

Pregnancy and Academic Attainment of Female Students of Tertiary Institutions in Lafia Metropolis of Nasarawa State

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.64450/njsh.v3i1.014>

ABSTRACT

Motherhood is a daunting yet irreplaceable part of human life that contributes immensely to the survival of the family and the society. It is a task that can take the entire time of women because it involves many activities. However, most women combine this already demanding responsibility with educational pursuits. It was therefore needful to empirically explore the likely effect of this situation and as a result, this study undertook to assess motherhood and academic attainment of female students of tertiary institutions in Lafia Metropolis. The main objective of the study, was to assess the effect of motherhood on the academic attainments of female students. The study employed a mixed methods approach which combined both quantitative and qualitative methods and adopted a cross-sectional survey design to include all women who had been pregnant while actively studying or were pregnant at the time of study in the Nasarawa State Polytechnic (NasPoly) and the Federal University of Lafia (FULAFIA). From a total of 365 respondents who were surveyed, the mean age was 29.6 with 39.7% of them being within the age range of 26-30. Results indicated that a significantly higher proportion of respondents (95%) $P < 0.001$ perceived that pregnancy had a negative effect on their academic attainment. The study recommended convenient child spacing and use of innovative technology such as online studies for regular students as a means to help student mothers study outside the classroom.

Keywords: Dual roles; Family planning; Higher education barriers; Maternal role conflict; Pregnancy; Student mothers

1. INTRODUCTION

Mothers in the academic field may sometimes find balancing school work with being pregnant draining and devastating under the best of circumstances (Odetoyinbo, 2024)). This is so because each role consumes a great deal of psychological, intellectual and emotional vigour. Moreover, the clockwork of the academic arena is clearly male as it is built on men's normative paths and their freedom from competing endeavours such as family (Winterson, 2012). During a study carried out among female students, Mahmute (2013), found that some of the pregnant students in Zimbabwe could not write exams because they put to bed during the period of examination. Pregnant students and student mothers are ordinarily expected to subordinate their desires and needs to those of their families, and may be forced to contend with the contradictory roles of motherhood and studentship (Mahmute, 2013).

Student mothers face a number of challenges which may be academic, social, economic or financial (Adofo 2013). Fatigue, maternal-linked sickness, lateness to lectures, inability to meet assignment deadlines, missing examinations, rigid attitudes of lecturers, stigma (or unfavourable comments), lack of or inadequate access to spouse, family, friends, lecturers, church members, and leisure, economic challenges such as inadequate funds for academic fees (including purchase of books, handouts, etc.) are some of the challenges faced by student mothers. Although reproductive mechanisms like contraceptives and family planning have helped women gain a level of control over their body and decisions, with regard to pregnancy and childbirth, thereby liberating them to pursue other roles other than motherhood, yet socio-cultural pressure for women to step into the roles of wives and mothers still prevents many from attaining higher education or pursuing rewarding and successful careers (Thabethe, 2020). In spite of the fact that merging motherhood with schooling is a common occurrence in the North Central, Nigeria especially Nasarawa State, there is a dearth of studies that have tried to discover how student mothers juggle these important roles and the resultant effect on their education. This study therefore undertook to explore the effect of motherhood on academic attainment of students of tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Research Question

How does pregnancy affect the academic attainment of female students?

Research Objective

Assess the effect of pregnancy on the academic attainment of female students of tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between pregnancy and academic attainment of female students of tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Once pregnant, a female student automatically takes up the new designation of expectant mother thereby adding the title of mother to her academic responsibility. More often than not, she soon discovers that these two roles are barely compatible. According to Sekgobela (2008), a female student's effort to combine academic work and motherhood is a heart wrenching activity filled with guilt and exhaustion. In her bid to faithfully serve two "masters", she may just fail to satisfy both as her physical and mental state already altered by pregnancy may adversely affect her studies. As Dekel (2017) rightfully observed, pregnancy is a unique condition as it is the only state that affords two people to live under one skin. This two-in-one state affects the general wellbeing of the mother. Dekel et al (2017)

outlined some of the challenges that the expectant mother may face which include nausea, vomiting, bleeding, tiredness, dizziness and so on.

