

Unveiling the Invisible Struggles: Exploring Psychosocial Challenges Faced by Student Nursing Mothers in Distance Education Programs and Their Impact on Academic Performance and Social Life in The Upper West Region, Ghana

Rolander Bogi¹, Seth Badu^{2*}, Esther Asebiga³, David Kojo Rockson⁴

¹ Department of Education, Tumu College of Education, Tumu, Ghana

² Department of Teaching and Learning, New York University, New York, USA

³ Department of Education, St. Vincent College of Education, Yendi, Ghana

⁴ Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

baduseth64@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Distance education serves as a valuable alternative for individuals who are unable to enrol in mainstream education due to various circumstances. However, recent reports have highlighted the considerable challenges faced by student nursing mothers within this educational framework. This study aimed to examine the psychosocial obstacles encountered by student nursing mothers by employing a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore their lived experiences. A sample of ten student nursing mothers from distance education centres in the Upper West Region was recruited, and in-depth interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved. Thematic analysis, supported by Dedoose analysis software, was utilized to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that student nursing mothers encountered interpersonal, environmental, and psychological challenges. They experienced social isolation as friends distanced themselves, faced unjust judgments from the community, and received harsh treatment from tutors. Furthermore, the lack of accommodation provided by educational institutions compounded their difficulties. These challenges resulted in a decline in academic performance, an increase in domestic responsibilities, and a destabilization of their psychological well-being. Based on these findings, it is concluded that the motherhood period may not be the optimal time to pursue education and should be avoided if possible. However, if attending school during this period is unavoidable, it is imperative to implement comprehensive guidance, advocacy, and policy amendments to support student nursing mothers in successfully adapting to their dual roles.

Keywords: distance education, student nursing mothers, psychosocial challenges, academic performance, social life

Cite this article as: Bogi, R., Badu, S., Asebiga, E., & Rockson, D. K. (2023). Unveiling the Invisible Struggles: Exploring Psychosocial Challenges Faced by Student Nursing Mothers in Distance Education Programs and Their Impact on Academic Performance and Social Life in The Upper West Region, Ghana. *Journal of e-learning Research*, 2(2), 12-38. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jelr.v2i2.463>

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

University education is known for its contribution to the training of extraordinary experts with the requisite skills to spearhead strategic and executive management of an institution and a country and to accelerate nationwide growth. Kwapong (2007) noted that while higher educational institutions in Ghana have embraced a positive position to rise the admission of female students and have acquired the resources to guarantee their wellbeing, circumstances of action on these campuses conflict with traditional opportunities of the role of females in the

family, which seems stagnant and does not always support the academic development of women.

Distance education despite being novel in Ghana (Amina, 2016), has served as a way to bridge the gap in education for most women. Since its commencement, it has evolved into one of the swiftest rising learning platforms in the country compared with other similar programmes such as the non-formal educational scheme. Currently, thousands of Ghanaians are enrolled in distance learning programmes which are offered by several higher educational establishments in the country among these numbers are student nursing mothers (Amina, 2016). During sessions, students are required to study not less than twenty courses in the programme. They are also expected to contribute to the discussion, write mid and end-of-semester examinations. These responsibilities place enormous psychological and social challenges for the learner of distance education and the need to adopt appropriate coping mechanisms to achieve academic excellence (Edwards, Hanson, & Raggatt, 2013). Promoting lifelong education places much more responsibility on student nursing mothers as they syndicate education and upkeep of their babies (Jarvis, 2004). This educational prospect is not devoid of challenges as student nursing mothers occasionally miss classes in order to take care of their sick children. When babies are taken to lecture centres, mothers usually share time for lectures/discussions with breastfeeding or caring for their children. It is also usual for student nursing mothers to be absent from face-to-face lecture as a result of their sick children. Likewise, they have to feed their babies sporadically at the expense of taking part in discussions (Wilson-Strydom, 2004).

Studies have found that student nursing mothers in distance education face some challenges in their studies, and some of these challenges include the inability to concentrate in class, difficulties in understanding topics taught in their absence, inadequate preparation for examinations, lack of encouragement from their relatives, the nonexistence of breastfeeding apartments and day-care centres to keep babies safe, stress, stigma and financial challenges such as cost of employing baby sitters, purchase of weaning foods and payment of school fees (Amina, 2016; Dankyi, Dankyi, & Minadzi, 2019; Esia-Donkoh, 2014). Onyeka, Okafor, and Onah (2018) in their study in Imo state in Nigeria found depression, stress, low self-esteem, fear of poor performance, dearth of honourable care from parents/in-laws/relatives, incapacity to relate with programme colleagues and lecturers are some psychosocial trials faced by student nursing mothers pursuing higher/tertiary education. The authors further asserted that student nursing mothers on distance education indicated they are traumatised because they do not have enough time to study and that the home environment was not conducive for learning. Their colleagues also avoided them (Onyeka, Okafor & Onah, 2018).

It has also been found that discrimination and obstinate approach of various lecturers increase the mental stress of student nursing mothers on distance learning (Esia-Donkoh, 2014). These challenges arguably influence the academic performance of student nursing mothers on distance education. For instance, a study conducted by Amina (2016) indicated that some psychosocial challenges are responsible for the following among student nursing mothers: unpunctuality to lectures, dozing during classes, delayed in submission of assignments, distraction and inattentiveness in class, lack of preparatory time for extra academic events, lack of contribution to discussions during lectures, overly worried during an upcoming test or examination, over-reliance on colleagues for note-taking and explanations and inability to study very well at home. Onyeka et al. (2018) confirm that student nursing mothers in higher educational institutes face psychosocial challenges of depression, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear of poor academic performance, distress concerning the lack of time for learning due to childcare and the absence of a serene home atmosphere for studies. Further, student nursing mothers experience domestic violence such as gossip and quarrels due to what families expect from these student nursing mothers. They also lack support from their parents, in-laws

and relatives. They are unable to relate freely with lecturers and course mates as well due to the several factors militating against their peace of mind during studies Onyeka et al. (2018).

Though distance education has been seen as a game-changer for women as it suits their study plan and learning style (Kwapong, 2007), the psychosocial challenges faced by most women, especially student nursing mothers, tend to affect their academic performance negatively. This study, therefore, explored the psychosocial challenges faced by student nursing mothers in distance education programmes and their impact on academic performance and social life in the Upper West Region.

1.2. Problem Statement

Balancing the pursuit of higher education, motherhood, and other familial and professional responsibilities poses significant challenges for student nursing mothers engaged in distance education (Jackson & Remillard, 2005). The commitment to academic excellence may conflict with societal expectations of being a "good mother" (Goodwin & Huppertz, 2010), resulting in various psychosocial obstacles for student nursing mothers seeking higher education. These challenges encompass stress, anxiety, social isolation or rejection, incomplete course completion, neglecting family needs, financial constraints, and lack of partner support (Beeler, 2016; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Consequently, many student nursing mothers find it difficult to fulfil their academic aspirations due to these hurdles. As a solution, distance learning has gained popularity among mothers as it allows them to simultaneously juggle their roles as wives, mothers, and students (Gold & Bratton, 2003). Nevertheless, this approach presents its own psychological and social challenges for student nursing mothers, particularly in traditional societies in the northern part of Ghana (Amina, 2016; Dankyi et al., 2019; Esia-Donkoh, 2014).

The accessibility of university education poses overwhelming difficulties for student-parents who must fulfil childcare responsibilities, work full-time to support their dependents and sustain their family's well-being. Extensive research has explored the challenges faced by student nursing mothers and pregnant women pursuing education in traditional campus-based systems (Adofo, 2013; Esia-Donkoh, 2014; Osafo, 2016). However, there is a dearth of studies focusing on the psychosocial difficulties of student nursing mothers enrolled in distance education programs, particularly in the Upper West Region of Ghana. This study aims to address this gap by examining the unique challenges faced by student nursing mothers in distance education programs in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The study is underpinned by Parsons (1971) role conflict theory. According to Parsons (1971), for society to function very well, it has social institutions with roles and statuses. Every status is attached with a role, which the status incumbent is expected to perform without waiver. Parsons (1971) used the idea of shared expectation based on the status one occupies in society. This means that the status as has a corresponding role as a woman. Parsons argued that the rules of society, its norms of proper conduct, become the expectations of its members. People's interrelationships work because the parties know what to expect of one another. Furthermore, one person can and does fulfil many different roles at the same time. In one sense, an individual can be seen to be a "composition" of the roles he/she inhabits. Certainly, today, when asked to describe themselves, most people would answer with reference to their societal roles. For instance, a student-nursing mother may describe herself as a nursing mother, a wife, a student and in some cases a career woman as well.

