MARITAL STATUS AND OTHER CAUSES OF STRESS AMONG NON-TRADITIONAL FEMALE STUDENTS COMBINING WORK AND STUDY: THE CASE OF A PRIVATE TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The past few decades has seen a general increase in the enrollment of non-traditional students in universities. More adult female students are enrolling in universities than males. The need to understand how balancing of the multiple demands and roles of work, school, and family affects such students, particularly, the female non-traditional students, necessitated this research. An exploratory survey was undertaken to find out the factors that caused stress among evening students, especially married ones, and for this, a sample of one hundred (100) undergraduate students were drawn from the Dansoman campus of the Methodist University College. Two-Way ANOVA and T-Test results revealed that demands of jobs, family and schooling made married students more stressed out than their unmarried counterparts. Married students who did not have their own means of transport were more stressed out than those who did and further that married students who had supportive relatives or housemaids experienced lower levels of stress compared to their counterparts who did not have such support. Based on these findings, some recommendations for practical incorporation of non-traditional students in tertiary institutions were made.

Introduction

The number of non-traditional students, that is, those over 25 years of age has been increasing rapidly over the past few decades. According to the basic statistics of the Methodist University College of Ghana, this group of students has grown from less than 50 to more than 1000 in the period between the 2000/2001 and 2008/2009 academic year, and now comprises approximately 55% of the total undergraduate student population (Principal's Report and Basic Statistics – 7th Congregation).

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2000), non- traditional female students have also entered at a higher rate than their male counterpart, and are helping to outnumber the greater proportion of male enrollment that prevailed earlier.

Donovant (2009) defines the non-traditional student as a person who returns to school full- or part-time while maintaining responsibilities such as employment, family, and other responsibilities of adult life.

These non-traditional students return to school for a variety of reasons (to advance in their current jobs; to pursue new interests, or to resume their education after having dropped out of school for reasons such as financial problems, competing responsibilities, or a lack of focus, maturity, support or motivation) and often have multiple non-school-related commitments and responsibilities (e.g. family and full–time jobs, etc) that they must also attend to while pursuing their educational goals.

Research over the years has shown that non-traditional students rather than traditional students are prone to stress (Taylor & Owusu – Banahene, 2010: Amegbe, 2002).

Stress has been identified as a factor negatively affecting persistence for college / university freshmen (Perrine, 1999: Zhang & RiCharde, 1998) and non-traditional students (Chartrand, 1992). According to Misra and McKean women express higher stress and anxiety than males in the academic environment, possibly because they are more often than not, saddled with family and marital demands, as well as having to combine schooling with a full time job (Taylor & Owusu – Banahene, 2007).

There are several sources of stress. One source is work overload, sometimes occasioned by multiplicity of roles such as combining work with education. In recent times, due to high demand of work output and a sense of professionalism by corporate institutions, more and more workers, are compelled to pursue higher education to better position themselves in the job market, or for economic security (Herideen, 1998). Thus work overload, and consequently stress, may become more obvious as more people continue to combine the school and work roles.

Main body of article

According to Gibson, John and James (1988), stress refers to a person's adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological and physical demands on a person. Two components are implied: first is the notion of adaptation, which means that people adapt to stressful circumstances in several different ways. Second is the role of stimulus. The stimulus is generally a stressor; which induces the stress. In addition, the demands placed on the individual by the stressor must be perceived as being excessive for the stress to result; and because of individual differences stress is experienced differently.

Arroba and James (2002) reported that the relationship between gender and stress is complex and varied and that women are more affected by stress than men. In the same vein, Melhinsh (1998) and Philips & Segal (1996) concluded that since most women work longer hours than men and both do not share duties equally at home, women tend to experience more psychological symptoms of occupational stress than men.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified psychological appraisal as a crucial mediating process. Elimadijan and Goodall (1967) affirm that the distinction in the way people experience stress lies in the individual's perception of the experience of stress. We also respond to stress with anxiety (Bourne and Ekstand 1973). According to Lazarus, (1963), anxiety is an effective aspect of stress which interferes with thinking and problem-solving and may thus reduce a person's effectiveness in mastering a situation. Basowitz (1955) also suggested that stressors were stimulating conditions which aroused anxiety in an individual.

The foregoing shows that stress is directly related to anxiety, thus to be able to look at stress in its entirety there is the need to look at the level of anxiety in individuals. It is widely accepted that most people respond to stressful events with increased anxiety and that anxiety reactions are characterized by feelings of apprehension, tension and activation of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1975).

Supporting this is a study by Agbolla and Ongori (2009) on the students of the University of Botswana, Gaborone. The study participants were drawn from undergraduate students of the University. The results of the research indicated that students were stressed on the various programs and the symptoms identified were anxiety, nervousness, indigestion, endless worries,

tension and pain in the neck or shoulders. Thus in measuring stress in this study an instrument that assesses stress with anxiety and depression was used.