Engaging in academic activities while pregnant is not a mean feat. Pregnancy especially when unexpected can endanger students' emotional and psychological well-being at universities (Thabethe et al. 2020). Hence, some students request for maternity leave when they realise they could not cope with the demands of pregnancy and study (Zwolak, 2008). However, while some students breeze through pregnancy without a hitch, others find it almost impossible to study while pregnant (Pankhurst, 2010). One of the downside of pregnancy is undue tiredness and fatigue which could affect the student's concentration and attention span; hence, it is usually recommended that pregnant mothers rest adequately (Mahlangu, 2024). Students who wish to continue with their studies while pregnant may be at risk of their grades falling or even failing outright. The health status of female students during pregnancy is a great determinant of their academic performance and development. Azonuche (2021) in recognising the peculiar and fragile state of women while pregnant, noted that pregnant women encounter physical problems such as morning sickness, nausea, dizziness, preeclampsia toxemia, etc. These sicknesses associated with the state of being pregnant do not make it easy for pregnant students to cope with school activities. The situation is further complicated if such students have other children, especially those of preschool age, to cater for.

In a study carried out to find out the relationship between pregnancy and academic performance among female students at the college of nursing, University of Mosul, it was discovered that pregnancy was associated with learning, social, psychological problems among others (Ahmed et al.,2022). Pregnant students may also undergo body changes with their bodies sending them signals which they must adhere to. Some of these signals include backache, morning sickness, heart burn, muscle cramps and hypertension and tend to be physically discomforting. Physical discomfort during pregnancy tends to negatively affect academic performances as concentration in class and attention span may reduce (Ezenwuba, 2015). Unfortunately, students who get pregnant often do not have acknowledgement by universities; this means that their problems, challenges and desires are not taken note of. For instance, Funiba (2011) commented that in Namibia, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture specifies that women who became pregnant while at university should take twelve months off university and take care of their child, signifying that pregnant bodies do not belong in spaces of learning.

Also, in a study carried out to discover the challenges faced by pregnant students at the University of Education Winneba, Ghana most of the participants in the study believed the pregnant students at the university experienced some difficulties in their academic work because of the inadequacy of available facilities as well as lack of support from their colleagues and lecturers in the institution (Nordzi, 2022).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL ROLE THEORY(SRT)

The Social Role Theory (SRT) was propounded by Eagly Alice, a Professor of Psychology in 1987. It is a social psychology theory as well as a perspective in sociology that views most of everyday activity as acting out of socially defined categories with each role being a set of rights, obligations, expectations, norms and behaviours that an individual has to face and achieve. According to SRT, differences and similarities arise mainly from the distribution of men and women and culminate into social roles within their society. Through socialization and the gender roles formation, the behaviours of men and women generally support and tolerate the division of labour. For example, in industrialized economies, social roles are arranged so that women are more likely than men to be homemakers and primary caregivers of children, while men are more likely to be primary family breadwinners and to assume full-time roles in the salaried economy (Eagly, 2012).

The social role theory succinctly explains how women give meaning to their experiences of combining motherhood and education while shedding light on how and why childcare and house chores predominantly fall into the domain and sphere of motherhood thereby limiting their opportunities to pursue other activities outside mothering and nurturing. This theory posits that the society holds stereotyped opinions of what behaviour is appropriate for both men and women to exhibit. While men are expected to be breadwinners, women are forced into the caretaker role.

As a result of the fact that a woman's pursuit of higher education distracts her from her role as a mother and also works to increase her financial power and bread winning capabilities, according to the social role theory, the student mothers may therefore not be perceived in good light unlike mothers and women who discontinue and sacrifice their education and aspirations to have children (Mottarella et al, 2009).

