STRESS AMONG MARRIED FEMALE SANDWICH UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated stress and their consequences among married female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. Stressors of interest were occupational stress, family responsibility stress, academic activities stress, financial stress, cultural roles stress, religious roles stress and programme generated stress. The consequences of these among the women on the sandwich programme were examined and ranked. Also, the contribution of each of the stressors to stress in the women was examined. The study was a descriptive research of the survey type. The population was all married female sandwich undergraduates from Southwest Nigeria in four hundred (400) and five hundred (500) levels of 2012/2013 academic session on the sandwich academic programmes of Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. A sample of 181 women was selected through stratified random sampling techniques. The research instrument was a questionnaire which was validated by the researchers. One (1) research question was raised and one (1) hypothesis was postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Results of the analyses revealed that the women experienced different magnitudes of the consequences of stress. Also, all the stressors taken together significantly predicted stress among the women. Counselling implications of the findings were highlighted. Based on the findings, it was recommended that married female undergraduates should be aided financially through scholarships and awards because demands of the roles of being married women conflicted with demands of education in their lives. In addition, cultural expectations for the married woman in the society should be subjects of interest to counsellors in marriage counselling.

Keywords: Stress, levels of stress, married female sandwich undergraduates, occupational, family responsibility

INTRODUCTION

The intention of every government to make education available to all citizens is highly appreciated by anyone who knows the relevance of education in the development of individuals and the nation. Tsokar and Okeke (2014) observed that to achieve sustainable development in any country, there must be strategic and deliberate strive towards adopting indigenous policy that would engender self-sufficiency. Thus, individuals are encouraged to find means of building their capacity in an attempt to achieve sustainable development. Hence, people are encouraged to acquire knowledge through formal and informal education. In order to achieve this objective, efforts are made towards designing programmes that enable people to go for further learning at their convenient times. People who have one employment or the other are able to go for higher education without losing their jobs. Hence, there are Distance Learning, Sandwich Programme, Part Time Programmes and Open Learning of the National Open University of Nigeria in higher education in Nigeria (Jegede, 2002).

Nigeria, like some other nations of the world, values education for her citizens and emphasizes quality education. There is no gain-saying the fact that quality education is very necessary for individuals and national development. Our society is not static but dynamic. If the society is dynamic, it means that it must demand certain priorities in terms of new knowledge, new status, innovations and updating of the existing knowledge (Allan, 1977). Sandwich programme, as a programme of study, is conducted outside the regular system of study by institutions of higher learning. In Nigeria, students on sandwich programme are not full time students of their respective universities because majority of the participants are teachers. They are expected to spend at least three months each contact period to receive lectures and be examined. The candidates are expected to be physically present, attend all lectures and write examinations during the contact period. The sandwich programme, with its good objectives of providing opportunities of education for workers, to improve their levels of education, tends to put a lot of pressures on the students. Many of the students leave their homes, which may be very far away from their Universities to get accommodation and settle down for studies. Women have been observed to have increased in academic activities and have made considerable strides in academic activities (Nonnemake, 2000; Dever, Zoe, Dalton & Tayton, 2006). However, it was observed in a study report that there was low proportion of women in research and that more women than men dropped out of research (European Commission, 2008; League of European Research Universities, 2012). Students of sandwich programmes are often times workers who seek to improve their professional status, position or income and educational levels. Nigeria’s educational policy, which outlines that the minimum teaching qualification is National Certificate in Education (NCE), has forced many teachers, in particular, to enroll for sandwich programmes. These programmes attract many people and for years, many graduates have been produced through them (Njoku, 1996).
Institutions running the sandwich educational programme in southwest Nigeria include Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Lagos State University, Lagos, Olabisi Onabanjo, Ago-Iwoye and Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. Borisade (2007) evaluated sandwich degree programme of universities in the southwestern Nigeria and found that all the institutions running the programme had inadequate facilities like lecture rooms, student accommodation, libraries and instructional materials. However, he revealed that the programme encouraged the continuous academic growth of servicing teachers, improved their level of productivity and competencies. Also, he revealed that the quality of the products of the programme was not in any way different from that of the regular programme.

