the absence of pay. Housewives make vital contributions to the family but their contributions are rarely recognized.

Mitchell, (1977) observed that housework is being underplayed and trivialized; Childcare is dramatized as the essence of the family and particularly as the most meaningful activity of the woman. So, the ideology of the family conflicts with reality since childcare often must be shared with persons outside the family. Material childcare creates a cost for student-mother with younger children. Both the women and the community often view shared childcare as a failure of the woman to meet her responsibility and as detrimental to the child.

Whether the mother does all or shares part of the child care, she remains responsible for routine physical care, training, discipline and play as well as supervision and arrangements for the child's contact outside the home; social life, skills, training, formal schooling and baby sitting. (Nyc and Hoffman, 1965).

How do student-mothers cope with their studies, take care of their matrimonial homes and their children? These depend on their ability to organize, plan and be determined to accommodate both career and family. Also, external organization sometimes do not respond to their needs or schedule. Consequently, married female undergraduate students schedules determine the extent to which the time at which their work at home could be done.

WOMEN AND FAMILY MAINTENANCE

Socialization of women into nurturing and supporting roles has dramatically impacted the life of the employed woman, who usually views herself as having several full time responsibilities, including not only her employment but also the maintenance of her home and family (Mackenzie, 1981). Research indicates that employed women are still carrying major load at home in addition to whatever their work responsibilities may be. To fulfill these time-consuming responsibilities, a woman has to become an expert manager of her time. If a woman wants to function successfully, she must seek more efficient and effective ways to juggle her academic and home routines.

Combining mothering and students life provides enthusiasm for the undergraduate life. Worriers and confusion emerges in the course of leaving their families for University education. Student mothers often times carry numerous thoughts in the course of taking lectures – how the children are being cared for at home. Have they been given food at the right time? Are the children being cared for at home? Have they been given food at the right time? Are the children been allowed to play with electrical equipment? Have they done their school assignment? What will their super be? Have their drugs been taken at the right time? Is the temperature all right? These and many more crosses the mind while at the same time trying to understand the lecturers' discussions. Student mothers often have frequent

complaints of ill health, surgical attention and problems requiring sudden or urgent trips home. Some of these trips home are reportedly based on situations that something is amiss at home or with the children. This is most likely an indication of guilt in loyalty as well as anxiety over day-to-day welfare of family members. Due to the uncertainty of house-helpers or baby sisters, mothers are patronizing day-care centers.

Day care centers throughout Akwa Ibom State are a product of the unprecedented influx of women into career world. Women in this state used to carry their infants on the back while working. With the increasing number of the women in the state in the professional line, in order to secure jobs the burden becomes greater, not only physical, but psychologically also as mothers battle to carry student hood and motherhood simultaneously. In times past, the women could always call upon their extended families for handy baby-sitter. The Sunday Times 1987 explains that with free primary education and availability of more manual unskilled jobs, the last residue of relatives available to sit babies at home went. So most women who are schooling and staying on campus embrace the day care centers for the assurance that there is somebody who takes care of the children till the husband gets home. Having in mind the children are well taken care off. It is expected that student mothers will concentrate on their studies seriously.

HINDRANCE TO WOMEN EDUCATION

A major factor that raises concern and hinders progress of women, in pursuing academic excellence is the material health. Studies have shown that the risk of death during pregnancy and childbirth is heightened by the poor health status of majority of the women. This is related to the general low status of women in our society. Women's choice and thus their freedom of expression are restricted in a variety of ways.

The marriage institution sees a woman's role as "wife" and "mother". Some people still think that her success in these roles depends on the number of children particularly male children – she is able to produce. Her ability to stay married and inherit her husband wealth are often dependent on this. Children are also viewed as security for future. Thus, excessive childbearing which increases considerably the risk of death and reduces the chances of further education, adds often time for marital security.

This hindrance to education through excessive childbirth could have been averted the family planning unit of the University Health Centre was effectively used by student mothers. Unfortunately, the awareness is very poor as student mothers still hold unto the erroneous ideas that family planning is sinful, or that it should receive the permissions of the husbands. The resultant effect is unplanned pregnancy by a student mother, thus increasing the family/academic burden and resultant poor academic performance.

It is apparent that promoting safe motherhood is an enormous task that requires money, understanding, knowledge, endurance, time, enlightenment, patience, and skills among others. Safe motherhood means, improving the socio-economic and political status of women, providing high quality delivery care for all women.

THE EFFECTS OF STUDENT MOTHERHOOD ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

As earlier discussed, the role and responsibilities of women in our society are enormous, most particularly as mothers. Their responsibilities are complicated when they have to combine what is expected of them as mothers with a career. When motherhood is overlapped by career or vice versa, it is natural that one has to suffer for the other.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MARRIED FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS FROM 1994 – 1998 IN THREE DEPARTMENTS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, SOCIAL STUDIES AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS.