4. METHODS

The mixed method research design was adopted for the study, by effectively combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study was able to assess the effect of motherhood on academic attainments of female students in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State. The population of the study comprised the total number of female students in all tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State. The target population for this study were those aged 18 years and above. For the quantitative survey, a total of 125 students were selected from Naspoly and 240 students from FULAFIA based on the student population from the two schools. From pilot study carried out, it was shown that both schools (FULAFIA and NasPoly) did not have many pregnant women, the convenience sampling method was therefore deployed. The inclusion/exclusion criteria were adopted to include all female students who were pregnant at the time of study or had been pregnant while actively schooling, while female students who had not experienced any of these were excluded. A total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were disseminated for the purpose of this study while 365 questionnaires were recovered with a return rate of 91 percent. The data collected from the questionnaires were analysed at univariate-frequencies, and also with the aid of Chisquare to test and establish relationship using SPSS version 24. Meanwhile, the qualitative aspect of the study focused on the use of indepth interviews which were carried out among 10 participants who were selected purposively with 5 participants from each school. The study was conducted with full adherence to established ethical principles throughout the process of interaction with participants, including informed consent, confidentiality and protection of participants' identities.

5. RESULTS

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N= 365)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
≤25	85	23.2
26-30	160	44.0
31-35	95	26.0
36 ≥	25	6.8
Mean		29.6
Marital Status		
Single	62	17.2
Married	279	76.2
DSW*	24	6.6
Level of Study		
ND	38	10.4
HND	87	24.0
Year 1-4	147	40.2
Post-graduate	93	25.4
Religion		
Christianity	224	61.3
Islam	140	38.4
Traditional	1	0.3

Source (Field study 2020)

*DSW (Divorced, Separated & Widowed)

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The mean age of the study respondents was 29.6 years. A majority of the respondents were married women. This is instructive because the study subjects were either meant to be presently pregnant or experienced pregnancy previously as students, and in the study area, pregnancy is usually done within wedlock. More so, over forty percent of the respondents were in undergraduate classes in the university, while the ND students were in the least, thereby implying that most of them may have experienced pregnancy while in school.

Table 2. Effects of pregnancy on academic attainment

Categories	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pregnancy causes sickness	72(20.0)	136(37.2)	59(16.1)	55(15.0)	43(11.7)
Reduces productivity	63(18.3)	189(54.8)	42(12.2)	50(14.5)	1(0.2)
Impacts negatively on academics	62(18.0)	201(58.4)	29(8.4)	48(14.0)	4(1.2)
Leads to missed lectures	83(24.1)	215(62.3)	5(1.4)	34(9.9)	8(2.3)

Leads to poor results	66(19.2)	134(38.8)	51(14.8)	67(19.4)	27(7.8)
Hinders academic attainment	65(18.8)	154(44.6)	43(12.5)	52(15.1)	31(9.0)

Table 2 displayed responses on the respondents’ perception of the pregnancy condition. A majority of the respondents agreed that pregnancy was a condition that impacted negatively on their health situation and academic attainment particularly. For instance, more than half of the respondents (60%) agreed that pregnancy causes sickness, while over seventy percent agreed that pregnancy reduced their productivity. Again, majority of the respondents (76.4%) were in complete agreement that pregnancy impacts negatively on their academics as it caused them to miss lectures thereby hindering their academic attainment. From the presentation, it is instructive that majority of the respondents were aware and agreed that pregnancy is a major cause affecting their academic attainment. This concurs with the view of one of the participants of the indepth interview who claimed that:

Yes, it did have a negative impact on my academic work. My program was meant to be just for 3years maximum, but because of pregnancy, I couldn’t do much. I wasted so much time and my project didn’t come out any better. I would have done better if I hadn’t been pregnant. (Respondent IDI 6)

Bivariate analysis of sampled data

Hypothesis 1: H0 There is no significant relationship between pregnancy and academic attainment of students of tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State

