

**Faculty of Pharmacy, Nursing and health professions**

**Nursing**

**SEMINAR IN NURSING RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE NURS3342**

**COPING** **IN SILENCE: CHALLENGES FACED BY PREGNANT-STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA**

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17th October 2021

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# **Abstract**

Governments in developing countries have noticed that there a difference in the ease of access to education between females and males, which led to increasing the gender gap in universities and schools. One of these countries is Ghana, which put huge efforts to solve this problem and improve access to education among females and it succeed in reducing the gender gap in basic schools and tertiary levels. Another issue the government had paid attention to is how female students cope on campus because of combining academic work with other roles. this study has been done to look into this context by contacting 62 respondents as well as conducting 12 in-depth interviews. More than 90 percent of the respondents were married. The result was that those students have a lot of challenges in playing their individual, occupational and conjugal roles which contributed to challenges on the psychological, socio-economic and academic-related sides. The study included short term goal that aim to developing interventions by university to assist pregnant-students to cope effectively on campus, while in the long term, develop a policy to that effect.

# **Introduction**

Female students face many challenges playing their individual, occupational, academic and conjugal roles. This may be due to females getting married while they studying, which increases the burden on them as students and may affect their academic life. We barely see married male students and even if we did, males don’t have to go through difficult times that affect them like menstrual periods and pregnancy. From this view, we thought that our research must relates to females in universities and after doing our searches we chose pregnant female students as our study population. This research aims to identify what challenges pregnant students go through and how to make it easier for them.

This article was published on 28th Of August 2014 about the same topic so I chose it to help us during our research knowing the methods followed and getting an idea about what we’re going to do. This study followed accidental and snowball sampling techniques to collect data from 62 respondents using survey and interviews.

**List of keywords used to find this article :**

[pregnancy in universities](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=pregnancy+in+universities), Pregnant + college, Pregnant university issue, pregnant issue, pregnant students' effects on school, pregnant students' academic life, pregnant females at university.

# **Theoretical and conceptual issues**

The Ghanaian government’s interventions to reduce the gender gap in education that includes making the basic education free and compulsory for girls, capitation fund and distance education, made the access to education easier for females who couldn’t study due to social, cultural and economic reasons. Increasing female’s numbers in tertiary level increased the attention to the challenges on this group playing their roles as students and family members. This issue became more challenging due to lack of special facilities for female students especially pregnant ones in universities.

Today, many developing countries like Ghana made women’s education a priority after it became an indicator for development process and this has increased the trend of female education in Ghana.

In general, students in universities are sexually active and according to the study 44% of women had sexual intercourse at the age of 18 meaning after admission to university, which suggests that some of female students are likely to get pregnant either intended or unintended before completion their study. As WHO and human rights give the non-minors the right to decide their reproductive life, the National Reproductive Health Service Policy and Standards in Ghana follows the same protocol *‘...all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly their reproductive life ...’.* This made the students freer with in their life and having relationships during their university life, even though the policy of university doesn’t prevent them, it regards all females as non-pregnant meaning there is no specific policies or facilities for pregnant students. However, many people look to pregnancy as medical condition that needs a special structure of policy in universities. And this what this research aims to.

These papers focused on the seven roles of pregnant students (maternal, occupational, conjugal, domestic, kin, social and individual roles). Also, they divided the challenges to biological, socioeconomic, psychological and physical challenges and they identified two main coping strategies the students follow which are emotion-based and action-based strategies.

# **Methods, and study population and data collection**

This research is combination of accidental and snowball sampling techniques. The antenatal unit of university hospital was the first point to contact pregnant students, who helped reach others. The study mixed the quantitative and qualitative approach using a survey and in-depth interviews.