Marital status and stress

There appears to be differences in the ways that married and single women experience stress. Married women report higher levels of stress than single women, with one – third (33%) reporting that they have experienced a great deal of stress in the past month (8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale) compared with one in five (22%) of single women. Similarly, significantly more married women report that their stress has increased over the past five years (56 % vs. 41% of single women). Single women are also more likely than married women to say they feel they are doing enough to manage their stress (63 % vs. 51%). Married women are more likely than single women to report they have experienced the following due to stress in the past month: feeling as though they could cry (54% vs. 33%), feeling irritable or angry (52% vs. 38%), having headaches (48% vs.33 %) and experiencing fatigue (47% vs. 35%) (American Psychological Association's Stress in America 2010 Report).

The role of women as being both married and taking care of families plus a career/job has been described as a dual – career. It must be added that due to the transient nature of continuing education (at most 4 years duration), it does not qualify as a career, but an added responsibility. Thus married women who are pursuing careers and studying might be said to be dual-career-plus-responsibility women which evidently is stressful.

It therefore does not come as a surprise that there are disparities between married and unmarried women in their attitudes towards work (Amegbe, 2002). In a survey of 350 non-traditional female students, Johnson, Schwartz, and Bower (2000) found that 84% of the

women were responsible for children in the home and suggested that "one of the most pressing concerns among students who are parents is child care". Child care facilities on campus offer a highly valuable resource for these students. Fadale and Winter (1991) reported similar findings in their study of New York community colleges. In their study, 500 student parents, 95% of whom were female, stated that the campus child care facilities contributed not only to their academic success, but also to their continued enrollment and persistence.

Married and Unmarried Students on stress levels

Grashal (1980) affirms that married women are more stressed out than unmarried women. One possible reason could be work overload (Crider, 1983) in that married students, apart from their various jobs and academic commitments, also have to take care of their husbands and their families thus causing them to jungle more things at once, than their unmarried counterparts.

In a study of Bankers in Cape – Coast, Amegbe (2002), observed that out of the total number of respondents, 90% believed that martial status did not have any advantages. Eighty-three (83) percent also believed that long hours at work affected marital obligations. Supervisors' assessments revealed that the work of a majority of the women could be rated as fairly satisfactory (2 on a 4 point scale) for punctuality, willingness to do extra work and ability to complete work on schedule. Thus, it seems that due to role conflict between the demands of their jobs and the demands of keeping a home, women are less likely to work well to meet their schedules at work.

Social support and means of transportation are two important factors that can serve as a buffer to stress for all students, especially the non traditional students, who more often than not have

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competing responsibilities.

Aim/objectives of study

Based on the above, this study intended to find out some of the factors that cause stress among married non-traditional students, particularly, the females of a private tertiary institution with the focus on means of transportation and the presence of social support. The main objective was for it to serve as a basis for policy implementation for relevant agencies and bodies

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that married evening students (male and female) will face significantly higher stress than unmarried evening students (male and female). Again, it was hypothesized that married students who do not have their own means of transport will face significantly higher stress than unmarried students who have their own means of transport. It was also hypothesized that, married students who have housemaids or supportive spouses or relatives have significantly lower stress than unmarried students who do not have. Finally, female married students would experience higher levels of stress than male married students.

Definition of Terms

For this study, *Stress* was defined as a condition that leads an individual to perceive a discrepancy - whether real or not – between the demands of a situation and the resources of the person's biological, psychological or social systems. *Single Students* were those who having attained the marriage age were still not married and *Married Students:* were those who were married under common law or customary law, attached to, or cohabiting with the opposite sex. *DASS*: - A standardized scale for measuring Depression, Anxiety and Stress.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was an exploratory survey which employed a non- probability purposive sampling to select a sample of 100 out of the 4000 students in the main campus of the Methodist University College.This campus was used because of the advantage of having both Traditional (regular) and non-traditional students, which the other satellite campuses do not have. The Methodist University College is a multi-campus University with its main campus at Dansoman and Satellite campuses at Tema (running only business courses for only non-traditional students) and Wenchi, which has the Faculty of Agriculture but with relatively few students.

Sample Characteristics

Of the number selected, 48 were married and 52 single. There were 61 males and 39 females. In terms of age, the range was 19-50 years, with a mean age of 32.08 (SD = 8.67). Fifty-five of them had no children whiles 45 had children aged between 1 – 5 years. In terms of employment, 18 worked in the private sector and 12 in the public sector with 60 of them being unemployed. Of the sample, sixteen (16) had their own means of transportation while eighty-four (84) did not have their own transport. Again, forty-two (42) had some form of help at home such as a housemaid, while 58 did not.

