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## An Assessment of the Challenges of Student Nursing Mothers in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study of St. Ambrose College of Education in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The study explored the challenges of student mothers in the Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions and its related impact on the education of these students. The study focused on St. Ambrose College of Education, situated in Dormaa Akwamu, in the Bono Region of Ghana. It considered the various techniques employed by the student mothers in coping with the challenges. The researchers adopted the case study design to address the research questions, which, to a larger extent, explored a qualitative research design. This approach allowed the researchers to collect and analyze data and present results with much convenience. The instrument used for data collection was primarily an interview schedule. Data were analyzed based on the themes of the research questions. The study found that the majority of the respondents faced challenges such as lack of concentration in class, and inadequate time for personal studies, which led to poor academic performance. To cope with these challenges, the respondents relied on their family members, and the services of nannies. They also relied on their colleagues to help them academically. The study recommended among other things that there is the need to provide lactating rooms and counseling services for student nursing mothers in the tertiary institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

It is an irrefutable fact that women play a vital and phenomenal role in human society. It is quite clear that their roles span from home to the workplace and even to the community in which they live. According to Kapur (2019), the massive role played by women in society has essentially improved peoples' social, political, economic, and religious lives, not excluding the improvement in education (Kapur, 2019). In days gone by, men were seen to be predominantly holding the fort in societal issues, sponsoring the family financially, ensuring that the children in the family were well educated to take over the family's properties, and taking care of other family members. These happenings indicate that the role of women, in those days, was relegated to the background (Bayeh, 2016). Nonetheless, in contemporary times, the trend is changing. Kapur (2019) indicates that, currently, women are not only being role models in the family, but they are also generating income by trading and working in financial and educational institutions to support themselves and their families (Kapur, 2019). Women are helping to build marginalized societies and people through consistent coaching and counseling. Education is thought to bring capabilities and experiences that can result in financial freedom, improved living conditions, and social progress. According to Jekayinfa (2009), any society's educational system is a complex social mechanism designed to instill in individuals particular talents and attitudes that are deemed valuable and desirable in society (Jekayinfa, 2009). Because of the importance of education, some people believe that if you

stop learning, you stop existing, even though you are still alive. The importance of education to the individual and the nation as a whole cannot be understated as already exemplified above for it has the potential to change lives for the better.

The above notwithstanding, the man is usually seen as the head of the family and provider and hence requires education to obtain better jobs and a greater income. The heart and caretaker of the home, the woman, must be schooled in the kitchen. Women have major responsibilities for the sustenance and welfare of the household even when they live with a husband. It is quite clear that women are overworked in their homes which inhibits their involvement in other aspects of life, such as education.

Women must now serve as co-providers of the family due to current trends in the global economy, and as a result, they must be educated to obtain jobs and earn a good living. Due to this trend, modern women need to be educated to gain the skills, knowledge, expertise, and attitudes necessary to thrive in the ever-expanding global market. This implies that a woman's traditional function as a family housekeeper in Ghana is hard to apply in contemporary times.

In Ghana, women are completely responsible for domestic and childcare duties. Women who choose to participate in extracurricular activities outside the house have a quadruple workload. Domestic work, children, and jobs outside the home make up the workload. The gender roles of domestic labour and childcare are obstacles to women's engagement in public life, as evidenced by this argument.

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Everyone benefits from education, but girls and women in particular benefit more from it. This is true not only because education provides a gateway to other opportunities, but also because a woman's educational accomplishments can have a long-term impact on their family and generations. Short and Greer (2002) state that, educated women are essential contributors to nationwide development and engage efficaciously in society's economic and political life (Short & Greer, 2002). Nonetheless, societal conventions, traditions, and socio-economic constraints make it extremely hard for females to reach optimal levels on the academic ladder. During the last decade, Ghana has witnessed a significant rise in the number of post-secondary institutions. This has made a significant contribution to the country's increased educational access. Adofo (2013) who looked at the challenges of student nursing mothers in tertiary schools in the Greater Accra Region highlights the incapacities of Ghanaian post-secondary institutions concerning the provision of special policies to help mitigate the challenges of student nursing mothers (Adofo, 2013). Though Adofo mentions the fact that special tutorial sessions are organized for these student nursing mothers, there is no mention of on-campus daycare centers and breastfeeding rooms which were recommendations from his respondents. It has become crucial for women to combine their pursuit of higher education with childbirth due to their reproductive duties. As a result, student nursing mothers have become a phenomenon in numerous higher educational institutions. Such occurrence has created various obstacles for student nursing mothers, such as the unavailability of lactation rooms and appropriate places for the babysitters who accompany them, as well as the fact that the home setting may present other obstacles that hinder the nursing mother from leaving the kid at home. It is impossible to overstate the impact of poor support networks in institutions and at home on academic performance, child care, and other household responsibilities. As a result, the purpose of this study is to explore the problems and coping methods faced by student nursing mothers who juggle family and academic responsibilities.