Stress is the body’s reactive response to any unusually challenging or overwhelming situation. As participants (lecturers) in the Sandwich Programme, it has been observed that the nature and design of the programme appear to generate stress in the students. The programme appears to be a stressor. Many students and staff of the programme appear to experience stress because of the associated problems of education in Nigeria generally. Married women experience personal-social-psychological, marital and financial problems as undergraduates (Ogunsanmi, 2011). Trockel, M. T., Bernes, M. D. & Egget, D. L. (2000) examined stress among married students in their first year in college and found that as they combined the roles of being mothers, wives and students, they experienced a lot of stress.

The financial implications of the programme seem to constitute stress to the students. Njoku (1996) observed that students on the programmes did not receive scholarships, grants or aids as others on regular programmes in institutions. Thus, meeting with the cost of materials, schools fees, family needs care and feeding while on the programme, away from home constituted stressors to married female undergraduates on sandwich programme.

Previous experiences with the sandwich students revealed that many broke down in health and were admitted into the hospitals around universities, far from relations. Most of the female students were married women who came in with pregnancies endangering the health of both mother and fetus as the former lived in unhealthy environment and living conditions. Some expectant mothers even left behind young children at home. Their thought about the children’s welfare often led to emotional breakdown. One could find a student being delivered of a baby and hours later proceeded to the examination hall for her papers. Similarly, many brought their new born babies to the sandwich programme and breastfed in between lectures or examinations.

Another problem on the programme is non-availability of hostels and inadequate lecture rooms. The Centre for Continuing Education of Ekiti State University recently built lecture rooms in the sandwich village of the university. However, these are still inadequate as the population of students admitted into the programme appears too large. In a review of various Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes in Nigeria towards women empowerment, Akomolafe (2011) observed that in empowering women in Nigeria through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes, which included education through the sandwich method, did not give much emphasis to accommodation as it was generally, a non-regular programme. Ogunsanmi (2011) also observed that one of the problems of education in Nigeria is the underlying problem of low political commitment and low funding of adult education. Hence, apart from inadequate facilities for lectures as observed by Omoniyi &Ogunsanmi, 2012, inadequate hostel accommodation exist in very many of the institutions that run sandwich programmes in South West Nigeria. An example is the Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, which runs the sandwich programme and operates a non-campus/residential accommodation system. Within a period of about three months as a contact period, students experience stress while trying to adjust to uncomfortable accommodation. Nkechinnejere (2008) opined that teaching-learning activities for the sandwich programme should be made less stressful by the provision of conducive environment, including hostels on campuses by university administrators. Unfortunately, both the Federal and State Institutions running the sandwich programme do not receive grants/aids for the running of the programme.

The periods of examination and the crowded time-table, coupled with some logistic problems, such as irregular examination table have been observed to generate stress in the students. In most cases, students found themselves writing examinations even on festive and religious holidays and on Saturdays or Sundays, when they ought to be in their homes with their family members. Cultural demands of marriage in some cultures in Nigeria, expect a wife or mother to care for and support both the husband and children in the home (Ogunsanmi, 2001). Married female undergraduates’ stress appeared to be caused by their multiple roles and responsibilities mothers, wives, religious leaders, employed workers and role-models in the society. In the same vein, Omoniyi and Ogunsanmi (2012) observed that married academic staff members in Southwest Nigeria experienced stress.