The data for this research was collected from 85 different pregnant students in the university of Cape Coast in Ghana in the second semester 2009/2010; the qualitative data were collected by interviews that were conducted by the author through the phone with 23 students. However, 3rd year students using surveys with 62 students conducted quantitative data

# **Findings**

## **background characteristics**

Include age, marital status, age at first birth, religion, academic level and residence status. The age of participants ranged between 21-36 years with only one teenager. (53.4%) of participants were in their twenties while the rest were in their early thirties. 90% married, 7% single and 3% lived together. Majority had their first baby at the age of 28. About 94% are Christians and 70.7% are Akans. A little over 42% and 50% of the pregnancies were in the second and thirs trimesters. 3% were in their 1st year, 14% 2nd year, 41% 3rd year and 41% seniors. Regarding residential status, close to 88% lived outside the University campus and 12% of the pregnant students lived in it.

**1.Pregnancy**

Either it’s planned or not, according to the study 23% of participants didn’t plan their pregnancy. 81.1% of the married participants had planned pregnancy while none of 3% participants who lived with their partners without marriage planned their pregnancy. The reason behind the unintended pregnancy was either contraceptive failure (16.7%) or miscalculation (83.3%)

**2.Attendance to antenatal**

According to the study, all participants had the minimum antenatal service attendance except the one teenage pregnant who didn’t because of shyness and fear of stigma. However, the participants reported that they didn’t compromise the antenatal services unless it clashed with examination, otherwise they prefer to attend the antenatal services instead of lectures

## **Challenging experiences**

**1.Hormonal (biological)**

Participants reported that hormonal changes, dizziness, vomiting and tiredness made them uncomfortable especially in the first trimester, which made them skip lectures and sometime exams.

**2.stigma**

Some of the participants reported that they got negative comments from their colleagues and sometimes lecturers who were ignoring their views regarding times of lectures or exams and sometimes blaming them for getting pregnant in this time and this caused psychological stress.

**3.structural**

60% complained of accessing to top floors using stairs, 49% reported that transport was a challenge, all of participants in their 3rd trimester complained about the design of the seats at the lecture rooms. All this led to increasing stress on them

**4.socio-economic**

Majority of participants said that they barely engaged in social activities especially in 3rd trimester. Regarding costs, they all agreed that pregnancy increased their spending (23% of participants are self-dependent and 58% get support from their spouse)

## **Effects of challenges on academic activity**

The mentioned challenges affected the academic performance of pregnant students in many ways. For example 60.3% of the had irregular attendance to lectures, group discussions and presentations, 50.8% had difficulty meeting assignment deadlines and 31.6% were unable to take part in continuous quizzes. These factors contributed to grades of majority of participants became affected negatively.

## **Coping**

As mentioned before pregnant students followed two strategies of coping. Negatively, using Emotion-based strategy, which included crying, depression, sleeping, skipping lectures, drinking and withdrawal. This strategy was most followed by those who didn’t plan their pregnancy. The other strategy is action-based strategy, which is the positive one and included seeking help from colleagues regarding missed lectures and discussions, getting support from friends and family and getting involved in social activities. According to the research none of the participants ever visited the counseling unit of university to seek help about how to cope with pregnancy and this should have been done especially with those who followed an emotion-based strategy.

# **Conclusion**

This paper was made to make it clear that pregnancy is not only a choice but it’s also a medical condition that needs attention wherever it goes even at home or university and it’s crucial for all universities to have a policy that facilitates the academic life of pregnant students. In addition, the university must improve coping skills to cope with challenges faced by students in general and pregnant in special.

Regarding myself, the research was very useful to me and I achieved the aim I wanted to by getting an overview of how our research should be done and what to include in it regarding goals, methods and data collection. The negative thing about this research is that I thought it might need more details in the part in which they talked about the effects of pregnancy on academic life, like comparing the participant’s grades before and after pregnancy, hopefully we can do this in our research. Overall, it was good and helped me a lot in making an idea about out topic.

# **Reference**

(Asare, H, & Esia-Donkoh, K. (Kobina) & Esia-Donkoh, K.(Kweku), 2014). (2014). COPING IN SILENCE: CHALLENGES FACED BY PREGNANT-STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA International Journal of Education and Practice, 2(10), 222-233

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