Table 3. X² test of relationship between pregnancy and academic attainment

Categories	Effect on academic attainment				X ²	Df	P<
	Positive	Average	Negative	Total			
Pregnancy causes sickness							
Agree	14(63.6)	91(58.5)	142(83.1)	183(100)	54.239	2	0.001
Disagree	11(23.7)	68(27.3)	29(37.6)	161(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)			
Affects productivity at school							
Agree	16(72.7)	122(75.7)	155(96.3)	293(100)	47.736	2	0.001
Disagree	6(2.4)	39(76.0)	6(12.0)	51(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)			
Impacts negatively on academics							
Agree	14(63.6)	124(77.0)	153(95.0)	271(100)	24.507	2	0.001
Disagree	8(15.1)	37(69.8)	8(15.1)	53(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)			
Leads to missed exams							

Agree	7(31.8)	42(26.0)	33(20.4)	82(100)			
Disagree	15(5.7)	119(45.4)	128(48.9)	262(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)	9.211	2	0.046

Leads to lower results

Agree	9(40.9)	94(58.4)	147(91.3)	250(100)			
Disagree	13(59.1)	67(41.6)	14(8.7)	94(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)	66.186	2	0.001

Hinders academic attainment of women

Agree	12(54.5)	91(56.5)	149(92.5)	252(100)			
Disagree	10(45.5)	60(37.3)	12(7.5)	82(100)			
Total	22(6.4)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)	66.727	2	0.001

Agree		5(22.7)	42(26.1)	17(10.6)	64(100)			
Disagree		17(77.3)	119(73.9)	144(89.4)	280(100)			
Total		22(6.5)	161(46.8)	161(46.8)	344(100)	15.789	2	0.002

Table 3 showed the relationship between pregnancy and the effect of motherhood on the academic attainment of students of tertiary institutions in Lafia metropolis of Nasarawa State. The results showed that there is a strong relationship between respondents' view that pregnancy causes sickness and the negative effect of motherhood on academic attainment, with a larger proportion of them (83.1%) agreeing that motherhood indeed has negative impact on academic attainment with the calculated value (X^2) of **54.239** and p-value of .001 which is lesser than the level of significance of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This finding was corroborated by the submissions of some of the participants of the indepth interview. One of them said:

I could not finish with the grade I desired because I was sick during the semester and missed some tests and assignments. It really affected my CGPA. (Respondent ID1 3)

6. DISCUSSIONS

The study discovered that the larger population of the respondents indicated that being pregnant as a student had an undesirable effect on their studies and in turn hindered their academic attainment. This is in line with the assertion of Odetoynbo (2024) who confirmed that the physical challenges which pregnant learners face have an undesirable consequence on their academic achievement and progress. These findings also confirmed those of Mahmute (2011) whose study of student mothers and their educational challenges showed that studentship may not go so well with pregnancy, as each responsibility has its own demands and this may result in conflict of priorities. Mahmute (2011) explained that pregnant students in her study experienced physical challenges such as vomiting, swelling legs and general body uneasiness including fatigue due to lack of sleep, as well as an overworked body which resulted in nonattendance to lectures, late submission of assignment, tests and examinations. This study exposed the fact that wide-ranging physical conditions dispossessed the pregnant students of time to read and adequately conduct

research for their assignments, tests and examinations (Mahmute 2011). In consonance with the findings of this study, Thabethe et al (2020), also recognized the struggle student mothers have to grapple with regards to childbearing conditions which include pregnancy and antenatal visits to the hospital, conditions that could have adverse effects on their academics.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that pregnancy affects the general well-being of women and also has negative effects on their academic attainment. It was therefore recommended that women should be advised to space their children conveniently and if possible delay childbearing while engaging in active study. They should also plan well ahead of time before they enroll into school by employing domestic help and getting some labour saving devices if possible. The use of technological innovations such as online studies even for regular students would go a long way to alleviate the stress student mothers go through. Lecturers should be encouraged to present some of their lectures and reading materials online so they can be accessed by student mothers in their various locations thereby reducing the need for them to attend classes physically.

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