Demands on their various jobs as teachers, civil or public servants, demand for higher teaching qualification, attendance at work place or shuttle between home, workplace and study institutions appear to be great stressors to them. Thind and Jaswal (2006) observed that married Indian women went through being educated and still coped well with marital responsibilities around them. Formerly, family and traditional culture acted as barriers to some women’s education, either on regular or sandwich basis in Canada. Girls and women were often discouraged from continuing their education by the cultural group they grew in. In some countries and ethnic groups then, the barriers could be as strong as taboos (McDonagh, 2004). However, since 1970 in Canada and after the United Nations’ fourth World Congress on Women in Beijing in 1995, most governments have been trying to fashion a just society for
both men and women. At times, reinforced by religion, many people appear to have had convictions of the roles of men and women in the home. Many married women who wanted continuing education programmes like the sandwich programme appear to have been faced with mind boggling schedules of home care, child care, being mothers, wives, role models, mentors and leaders in the society. The extent of the consequences of the stress and the contribution of each of the perceived stressors to stress in the lives and families of the women and the society at large are of interest to these researchers. The study is significant in that data generated have contributed to issues on gender in the sustainable development and human capacity building of Nigeria, a developing nation of the 3rd world. Findings have also added to literature on women education and gender issues in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHOD
The study was a descriptive research of the survey type. Data were collected with the aim of describing and interpreting existing state of affairs concerning sources of stressors and their consequences. The design enabled the researchers to observe and measure the consequences of stress being experienced by the women on the programme. Also, it investigated the contribution of stressors such as their occupation, family responsibilities, academic activities, financial needs, cultural roles, religious roles and programme generated stress to stress among the married female undergraduates. The population for the study consisted of all married female sandwich undergraduates of four hundred (400) and five hundred (500) levels of 2012/2013 academic session, who were natives of Southwestern states in Nigeria and on the sandwich programme of Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. The sample consisted 181 women selected using stratified random sampling techniques. The research instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire which solicited opinion of the selected women on the consequences of the stress that they appear to be experiencing. Face and content validities of the instrument were ensured. Using test-retest method, reliability co-efficient of 0.81 was obtained for the instrument. The internal consistency of the instrument was also determined using split-half reliability method and reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained. These were significant at 0.05 level of significance. The research instrument was administered by the researchers in lecture rooms. Data generated were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics- frequency count, percentage, ranking and Multiple Regression Analysis.

RESULTS
Research Question 1: What are the consequences of stress among female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 1: Consequences of stress among female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Consequences of stress</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provides a higher qualification</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provides a means for higher promotion.</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-satisfaction for possessing a degree certificate</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leads to improved social status.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Increases financial income.</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Leads to frustration.</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Leads to death.</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Causes family poverty.</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Loss of relative while on programme.</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Health failure.</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Loss of pregnancies.</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Leads to complications during child-birth.</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Frequent visitation to the hospital.</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Loss of husband or children due to lack of care.</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Leads to broken homes.</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Leads to premature delivery.</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Leads to fornication and adultery.</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>15th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 presents the percentages and ranking of the consequences of stress among the married female undergraduates. The results show the percentage and rank order as follows: provide a means for higher promotion and improved social status (94.2%). These are closely followed by self-satisfaction for possessing a degree certificate (91.3%), provides higher qualification (85.5%), increases financial income (78.3%), health failure (71.0%), leads to frustration (69.6%) frequent visitation to hospital (68.1%), loss of husband and children due to lack of care (63.8%), experience complications due to childbirth (63.2), loss of relative while on programme, premature delivery (62.3%), leads to broken homes (60.9%), leads to fornication and adultery (58.0%), leads to death (49.3%) and causes family poverty (44.9%)

Hypothesis One: There is no significant contribution of the observed stressors to stress among married female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria.
Nigeria. The relationship between the stressors and stress jointly contributed highly to stress experienced by female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. The relationship between the stressors and stress was high, positive and significant ($r=0.850$). The $F$-value (22.773) for the regression model was also highly significant. This showed that all the stressors taken together significantly predicted stress among married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. The overall regression model is statistically significant in terms of its goodness of fit ($F = 22.773$, $P< 0.05$). The regression result is given as:

$$Y = 17.245 + 1.000X_1 + 1.110X_2 + 1.004X_3 + .148X_4 + 1.566X_5 + .076X_6 + .710X_7,$$

where

$Y =$ Sources of stress, $X_1 =$ Occupational stress
$X_2 =$ Family responsibility stress, $X_3 =$ Academic activities stress, $X_4 =$ Financial needs stress
$X_5 =$ Cultural roles stress, $X_6 =$ Religious roles stress
$X_7 =$ Programme generated stress