Test Instruments

The main instrument was a 2-part Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 42) standardized questionnaire, designed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995).The first part (Section A) collected demographic data with questions asking about age, sex, number of children, and "yes" or "no"

questions asking whether they had their own means of transport and help at home. The second part (Section B) consisted of items measuring Stress- anxiety- and Depression-related conditions (personal, psychological, social symptoms) and mental stress (nervous tension and nervous energy) which factor out as two distinct domains. The DASS This scale has been used on clinical and community samples to show that it distinguishes well between features of depression, physical arousal, and psychological tension and agitation (Anthony, et al, 1998). Some of the questions scored on a scale of 0 – 3 include: "I found myself getting upset by quite trivial things"; "I felt sad and depressed"; "I had a feeling of faintness", among others. Cronbach's reliability for this sample was high at .71 for depression, .79 for anxiety and .81 for stress.

Scoring

Low scores on the (DASS 42) reflected a minimum exposure to Stress, Anxiety and Depression and high scores reflected more experience with the variables. To determine the individual score, the global score meaning is employed thus the higher one's score, the higher his/her stress, anxiety or depression. The score ranged from zero to a maximum of 126. Answered questionnaires were coded, scored and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) Version 10 software .Main variables were analyzed using the Two-way ANOVA because variables were from a known population and were normally distributed.

Results

Marital Status

Table 1. INDEPENDENT T-test RESULTS ON STRESS AND MARITAL STATUS

		Groups (n=100)			
Marital Status	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**Sig**
Married	42	67.2451	0.3424		0.001
Single	52	46.2641	2.2536	2.98	0.001

To test for the difference in stress levels between married students and unmarried students, an independent t-test was conducted on the data gathered using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] software. The result (Table 1) shows that married [M=67.2451, SD=0.3424] AND unmarried [M=46.2641, SD=2.2536] have significant difference in terms of stress [t [98] =0.001, p=s]. Thus, students who are married suffer stress more than those who are unmarried [single].

Transport

Table 2. Independent T-Test Results On Stress And Means Of Transport

Married	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig
Groups (n=100)					
Own Means of Transport	16	67.524	3.534		0.005
No own Means of Transport	84	73.635	2.021	2.98	0.005

To test for the difference in stress levels for married students who had their own means of transport and married students who did not have their own means of transport, an independent t-test was conducted on the data gathered using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] software. The result (Table 2) showed that married students who had their own means of transport [M=67.524, SD=3.534] AND married students who did not have their own means of transport [M=73.635, SD=2.021] had significant differences in terms of stress levels [t [98] =0.005, p=s]. Thus, Married students who do not have their own means of transport face significantly higher stress than married students who have their own means of transport.

Support

Table 3. INDEPENDENT T-test RESULTS ON STRESS OF THE PRESENCE OF SUPPORT

Groups (n=100)					
Married	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**Sig**
With Support	42	42.753	2.534		0.005
With No Support	54	53.413	1.021	2.98	0.005

To test for the difference in stress levels between married students who have housemaid or some support and married students who did not have housemaid or some support , an independent t-test was conducted in the data gathered using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] software. The result (Table 3) shows that married students who have housemaids or some support [M=42.753, SD=2.534] AND married students who did not have housemaid or some support [M=53.413, SD=1.021] have significant differences in terms of stress levels [t [98] =0.008, p=s]. Thus, married students who have housemaids or supportive spouses or relatives have significantly lower stress than unmarried students who do not have such help.

Gender

Table 4.INDEPENDENT T-test RESULTS ON STRESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GENDER

Groups (n=100)					
Married	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**Sig**
Female	61	77.2451	0.2451		0.005
Male	39	56.2641	4.634	2.98	0.005

The 5th table shows the results for the difference in stress levels between married students [Females] and married students [males], using an independent t-test. It indicates that married students [females]-[M=77.2451, SD=0.2451] AND married students [males]-[M=56.2641, SD=4.634] had significant difference in terms of stress level [t [98] =0.002, p=s]. Thus, for this sample, female married students experienced higher levels of stress than male married students.

Table 5.A Two- way ANOVA Summary on Marital Status and Treatments (Transport, Housemaid and Child's Age)

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean Square	F-Ratio	*p*(Level of significance)
Rows [Marital Status]	3254.32	1	1634.54	3.32	0.655
Columns (Treatments-Transport, Housemaid, Child's age)	54301.45	3	103.65	5.2	0.007
Interaction(Marital Status *Treatment)	45321.34	3	756.87	12.5	0.003
Error (within cells)	7654.54	48	898.98	-	-
Total	35340.65	55	-	-	-

With a 95% degree of confidence it was realized that significances existed in the mean scores of columns [Treatment, sig =0.007] and interactions [sig=0.003] while there existed no significance in the mean scores of rows [Marital status]. Since significances existed among Treatments [Transport, Housemaid, Childs age] and Interactions a multiple test was used to test for exactly where the differences were. The results above in Table 5 supported the hypothesis that students who are married suffer stress more than their unmarried [single] counterparts. Married students who do not have their own means of transport face significantly higher stress than married students who have their own means of transport, Married students who have housemaids or

supportive spouses or relatives have significantly lower stress than married students who do not have, Female[married students] would experience higher level of stress than male [married students].