### Statement of the Problem

More women are venturing into academia and, more importantly, women in the maternal period of their lives. As a result of the increase in enrolment at the tertiary level concerning women in education, there have been numerous challenges for student mothers which comprise the fact that universities, colleges, and other tertiary institutions lack facilities such as lactation rooms and appropriate places for the babies. Egenti & Omoruyi (2011) establishes, the inconvenience, stress, and trauma these student nursing mothers experience make them feel emotionally, psychologically, and physically unfit for any programme of study they pursue at the tertiary level (Egenti & Omoruyi, 2011). It is impossible to overstate the impact of poor support networks in institutions

and at home on academic work, child care, and financial support. This research aims to explore the problems of student mothers who mix family duties and academic pursuits at the teacher training college level in terms of child care, academic pursuits, financial concerns, and coping strategies or mechanisms.

There have been many empirical studies conducted in this area. However, their focus has been on the general challenges that students face in the various regular universities. Few of these studies focused on student mothers in regular universities (Bruening *et al.*, 2017). However, fewer studies have looked into the challenges of students in teacher training colleges, especially those in Ghana. In Ghana, Adofo (2013) looked at the challenges of nursing mothers but her focus was on tertiary institutions in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana (Adofo, 2013). More so, Amos, Amoako, Antwi, and Amoah (2021) looked at motherhood and higher education at the University of Education-Winneba using the descriptive phenomenological design (Amos *et al.*, 2017). Finally, Dankyi, Dankyi, and Minadzi (2019) conducted a study on the "Struggles and Coping Strategies of Student Mothers at the University of Cape Coast" with a concentration on Distance Education students (Dankyi *et al.*, 2019). This study will be conducted at St. Ambrose College of Education in the Bono Region of Ghana. Contextually, the subjects of this research are teacher trainees who are expected to be on campus all the time. This study therefore is among few if any studies that target the maternal-mothers in teacher training colleges, specifically St. Ambrose College of Education.

### Purpose of the Study

The main thrust of the study is to explore maternal challenges and their related impacts on academic life amongst teacher trainees in the various tertiary institutions, especially the St. Ambrose College of Education in the Bono Region of Ghana. It identifies the challenges that nursing mothers go through in their tertiary education and how these challenges impact their academic life in the school. This study further explores the strategies the nursing mothers use in handling these challenges.

### METHODOLOGY

The study sought to explore the challenges faced by student mothers in St. Ambrose College of Education and their related impact on the education of these students. It also considered the various techniques employed by the student mothers in coping with the challenges.

The researchers adopted the case study design to address the research questions, which to a larger extent explored a qualitative research design. This approach allowed the researchers to collect and analyze data, and presented results with much convenience. The sample size numbered up to fifteen (15) participants to answer questions through interviews. This was achieved through the implementation of convenience and purposive sampling techniques.

The instrument used for data collection was principally

or primarily an interview. Data were analyzed based on themes in relation to the research questions. A descriptive form of analysis was therefore implemented to give a better understanding of the challenges student mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education face and various techniques and strategies employed by these student mothers in dealing with these challenges.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The fundamental theory and relevant material reviewed to guide the investigation are discussed in this chapter. The Role Conflict Theory is the theoretical foundation that underpins the research. Gender or traditional roles and education, motivation for women's education, obstacles of student nursing mothers, various effects on them, and support systems accessible for student nursing mothers will all be examined in the literature.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Role Conflict Theory

Parsons (1977) Role Conflict Theory serves as the study's theoretical basis. Parsons (1977) states that a well-functioning society requires social structures with duties and ranks (Parsons, 1977). Every status comes with a set of responsibilities that the person in that position is expected to fulfill without fail. One individual, according to Parsons, may and does play multiple roles at the same time. In some ways, a person can be thought of as a "composition" of the various roles he or she plays. Most people nowadays would respond by referring to their societal responsibilities when asked to identify themselves. A student nursing mother, for example, may identify as a nursing mother, a student, a wife, and, in some situations, a career woman as well. In the same vein, a father may identify himself as a soldier, a family head, and an opinion leader.

