



STRESS AND COPING AMONG MARRIED WOMEN STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

Background: Stress is considered to be main cause of many underlying health issues. Females are more prone to get stressed easily. Use of maladaptive coping strategies also end up in causing increased stress to the person. Stress reduction is an art which should be known to everyone which will help in managing stress and lead a healthy life. **Purpose:** To systematically review articles on stress and coping among married women students. **Method:** The search of significant articles was done in PubMed/Medline and Google Scholar. The included studies were reviewed according to quality criteria. The inclusion criteria were the studies related to stress and coping among married women students and those which were written in English language. A total of 40 articles were selected, out of which 13 were reviewed. **Conclusion:** Based on the current review, it was found that married women students were stressed and using maladaptive coping mechanisms. They need any of the intervention to reduce stress which will help them in better academic performance and well as performing their role well as married individual.

Key words: Stress, Coping, Married Women Student

Introduction

Stress has a very strong impact on the physical and mental health of an individual. It has been proved from several decades that stress decreases the normal functioning of the person. Women, particularly, reveal a larger amount of stress due to role straining and gender based discrimination.¹

The concept of marriage is not only limited to the relation of husband and wife but it is the most complex of all the human relationships. Women have more responsibilities to handle after marriage as compared to men. Over the years, women have increased their presence in studies or work place, but their responsibilities at home has not diminished.²

It has been found in various studies that women need interventions for relieving stress as they are the one who are the founders of the family. Women have to manage their roles at workplace or studies and at home for which stress reduction programs plays a very important role.³

Method

A Systematic review was conducted to identify articles in PubMed/Medline and Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria was the studies including stress and coping among married women students. Descriptive, cross sectional, quasi experimental and qualitative studies were included and case reports/ series, randomized control trials were excluded. The search generated total 40 articles. Out of 40 articles, the full texts of 13 articles were retrieved and reviewed.

Results

Analysis was done and 40 articles were retrieved. Out of these, 13 articles were included in the Systematic review done to assess stress and coping among married women students. The reviews were divided into two areas:

- Reviews related to stress and coping among married women students
- Reviews related to various psychological interventions given to reduce stress or improve adaptive coping among females

Out of these 13 articles, ever article stated that married women students have stress and none of the article stated that married women student do not need any intervention to reduce stress. Some articles also stated that it becomes responsibility of the university to provide stress reduction programs to these students.

Sample Reviews

A descriptive study was conducted to find that how perceived stress, adult attachment, and dyadic coping strategies affect the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students in Greensboro, NC, USA. A sample of 191 married students was included in the study. The data was collected using self-report questionnaire through; the Perceived Stress scale, Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire–Revised, Dyadic Coping Inventory, the Relationship Assessment scale and a demographic questionnaire. Results showed that 67% of the difficulty in achieving marital satisfaction was contributed by attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and dyadic coping. Also, dyadic coping partially lies in the middle of the relationships between both attachment dimensions and marital satisfaction. The study concluded that there were key roles of adult attachment characteristics and dyadic coping patterns in the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. The study concluded the need for further exploration of factors that impact the stress and coping processes of this population.¹

A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the marital satisfaction and stress of married graduate students by examining gender/marital roles and the variables that relate to marital satisfaction in Texas tech University, Texas. A sample size of 161 married couples in which at least one of the two partners was a student in medical school, law school, or other graduate program were assessed. The data was collected through self report questionnaires using Background inventory, The Love Attitudes Scale Short Form, Self-Disclosure Index, Relationship Assessment Scale and Social Support Questionnaire-Six Item Brief Measure tools. The study results found that there is a greater marital satisfaction where both partners were students than in with only one partner as student. The study concluded the importance of personal happiness, marital commitment, physical intimacy and a spouse doing his or her fair share of the housework for marital satisfaction. It was found that there was a stress among female students related to financial burdens on the families while this stress was not that much in male students.⁴

An exploratory survey was conducted to find out the factors that caused stress among married students attending evening classes in University of Ghana. A sample of one hundred undergraduate students was drawn from the Dansoman campus of the Methodist University College. The study results revealed that demands of jobs, family and schooling made married students more stressed out than their unmarried counterparts. Married students who did not have their own means of transport were more stressed out than those who did and further that married students who had supportive relatives or housemaids experienced lower levels of stress compared to their counterparts who did not have such support.⁵

An exploratory study was done to find out common challenges faced by married undergraduate female students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, factors responsible and the effects these have on them. The study utilized the survey design with sample consisting of 150 married undergraduate female

students purposively selected from two of the six Universities in Ogun State. The study revealed that combining work with family responsibilities and school obligations lead to stress among 108 (83.1%) respondents and these have the greatest effect on their general life. A total of 88 (67.7%) respondents disagreed that poor academic performance is a challenge they face whereas a total of 77 (59.2%) respondents agreed that finding adequate time to do homework is a challenge they face.⁶

A descriptive study was done to focus on stress faced by married female students in the Enugu State, Nigeria in South-east education zone. A total of 387 students participated in study. A 26-item questionnaire on a 4 point rating scale was used to elicit information on respondents' bio-data, benefits of university education (UE) and challenges faced by married female students in the university. The study results found that the married female students revealed the benefits enjoyed by married female students which includes; UE helped them come out of inferiority complex, build their self worth and improved family income. The study concluded that there were lots of challenges faced by these students which subsequently led to their poor academic performance, their marriage being threatened and no financial support from husband and relations which further increased the stress of married students.⁷