DISCUSSION

Relationship between Married Students and Unmarried Students on stress levels

The first hypothesis that married students are more stressed out than unmarried students was confirmed. This is in consonance with the findings by Grashal (1980) that married women are more stressed out than unmarried women. This could be as a result of work overload (Crider, 1983) in that married students, apart from their various jobs and academic commitments, also have to take care of their husbands and their families thus causing them to juggle more things at once, than their unmarried counterparts.

Transport as a factor of stress

The second hypothesis stated that married students who do not have their own means of transport will face significantly higher stress than unmarried students who do not have their own means of transport and this was also confirmed. Conway (1987) compared the pressure existing with owning a car and not owing a car, he stated that owing a car is more of advantageous than otherwise. However, both the married and the unmarried students who did not have their own means of transport faced some levels of stress.

Social Support (from relatives or housemaid) and stress amongst Married Students

The third hypothesis stated that married students who have housemaids or supportive spouses or relatives have significantly lower stress than married students who do not have. Three unique aspects of social support has been identified by House (1981) i.e. (a) Instrumental support, which includes practical kinds of help or tangible aid, such as financial assistance, that is provided by family and friends; (b) informational support, which consists of information and advice that help an individual cope with personal problems; and (c) appraisal support which includes praise and validation that bolster an individual's self-evaluation. The family environment is a very important source of social support, from which all three aspects can be acknowledged. A supportive husband, a relative or housemaid to take care of the home and the children can serve as a buffer to stress. Crider (1983) stated characteristics of a stressful stimuli or stressor, namely; overload, conflict and uncontrollability, in effect he concluded that the absence of support put stress on the individual confirming the third hypothesis that married students who have social support have significantly lower stress than married student who do not have. The implication is that married students without social support have to combine their academic and household duties with the result that they have divided attention and less time to study and complete assignments related to their academic work.

Conclusion

This study was intended to find out some of the factors that cause stress among married non-traditional students of a private tertiary institution with the focus on means of transportation and the presence of help at home. The main objective was for it to serve as a basis for policy

implementation for relevant agencies and bodies. Married students in the UniversityCollege, as confirmed by the results of the study, go through stress in their attempt to pursue their programmes.

Limitations/Recommendations

This study, although conducted on a sample of students from the MethodistUniversity, holds knowledge that is important to institutions that already have or are contemplating the inclusion of non-traditional students in their population.

Students who are married, especially women, must be supported in their social duties by their relatives. They should also as much as possible, be granted study leave with pay, in order to ease the stress-related pressures. In the case of transport, the school can facilitate a means by which students who do not have their own means of transport can get to the school without necessarily going through stress, for instance, by the provision of buses at some vantage points in the community for students to board to campus on school days, or allowing some private commercial transport owners to provide that service for a fee.

Again, the University authorities would have to consider these stressful conditions and look at alternative ways of assessing students' academic performance such as the use of cumulative assessment strategies and even oral exams.

Although some credible results have been obtained, for future replications of this study, a larger sample size should be used, and in the case of institutions, data should be collected to cover all the departments. There should also be a further study into the mechanisms such persons have to cope with stress.

Furthermore, a stress inoculation program must be implemented to advise students in advance of the difficulties non-traditional students may face and help them develop appropriate coping strategies to combat stress. A study by Rosenblat and Christensen (1993) concluded that graduate students had lower levels of anxiety when given a proper orientation. Thus, if a similar orientation programme is instituted by the University administration, it may help non-traditional graduate students be better equipped to cope effectively with (under)graduate school stressors.

Given the large number of women students who are responsible for children, providing a safe place for children while the mother is on campus could alleviate some of the stress of going to school. Child care issues are very significant in the lives of adult female students. Alleviating this as a concern could provide additional encouragement for this population to persist in their academic pursuits.

Finally, it is recommended that universities should develop a framework and assessment tool to evaluate their effectiveness in serving non-traditional students. Universities should re- examine the programs and fees paid by all students. Research would need to be done in order to conclude if non-traditional and traditional students require different amenities paid for by their fees. It might make more sense to have traditional students pay one set of fees as contribution for things that they would need (e.g., recreation center, etc.). Perhaps satisfaction could be increased once the university knows what is desired by each group of students.

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GROS PLAN SUR LE FRANÇAIS LANGUE ETRANGERE AU GHANA: PERSPECTIVES ET ENJEUX

(SPOTLIGHT ON FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN GHANA:

PERSPECTIVES AND STAKES)

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