According to Burr (1972), individuals perform diverse roles at any given stage within the life course (Burr, 1972). All through life, individuals transfer into and out of different roles, keeping some, leaving others behind, and assuming new roles. For example, the student nursing mother assumes the role of a student when she enrolls in any academic institution and as soon as she finishes the course, she stops performing the role of a student. Also, the transition into one role can affect the transition into another. For instance, women in Germany and other European countries are delaying their conversion to the roles of wife and mother as they extend their time in performing the role of a student. It is established that remaining a student delays the change to adulthood and likewise to normatively associate adult roles.

Role conflict, according to Wolf (2011), is a confrontation between two or more of a person's roles, or conflicting elements within the same role (Wolf, 2011). Different requirements, expectations, beliefs, and/or attitudes are examples of incompatibilities. Role conflict can also arise from conflicting requirements within the same role. Intra-role conflict, which refers to mismatched requirements

inside the same job, and inter-role conflict, which refers to conflicting expectations from different roles within the same individual, are the two categories of role conflict outlined by (Wolf, 2011). There are two ways that intra-role conflict might occur. For starters, various people may have differing ideas on what constitutes a specific role's needs and expectations. Dorcas' definition of being a good mother can include working outside the home. She may also consider that providing social and emotional support to her family is an important part of her mothering duty. Dorcas' mother-in-law, on the other hand, might believe that to be a good mother, Dorcas would have to quit her job and care for her children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Dorcas is likely to face intra-role conflict as a result of these divergent perceptions of a mother's role.

On the flip side, inter-role conflict arises when the requirements and prospects of one role interfere or conflict with those of another role. Dorcas' role as a mother is probable to conflict sometimes with her role as a student and a worker. On the event of one of her children becoming ill, Dorcas may discover that the demands of her job such as staying at work are in conflict with the demands of motherhood such as taking her child to the doctor, as said by (Wolf, 2011).

As stated by Leslie and Thompson (2003), individuals may experience cognitive dissonance as a result of the prescribed sets of behaviour that characterize roles (Leslie & Thompson, 2003). Role conflict is a type of social conflict that occurs when a person is obliged to play two incompatible roles simultaneously. For example, a person's position as a mother and her position as a student may conflict when her child's requests for time and attention divert her attention away from her studies. Similarly, role confusion happens when a person has difficulty deciding which role he or she should perform, even though the roles are not necessarily incompatible. If a college student meets his teacher as a fellow guest at a social occasion, he must decide whether to treat him as a student or a peer.

#### Consequences of Role Conflict

Role conflict has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes in studies. The challenges linked with various positions have received a lot of attention. Among the popular role theory concepts are role overload and role strain. Role overload refers to the inability to fulfill the demands of all positions due to a shortage of resources, for example, time and energy. Role strain is caused by role overload and conflict, which makes it harder to meet role expectations (Goode, 1960).

As noted by Egenti and Omoruyi (2011), the kind of stress and trauma experienced by student mothers causes them to be physically, psychologically, and emotionally averse to the program (Egenti & Omoruyi, 2011). As a result, several students have dropped out of the program. In addition, some students must balance their studies with pregnancy, while others must milk their newborn newborns. This adds to their stress and has caused some

to fail their tests, while others have had to drop out entirely. As a result of home pressures and obligations, some students arrive late for lectures or even miss lectures for an extended length of time. All of this has an impact on their learning and accomplishment (Egenti & Omoruyi, 2011). Smith (2019) as found in Adofo (2013), on the other hand, discovered that financial concerns had a negative impact on both pregnant and nursing students' academics in a study (Adofo, 2013). Students briefly escaped from various educational activities or programmes such as lectures to raise finances and/or other required materials when financial resources were insufficient to support them. Furthermore, Najjuma & Kyarugahe (2006) found in their study that student mothers face numerous challenges as a result of their triple duties of productive, reproductive, and community service, all of which are likely to cause stress, worry, and, in some cases, sickness (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). As a result, they recommended that student mothers be provided with significant support services such as counseling to better handle the problems brought on by the hurdles they confront.

### Techniques Used by Maternal Mothers in Coping with Role Conflicts

Hall identified three forms of coping behaviours for dealing with inter-role conflict, as referenced by Adofo (2013).

1) Type I coping (structural role redefinition) entails making an intentional effort to deal directly with role senders to reduce conflict by agreeing on a new set of prospects. Relocating and sharing one's role tasks is one method to change structural demands (such as washing, cleaning, and child care).