An exploratory study was done to assess stressors and list of psychosomatic ailments related to stress among married staff nurses in Pune, Maharashtra. One hundred and six nurses were all included in the study according to convenience sampling. Stressors were based on four main factors: work related, work interactions, job satisfaction, and home stress were assessed using a questionnaire and was divided into mild, moderate, severe, and burnout. Study results revealed that moderate levels of stress are seen in a majority of the nurses and most important causes of stress were jobs not finishing in time because of shortage of staff, conflict with patient relatives, overtime, and insufficient pay. Psychosomatic disorders like acidity, back pain, stiffness in neck and shoulders, forgetfulness, anger, and worry significantly increased in nurses having higher stress scores. Increase in age or seniority did not significantly decrease stress.⁸

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was conducted to explore the lived experience of married nursing students and their stress during nursing school at the University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park. A total of 7 married nursing student participants were included in the study. The data was collected through the journal notes about their experiences in nursing school and marital stress and/or satisfaction, which was filled by participants themselves. Journal entries by each participant were then analyzed for themes. A total of 4 themes were identified as common among the participants: 1) Familial social role changes 2) Imbalances between school and family 3) Emotional stress and 4) Spousal support. Study results conclude that the journal entries focused on the marital stressors that occur during nursing school. The theme of familial social role changes permeated all of the journal entries across all participants. The common theme of imbalances between school and family include divided attention

between family and school with limited quality time spent with the family. Some of the participants described this division of attention between family and school in different ways. Many participants reported that nursing school adds to their stress levels. The study concluded that Familial social role changes, an imbalance between school and family, additional emotional stress, and both negative and positive spousal support were described.⁹

A descriptive study was conducted to identify the family roles and the coping strategies students used to manage the roles while in school, to ensure academic excellence of married female students in five public universities in Ghana. Questionnaire was used to collect data in order to allow for a wide coverage and generalization. The study revealed that family roles performed by the students while in school were found to include: running errands, meal provision, fulfilling marital obligations, decision making, laundering, settling disputes, cleaning, supervising domestic work, shopping, helping children to do school assignments, financial support, disciplining children, fetching water, mending clothes, child, elderly and invalid care, and leading religious activities. Coping strategies adopted by the students to manage these family roles and academic work were: creation of new social boundaries, delegation of roles, acting in context, prioritizing activities, postponing responsibilities, pre-planning activities; dovetailing family and academic work. Mature and married students had more family roles to play than non-mature and single students.¹⁰

An exploratory study was done to explore the stress and stressors among married female students with motherhood in Iran. A sample of 20 female students aged between 24-50 years was included in the study. Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data and analysis was done using a qualitative content analysis approach. Three main themes were developed during data analysis: “simultaneous management”, “facilities”, and “barriers”. “Simultaneous management”-This theme consisted of two sub-themes: “planning” and “sacrificing”. Almost all student mothers had to increase their control over situations in order to fulfill their multiple tasks as mother, student, housewife, and so on. “Facilities”- this theme consisted of two sub-themes: “self-efficacy” and “comprehensive support”. Facilities refer to the quality which simplifies and optimizes the performance of different tasks. “Barriers”- “barriers” are the factors and conditions that tend to limit or raise problems for simultaneously playing the roles of mother as well as students; in the context of the present research, these have been highly taken into considerations by the participants and exhibited the highest frequency in the findings. This theme consisted of three sub-themes: “an inappropriate social and financial condition”, “the inflexible education system”, and “physical and mental strain”. The study concluded that management of maternal and family affairs by female mother students in universities is a challenge. The study also laid emphasis on the significance of the roles of mother student should be provided support and education for gaining skills to play these roles.¹¹

A mixed method research was done to assess academic performance and related stress of married women students in higher education in University of South Africa. The study population was drawn from two higher education institutions: a university and a college of education. Focus group conversations and interview protocol were used to gather qualitative data, while a questionnaire and the academic results of participants were used to gather quantitative data. The study findings revealed that some women students in this study were satisfied with their academic performance while others were stressed. They blamed their academic performance on several factors including cultural practices, marital status, financial constraint and so forth. Despite their complaints, however, the majority of the women student participants in this study, both married and single, continue to support cultural practices. Participants verbalization revealed that cultural practices, including the ones that are considered harmful to higher education for women and their academic performance.¹²

An experimental study was done to determine the Effectiveness of Distance Education Program and related stress in the Ghanaian school system among married females. A total of one hundred fifty participants were selected in the study using stratified random sampling. The data was analyzed using graphs and tables as well as chi-square test. The study results showed that, DE has improved quality and accessibility to higher education culminating in significant improvement in productivity levels in both public and private sectors of the economy over the last several years. Access to tertiary education, convenience, flexibility and improved knowledge and employee efficiency are the ultimate benefits derived from Distance Education program. But the stress level has been significantly increased among Distance Education students.¹³

Conclusion:

Based on the above reviews, it was found that married women students were having stress and were using maladaptive coping mechanisms in dealing with the stress. They were finding it difficult to make a balance between responsibilities as being married and the responsibilities of a student. Stress reduction techniques helped a lot in reduction of stress. With the reduced stress, married women students were able to use adaptive coping mechanisms also in their day to day life.

Conflict of Interest: Nil

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