Table 2 shows that all the stressors jointly contributed to about 72% ($r^2=0.723$) of the observed variance in stress experienced by married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. The relationship between the stressors and stress was high, positive and significant ($r=0.850$). The $F$-value (22.773) for the regression model was also highly significant. This showed that all the stressors taken together significantly predicted stress among married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. The overall regression model is statistically significant in terms of its goodness of fit ($F = 22.773$, $P< 0.05$). The regression result is given as:

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$X_5 =$ Cultural roles stress, $X_6 =$ Religious roles stress
$X_7 =$ Programme generated stress

**DISCUSSION**

The findings revealed both positive and negative consequences of stress among the women. This implies that they had high and positive expectations of benefits after the programme, like the attainment of higher educational degrees, improved social status and at the same time, experienced loss of loved ones, frustration, illness and broken homes. These findings were similar to the observations of Thind and Jaswal (2006) concerning some Indian women who went through stress of academic activities as mothers and housewives. They experienced a lot of stress but had benefits at the end of their studies. Findings of the study also show that all the stressors jointly contributed highly to stress experienced by married female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. The relationship between the stressors and stress was high, positive and significant. All the stressors jointly significantly predicted stress among married female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, cultural roles stress was revealed to be the greatest contributor to stress among the women. This implies that demands of culture as wives, mothers and role models in the society contributed immensely to stress in the lives of female married undergraduates. This finding is similar to the findings of Trockel, Barnes & Egget (2000) who examined stress in women who combined academic work and being housewives and mothers. They found that the women experienced stress. Also, this is similar to the observation of Ogunsanmi (2001) that, demands of cultural roles of the housewife and mother dictate that she should care for her husband and children. These demands lead to stress in women. The positive consequences could be the possible reasons for their encouragement and thus, went through the stress of the programmes. Education through the sandwich educational system has been established and effective for a few decades now in Nigeria. This system of education has proved to be an effective method of building human capacity generally, and especially, women towards sustainable development of Nigeria as a third world nation. The observation of Tsokar and Okeke (2014) that there must be strategic and deliberate strives towards adopting indigenous policy that would engender self-sufficiency towards sustainable development and human capacity building agrees with the efforts of married women struggling to improve their lot educationally.

**CONCLUSION**

The following conclusions could be drawn from the analysis of data and interpretation of the findings of the study:

- Married female sandwich undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria experience stress, which have both positive and negative consequences in their lives.
- Cultural roles contribute greatly to stress among married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria.
- Religious roles contribute less to stress than other stressors in the lives of married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria.
- All the stressors together significantly predict stress among married female undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria.

**COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The establishment of community counselling clinics is essential in communities because of the negative consequences of stress on women as they perform their multiple roles. They need counselling on strategies to help them develop coping skills in their attempts to obtain more education and acquire higher certificates as wives, mothers, career women and role models in the society. Counselling sessions could involve their husbands, in-laws and other significant individuals in their lives, who can give assistance in the care of the home generally. Thus, the significant stressors of cultural roles and family responsibilities could be minimized as they seek to improve on their educational levels to build up their human capacity towards sustainable development. In addition, institutions of higher learning require well-
established counselling centres to meet the psychological needs of married female undergraduates while undergoing academic activities on campus. Based on the findings and their interpretations in this study, it is recommended that female married undergraduates should as a matter of practice, visit counselling clinics in their communities and campuses often. Both marriage counsellors and women undergoing studies through the sandwich educational programme, should take note of the variables that have been found to be significant in this study. Husbands and significant individuals in the lives of such married women should be of assistance to them.

LIMITATION
The study was only able to use married female sandwich undergraduates of 2012/2013 session from the states that comprise the Southwestern zone of Nigeria, studying in Ekiti State University, Nigeria.

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