Individuals accumulate different roles at any given stage within the life course which is termed as *role transition* (Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams Jr, 1992). An example is when nursing mothers assumes a student's role when she enrolls in any academic work and as soon as she completes the course she ceases to assume the student aspect of her roles. The difficulty of this role transition depends on the timing and social context (Ashforth, 2000; Hayes, 2003; Macmillan & Copher, 2005). In addition, the transition into one role can affect the transition into another (Segel-Karpas, Ayalon, & Lachman, 2018). Some women can delay their transition to the roles of wife and mother as they extend their time in the role of student. It is concluded that remaining a student delays the transition to adulthood and likewise to normatively associate adult roles. It is asserted that role theories are predominantly concerned with describing the mechanisms by which individuals are socialized to assume congruous societal roles in a manner that sustains a stable social order (Diekman & Eagly, 2008).

Traditionally, the academic discussion and popular discourse surrounding how a female will engage the role of mother primarily focuses on the decision of whether to be "at-home" or "at-work". However, this ignores the many different parenting decisions, and role conflict experiences that exist in contemporary society. For instance, a growing number of mothers are also students in higher education (Haleman, 2004).

The challenge is that different roles are sometimes incompatible, however, and the requirements of one role can clash with those of another. In addition, contradictory requirements within the same role can produce role conflict. Different people sometimes have inconsistent conceptions concerning the requirements and expectations that constitute a particular role. In one situation woman might feel the conception of being a good mother might consist of having a job outside of the home, in another situation, that same woman believes that providing socio-emotional support to her family is a necessary ingredient in her role as a mother. This results to the experience of intra-role conflict.

Another situation where the role conflict theory is evidenced is role overload. Osafo (2016) stated that role overload refers to the experience of lacking the resources, including time and energy, needed to meet the demands of all roles. Role overload and conflict often lead to difficulties with meeting role expectations, known as role strain (Creary & Gordon, 2016). Various negative psychological and physical problems can follow from role strain. In many cultures, women experience stress, as a result of combining work and family roles (Hayes, 2003). Levels of conflict, however, vary across cultures as a result of perceptions of gender roles and the subsequent amount of time given to work and domestic roles (Borelli, Nelson, River, Birken, & Moss-Racusin, 2017; de Luis Carnicer, Sánchez, Pérez, & Jiménez, 2004; Moore, 1995). This means that as the student nursing mothers perform other roles, there is likely going to conflict of their roles. The student nursing mothers at every point in time has to decide which of the conflicting role to be performed. This means that student nursing mothers do not seem to have a free period.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The study sought to explore psychosocial challenges faced by student nursing mothers in distance education programs and their impact on academic performance and social life in the upper west region of Ghana.

1.5. Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Identify the psychosocial challenges of student nursing mothers in distance education programmes in the Upper West Region.
2. assess the psychosocial challenges that affect the academic performance of student nursing mothers in distance education programme in the Upper West Region.
3. assess how the psychosocial challenges affect the social life of student nursing mothers in distance education programme in the Upper West Region.

1.6. Research Questions

1. What are the psychosocial challenges student nursing mothers in distance education programmes in the Upper West Region face?
2. What are the effects of the psychosocial challenges on the academic performance of student nursing mothers in distance education programmes in the Upper West Region?
3. What are the effects of the psychosocial challenges on the social life of student nursing mothers in distance education programmes in the Upper West Region?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Approach

The study was rooted in the qualitative research approach, specifically chosen for its appropriateness and relevance to the research objectives. The researchers selected this approach to gain an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the psychosocial challenges confronted by student nursing mothers enrolled in distance education programs, and the subsequent impact on their academic performance and social lives in the upper west region. Consequently, the data analysis centered on both predetermined themes and emerging themes derived from the interviews, without placing emphasis on the frequency, quantity, amount, intensity, or pervasiveness of the issues faced by student nursing mothers in distance education programmes.

2.2. Research Design

A descriptive phenomenological design was employed in this study to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants. A phenomenology is a research approach that focuses on examining and describing the essence of human experiences as they are perceived and understood by individuals (Creswell, 2014). By adopting a descriptive phenomenological design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the phenomenon as it is perceived and lived by the participants. This design allowed for a holistic exploration of the topic, enabling a deep understanding of the various aspects, contexts, and complexities involved.

2.3. Research Setting

The focus of this study was the Upper West Region of Ghana, which comprises five municipalities (Jirapa, Lawra, Nandom, Sissala East, and Wa Municipal) and six districts (Daffiama-Bussie-Issa, Lambussie, Nadowli-Kaleo, Sissala West, Wa East, and Wa West). While most districts and municipalities in the region have secondary educational institutions, there is a lack of tertiary educational facilities in many areas. To address this issue, distance

education has been implemented by various tertiary institutions to provide higher education opportunities to the residents of the Upper West Region. One such institution is the University of Cape Coast (UCC). The UCC offers a distance learning program in the region, operating through four study centres: Lawra, Nandom, Tumu, and Wa. The Lawra Learning Centre is located at the Lawra Senior High School (SHS) campus, where classes are held on weekends and during SHS students' holidays. The Nandom Learning Centre is hosted at the Nandom SHS, while the Tumu Study Centre is situated at the College of Education in Tumu. In the Wa Municipality, the Wa SHS serves as the study centre for distance education. Notably, a significant proportion of distance education students are student nursing mothers. This research was conducted across the four study centres of the UCC's distance education program in the Upper West Region.

2.4. Population

The population of this study consists of all student nursing mothers pursuing distance learning programmes at the UCC in the four learning centres of the Upper West Region. There is an average of 20 student nursing mothers in each of the four centres in the Upper West Region, making 80 student nursing mothers who are schooling by distance with the UCC with different programmes. It was assumed that all student nursing mothers face similar challenges of combining motherhood and schooling. However, it would be impossible to study all student nursing mothers, therefore, an acceptable number was chosen to represent the entire population for the research (Lavrakas, 2008). The selection of the group was guided by the eligibility criteria outlined below.

2.5. Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria is the yardsticks used to guide the selection of participants from the study population. The criteria suggested explanations on why a potential subject was included or excluded in the study without losing the true characteristics of the population.

Inclusion criteria: Potential participants considered for this study if they meet the following criteria:

- A student woman (nursing mother) who is breastfeeding a child less than two years of age
- A nursing mother pursuing distance education at the University of Cape Coast distance learning centres in the Upper West Region.
- Should be a resident of the Upper West Region.
- Should be of sound mind.
- Should consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria: The exclusion of potential participants in this study included all those who met the above inclusion criteria but:

- Refuse to consent to participate in the study
- Were seriously ill at the time of the data collection
- student nursing mothers pursuing distance education programmes with other universities
- Students from outside the Upper West Region but studying the centres.
- The student is not of sound mind.

2.6. Sample and Sampling Procedure

Contrary to the quantitative approach, there is no set formula for calculating the sample size in qualitative research. The sample size is crucial in order to be able to get feedback from the majority or all of the perceptions. Interviews with participants continued until no further information could be retrieved. When no novel ideas emerged from the interview, it was terminated. That is, after the tenth interview, when data saturation happened. Therefore 10 participants were recruited for the study. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to recruit student nursing mothers. Purposive sampling was used because participants have the characteristics needed to give the researcher the most and best information (Kumar, 2011; Neuman, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2010). They are people from whom one could learn greatly about the phenomenon being studied (Mayan, 2016). The study, therefore, purposively selected student nursing mothers pursuing distance education from the four learning centres of the UCC, College of Distance Education in the Upper West region. The challenges whilst schooling, are specific to student nursing mothers, and can only be the best people to give such experience.

2.7. Data Collection Instrument

A Semi-structured interview guide was used to gather report from respondents. “A semi-structured interview guide is a tool or instrument with open-ended questions”(Hammer & Wildavsky, 2018; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). This tool permits a certain amount of flexibility, power, and course of the conversation procedure (Blee & Taylor, 2002). The flexibility nature of the semi-structured interview guide enabled the researchers to explore by probing to get new and exciting responses. The questions were formulated based on the review of related literature in line with the objectives of the study.

