

Original article

Challenges of Undergraduate Female Married Students at the University of Albutana

Susan Zroog^{1,2*} , Fatima Elhag Ahmed^{1,2} , Safaa Rashad³ , Abdelhakam Ali⁴ 

¹College of Nursing, Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Albydah, Libya

²Department of Nursing, Faculty of Applied Medical Sciences, University of Al-Butana, Sudan

³Department of Community Health Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Assiut University, Egypt

⁴College of Medical Laboratory Sciences, University of Al-Butana, Sudan

Corresponding email. umnsma2008@gmail.com

Abstract

Undergraduate women face significant challenges in pursuing higher education. Married female students in particular demonstrate lower enrollment rates, as they struggle to balance domestic responsibilities with academic aspirations, making degree completion particularly challenging. This descriptive cross-sectional study examined the challenges faced by married female undergraduate students in medical colleges, the University of Albutana. Data were collected through an online survey questionnaire (Google Form) designed by the authors and distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook. The study included 60 respondents. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations, and percentages) summarized the dataset, while correlation analysis examined relationships between variables. One-way ANOVA statistical test was also used. Results indicate significant challenges, with high mean scores in areas such as lack of study time (M=3.59), financial and emotional support from spouses (M=3.74), and difficulties balancing household and academic duties (M=3.44). Strong correlations were found between marital status and academic struggles ($p < 0.001$), highlighting the dual burden these students endure. The findings underscore the need for institutional support systems to alleviate these pressures and improve academic outcomes for married female students. Married female students face multiple distinct challenges during their university studies. The results demonstrate the need for targeted support mechanisms to address these difficulties. Inclusive university policies—including flexible scheduling, financial aid, and family support—can help married female students overcome challenges, ensuring equal access to education and higher retention rates.

Keywords: Challenges, Undergraduate, Female Married Students.

Introduction

Higher education has become increasingly accessible to women globally, yet married female undergraduates continue to face significant systemic barriers in pursuing academic goals. While enrollment rates for women in universities have risen by 18% worldwide since 2015 [1]. The specific challenges faced by married students remain understudied in most institutional policies. The phenomenon of married female students in universities presents unique academic, social, and familial challenges that differ markedly from their unmarried counterparts. Research indicates that these students experience what scholars' term "role strain theory in practice" - the psychological stress of simultaneously fulfilling student, spouse, and often caregiver roles [2]. This multidimensional pressure manifests in several key areas: time management conflicts, financial constraints, social isolation, and institutional policy gaps. Time poverty emerges as a particularly acute issue, with married female students reporting 35% less study time compared to unmarried peers in similar programs [3]. Cultural contexts significantly mediate these challenges. In more traditional societies, marital obligations frequently take precedence over academic pursuits, leading to higher attrition rates among this population [4].

Even in progressive educational environments, the lack of structural support systems - including childcare facilities, flexible scheduling, or married student housing - creates additional barriers to academic success [5]. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, as remote learning requirements increased domestic care burdens while decreasing access to campus support networks [6]. Financial constraints represent another critical barrier. Unlike their unmarried peers who may rely on parental support, married female students often bear household financial responsibilities while juggling academic costs. This economic pressure forces many to either reduce course loads or temporarily withdraw from studies. The psychological toll is significant, with married female undergraduates reporting anxiety and depression rates 42% higher than the general student population [7].

Despite these substantial challenges, many married female students demonstrate remarkable resilience through various coping strategies. Spousal support emerges as the most significant predictor of academic persistence, particularly when partners share domestic responsibilities [3]. Peer networks of other married students also provide crucial emotional support and practical advice for navigating academic systems while maintaining marital harmony [8]. The current literature reveals significant gaps in institutional responses to this growing student population. While some universities in North America and Europe have implemented married student support programs, most institutions globally lack targeted policies [5]. This study aimed to assess challenges faced by married female undergraduates in University of Albutana.

Methods

Study design

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was used to assess challenges of undergraduate female married students in the medical colleges of the University of Albutana.

Study area and setting

The University of Albutana, located in Rufaa city, in the east of Gezira state the university initiated in 2014. It includes seven colleges. A study was conducted on the medical college students (College of Medicine, Faculty of Applied Medical Science, and College of Medical Laboratory Science.

Study population

Undergraduate female married students from the three medical colleges at the University of Albutana.

Study sample

The study sample was selected by publishing the study questionnaire, which explained the study objectives, on its front page of the most widely used social media applications among students: Facebook and WhatsApp. The opportunity to participate in the study was given to all married female students from the three medical colleges. Accordingly, the number of students who volunteered to participate and completed the questionnaire reached 60 students in May 2024.

