

**FACULTY OF PHARMACY, NURSING AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

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**EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AS EXPERIENCED BY PREGNANT STUDENT NURSES AT A COLLEGE IN MPUMALANGA**

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# Abstract

, some student nurses are forced to start their training while they're pregnant, which can make it impossible for them to finish their studies on time, this study explored the educational challenges faced by pregnant student nurses at an institution in Mpumalanga, and the findings were used to formulate recommendations to address these challenges. The study was conducted in three phases: exploratory, descriptive, and contextual. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten student nurses; the study revealed that student nurses who were pregnant experienced various challenges in their academic pursuits, some of these included failure to write examinations and inadequate support system. There is a need to minimize the identified educational challenges in order to improve the quality of training.

List of keywords used to find this article: challenge, college, educational, pregnant, student.

# Introduction

Many student nurses in nursing colleges face various challenges when it comes to dealing with pregnancy. Aside from the psychological issues, academic success can also be affected by the absence of support and benefits during pregnancy, and because of these challenges it’s taking them longer to complete their studies, which has an impact on the economy, like in Zimbabwe, they have a policy that exclude the pregnant student nurses because of discomfort related to pregnancy, also, student nurses are not allowed to get pregnant during their training because of the new bursary system, compared to united kingdom, it doesn’t make a challenge to pregnant women there, because they have the support they need, and they have authorized absence, so we deduce that they need more support and better regards from academic community and the concerned to balance their roles as a mother and student.

# Research design and methods

## Research design

This research is qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual, which was an investigative process and explore what these pregnant student nurses have been through, also, it was held at a collage in Mpumalanga.

## Research method

Phenomenological method was used and eased by bracketing, so it focuses on the lived experience, which proven neutrality and truth value of the findings.

## Population and sample

In this study the population was all female student nurses who are in SANC for a diploma in nursing and midwifery at a collage in Mpumalanga, which includes students admitted while pregnant, those who become pregnant during their study and those who had their babies and still in collage. The researcher consciously chose participants with rich information, which was a non-probability purposive sampling.

## Data collection

Data were collected by means of unstructured individual phenomenological interviews in a quiet noisiness place away from distractions which took about 30-40 min, because the researcher was known by the participants she didn’t do the interviews, it was done by a colleague who had interviewing skills, and the permission was taken to voice record.

The central questions posed during the interviews include the following:

* What were the educational challenges you experienced as a pregnant student nurse at this college?
* What do you recommend should be done to address these educational challenges?

## Data analysis

Data were analyzed according to Giorgi’s thematic data analysis method; an independent coder confirmed the accuracy of analyzed data.

## Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability was applied, ensured and reached.

## Ethical consideration

Rights, dignity and safety of all participants was preserved, respect for personal autonomy, the principle of beneficence and non-maleficence, informed consent, the principle of justice, and privacy and anonymity was applied, all participants give consent and had the right to withdraw from this study.

# Discussion of findings

## Theme 1: Academic challenges

The academic progress was affected negatively by lack of concentration, failure to cope with workload, and physical discomforts, which lead to losing learning time especially if the condition becomes severe. Also, academic stress can affect not just the academic performance but all aspects of student’s health, which happens because of being afraid to not know how to deal with these entire situations in her life. So if these pregnant student nurses can be given information about stress and how to deal with it, and learn coping mechanisms and apply it will reduce the challenges that those students face, and the educational institutions are obligated to provide a healthy, stress free environment for students and enjoy the best.

## Theme 2: Failure to write examinations

There is missed examination dates because they either had to join programs during it, or because of illness or childbirth, having missed lectures and tests because of being absent from class will likely fall behind in their school work, efforts should be done to help them to write their examination and catch up programs.

## Theme 3: Support system

Students experience pressure because they try to get used to higher education, as a result it affect their attitudes, which weakness the relationship between pregnant student nurses and their peers and lectures, student nurses can help each other which can increase the ability to understand program of studies, to protect themselves from isolation and discriminated against, if they felt in that way it will lead them to leave school, and may be embarrassed of their situation and keeping their pregnancy a secret, so they may not have support from peers and lecturers, so it will affect how they are handling them, and shouldn’t learning differ between pregnant and non-pregnant, the lecturers have to provide a suitable environment that encourage positive self-concept for pregnant student nurses. So classrooms must be conducive to positive interactions, and pregnant nursing student must encouraged to speak up their problems, lack of support and harassment in the clinical learning areas negatively impact their practice, which making it important to all people involved to be taught about the college pregnancy policy and other regulations that protect pregnant women. Also, they should be encouraged to make the right choice and report their pregnancy in good time.

## Theme 4: Maternity leave

It’s hard for pregnant students nurses and those who gave birth to handle their academic duties because they have to make a balance between working life and baby and self-care and have enough rest to do their responsibilities the next day as should, so MDOH stipulates that pregnant student nurses should be given 6 weeks of maternity leave, but some of students come back to write their examination before the leave ends without permission because they would be left behind, which can impact the mothers mental, physical and emotional health, and increase the risk of depression, so the college should promote eligibility of pregnant student nurses to maternity leave benefits.

## Limitations of the study

The views of lecturers cannot be covered because it wasn’t explored, and these findings cannot be generalized to other collages because it’s contextualized.

## Implications for college and clinical setting

Pregnant student nurses experienced challenges in academic and clinical areas, lack of concentration, physical discomforts led to fail in academic duties and progress and continuous harassments prevented them to continue training.

# Conclusion

Pregnant student nurses faced challenges in both classrooms and clinical areas that made them fail to cope with their academic duties and their peers, also examination policy not flexible which makes them left behind in their studies.

# References

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