2) Type II coping (personal role redefinition) entails

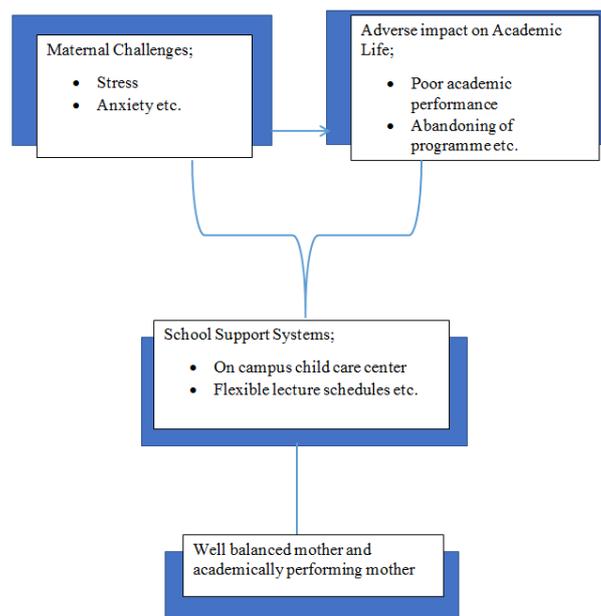
altering an individual's perception of the role demands placed on them by others. It includes altering one's expectations.

3) Type III coping (reactive role behaviour) comprises seeking to boost role performance while not attempt to alter the structural or personal definition of one's roles (Adofo, 2013).

On the other hand, Najjuma & Kyarugahe (2006) discovered that some mothers either carry their children with them or hire domestic help to assist them (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). Other mothers leave their children with neighbors, relatives, or older siblings, or send them to daycare centers. Support from family members, particularly husbands, parents, cousins, grandparents, and other relatives, is an important coping mechanism. All participants employed Physical support from husbands in a study on coping techniques adopted by student mothers to be successful in Occupational Therapy School. 93.3 percent of the participants relied on emotional support from their husbands and peers, as well as time management skills. According to the findings, 100 percent of those who gave birth to their first child in school said they relied on emotional and physical assistance from their parents and husbands, as well as time management skills.

### Conceptual Framework

The researchers created this framework based on their readings. The researchers envisage that, maternal challenges have the tendency of impacting the academics of student-mothers. Thus, when there are maximum support systems in place, it will lead to a well-balanced maternal mother whose academics is not adversely affected as shown in the figure below.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework on Maternal Challenges and their impact on education, and how the challenges can be contained.

## Empirical Evidence

### Challenges of Student Maternal Mothers

Even though these women are still in school, they are responsible for their children's homework, childcare, and establishing cultural values. The child may feel lonely and ignored in terms of parental control, training, and supervision when the mother is absent, as it may be in the case of a student nursing mother. This may have an impact on the mother's emotions while she is at school. According to Jarvis (1995), adults who are over-excited or worried are unable to learn as well as those who are stimulated to respond to their learning setting in a regular way (Jarvis, 1995). Anxiety, it was discovered, may obstruct even the possession of new motor skills, and it has a tendency to obstruct and prevent innovative cognition. The timetable for lectures, tutorials, discussions, presentations, and other academic programmes on campus are major obstacles that student-mothers face. According to Dalian (1987), college courses are time-structured and strict, requiring a woman to be present in classes compulsorily every time rather than when they fit into her schedule (Dalian, 1987). She must study for examinations, prepare for her assignments, and redirect her attention to the things she must complete. Unlike a 9 am to 5 pm employment, university courses do not permit one to punch out at a specific time and leave work behind but rather consume one's thoughts and emotions all through the day. When mothers spend significant periods away from their children, the children do not receive what they require most, such as their mother's time and attention. Undoubtedly, no one can perform the function of a mother like herself. Thus, a substitute personality can lessen a child's yearning for his or her mother, but it cannot replace her. If the aforementioned issues remain, student nursing mothers will have the challenge of efficiently balancing their obligations as mothers and/or wives with their academic work. Breastfeeding is also one of the obstacles that most nursing women, particularly those with newborns, face. Breastfeeding has several advantages for both the mother and the baby. Breastfeeding, like childbirth, gives women confidence in themselves and their abilities. Breastfeeding protects babies from a variety of ailments, including otitis media, respiratory infections, and diarrhea. In 2003, the World Health Organization recommended that babies should be given only breast milk until they are six months old, where possible. Banda (2000) conducted research at Domasi College of Education in Malawi on 'Challenges in Distance Education: Experiences of Female Teacher-Learners' and discovered that nursing mothers with babies carry along with them babysitters, the majority of whom are not mature enough to take excellent care of the newborns (Banda, 2000). As a result, some student-mothers miss sessions since they are frequently required to attend to crying babies right in the teaching area. Some newborns become ill, putting pressure on their mothers who must transport them to hospitals. During the residential session in 2002, one teacher-learner lost