2.8. Pre-testing the Interview Guide

The interview guide was pre-tested among two student nursing mothers in the Tumu College of Education Study Centre. These two students used for the pre-testing were not involved in the main study. The essence of the procedure was to enable the researchers to test the voice recorder to be used for the main interviews as well as to assess whether the interview guide would measure what it is expected to measure. The findings from the pre-test guided the researchers to amend the interview guide to enable the researchers to collect credible data for the study.

2.9. Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

Steps were implemented to guarantee reliability and trustworthiness in the study (Polit & Beck, 2012). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, data triangulation, adaptability, peer assessment, and the involvement of a co-coder. To maintain impartiality and objectivity, a reflective journal was maintained. This journal enabled the researchers to reflect on their own biases and set them aside. Detailed records were diligently maintained and securely stored, ensuring the availability of an audit trail for any future researchers. Peer debriefing was conducted as part of the evaluation process, addressing any inconsistencies that arose. To ensure dependability, the researchers engaged in multiple rounds of coding and recoding, comparing themes and categories with a co-coder. Verbatim excerpts from interviews were utilized to enhance the authenticity of the findings.

2.10. Data Processing and Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic content analysis entails identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data, allowing the researcher to organise, and describe data sets in rich detail minimally. All interviews conducted were transcribed verbatim by the researchers after each meeting. The researchers then played the audio and matched it with the transcribed data to ensure uniformity. The transcribed data were recited numerous times to warrant proper meaning and that the gravity of all interviews were comprehended. These helped the researchers to be immersed in the data, examine the data, and systematically explore the significance and in-depth understanding.

The vital assertions and associated opinions were acknowledged and given codes based on the objectives of the study and were concurrently repeated during data collection. The codes were developed by assigning the main words or phrases to aspects of the responses given by respondents. The codes were grouped to match the various study questions and then summarised into sentences and phrases or themes. Dedoose analysis software (version 4.12) was used to generate the themes and sub-theme. The emergent themes and sub-themes were reviewed in the analysis process. The field notes from respondents were cited to back the themes. The coding themes were classified into distinctive reports (Kumar, 2011). These themes and sub-themes that emerged were compared for uniqueness, frequency, commonality and differences. The themes and sub-themes were revised as the study progressed.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Results

3.1. Demographic Data

The researcher interviewed ten (10) participants for the study. The participants were aged between 21 and 29 years, all pursuing tertiary education. In all, nine (9) of the ten (10) participants were married. Though everyone was a student at the time of the study, two (2) were traders as well, and practicing teachers. The nursing mother students were socially affiliated with three teachers, two farmers, a nurse, and a banker by marriage.

The participants had between one and two children at the time of the study of equal proportions. By religious affiliation, eight of the ten participants reported practising the Islamic religion. Apart from a participant, who reported studying social studies and English, all participants were studying early childhood development. Pseudo names were assigned to participants, pseudo names are fake names used by the researcher in order to protect the identity of the participants in the data analysis.

3.2. Research Question One: Psychosocial Challenges Facing Student Nursing Mothers on the Distance Programmes

The psychosocial challenges of student nursing mothers were explored in the two naturally occurring themes: social and psychological challenges. Socially, the study participants reported facing challenges with childcare whilst schooling on one hand and relating with their family, lecturers and friends on the hand.

3.2.1. Childcare, Schooling and Domestic Work

Family power play is a major challenge. There are families where student nursing mothers reported that their sisters-in-law would not do any household chores because domestic roles are the duties of 'wives.' So, even if they (sisters-in-law) are not doing anything, they would

wait for their brothers' housewives who are student nursing mothers and schooling to do so. This is how a study participant put it.

The family expects that as a mother and wife for that matter, I should shoulder more of the responsibilities. This includes fetching water, cooking food, taking part in farming activities and many others (NM007).

Attendance at family events like funerals, naming ceremony, and wedding are, a must-do for all family members including nursing mother students. Unfortunately, these events usually coincide with schooling periods. This is explained in the following text.

The family expects that I should always be present for all family-related ceremonies like funerals, naming ceremonies, weddings and others. When a particular ceremony I am not able to take part because of my classes, they don't take it kindly with me. They find it difficult to understand why I should abandon the funeral ceremony and go for lectures. So, generally, the challenges have to do with carrying out house responsibilities at the expense of my classes (NM008).

3.2.2. Childcare, Schooling and Accommodation

Some student nursing mothers stay at their homes and do not have challenges with accommodation. For those who had to look for accommodation, understanding friends, and closer relations, were the leverage. The challenge of adequate space comes in handy here. The space for lodging has been a challenge for mothers who choose friends and family members to lodge with. A participant who chose this option had this to say.

I do not have accommodation closer to the school. A generous friend who understood my situation and is living in town accommodates [us] any time I come for classes. But you know if you are not in the comfort of your zone things can go abnormal and you have no say. I do not get that ample space to put things in order and take my studies. I have to always squeeze myself, especially for my child within the limited space my friend offers us (NM007).

Other student nursing mothers who could not find any friends and relations, had to rent. Many rented apartments also had their issues. Apart from the fact that landlords may not keep them descent enough for human habitation, the presence of amenities like water, toilet, and electricity, among others is a source of discomfort. The cost of the rooms is also a challenge to student nursing mothers. The following text adds more living experiences.

It is a rented place that I am living in. The place is not that conducive but it costs us a lot of money. There is no mechanized water around here and so I have to always walk some meters away from where I stay to just fetch water from the borehole. I wish there could have been a tap within that, flows any time I want. At least this could have always saved some amount of time I waste when I go to the borehole to join other commuters (NM004).

Another challenge with accommodation is the fact that student nursing mothers share rooms with other people. The participants complained many of them do not have privacy anytime they come to school as a result of pairing of rooms. An example is as follows:

As for accommodation where I stay right now, we are two people pairing the same verandah. Sometimes my children disturb the other woman and me too the time I will want to sleep she is awake to do her things. So when she is turning things all over I can't sleep and I can't read as well. So let me say there is no privacy because we are sharing the same verandah (NM006).

3.2.3. Childcare, Schooling and Community Relations

Study participants intimated that community members make derogatory comments about their schooling whilst nursing babies. The first is the effect that they are women, and then the fact that they are nursing babies. The general reasoning is that there should not be an instant that a woman will combine social work with schooling since the former takes priority over the latter in the life of a woman. As a result, study participants, for defying this social order, are being tagged as lazy, proud, wasteful, irresponsible, and with no community interest. Study participants reported meeting the expression of negative attitudes from community members. Participants believe many community members backbite about them, especially if they (participants) will have to attend classes at the expense of community activities like communal labour. Some study participants' comments are as follows:

Because of my schooling, I do not get the time to take part in some community activities, especially meetings and communal [labour]. The times that I happen to attend, I am always late because I spend time taking care of my child. So, the utmost contribution that I should have always given to the community I am not able to do that. [This makes them] feel that I do not have any concern for the community hence they ignore me (NM002).

The community members do not see the reason why a mother of my age will still be forcing her way through education when I should have always been in the house taking care of children and helping my husband on the farm. The situation always becomes serious when they call for communal labour and I am not present because of my classes. The women are the worst offenders when it comes to my challenges with the community members. They talk about me that I am lazy. Some will even tell me that it is a waste of time and effort that I have been going there [school] (NM007).

In the community, there are those that appreciate our efforts of furthering our education and at the same time nursing children. There are also those who do [not] appreciate us at all and so our problem is with them. They feel that you are too proud that is why we are going to school.... So sometimes they treat us with some contempt and all kinds of negative impressions (NM008).

3.2.4. Childcare, Schooling and Transportation to School

Commuting from home to school post challenges to student nursing mothers. For those who are fortunate to own motorbikes, transportation is not much of a challenge. However, some are without any means of transport and thus commute from their homes to the lecture halls in various forms. This adds to lateness, tiredness, fatigue, and cost, among others, as has been reported by the study participants.

In the morning, it is my husband who picks me up on the motorbike to school. When we close from lectures, I seek help from generous people to pick me up to town. When I get to town I walk while hoping to get a lift from people. When I realize, I am not going to get a means I have to call from the house to come and pick up from anywhere... (NM001).

Anytime we are to have lectures, I walk from town to school which takes a lot of time. So especially on days that I prepare the child not quite early enough, I always arrived at school late. I would have always wished to enter "Camboo" in such distress times but I don't always have the money. With the little money I have if I should use it to enter the "Camboo" what will my child and I feed on? So due to that, I am always compelled to get up early, prepare the child and start walking to school. But sometimes too I also beg for a lift and those who are generous help me (NM002).