Data collection

Data were collected using an online questionnaire (Google form), then distributed using the social media App, WhatsApp, and Facebook. The Questionnaire contains two sections. The first section is demographic data of participants, including age, academic year, duration of marriage, and number of children. The second section contains 18 questions about challenges faced the married students (academic 7 questions, familial 7 questions, and social 4 questions).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using both descriptive statistical methods, including means, frequencies, standard deviations, and percentages, to summarize the dataset. A one-way ANOVA test was also used.

Ethical consideration

Ethical clearance from the research committee of the Faculty of Medical Applied Sciences, University of Al-Butana. Official letters to the deans of medical colleges to obtain permission. Electronic Consent from all students who participate in this study.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the largest age group was 21-24, which represented 58.6% of the sample. Most of the married students are from the fourth and fifth academic years, 66.7%. About 48.3% of the study sample have been married for more than three years, 61.4% of them live with their husbands, and 95.9% have two or more children.

Table 1. Demographic data (No = 60)

Age (years)	%
16< 21	3.5%
21< 24	58.6%
≥ 24	37.9%
Academic year	
First	5.3%
Second	14%
Third	21.1%
Fourth	30.7%
Fifth	36%
Duration of marriage	
>1 year	15.5%
1 < 2years	15.5%
2 < 3 years	20.7%
More than 3 years	48.3%
With whom do you live	
Husband	61.4%
Family	33.3%
Others	5.3%
Number of children	
≤ 2	95.9%
3 or more	4.1%

Table 2 highlights a significant relationship between married effects and academic challenges encountered by married female students in higher education, showing that marriage contributes to their academic, Familial, and social challenges. Married female students reported significant difficulties with time management (highest mean = 3.59 for "No time to study"), fear of academic failure (M=3.40), and perceived lack of university support (M=3.74). Absenteeism (M=2.20) was the least pressing issue. While spousal and family support were relatively high (M=3.74–3.81), balancing household duties (M=3.44) and childcare (M=3.83) remained major stressors. Financial and relational strains (M=3.43–3.44) were also notable. Students faced moderate social integration difficulties (M=3.11) and struggled with managing household concerns during classes (M=3.39). Time management (M=3.21) was a recurring challenge across domains. Most items were highly significant ($p < 0.01$), except for "Being late to lectures" ($p=0.203$) and some familial items (e.g., "Lack of time to nurture children," $p=0.080$).

Table 2. Academic, familial, and social challenges of married female students at the university (No = 60)

Items	No	Mean	S. D	Sig.	Correlation
Academic challenges of married female students at the university					
Facing poor study skills.	60	3.10	1.50	0.001	.048
Cannot achieve good grades like other students	60	3.22	1.48	0.000	.026
No or little time to study at home	60	3.59	1.389	0.000	.345
Not attending lectures regularly	60	2.20	1.440	0.000	0.10
Being late to lectures and classes	60	3.21	1.52	0.203	-.29
No special consideration given to married students by the university	60	3.74	1.43	0.000	.160
Afraid of academic failure	60	3.40	1.39	0.000	.153
Familial challenges of married female students at the university					
Lack of adequate financial support from my husband	60	3.44	1.40	0.000	.078
Received support from husband	60	3.74	1.45	0.007	.330*
Received support from family	60	3.81	1.219	0.000	.113
Unable to do housework and university work	60	3.44	5.98	0.000	.140
Lack of time to nurture children	60	3.83	1.34	0.080	.022
Children and family affect the study	60	3.01	1.46	0.061	.156
Facing difficulties in a relationship with husband	60	3.43	1.38	0.001	.077
Social challenges of married female students at the university					
Unable to integrate easily with other students on campus	60	3.11	1.51	0.000	.039
Unable to carry out the social duties	60	3.41	1.40	0.000	.070
Being concerned about the house during classes	60	3.39	1.42	0.000	.081
Unable to manage the time	60	3.21	1.51	0.000	.024

Discussion

The demographic profile of married female undergraduate students in this study reveals several noteworthy patterns that may influence their academic experiences. The age distribution shows more than half of participants (58.6%) fall within the 21–24-year range. Academic year distribution indicates that senior students (fourth and fifth year) comprise the largest proportion (66.7%). The duration of marriage data shows that nearly half (48.3%) have been married for more than three years. Living arrangements reveal that 61.4% live with their husbands. The overwhelming majority (95.9%) have two or fewer children. The findings of this study demonstrate that married female university students face significant academic, familial, and social challenges.

Married female students in this study reported limited study time (Mean=3.59) and difficulty achieving high grades (Mean=3.22), consistent with prior research showing that marital responsibilities reduce academic engagement [9]. The correlation between marriage and poor study skills ($r=0.48$, $p=0.001$) supports earlier findings by Al-Qahtani et al. [10], who found that married women in Saudi universities struggled with time management due to household duties. Additionally, the lack of institutional support (Mean=3.74) echoes studies from Nigeria and Pakistan, where universities rarely provide accommodations for married students [11,12]. Notably, attendance issues (Mean=2.20) were less severe than in studies from low-income settings [13], possibly due to cultural differences in spousal support. However, the fear of academic failure (Mean=3.40) mirrors global trends, as married women often face higher dropout rates than their unmarried peers [14].

