

## **INFLUENCE OF MARITAL LIFE AND PARENTHOOD ON WOMEN'S ENROLMENT INTO POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME IN EDUCATION IN NORTH CENTRAL ZONE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of marital life and parenthood on women's enrollment in postgraduate programs in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. A correlational research design was used. The population consisted of 1,770 individuals, comprising 380 female teachers, 1,345 female postgraduate students, 25 staff members of postgraduate schools, and 20 staff members of university education departments in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. The sample size was 306. A researcher-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. Three experts in Educational Administration and Planning established the instrument's validity. The instrument's reliability was determined using the test-retest method, and the results were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), yielding a value of 0.89. Frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that marital life and parenthood influence women's enrollment in postgraduate education programs. The study concluded that there is a significant relationship between marital life and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. The study recommended that women be supported and encouraged by their families to pursue higher education, and that marital life should not be considered a barrier to pursuing higher education.*

**Keywords:** Marital Life, Parenthood, Women Enrolment, Postgraduate Programme

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### **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental human right and a major instrument for national development. No nation has ever developed politically, economically, or socially without education as its foundation. Qualitative education for all citizens is therefore imperative for any nation's comprehensive development (Aliyu, Said & Dauda, 2019). The education of all genders and ages is a priority for governments, parents, and even spouses of married women. The importance of women's education to national development cannot be overstated, as demonstrated by women's significant achievements in the last century and their positive influence as mothers on their children's education and health. Nwobodo (2018) opined that a woman passes on her knowledge and skills to her peers and family members, particularly her daughters, thereby multiplying the effects of her own education. Women's educational development is a tool for career development and individual growth.

Marital life is an important stage in every human life. For women, it often presents challenges to their education. While some women pursue higher education for the benefit of themselves and their families, many married women who are willing to continue their education after marriage face safety and security problems, long commutes to educational institutions, and the challenge of balancing workload with child rearing, family engagements, careers, and studies (Behlo & Irfan, 2016). Pursuing higher education provides women with opportunities to work outside the home and acquire diverse skills and useful ideas from both books and colleagues, which can strengthen their relationships with their husbands, in-laws, and children. This, in turn, affects their ability to enhance family welfare, health, and nutrition, as well as their participation in reproductive decision-making within the home (Mason & King, 2017). Marriage, as a union, is the first step in establishing a family, the essential unit of society. Women and men do not marry at the same age. Married women pursuing their interests in all aspects of learning face the challenge of extending their education to the highest level while being under their spouse's authority and bearing children. Some women are only able to complete their education up to secondary school, diploma, National Certificate in Education (NCE), or a first degree if the university is located near their marital home (Hughes, 2014).

Parenthood encompasses marriage, pregnancy, delivery, breastfeeding, postpartum recovery, and child mortality. Teenage parents often find it difficult to progress in their education because they are expected to have children soon after marriage. Parenthood affects women's enrollment in higher education. Society often equates delayed childbearing with childlessness for women pursuing postgraduate studies. Some women are reluctant due to the problems encountered by married female students they know or have heard of who are pursuing postgraduate studies. Blossfeld, as cited in Okuneye and Adelowokon (2014), emphasizes that much of the literature on delayed childbearing and childlessness highlights women's increased involvement in higher education and increased career opportunities as the most important causal factors.

In the North Central Zone of Nigeria, the researchers observed that women can achieve and excel in their education up to the Ph.D. level in enabling environments. This is because women have the capacity to change and transform ideas and resources for national development. Unfortunately, the conflict between career advancement and family roles hinders the career development of most Nigerian women (Eze, 2017). This affects the roles women need to fulfill, hindering them from competing for or attaining certain qualifications, especially compared to their male counterparts, as is the case in the North Central Zone. Findings from Varrella (2021) revealed that in the 2018/2019 academic year, enrollment in postgraduate programs in Nigerian universities was 242,333 students, of whom only 38% were female. This is also evident in data collected from institutions offering postgraduate programs in the study area, which indicated that female enrollment was only 34%. This figure is far below average expectations and is a challenge that needs to be addressed through studies like this. Among educated women, the majority of those in the teaching profession hold NCE and first degrees. Very few have postgraduate diplomas, master's degrees, or Ph.D.s in education, which would qualify them to participate in decision-making, contribute to research that will accelerate state development, and hold positions at different levels of the educational system in the country.