Even those with motorbikes are not spared some challenges. It mostly depends on the schedule of the husbands. If the bike is available, weather conditions would post a challenge from time to time.

The bit of challenge I face is during the raining season. ... When it rains the previous night and I am to attend lectures the following day, it is always difficult. The road gets muddy with stagnant water all over the potholes.... So sometimes I get dirty before I get to school. There are times I have to ride slowly if I want to avoid much of the dirt and so I end up showing up show lectures late (NM004).

[If] my husband is busy with [the motorbike] or having a place to go to, I have to always go and stand by the road side and look for means. Sometimes when I realize that I am not going to get the lift any time soon I have to start walking while praying and hoping of getting help. So ... I take advantage of whatever means of transport are available (NM008).

The student nursing mothers who do not have any means of transport will have to rely on a more expensive public means of transport. A study participant remarked:

As for the motorbike we cannot all sit on it. We have to look for other means like these "Camboos" since that is the only means we can rely on. So, I always go by that one because there are no taxis here (NM008).

3.2.5. Childcare, Schooling and Leisure

The pressure from home, school, and childcare has forced student nursing mothers to sacrifice their leisure time for productive hours. Though they know the importance of leisure hours, it has become practically impossible to observe it as such. The moments they regard as leisure, happen when they are so exhausted, lie down and sleep off. Others consider the period they take those important walks to school or social gatherings as such.

Considering my situation, I do not get leisure time not to even talk about how it is spent. I do not have a specific time I can boast of as my leisure time. However, in the little free time I get, I just go out and relax under the mango tree (NM001).

As a nursing mother ... student, where do I get leisure time? For me, I do not get leisure because I am always occupied with so many house chores to perform. All the time you will be doing one thing or the other. If I am not cooking, I am washing. If I am not washing then I am fetching water and tidying up the surroundings. So, combining all these do not give any leisure time (NM003).

Times spent with the kids, soothing them to sleep are equally seen by study participants as leisure periods. Singing songs, playing with the kids, and teaching them things at home are some of the activities student nursing mothers do with their children.

If my child is not asleep in my free time, I just play with him. However, if he is asleep, I just pick my hand outs and start going through them or just be reading some inspiring novel. Sometimes I also used my leisure time to sleep to regain energy and be ready for the next task (NM002).

3.3. Research Question 2: Effects of Psychosocial Challenges on the Academic Performance of Student Nursing Mothers on Distance Education Programmes

Study participants believed that, if they were not nursing babies, they would have been performing better than they are currently doing. Universally, participants described their

current academic performance as ‘average’ or a little above average. The major reasons they gave were that divided attention, increase responsibilities, and dispensed efforts to unrelated academic activities. Resource constraints add a lot to challenges psychologically. The thought of not being able to make it give way to worries, and anxiety, among others, especially if examination or any form of assessment is mentioned. Most importantly, participants alluded to the fact that so much time is expended in taking care of the children. An important phenomenon that came from the majority of study participants had been the fact that they usually missed classes, exercise, assessment deadlines, and even examinations because of the sickness of their children. In many instances, the time available for studies is when the baby is healthy and asleep. The following are excerpts.

It is affecting or has already affected my ability to learn to be honest. I can remember I used to perform well in my secondary school days when I was not married and not having a child. At that time my brain was still sharp and was not always divided over so many issues. But now that I belong to a different family with a child I cannot perform as I used (NM003).

Sometimes it will be time for us to write quizzes and the child will fall sick. As a mother, definitely I get worried about how to get the child cured of that ill health. Even in some instances, it makes you the mother also look like you are sick. Your concentration is always on the child more than any other thing. To be honest, ... my performance keeps going down ever since I gave birth. About two quiz papers I have not been able to cross the pass mark. This is because of the much time spent on the child and other family responsibilities instead of studies (NM004).

I have to go out and breastfeed the child while learning is going on. My husband who should have always been of little help does not cooperate. you see that at the end of the day you get exhausted and cannot learn because house chores are basic activities that must be fulfilled by every means available. As for the studies, it is a secondary necessity. I am always inadequately prepared for exams (NM007).

The time that you will want to read is the time the child will either be crying or just be disturbing. You have to do cooking, washing clothes, fetching water. You get tired at the end of all these activities hence no energy and time again to do any effective studies. The kind of ease I should have always gone about when it comes to studies I cannot get it being a nursing mother (NM001).

3.3.1. Childcare and Class Attendance

Participants reported they are always regular in attendance at lessons. The major challenges have to do with concentration and full participation. For many, attendance is irregular, and the absence is usually due to either the need to cater for the child or to do some petty jobs to mobilise funds for the purpose. There are also unpleasant occurrences of lateness when student nursing mothers make time to attend the lectures. The following are illustrations.

My attendance is irregular in the sense that I sometimes take instructional hours to engage in some economic activities that can earn me money. I can say days that I miss the first lessons due to lateness I make sure that I can attend the rest of the lessons fully only on condition that my child is fit and does not disturb so much (NM002).

Attendance is regular except when the child was too small and sometimes bad nature of the weather, especially the coldness during the harmattan season. The cold was too much so I don't go out with the child at that tender age. That made me absent myself for the period ... (NM010).

Even when there are no conflicting programmes, the mothers themselves sometimes get tired to extent that they see it as practically impossible to attend lectures. This is particularly so for mothers staying far away from lecture halls.

Attending lectures for two consecutive weekends gets me tired considering how far my place is from town. So what I do is that when I attend lectures for two weekends I don't attend the third one (NM003).

At times the work load in the house wears me down. So the next day that I am supposed to attend lessons I always feel very weak. [When] it happens that way I always just decide to absent myself from school. ... sometimes I take off my lecture days to solve family problems like a funeral or anything emergency (NM007).

The lateness and periodic breaks in participation, to take care of the needs of the child among what study participants termed 'learning gaps' whilst attending lectures.

I am not always there fully for the lesson. When the child is crying I always go out with her so that I will not disturb my colleagues and so by the time I will be back they have gone far with the lesson. Sometimes I come back to see that the lesson is over. So what they learn at the time I am outside with the child I don't benefit it (NM003).

There are times that the baby will be crying continuously in the course of the lesson. Sometimes, if the lesson has not commenced, I just forget about it and be attending to the child. Sometimes too I come out to attend to some emergency calls. There are [also] times that I get tired sitting throughout. When I realize that the lecturer is explaining something that I already have a fair idea I will just use time to go out to stretch myself. So due to all these, I don't sit fully for all lessons (NM007).

3.3.2. Childcare and Punctuality to Lectures

Punctuality to lecture halls depends on distance, season (raining and harmattan), health of the child and means of transportation. The following are further explanations.

When I am unable to prepare the child early enough, I attend lectures late. Another reason is that I always walk. Sometimes too when the weather is bad, especially during the raining and harmattan seasons I come to school late. There are days it is always threatening to rain in the morning. So when it is happening like that you have to wait for a little to avoid being caught up in the storm (NM007).

I don't always come early because I have to get up and prepare food for the children. Sometimes she does not wake up early for me to bath her before taking the new baby. Some tutors do sack when you come in late (NM006).

When the child is sick, I spend a lot of time ensuring that he is in good health before I leave the house. By the time I am always done it is always already time for lectures or even past time (NM008).

3.3.3. Childcare and Class Participation

Student nursing mothers and others reported that their active class participation is usually dependent on the cooperation level of their children. As long as the child is not crying and/or is in good health, they can contribute in class. In many instances, their full participation is dependent on whether or not their children are asleep, as explained here.

In a particular lesson when the child is asleep I am always able to participate fully, especially in the morning. But when the sun goes up and the place is warm and [is]

uncomfortable for him to sleep, he cries. So within such times that a lecture is ongoing I am always outside with the child to make sure that the child stops crying (NM001).

When he is not disturbing I can contribute but when he makes noise or crying I always lose track of the discussion in class hence being unable to share my thoughts (NM001).

Another factor that determines whether mothers can contribute in class is their ability to prepare before the class. A study participant coined it this way.

On the good that my mind is filled up with ideas that are related to the topic under discussion, I contribute to the best of my ability. In any topic that is raised for discussion, I do well to participate as well. When I don't even have any idea to offer, I make sure that I pay attention to whoever is talking. Through keen listening, my ideas come up and I build my points from there (NM002).

