

Stress and its effects on female students at a Zimbabwean State University

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Abstract: Indisputably, university students are exposed to multiple stress situations on a daily basis. However, research evidence shows that globally, female university students are more susceptible to stress than their male counterparts. This study sought to establish some causes and forms of stress, as well as effects of stress confronting undergraduate Bachelor of Education Degree female students at a satellite centre of a state university in Zimbabwe. We purposively selected a sample of 100 female students (n=100) comprising 50 married and 50 single. We preferred a qualitative survey and used a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to collect data. Interview data were subjected to content analysis and distilled into broad themes, while a Chi-Square statistics was computed to prove the hypotheses to determine the association between the effects of stress and the marital status of female university students, thereby addressing the question on the effects of stress on these students. The findings revealed academic demands, economic hardships and social issues as major sources of stress and categories around which stress among female students revolved. An association existed between the female students' marital status and effects of stress on them, in a statistically significant manner, prompting us to conclude that stress effects took their toll more on married female students than single female students. These findings have implications for furthering our understanding of stress experience profiles of female university students with a view to helping them to develop stress coping strategies.

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As a form of affirmative action to address gender imbalances that hitherto have always worked in their disfavor women the world over have overwhelmingly responded to the universal call for them to take up available educational opportunities. Consequently hundreds of thousands of them have enrolled for degree programmes in universities. However, in their pursuit of university education women confront many challenges that lead to stress. A potential predisposition to stressful situations for female university students situated in Sub-Saharan Africa is their obligation to satisfy the demands of university education and training while at the same time performing what FAO(2016) refers to as reproductive, productive and community engagement gender roles. Regardless of their marital status, female university students are involved in reproductive roles in forms of household chores such as food preparation, home cleaning, fuel and water collection, and child care. Anthropologically speaking, Sub-Saharan married female students are embedded in a socio-cultural milieu which expects them to perform conjugal roles to maintain their

marriage ties and bear and rear offspring. In addition, the very same female university students perform the productive roles of employment, self-employment and the production of goods and services for consumption or for sale on the market for example, crop and livestock production (Kwaah and Essilfie, 2017). Along with their single female counterparts, married university students also play the community engagement roles which consist in activities and tasks that involve the collective organization of services and social events. For example they have to attend ceremonies, community development activities, church services, funerals, local political activities and resources used by everyone such as water, health care and education (GLOPP/ILO, 2008; Kwaah and Essilfie, 2017). In many developing nations, research evidence attests to numerous situations whereby female university students have often experienced a wide array of stressors such as pressure of work, peer pressure, the demands of different programmes, uncertain future employment prospects, maladministration of the universities and the multiple social and intellectual demands of the university environment (Chemutai and Mulambula, 2020; Tuncay, Muduroglu, and Bulut, 2020). However, not much emboldened research has been conducted to unearth the stress encounters confronting female university students operating in a socio-economically volatile setting such as Zimbabwe. The dearth of research-based evidence on the prevailing stress and its effects on female university students taking account of their marital status as they pursue their education and training motivates this study.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

From time immemorial stress has always been regarded as a problem which leads to psychological and behavioural malfunctioning of students on various levels of study including university. Stress occurs among university students engaged in academic studies due to a variety of reasons. These include overload of work, competition with other students, peer pressure and social problems at home among others. While numerous studies conducted to establish stress levels between male and female universities have confirmed higher prevalence of stress among females than males (Adasi et al, 2020; Al-Qahtan and Alsubie (2020), little is known about how single as compared to married female students experience stress. Since the variable of marital status of female university students has received little or no attention in relation to the effects of stress on these students, it is necessary to employ this variable to disaggregate these