The researchers observed that one reason likely hindering women from furthering their education is marital responsibilities, as most women prioritize marriage regardless of their education level. The researchers observed that parenthood soon after marriage, the expectation of a baby, breastfeeding, nursing, and other household chores, coupled with official responsibilities, discourage women from enrolling in postgraduate programs. The thought of spending more years pursuing such degrees, especially at a young age (20 to 40) when they are expected by their community to be married, give birth, and nurse their babies, while also occupied by work and studies, makes most women feel that additional degrees will be stressful and unnecessary. It was against this backdrop that this study examined the influence of marital life and parenthood on women's enrollment in postgraduate programs in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives were set to guide the study:

- i. examine the relationship between marital life and women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria; and
- ii. find-out the relationship between parenthood and women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. How does marital life influence women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria?
- ii. How does parenthood influence women enrolment up to postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between marital life and women enrolment in postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between parenthood and women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a correlational research design. According to Fleetwood (2023), a correlational research design is a non-experimental method where researchers measure two variables to understand and assess the statistical relationship between them, without influence from extraneous variables. This design was deemed appropriate for this study. The population consisted of 1,770 individuals, comprising 380 female teachers, 1,345 female postgraduate students, 25 staff members of postgraduate schools, and 20 staff members of education departments at federal universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. The instrument, consisting of 20 items, used a five-point Likert scale: Very High Influence (VHI) = 5.0 (70-100%), High

Influence (HI) = 4.0 (60-69%), Moderate Influence (MI) = 3.0 (50-59%), Low Influence (LI) = 2.0 (40-49%), and Very Low Influence (VLI) = 1.0 (0-39%). A score of 3.0 and above indicated agreement, while a score below 3.0 indicated disagreement. Experts in Educational Administration and Planning validated the instrument. Frequency, percentages, and mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

Research Question I: How does marital life influence women enrolment into postgraduate programme in universities in north central zone, Nigeria?

**Table 1: Opinions of Respondents on Relationship between Marital Life on Women Enrolment into Postgraduate Programme in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.**

S/N	Statements	Freq	Rating	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Cook all the meal daily	200	65%	4.0	HI
2	Sweep all rooms and compound daily	197	64%	4.0	HI
3	Go to market/shop daily	106	35%	1.0	VLI
4	Wash toilets daily	250	82%	5.0	VHI
5	Fetch water daily	100	33%	1.0	VLI
6	Wash dishes daily	197	64%	4.0	HI
7	Scrub furniture daily	198	65%	4.0	HI
8	Iron all the cloths daily	136	44%	2.0	LI
9	Require husbands permission to enroll	300	98%	5.0	VHI
10	Marriage life influence enrolment	200	65%	4.0	HI
	Average	188	61%	4.0	HI

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1 shows that respondents indicated a high influence of several daily household tasks on women's enrollment in postgraduate programs. These tasks include cooking all meals daily (65%), sweeping all rooms and the compound daily (64%), washing dishes daily (64%), scrubbing furniture daily (65%), and general marital life influence (65%). Requiring a husband's permission to enroll (98%) and washing toilets daily (82%) were reported as having a *very* high influence on their enrollment. The table further reveals that ironing all clothes daily (44%) has a low influence, while going to the market/shop daily (35%) and fetching water daily (33%) have a very low influence on their enrollment.

Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that characteristics of marital life have a high influence (61%) on women's enrollment in postgraduate education programs in universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. Specifically, 188 respondents indicated that marital life has a high influence.

Research Question 2: How does parenthood influence on women enrolment into postgraduate programme in universities in north central zone, Nigeria?

**Table 2: Opinions of Respondents on Relationship between Parenting on Women Enrolment into Postgraduate Programme in Universities in North Central Zone, Nigeria.**

S/n	Statements	Freq. Rating		$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Lactation disrupts studies and examination	250	82%	5.0	VHI
2	Nursing a sick child require attention	300	98%	5.0	VHI
3	Childbirth may require operation and hospitalization	136	44%	2.0	LI
4	Parenthood influence enrolment	250	82%	5.0	VHI
5	Proper feeding of children is a responsibility of woman	300	98%	5.0	VHI
6	Grooming children is a man task	306	100%	5.0	VHI
7	Supervising child activities at home	197	64%	4.0	HI
8	Attending to children’s complaint/ needs	198	65%	4.0	HI
9	Ensuring children discipline	300	98%	5.0	VHI
10	Pregnancy comes with sickrooms	200	65%	4.0	HI
	Average	244	80%	5.0	VHI

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 2 shows that several aspects of parenthood have a very high influence on women's enrollment in postgraduate programs in universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. These include lactation (82%), nursing a sick child (98%), general parenthood influence (82%), proper feeding of children (98%), grooming children (considered a man's task) (100%), and ensuring children's discipline (98%). Supervising children (64%), attending to children's complaints (65%), and pregnancy-related sickness (65%) have a high influence. Childbirth requiring an operation and hospitalization has a low influence (44%).

Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that characteristics of parenthood have a very high influence (80%) on women's enrollment in postgraduate education programs in universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. Specifically, 244 respondents indicated that parenthood has a very high influence.

**Hypotheses Testing**

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between marital life and women enrolment in postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

**Table 3: Summary of PPMCC Analysis on the Relationship between Marital Life and Women Enrolment into Postgraduate Programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria**

	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	r- Cal	p- Value	Decision
Marital Life on Women Enrolment	306	2.43	.778	611	.877	.000	Rejected
Women Job Effectiveness	306	1.70	.544				

Source: Fieldwork, 2023 level of sig. = **0.05**

Table 3 presents the relationship between marital life and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs, as well as the correlation with women's job effectiveness. Marital life's influence on enrollment had a mean of 2.43 and a standard deviation of 0.778. Women's job effectiveness had a mean of 1.70 and a standard deviation of 0.564. The correlation between these two variables was significant ( $r(611) = 0.877, p < 0.000$ ). Because the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis (HO1), which stated that there is no significant relationship between marital life's influence on women's postgraduate enrollment and their job effectiveness in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, was rejected.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between parenthood and women enrolment into postgraduate programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Summary of PPMCC Analysis on the Relationship between Parental Influence and Women Enrolment into Postgraduate Programme in North Central Zone, Nigeria**

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	r- Cal	p- Value	Decision
Parenthood on Women Enrolment	306	2.10	1.32	611	.793	.000	Rejected
Women Job Effectiveness	306	2.96	.978				

Source: Fieldwork, 2023 level of sig. = **0.05**

Table 4 shows the relationship between parenthood and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs. Parenthood had a mean of 2.10 and a standard deviation of 1.32, while women's enrollment in postgraduate programs had a mean of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 0.978. The correlation between these variables was significant ( $r(611) = 0.793, p < 0.000$ ). Because the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis (HO2), which stated that there is no significant relationship between parenthood's influence on women's postgraduate enrollment and their job effectiveness in the North Central Zone of Nigeria, was rejected. This indicates a positive relationship between parenthood's influence on women's postgraduate enrollment and their job effectiveness in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

### Discussions of the Findings

The findings from Table 1 show that 188 respondents (61.44%) agreed that marital life characteristics influence women's enrollment and effectiveness in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. This aligns with the significant relationship found in Hypothesis One between marital life and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs, as well as the significant positive relationship with women's job effectiveness. Family support can motivate and encourage married women pursuing education, and higher education benefits both women and their families. This agrees with Smadi's (2020) findings, which aimed to identify the difficulties faced by married female students at the World Islamic Science and Education University during the 2018/2019 academic year, considering variables like age, number of children, family income, and husband's educational level. Smadi found that married females enroll in university studies based on mature decisions and adapt well, experiencing a medium level of difficulty. The most significant difficulties stemmed from the overlap and increase in household

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burdens and university assignments. Most married female students experiencing difficulties were in the 31-40 age group, with no correlation found between difficulties and family income, number of children, or husband's educational level.

The findings for research question two in Table 2 show that 244 respondents (79.74%) agreed that parenthood influences women's enrollment and job effectiveness in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. This aligns with the significant relationship found in Hypothesis Two between parenthood and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs, which showed a significant positive relationship with their job effectiveness. This is consistent with Musili's (2018) empirical study in Kenya, which evaluated the motherhood experience of female postgraduate students and found a strong relationship between women's educational attainment and their ability to manage the dilemma of combining motherhood and studying without compromising either. Musili's study analyzed the multiple roles of mothers in postgraduate studies, examined the benefits they experience, explored the challenges they face in balancing motherhood and postgraduate studies, and evaluated their coping strategies.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that a significant relationship exists between marital life and women's enrollment in postgraduate programs in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. This implies that sociocultural factors are major predictors of women's enrollment in such programs. One potential effect is that women from marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities or lower socioeconomic backgrounds, especially married women, may face more barriers to finding and keeping teaching jobs. The study also concluded that parenthood at early ages discourages many women from enrolling in postgraduate programs and affects their ability to discharge their duties in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommended that:

1. Women should be supported and encouraged by their families to pursue higher education, and marital life should not be considered a hindrance.
2. Women's educational attainment has been found to be strongly related to parenthood and can influence both the timing and number of children they have.

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