The style of teaching also influences whether student nursing mothers will contribute to the discussion. For instance, lecturers who attach marks to active participation will usually entice every student, including student nursing mothers to contribute, as outlined in the following text.

The lecturers always emphasize that our contribution to the class discussion is part of our continuous assessment. So because of that I always try my best to make my input when a question is raised for a whole class discussion. I don't also hesitate to ask questions when I am not clear on something (NM007).

Sometimes it is the tutors who are not happy they will do their face "some way bi" which you don't understand and anything you say angers them (NM009).

3.3.4. Childcare and Concentration while in Class

Just like attendance, concentration depends on the state of the child. Crying disrupts everything. The worry about whether the crying is a sign of hunger or illness-related keeps mothers as half participants in lecture halls. Secondly, the crying child disrupts everyone including the lecturer. Some situations that mothers have been through include:

I am always worried that the child is not in good health. If it is that the child is just crying or disturbing, it does not only distract me alone but also distracts my colleagues and the lecturer as well and so there is always that sway of attention from the lesson to the source of the noise (NM001).

It is not easy to concentrate in class as a nursing mother. Sometimes I am forced to go with the child to class if I do not get someone to look after him for. While in the class I do everything possible to soothe him to sleep because I am always afraid that he may cry and disturb the peace of others. If I happen to get someone to be looking after him, I am worried that the child may be crying and making it difficult for the fellow (NM002).

Mothers generally described their concentration in class as 'interrupted' with movement in and out of the lecture hall. There is also an interruption in thoughts as their minds keep moving from the academic halls to the babysitting area. Some experiences include:

I have to always go out with the child when she is crying. When the child is not well, I am always worried because I don't know what is wrong with her. Even when I am sitting in the class but my mind is outside wallowing about the ill-health of the child. Sometimes too, when I leave behind so many house chores unattended and I am in

class, I can't concentrate. I am always worried about how I will go about them alone when I finally close from class and get back home (NM003).

It is a fact that no responsible mother will ever live a moment of life without having to shoot her mind back at how the child or children are faring. In my case, though I have someone to always be looking after my child for me, I still do not concentrate fully in class because I always feel that I should care more about my child better than any other person (NM004).

Even the noise alone will distract everybody including you the mother. So in a situation where the baby is crying nonstop, I am always worried about what the problem could be and so my concentration in class at that moment is disturbed (NM008).

The major reason mothers cannot avoid concentrating for a few moments they find themselves in the class is the temptation to avoid failure, manage limited time, and avoid resit payments.

I have in mind that if I don't concentrate, I will fail. Sitting in class and thinking about her can lead me to failure (NM006).

Okay for me my concentration is always 95% because I know very well that my child is with my mom and she is in a safe hand. And if anything, sometimes my mom does call me (NM009).

3.4. Research Question 3: Effects of Psychosocial Challenges on Social Life of Student Nursing Mothers on Distance Education Programmes

Student nursing mothers believe that the family is a major barrier to personal growth and development. The desires of the family and especially some husbands supersede everything within the marriage circles. The most important disruptions reported have been farming and farm work, family funerals, and household chores. A participant further explained that:

Marriage is not an easy institution to enter. Once you enter into it, your desires are relegated leaving alone the desires of your husband and the demands of the entire family. Sometimes when your things you would want to do, the family will come with its own to disrupt everything (NM001).

Student nursing mothers also reported neglect from some families as a result of schooling. *I face quite a several challenges. I face some amount of neglect or better still family rejection. At first, when I was single without a child, I could enjoy the support of the family from all angles. But since I got pregnant and finally gave birth ..., the family especially those who were supporting me feel that I can cater for myself which is why I got pregnant ... (NM002).*

For many, the home is their most serene environment for studies. However, many things make this environment not conducive. The workload at home in the domain of cooking, washing, childcare, and family care makes the environment so. Some family members interpret schooling challenges on the family as signs of laziness, disrespect, rudeness or show of pride. The mothers on the other hand feel discriminated against as they feel uncomfortable and unhappy. The family members believe that women should go to school only when they have finished giving birth so that roles do not conflict. The following are explanatory comments:

One challenge is the lack of quality studies in the house. Due to the heavy workload on me every day, I am not able to do any effective reading at night. My husband does not help me in any little way to do the house chores. Sometimes I have little issues with my husband in terms of cooking (NM003).

The time I get to read is the time the family requires that we carry out some activities like farming, preparing food for farmers, preparing food for the family, fetching water and others. Times that I fail ... to perform these responsibilities my husband does not always take it kindly with me. It is affecting my relationship with the family in the sense that they do not enjoy my full-time services to the family. The kind of togetherness, closeness and cooperation that should have been existing if I were not schooling ... is not happening (NM004).

When it comes to ceremonies like funerals, weddings, the outdooring of a baby or generally anything eventful, I am expected to be there to offer support. Meanwhile, most of these ceremonies are organized during weekends which coincide with the lectures Because of that the family members including my husband sometimes put up some stern resistance to my coming to classes. They feel that family matters are supposed to be a collective one and no personal interest must conflict with that. In instances where I insist and come, they see me as rude, lazy and all the negative impressions one can think of (NM007).

Some other family members have to shift responsibilities because student nursing mothers are not available to work at home.

3.4.1. Schooling and Relationship with Friends

Many social activities previously done with friends are put on hold now to allow student nursing mothers to adjust. Those who face the same situation usually understand. Others however feel otherwise. There is generally an alteration in the relationship that used to exist between student nursing mothers and their friends. This gap is captured in this comment by a participant.

I no longer enjoy the company of my friends now as compared to when I was not having a child and not doing this programme. They too do not enjoy my company. I have to always boycott going to weddings with friends when the day falls during my class period. I have not been closed to my friends again (NM001).

The major reason assigned has been that friends explained they have to create space for student nursing mothers to have enough time for their children and their studies. Student nursing mothers on their part, think that their friends see a kind of 'burden' in their situation they (friends) must avoid. Student nursing mothers interpret this to mean their friends could be 'shunning' them. The following gives further explanations:

Of my friends some got disappointed that I could just get pregnant like that ... so there is no more closeness and they feel that I need more time for myself and the child. Some of my friends see my situation as some kind of a burden they wouldn't want to share in. [I believe] some ... shun me and I also decide not to confide in them as well. I just want to shoulder the situation the way I can. I am busy exploring ways I can take care of my child and run the program as well. I do not always get that ample time to visit friends so we can go to the favourite places we used to and so I am facing the challenge of enjoying the companionship of friends (NM002).

We are not even moving together again because I have a child, they feel like I am too young to do that and that if I am with them, I will pollute them to also have children. So, we are no longer even friends (NM009).

For some student Student nursing mothers, the ideal of keeping a good home means that some friends would have to go. The values of their families, especially the dictates of their husband demand that some social distances be created between some friends and themselves. However,

the biggest challenge in relating to friends remains time. Some further illustrations are as follows:

... I am always occupied to the extent that I even forget that I have friends to hang out with. I have just decided to distant myself from friends because anyway I try, it does not work. I feel... [I need] to keep a good home, and [relating with some friends] ... may end up creating problems with my husband. So, for now, the family is so dear to me. Maybe later I will always find small time to be with them (NM003).

The company of friends is good but keeping a peaceful home and running my programme [are] more important and dearer to me. ... I am somehow cut out from friends ... we no longer communicate often, we no longer meet in person, and we no longer associate closely (NM003).

There is an element of perceived neglect in the friendship between friends and student nursing mothers. Both sides feel the impact of neglect and would have loved to avoid it if the situation were possible. A few backing instances are illustrated below.

The few [friends] that I have feel I am neglecting them because of the time we used to spend together, and the ideas we used to share they don't see me again. They feel I have neglected them so they also turn to forget about me (NM006).

Because of my schooling while nursing a child my friends have distant themselves from me. They feel that I have neglected them and they need to move on in their way. We are no longer as closed as we used to be. My freedom of association with them has been curtailed because I am now a mother and at the same time a student (NM007).

