

THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD ON
UNIVERSITY FEMALE STUDENTS.

A Case Study Of Undergraduate Students
The University Of Nairobi

by

SUSAN NJERI MBUGUA

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ABSTRACT:

This study is an analysis of the impact of Marriage and Motherhood on female students in the University of Nairobi. Its main purpose was to establish the difficulties involved in combining university education with marital and motherhood role obligations and thereby recommend ways of assisting such students.

The sample for this study consisted of undergraduate female students. These undergraduate students were in three broad categories, namely; married mothers, married females with no children and single mothers. The number of respondents interviewed was one hundred and thirty.

The sample was selected using the stratified sampling method as well as the snow-ball method of sampling. Non-probability principles of sampling were employed.

The main method of data collection was interview schedule. A standardized interview-administered questionnaire was used. It had both open-ended and closed questions. The researcher carried out the interviews singly. Other methods of data collection used included simple observation, panel discussion, key informants and secondary sources.

Motherhood role obligations were found to be very taxing. These role obligations interfered with the students' health, class attendance, ability to sit for examinations and use of 'boom'- university slang for money given by the university to students to assist them meet their academic requirements such as purchase of books, laboratory equipment, medical kits etc.

The process of motherhood, (pregnancy and subsequent delivery) was found to affect the respondents' ability to sit for examinations. The

respondents who were in their late months of pregnancy or who delivered during the examination terms, (Second or Third Academic Terms) sat for special examinations. Pregnancy and subsequent delivery also affected the respondents' health negatively. The expectant respondents had to attend health clinics and in the process many failed to attend lectures.

The single mothers were affected emotionally and socially by the stigma of having a child out of marriage. Most of their pregnancies were un-planned and the men responsible did not help them in any way. After giving birth, over 90% of the single mothers left their children in the rural areas being taken care of by their relatives while they resided in the students' halls of residence.

The state of motherhood (being a mother), was also found to be very taxing to the respondents. The single mothers more than the married mothers were affected by the financial difficulties associated with taking care of their children since they had no spouses to give them financial assistance. This resulted in the majority of single mothers using their 'boom' for non-academic purposes. They remitted their 'boom' back home to assist in caring for their children.

Married mothers were fortunate to have spouses who helped them meet their financial obligations. However, more married mothers than single mothers missed attending classes. This was partly due to the fact that more married mothers than single mothers were non-residents. This meant that they played a more direct role in taking care of their children than the single mothers (who were mainly residents). Being non-residents resulted in the mothers missing many lectures as they were affected directly by the children's daily needs, problems with maids and in-laws, transport difficulties and other domestic difficulties.

Despite the stress associated with motherhood role obligations,

65 mothers did not use family planning methods. The main reason given for not using family planning methods was due to the fears they held concerning contraceptives.

According to the study findings, being married but having no children, did not seem to have a significant impact on the students' life. There was no significant change in health among the respondents married but with no children. Marriage did not seem to affect their use of 'boom', their class attendance or their academic performance in any significant way. Motherhood, however, was found to have a negative impact on the respondents' academic and non-academic lives.

The examination performance among all three category of respondents was very good with less than 10% having sat for supplementary examinations or repeated an academic year. This good performance was attributed to the coping techniques the respondents had developed. These coping techniques included limiting their leisure, utilising their free hours in academic activities, using their 'boom' wisely so as to purchase academic items, careful planning on when to attend pre-natal and post-natal clinics so as not to miss classes etc.

The study concluded that combining university education with marriage and motherhood was very taxing on the students. It recommended that the female students be educated on the need for delaying births until completion of their university education; they be given a thorough education concerning family planning methods and warned against pre-marital sex so as to reduce the incidence of unplanned pregnancies and/or pre-marital pregnancies. It also recommended that the university authorities look into ways of assisting those students who were married or were mothers by providing them with pre-natal/post-natal facilities and children's day-care unit, building them married quarters and providing the with non-residents a college bus to meet their transport needs.