Table 1: (1994)

DEPTS.	NO. ADMITTED	1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS UPPER	3RD CLASS LOVER	3RD CLASS	PASS	TOT AL
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	12	-	1	9	2	-	12
CURRICULUM/ INSTRUCTION	8	-	2	5	1	-	8
FOUNDATIONS	9	-	2	5	2	-	9
TOTAL	29	-	5	19	5	-	

Table II: (1995)

DEPTS.	NO. ADMITTED	1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS UPPER	3RD CLASS LOVER	3RD CLASS	PASS	TOT AL
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	11	-	4	7	-	-	11
SOCIAL STUDIES	14	-	4	10	-	-	14
FOUNDATION	8	-	3	5	-	-	8
TOTAL	33	-	11	22	-	-	

Table III: (1996)

DEPTS.	NO. ADMITTED	1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS UPPER	3RD CLASS LOWER	3RD CLASS	PASS	TOTAL
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	13	-	4	8	1	-	11
CURRICULUM/ INSTRUCTION	14	-	4	8	2	-	10
FOUNDATIONS	12	-	2	10	-	-	10
TOTAL	39	-	10	26	3	-	

Table IV: (1997)

DEPTS.	NO. ADMITTED	1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS UPPER	3RD CLASS LOWER	3RD CLASS	PASS	TOTAL
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	8	-	1	6	1	-	6
CURRICULUM/ INSTRUCTION	10	-	2	7	1	-	8
FOUNDATIONS	13	-	2	9	2	-	10
TOTAL	31	-	5	22	4	-	

Table V: (1998)

DEPTS.	NO. ADMITTED	1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS UPPER	3RD CLASS LOWER	3RD CLASS	PASS	TOTAL
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	7	-	1	4	2	-	7
CURRICULUM/ INSTRUCTION	9	-	1	7	1	-	9
FOUNDATIONS	8	-	2	5	1	-	9
TOTAL	24	-	4	16	4	-	

Generally, for the five year-period under observation, no student-mother (married female) made a first class honours, two only made second classes upper and a greater number made second class lower and third class. From the foregoing; it is now observed that married female students perform poorly academically. It can rightly be concluded that this could be due to their dual responsibilities of motherhood/family life and academic pursuits.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LOWER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES IN MARRIED WOMEN

A lot of factors do contribute to the low performance of married female students in our various institutions of higher learning, which are not peculiar to the University of Uyo.

Lack of suitable accommodation to student-mothers. Poor accommodation makes them unable to perform well academically. Since there is no decent/comfortable accommodation for them and perhaps their babies to stay with them, it makes it difficult for them to cope with their academic activities. Hostels are not situated near the lecture halls, thus, giving them the trouble of having to track distances for lectures, and as mothers, will find it difficult coping with such situation. Lack of adequate health care services on campus also serve as one of the contributing factors to poor performances of students mothers. The health centers are becoming diagnostic centers with no drugs to dispense.

Also, student mothers complain bitterly about lack of dependable house-help as one of the contributing factors for their poor performance. This is so because mothers think of their children's welfare often even when receiving lectures. This creates lack of concentration on what is being taught.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

SUMMARY:

Although many of our women marry before they attain their full academic goals, it has been observed that marriage is no barrier to women education. The manner in which married female undergraduate students recently flood higher institution worldwide, and the university of Uyo in particular makes this observation very true. This married undergraduate students are so determined that they do not mind all the odds and ordeals of having to combine their marriage responsibilities with the academic requirements. The married students are so daring that pregnancy; childbirth and care while in school are no hindrances to their academic pursuit. Listed below are some of the underlying factors that motivated married women to attempt education at the higher level.

1. To understand their children's educational problems.
2. To earn a living and support their husbands financially.
3. To help in decreasing manpower shortage in the country.
4. To improve on their social status quo.
5. To reduce the boredom of staying all day at home as house wives and make them physically fit.
6. To be good public figures and help in the social development of the country.
7. To attain the much desired equality with men.
- 8.

Recommendations

From the foregoing therefore, the following necessary suggestions have been made:

1. The University authorities should pay considerable attention to the provision of general services for the University that would be beneficial to married nursing female students. These include the availability of supermarkets; maternity, effective family planning services units and baby clinic.
2. The University should provide separate hostels for married students with adequate baby care facilities.
3. Adequate infrastructure facilities and counseling services should be provided. Such facilities will enable student mother study under less strain. In conjunction with the counseling services, awareness should be mounted on proper understanding of family planning programmes.

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