3.4.2. Schooling and Relationship with Tutors

Late coming has been reported as one challenge that student nursing mothers have with tutors. For those who can make it to the lecture hall on time, there are no big issues with tutors. The next important issue with tutors would be child control during lectures. Student nursing mothers have observed some level of discomfort that tutors have expressed when their children cry or make disturbing noise. Many would ask student nursing mothers to walk out of the hall; some would pause and restart the lecture from the point of the interruption; whilst others would express physical anger without a word. This makes student nursing mothers uncomfortable, scared, and even afraid to ask questions in such lectures. Some backing evidence is as follows:

My child's noise or disturbances make them unhappy. When that happens it does not give me that urge to get close to them because I feel that they will always be uncomfortable even when they see me and my child outside (NM001).

My lecturers sometimes feel that I disturb a lot with my child because the child can cry or make noise at any time during lecture delivery. So, when it happens like that they get distracted because they feel that most of the students might have lost track of the pace of the lecture due to the noise. In such a situation they have to take time to explain things again. some tutors do not want me to be that closer to them (NM002).

Student nursing mothers believe many tutors are unfriendly towards them, maybe disproportionately. Some lived experiences are expressed below.

At first, when I was not having a child, I could approach any tutor and they don't have any problem with that. But now I cannot. The problem is that some of them are [now] very hostile because of my child's behaviour in class. They complain every little time the child cries or disturbs. When they complain like that I am always scared to even

approach them with academic issues. ... Some of the tutors are unfriendly towards us (NM003).

As for the tutors, I have problems relating to them. Any time the child cries some of them feel upset by the noise Some will just shout at you ... Others too will ask that you go out... [Till] the child stops crying. When it happens, I feel I am making the tutor uncomfortable ... The upset mood alone on the faces of some tutors ... scares me from establishing a good relationship with them. How I wish I could [have] been much closer to them... (NM003).

Some of them [tutors] go to the extent of always walking me out of the class immediately after the child begins to cry. The shout alone sometimes frightens me. They always say that my child alone cannot disrupt their lessons... (NM007).

Student nursing mothers feel some tutors are inconsiderate of them. Though they (nursing-mothers) do not wish for any preferential treatment, they believe some form of equality in addressing their issues would be appropriate. Some few instances cited by participants include the following:

Sometimes if a tutor is in class and I go late, they can just say something that you will not happy. Some of the teachers will even sack you for being late (NM005).

I remember one of them cautioning us that, we should not come to campus after six, we are not supposed to enter, and nobody is supposed to come out. But [assuming] you have group studies you are forced to go there at night! Some [even] feel that we are not ready to receive training (NM006).

Some of them don't allow us to send our children into the lecture room. Others don't have a problem except that, they will draw your attention to walk out with the child when the child is crying or disturbing. But others don't accept at all for you to go in with the child (NM010).

3.4.3. Psychological Effects of Schooling Student Nursing Mothers

Student nursing mothers feel a mixed of psychological issues in their struggle to get an education. Boredom, frustrations, stress, and despair, are a few of these issues. Intensive thinking about things they do not have control about has been labelled as the root cause of these issues. The overall effect is a feeling of guilt since all accusing fingers are pointed at them. The situation has always been created to look like it's the schooling of nursing-mothers that brought the challenges. Here are some testimonies of study participants.

I go through frustration, stress, and sometimes I just threaten my husband that I will leave the course because the time I need to study I don't get. You need to cater for the child and the family and a whole lot of things. Sometimes I just feel bored doing the program (NM001).

I think too much. Sometimes I feel I am not well, and the child is not getting enough milk from me. I try to make myself happy and to have a peaceful mind so that I can concentrate on my studies as well as the child (NM005).

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. Psychosocial Challenges of Student Nursing Mothers

This study identified many and varied psychosocial challenges faced by student nursing mothers. These challenges can broadly be classified as interpersonal, environmental and psychological. The first category of challenges generally included challenges that student nursing mothers face in relating with their families, friends, and communities, or adjusting themselves to such. Spouses do not offer any relief just as any other members of the family. Friends feel student nursing mothers, are either a burden or deserve some privacy to care for their children or their books. The communities think the times for their schooling are wrong and do not need sympathy. Many tutors see student nursing mothers to be a disruption to their studies and must be separated from the others. These challenges are termed interpersonal challenges, as they involve interacting with people. These findings bear semblance with Mamhute's (2011) study in South Africa among these same target populations, which the study classified as physical, social, financial and administrative.

At the level of the family, student nursing mothers are made to perform household chores alone, even if other female members (older or younger) were available, as well as attend all family activities and gatherings. The understanding is that a woman, once married, is responsible for all household chores, including attending family gatherings. The family members see the decision to school at the time of mothering as a personal one, and must not be used as a reason for the neglect of family responsibilities. This finding in the current study conforms with a study conducted by Osafo (2016) where the study found that student nursing mothers were made to perform a lot of laborious non-academic activities daily in their homes and workplaces.

The current study also found that community members intimidated student nursing mothers by causing conflicting roles in themselves. According to community members, when there is a conflict between a woman's agenda (studies) and the socially defined role of a woman (familial or societal roles), the former must be given priority. This finding is comparable with the findings of Najjuma and Kyarugahe (2006), in which the community extended to places where such students worked.

The next category of challenges includes student nursing mothers' complaints that bordered on the environment in which they operate. The complaints generally centred on accommodation and transportation. So, the researcher termed these as environmental challenges. This study found that student nursing mothers stayed in congested rooms with limited space, with no or deteriorated amenities, which they rented at exorbitant rates. The thrust of these complaints stemmed from the fact that the academic institutions did not provide them with accommodation. Student nursing mothers were therefore given the arduous task of accommodating themselves. Close relatives, friends, and the public were the options available to mothers, any of which had their challenges. For instance, those who choose to live with relatives are seen as family members more than students, so whatever activity is available for the family is performed by all. Weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, farm work, as well as household chores are family events that need the attention of all family members. Though who choose to stay with friends will have the challenge of space for themselves and their babies. Since they are usually kept in guest rooms or verandas, any additional guest is added to them at the expense of their privacy. Then the group who would rent will have challenges with cost and amenities. Since the rents are always for shorter periods, the landlords see some desperation in the students and decide to exploit them. Usually, family rooms not in use are the ones given out as rented apartments. The findings of the current study are similar to the findings of previous studies across the globe. (Mwaifuge, 2015; Freeman, 2015; Threlfall, 2015).

However, unlike Mwaifuge's study, where the biggest challenge was in finding accommodation, the participants in the current study found some accommodation but had issues with space, privacy and cost.

The absence of accommodation facilities brought the need for transportation. The forms of transportation available for student nursing mothers include walking and being picked up, using a personal means of transport, or using public means of transport. In this study, the commonest means of transport was found walking. The study found student nursing mothers walking for long distances to and from lecture halls, relying on generous individuals to give them helping hands. Sometimes, lectures close at odd hours, and the student is left stranded. Closer family members like spouses were found not to help offer their wives 'lifts' to and from lecture halls, even for those in marital homes that own means of transport. For public means, the challenge has to do with cost. The majority of the student nursing mothers are in the low-income bracket, and so are unable to afford transportation fares. The finding contradicts the conducive environment needed to facilitate distance learning, as reported in many earlier studies and reports (Freeman, 2015; Threlfall, 2015; US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2013, Ortega & Mutch, 2018).

Lastly, transportation challenges, especially those who walk or use personal motorbikes are exposed to unfavourable weather conditions, which in turn brought many other challenges like motorability of roads, the health risks to mother and child, and even when the time it would take to get to lecture halls. For instance, rainy weather and harmattan have been cited as unfavourable weather for especially newborns. When they occur, the mother will have to be indoors till such time the condition is stable. Participants reported missing major academic events like class quizzes, and even exams. The findings on the exposure to weather conditions contradict the recommendation of the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2013), for institutions offering distance education.

The interruptions in their lives due to stress and no leisure periods were also central to the challenges student nursing mothers face. These can be categorized as psychological challenges. This study found that student nursing mothers have been so much pressed that, they chose to sacrifice their leisure period to be able to adjust to the increased demands. Though this has in many instances temporarily solved the problems, it may create bigger problems if no intervention is introduced. There is no way that an individual can work continuously without resting periods and remain efficient and productive. Apart from this, the children may suffer in later years if their mothers do not find enough time to play with them. This is because, Egenti & Omoruyi, (2011) found a weakened child-mother relationship in mothers who did not have enough time for their children in an earlier study.

4.2. Effects of Psychosocial Challenges on Student Nursing Mothers

The current study generated three major themes from the effects that psychosocial challenges have on the schooling lives of **student nursing mothers**. These included effects on academic performance, effects on domestic activities, and the effects on the psychological state of the mother.