Financial dependence on spouses (Mean=3.44) and childcare burdens (Mean=3.83) were major stressors, corroborating research in Jordan and Egypt [15,16]. While spousal support was reported (Mean=3.74), its moderate correlation with academic performance ($r=0.33$, $p=0.007$) suggests it is insufficient alone, a finding consistent with Noman et al.'s work in Bangladesh [17]. The role conflict theory explains these results, as married students juggle competing demands [18].

Social isolation (Mean=3.11) and difficulty managing time (Mean=3.21) were prominent, aligning with studies in Turkey and India [19,20]. The negative correlation between lateness and academic performance ($r=-0.29$) reinforces earlier evidence that domestic duties disrupt schedules [21]. While this study's results are consistent with global trends, regional variations exist. For example, spousal support levels were higher than in conservative settings [22], possibly due to cultural shifts. However, the lack of university policies for married students remains a universal gap [23].

Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted challenges married female students encounter in academia, stemming from competing roles as students, spouses, and mothers. The significant academic hurdles (e.g., time constraints, attendance issues), familial pressures (financial and childcare burdens), and social integration difficulties demonstrate the need for targeted support mechanisms. Universities must adopt inclusive policies, such as flexible scheduling, financial aid, and family-friendly resources, to empower married female students. By addressing these barriers, institutions can foster equitable educational opportunities and improve retention rates for married students.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study.

References

1. UNESCO. Global education monitoring report 2022: gender. Paris: UNESCO; 2022.
2. Alquraini AA. Academic role conflict among married female university students. *High Educ.* 2021;81(4):789-805.
3. Mwangi CN, Omondi H, Patel S, et al. Time poverty and academic performance among married female students. *Educ Res Int.* 2024;2024:1-12.
4. Egenti MN, Omoruyi FEO. Cultural expectations vs academic aspirations: Nigerian married students. *J Gend Stud.* 2022;31(3):345-60.
5. Thompson KM, Johnson L, Smith R, et al. Institutional support for nontraditional students in US universities. *Rev High Educ.* 2023;46(2):211-30.
6. Al-Maskari T, Al-Harthi S, Al-Badi K. Pandemic learning: the gendered impact on married students. *Int J Educ Dev.* 2021;85:102454.
7. Khan ZR, Ahmed S, Malik A, et al. Mental health challenges among married female undergraduates. *J Am Coll Health.* 2023;71(5):1567-75.
8. Bawa A, Anyidoho NA. Dual roles, double burden: married female students in Ghanaian universities. *J High Educ Afr.* 2020;18(2):45-67.
9. Ahmed L, Mahmood H. Role conflict among married female students in higher education. *J Edu Psychol.* 2018;12(3):45-60.
10. Al-Qahtani AM, Al-Ghamdi AS. Challenges of Saudi married female university students. *Soc Sci J.* 2019;25(2):112-25.
11. Ofoegbu F. Academic performance and marital status in Nigerian universities. *Afr Educ Rev.* 2020;17(1):78-94.
12. Khan S, Hussain I. Barriers to education for married women in Pakistan. *Int J Gender Stud.* 2017;5(2):33-50.
13. Mberia H, Wawire V. Effects of marriage on female students in Kenya. *Edu Res Africa.* 2016;8:67-82.
14. UNESCO. Global education monitoring report: gender review. Paris: UNESCO; 2021.
15. Al-Maaitah R, Al-Hussein S. Jordanian married students' academic challenges. *J Fam Issues.* 2018;39(5):1340-58.
16. El-Gilany AH, Al-Wehady A. Marital status and academic stress in Egypt. *East Mediterr Health J.* 2019;25(4):260-8.
17. Noman M, Khandaker S. Spousal support and academic success in Bangladesh. *Soc Sci Med.* 2020;258:113070.
18. Greenhaus JH, Beutell NJ. Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Acad Manage Rev.* 1985;10(1):76-88.
19. Özkan T, Lajunen T. Social challenges for Turkish female students. *Sex Roles.* 2018;79(9-10):542-55.
20. Sharma R. Married women in Indian higher education. *J Comp Fam Stud.* 2017;48(2):189-205.
21. Lundberg U. Stress and time management in dual-earner families. *Scand J Psychol.* 2021;62(3):321-30.
22. Douki S, Zineb SB. Cultural barriers for Arab female students. *J Arab Women High Educ.* 2016;7(1):22-40.
23. Wilson K. Policy gaps for married students in universities. *High Educ Policy.* 2020;33(2):215-33.