In academic performance, the effects ranged from the regularity and punctuality to class, the number of days mothers can make it to class (attendance), concentration whilst in class, and their ability to contribute to the discussion, as well as the outcome of the assessment of their learning. The attendance to the lecture is irregular, punctuality unassured, whereas the concentration in class is interrupted, all due to the pressures caused by the responsibility of childcare. Most of the time, the child determines what the student nursing mother does. For instance, when the child is sick, the most likely place the mother can be will be the hospital.

From time to time, during lectures, the child will have to be fed, or better still, when the child cries during lecture hours, the mother will have to care for them. These findings agree with Thabethe, Mulondo, and Tugli (2020), as well as Osafo (2016). These influence overall performance. Participants in this study reported that their academic performance has fallen, compared to their pre-pregnancy years. Without pregnancy, students pursuing distance education, are expected to perform poorer than their counterparts in mainstream education due to the large numbers that enrol therein (Keegan, 1991). Also, Pinilla and Muñoz (2005) observed in their study that the academic performance of student mothers is lower than that of other groups of university students. Childcare appears to be adding more to this. This study found that student nursing mothers' inability to attend classes regularly, concentrate whilst lectures are ongoing (what they termed interrupted concentration), and contribute to the discussions on the floor, among others have influenced the fall in academic performance, just as was reported by Esia-Donkoh (2014) in a study in the University of Cape Coast.

Further, the inability to concentrate, inability to contribute to discussions, and inability to even attend classes, were found to have direct links with the care of the children. For instance, mothers reported that they missed classes anytime their children felt sick, or the weather was too cold to go out with the child, in conformity with the findings in many earlier studies (Adofo, 2013; Esia-Donkoh, 2014; Mwaifuge, 2015; Esia-Donkoh, Esia-Donkoh, & Asare, 2014). The current study found the specific case of a mother who would sacrifice classes to do a menial job to be able to raise money for the care of the child. Though earlier studies reported on the financial challenges of nursing mother students (Mwaifuge, 2015; Esia-Donkoh, Esia-Donkoh, & Asare 2014), no mention was made of how such challenges were addressed. There was also the unique feature of the styles that tutors adopt to teach as affecting academic performance. The study found that many tutors intentionally rush through courses, only to turn around and organize extra classes for the same students they taught.

The effects on the domestic activities identified gaps in relating with families, or better still, specific family members, friends, as well as players in the academic domain, such as tutors. This finding conforms to the finding of Adofo (2013) in an earlier study among the same target population. The empirical study found the family to be a barrier to the academic achievements of student nursing mothers. The study agenda of student nursing mothers had not been adopted as a family agenda, and many members see such an agenda as a personal agenda. Families turned to neglect, instead of supporting student nursing mothers, as reported in studies by Mamhute (2011) and Osafo (2016). This stand is, however, in sharp contrast with the study by Pinilla and Muñoz, (2005) where student nursing mothers can participate in higher education mainly due to the help they receive from their extended families (Pinilla & Muñoz, 2005). The latter study which happened quite some time back may mean that family values are breaking and hence the inability to help one another now.

This makes the home, a hostile rather than an enabling environment needed to facilitate studies for student nursing mothers. These findings which affect the overall output both at home and in academic work were earlier reported in the work of Onyeka et al. (2018). The general interpretations given to the challenges arising out of schooling student nursing mothers have been adverse to student nursing mothers. Student nursing mothers are seen to be root causes, rather than the victims of domestic challenges at home. Some spouses propagate this ill, rather than playing the supporting roles naturally assigned to them, to the extent that some student nursing mothers have contemplated abandoning their studies just to make their spouses, families and community members happy.

Surprisingly, tutors who should have known the importance of, not just women's education, but also Student nursing mothers, are not left out of intimidating roles. The study also found an

unfriendly relationship between nursing mother students and some tutors, who shout at them, walk them out, and expressed anger when children interrupt classes. This finding adds up to Thabethe, Mulondo, and Tugli (2020) finding in South Africa on the relationship between student nursing mothers and their Tutors but contradicts Ngcobo (1996) assertion that more tutors would serve as support systems to help students relieve their stress. Tutors in the current study appeared to be a major source of stress particularly student nursing mothers. The cumulative effect is tension, fear, frustration, and pressure on the young mothers, which keep them thinking all the time.

The stance of tutors is not clearly understood, but two things come to the mind of the researcher. First is that they have no experience of motherhood and so are unable to support. Second is that they are deliberately intimidating them to make them vulnerable to exploitation. The latter stand is reinforced by complaints that, many of them rash through their lessons.

The study also found some psychological effects of childcare, on academic work. The study found worries anxiety, pressure, and stress to be high in nursing mother students. Both studies by Najjuma and Kyarugah, (2006), and Prikhidko and Haynes (2018), confirmed (as has been the case of this study), that psychological challenges exist. Najjuma and Kyarugah, asserted that the triple roles of production, reproductive and community service, together increase stress, anxiety, and time usage; whereas Prikhidko and Haynes, identified guilt among student nursing mothers because they had to choose some of their responsibilities ahead of others including childcare. The challenges affect their learning abilities and thus academic performance. Schooling has also been found to create a gap between student nursing mothers and their friends, a situation that leaves them with almost no one to share their pains with. This can be likened to societal isolation that Tait (1995) found to be a barrier to effective learning by a student on distance learning. Other earlier studies also found an association between psychological challenges and learning difficulties (Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018; Onyeka et al., 2018).

4.3. Key Findings

The study identified several key findings regarding the psychosocial challenges faced by nursing mother students. These challenges can be grouped into three categories: interpersonal, environmental, and psychological.

Interpersonally, nursing mother students face difficulties in their interactions with various individuals and groups. They often experience discrimination and lack of support from their families, which can hinder their ability to focus on their studies. Additionally, they may face social and psychological distance from their friends due to the overwhelming responsibilities of motherhood and academic demands. The community may also intimidate and label them for prioritizing education at a young maternal age. Furthermore, some nursing mother students may encounter inconsiderate treatment from their tutors during class hours.

Environmentally, these students encounter challenges related to accommodation, transportation, and weather conditions. Their living spaces often lack sufficient space, privacy, and necessary amenities, while the cost of such accommodations remains unreasonably high. Transportation can be burdensome, costly, and uncomfortable, adding to their overall challenges. Moreover, nursing mother students may have to endure harsh weather conditions such as heavy rains or extreme dryness during the harmattan season.

Psychologically, nursing mother students experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and worries due to the heavy workload resulting from their multiple roles. They often sacrifice their leisure time in order to manage their responsibilities effectively.

These psychosocial challenges have significant effects on the academic work of nursing mother students, particularly in terms of their academic performance, domestic activities, and psychological well-being.

Academically, these students face obstacles that impact their performance, including irregular attendance, late reporting to lectures, and poor concentration. The additional responsibility of childcare, combined with the non-involving teaching style, contributes to these difficulties.

Domestically, nursing mother students do not receive the support they need from their family members, friends, and tutors, as schooling is often perceived as a personal agenda that should not interfere with others' priorities.

Psychologically, nursing mother students experience increased levels of anxiety, stress, pressure, frustration, and fear. Juggling the demands of motherhood, education, and family care leads to feelings of guilt, sadness, tiredness, and isolation.

4.4. Conclusion

The researchers after carefully studying the major findings of the psychosocial challenges of student nursing mothers on distance education in the Upper West Region of Ghana, draws the conclusions that, Motherhood is a complicated and marvellous adventure. This major hurdle becomes more complicated when mothers add demands of the global changing roles, such as working outside the home, furthering of education to their many traditional family responsibilities. From the findings of the study it is concluded that the role conflict experienced by student nursing mothers affect their performance both at home and in their academic pursuit. The challenges faced included inability to attend lectures, tutorials and group discussions regularly and also prepare adequately for exams. They are as well unable to perform their childcare functions adequately.

4.5. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the researchers suggest several interventions to address the difficulties faced by students who are Student nursing mothers. These recommendations are aimed at various stakeholders, including colleges of education offering distance education programs, tutors in these colleges, and regulatory bodies.

For colleges of education offering distance education programs, it is recommended to provide counseling to all Student nursing mothers, informing them about the challenges they may face as student mothers and allowing them to make informed decisions about their education. Additionally, these institutions should offer the option for mothers who find it difficult to balance student motherhood to defer their courses for a minimum of one year, giving them the opportunity to resume their studies from where they left off. Furthermore, special considerations should be given to women who choose to continue their schooling as student nursing mothers. This may involve providing flexible reporting times, granting deadline waivers for assignments, and offering additional tuition at no extra cost.

Tutors in colleges where distance education is offered should foster positive attitudes towards women who are simultaneously studying and nursing babies. They should create an enabling environment for these students, who are already under significant stress. Tutors can allocate time, even if it is not institutional policy, to engage with nursing mother students both during and outside of class hours. It is important to regularly check for any learning interruptions they may be experiencing and assist them in bridging any knowledge gaps. During class hours, tutors should specifically address nursing mother students, encourage them to ask questions,

and provide them with the necessary time to attend to their babies when needed. If academic struggles are observed, tutors should offer counseling or refer student nursing mothers to the guidance and counseling unit, allowing them to come to terms with their challenges and make any necessary adjustments.

To the Ministry of Education and/or Ghana Education Service, it is recommended to review the policies governing distance education to ensure that facilities and amenities are in place to facilitate effective, efficient, and affordable teaching and learning for all students, particularly student nursing mothers. Embracing the use of information technology can significantly enhance distance education by reducing the need for physical contact hours. Exploring technologies such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and others can greatly facilitate distance learning.

References

- Adofo, S. (2013). Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Nursing Mothers in Tertiary Institutions in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Unpublished MPH Thesis, Legon: University of Ghana.
- Amina, A. (2016). The impact of distance education on women's empowerment in Ghana. Master's thesis, University of Ghana.
- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472-491. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259305>
- Beeler, S. (2016). Undergraduate single mothers' experiences in postsecondary education. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 16(176), 69-80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20210>
- Blee, K. M., & Taylor, V. (2002). Semi-structured interviewing in Social Movement Research. *Methods of Social Movement Research*, 16, 92-117.
- Borelli, J. L., Nelson, S. K., River, L. M., Birken, S. A., & Moss-Racusin, C. (2017). Gender differences in work-family guilt in parents of young children. *Sex Roles*, 76(5), 356-368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0579-0>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creary, S. J., & Gordon, J. R. (2016). Role conflict, role overload, and role strain. *Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 7(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119085621.wbefs012>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*: SAGE Publications.
- Dankyi, J. K., Dankyi, L. A., & Minadzi, V. M. (2019). Struggles and coping strategies of student mothers at the University of Cape Coast Distance Education, Ghana. *Creative Education*, 10(11), 2484-2494. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1011176>
- Diekmann, A. B., & Eagly, A. H. (2008). Of men, women, and motivation. *Handbook of motivation science*, 434.
- Edwards, R., Hanson, A., & Raggatt, P. (2013). *Boundaries of adult learning* (Vol. 1): Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315004655>
- Egenti, M., & Omoruyi, F. (2011). Challenges of women participation in continuing higher education programme: Implications for adult women counselling and education. *Edo Journal of Counselling*, 4(1-2), 131-143.

- Esia-Donkoh, K. (2014). Child-rearing practices among student-mothers at University of Cape Coast, Ghana. *Soc Biol Human Affairs*, 78, 1-2.
- Esia-Donkoh, K., Esia-Donkoh, K., & Asare, H. (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. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61/2014.2.10/61.10.222.233>
- Freeman, M. (2015). *Rewriting the self: History, memory, narrative*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315674599>
- Gold, J., & Bratton, J. (2003). *The dynamics of professionalization: Whither the HRM Profession*. Paper presented at the Critical Management Studies Conference.
- Goldrick-Rab, S., & Sorensen, K. (2010). Unmarried parents in college. *The Future of Children*, 20(2), 179-203. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2010.0008>
- Goodwin, S., & Huppatz, K. (2010). *The good mother: Contemporary motherhoods in Australia*. Sydney University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1sr6kgj>
- Haleman, D. L. (2004). Great expectations: Single mothers in higher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(6), 769-784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839042000256448>
- Hammer, D., & Wildavsky, A. (2018). The open-ended, semi structured interview: An (almost) operational guide *Craftways* (pp. 57-101): Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203794517-5>
- Hayes, S. C., & Wilson, K. G. (2003). Mindfulness: Method and process. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 161-165. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg018>
- Jackson, K., & Remillard, J. (2005). Rethinking Parent Involvement: African American Mothers Construct their Roles in the Mathematics Education of their Children. *GSE Publications*. https://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/11
- Jarvis, P. (2004). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice*: Psychology press. San Francisco, CA 94104-1310. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203561560>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research Methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. SAGE.
- Kwapong, T. (2007). Widening access to tertiary education for women in Ghana through distance education. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 8(4), 65-79.
- Lavrakas, P. (2008). *Cross-sectional survey design*. Sage research methods, 173 <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947>
- Macmillan, R., & Copher, R. (2005). Families in the life course: Interdependency of roles, role configurations, and pathways. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(4), 858-879. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00180.x>
- Mamhute, R. (2011). *The educational challenges of pregnant and nursing adult learners: A case study of Morgenster Teachers' College*, University of South Africa, Pretoria. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/4809>

- Mayan, M. J., & Daum, C. H. (2016). Worth the risk? Muddled relationships in community-based participatory research. *Qualitative health research*, 26(1), 69-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315618660>
- Moen, P., Lam, J., Ammons, S., & Kelly, E. L. (2013). Time work by overworked professionals: Strategies in response to the stress of higher status. *Work and Occupations*, 40(2), 79-114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413481482>
- Moore, M.H. (1995). *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Harvard University Press, London.
- Mwaifuge, A. J. (2015). *Exploring the experiences of pregnant and mothering students in higher learning institutions: A case of College of Education at UDOM*. The University of Dodoma.
- Najjuma, S. M., & Kyarugahe, D. T. (2006). Studying and parenting: Experiences of student mother in Ugandan universities. *Mtafiti Mwafrika (African Researcher)*, 17, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mtafiti.v17i1.38353>
- Neuman, D. (2014). Qualitative research in educational communications and technology: A brief introduction to principles and procedures. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 26(1), 69-86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-014-9078-x>
- Ngcobo, N. (2006). The experiences of Student nursing mothers as students in a higher education institution in South Africa. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45(1), 27-32.
- Onyeka, F. C., Okafor, F. O., & Onah, H. N. (2018). Displacement and Stress Analysis in Shear Deformable Thick Plate. *International Journal of Applied Engineering Research*, 13(11), 9893-990
- Ortega, R. E., & Mutch, D. G. (2018). Snyder, T. and Dillow, S.(2010). *Digest of Education Statistics*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education.
- Osafo, A. B. (2016). *Challenges and coping strategies of student mothers of UCC College of Distance Education: The case of the Cape Coast Centre*. University of Cape Coast.
- Parsons, T. (1971). *The system of modern societies* (p. 12). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Pinilla, B., & Muñoz, S. (2005). Educational opportunities and academic performance: A case study of university student mothers in Venezuela. *Higher Education*, 50(2), 299-322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6356-y>
- Polit, D., & Beck, C. (2010). *Essentials of nursing research, methods, appraising evidence for nursing practice* (7th ed.). Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins.
- Prikhidko, A., & Haynes, C. (2018). Balancing graduate school and mothering: Is there a choice? *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 13(2), 314–326. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4109>
- Segel-Karpas, D., Ayalon, L., & Lachman, M. E. (2018). Loneliness and depressive symptoms: The moderating role of the transition into retirement. *Aging & Mental Health*, 22(1), 135-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2016.1226770>
- Tait, A. (1995). Barriers to learning in distance education. In D. Sewart, D. Keegan, & B. Holmberg (Eds.), *Distance education: International perspectives* (pp. 105-122). London: Routledge.

- Thabethe, L. R., Mulondo, S. A., & Tugli, A. K. (2020). Psychological experiences of pregnant students at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province, South Africa. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 24(3), 23-44
- Threlfall, J. M., & Kohl, P. L. (2015). Addressing child support in fatherhood programs: Perspectives of fathers and service providers. *Family Relations*, 64(2), 291-304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12119>
- Wilson-Strydom, M (2004). Module B4: Programme evaluation and its role in quality assurance. Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training in Open and Distance Learning. Commonwealth of Learning. Available at: <https://oasis.col.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/41dea8d0-2369-4eba-bfbb-8e6f8b84721f/content>