her kid, and her husband blamed her involvement in the program for the kid's death. Furthermore, teacher students who bring babies to class claimed that they do not have adequate exam preparation. They are unable to focus on their studies or the actual drafting of exam papers. It is not uncommon for a student mother to be sitting for a test or exam and she hears her baby crying just outside the examination hall. Such student easily loses focus. Other issues connected with teacher-learners who carry their babies along with them to college, according to Banda's research, are a lack of room in the hostels and improper food for the newborns. In St. Ambrose College of Education, the whole journey starts from when they become pregnant; when pregnant, they sleep on campus with their colleagues. After they give birth, they rent a place outside of campus to stay. Nonetheless, there is a need to investigate strategies that could help these teacher-learners handle their challenges; establishing an infant care center, for example. As a result, there is a clear need for tertiary institutions to develop a policy framework that can assist in addressing the challenges faced by these numerous students who also have a right to formal education. As indicated by Egenti & Omoruyi (2011), the trauma or stress that student mothers experience renders them psychologically averse to the program (Egenti & Omoruyi, 2011). As a result, some of their coworkers have dropped out of the program. They are concerned for their children as mothers. In addition, some students must balance their studies with pregnancy, while others must milk their newborns. Some students have had to go to bed during their lessons or even during exams. This adds to their stress and has caused some to fail their tests, while others have had to drop out entirely. Because of domestic pressures or responsibilities, some students arrive late for lectures or even miss lectures for an extended period of time. All of this has an impact on their learning and accomplishment (Egenti & Omoruyi, 2011).

### Diverse Effects of the Challenges on Maternal Mothers

The difficulties that student nursing mothers face may have a variety of effects on them. This could be due to the role conflicts they face, which limit the amount of time they have to study, the cost of childcare for their children, and health issues. According to a study done by Andres & Finlay (2005), some participants traded babysitting time with friends to lower the cost of babysitting (Andres & Finlay, 2005). Although they saved money, they made up for it by studying all night before an exam. Their effectiveness was hampered by a lack of sleep. Sleep deprivation was frequent, and as a result, decision-making processes were slowed. Most re-entering women slept less than five hours each night as they juggled academic and household commitments, which have been shown to impair brain processes like focus, memory, the ability to reason, and decisiveness (Andres & Finlay, 2005).

Some mothers take their babies with them, hire domestic

workers, leave their children with neighbors, relatives, elder siblings, or send them to day care centers. This situation may prevent those women from concentrating on their books, while also putting their children in danger (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). In order to care for their babies, some mothers are obliged to change their programs or courses. As a result, mothers face considerable obstacles in pursuing a university degree, the majority of which are somewhat unknown, and some of which are probable to ensure poor performance and, in some cases, inability to complete their studies. However, even though continuing to study is difficult for student mothers, they are doing so in larger numbers (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). According to Meindl, re-turning to school as an adult, whether after a few years or several decades, is a tremendous chance for personal growth and development (Meindl, 2009). However, it can also provide unique personal and interpersonal obstacles, leading to stress and interfering with academic or skill acquisition goals. Milner-Home, Power, and Dennis (1996) as cited in Adofo (2013) support this by stating that the conventional image of a mother is one of self-sacrifice (Adofo, 2013). If treated as such, the nursing mother is likely to become exhausted as she juggles her education and her parental responsibilities. Furthermore, as quoted in Mamhute (2011), the duties of being a parent and being a student are not only incompatible but also stressful, causing significant problems for the nursing mother (Mamhute, 2011). Returning to school is both thrilling and emotionally and mentally stimulating. External manifestations of inward turmoil and self-examination may include increased physical and mental tiredness, which can lead to minor depression and social withdrawal, but through research, it is assured that even if it feels “destabilizing,” returning to school and changing careers is sensible responses to discontent and unmet needs by stable people. According to Welch (1990) as found in Adofo (2013), being a mother entails being frequently interrupted and receptive to the demands of others, which makes it difficult to build the attention required to write and study as cited in Dalian (1987). According to Meindl (2009), the psychological stress of new experiences and challenges includes:

- 1) Feelings of inadequacy in comparison to younger classmates’ abilities in an unpleasant mix with emotions of superiority based on one’s achievements in life
- 2) There may be tension in group efforts as a result of this.
- 3) Isolation from student peers on a social level (Meindl, 2009).

Furthermore, the drudgery of juggling many activities may drive most student mothers to skip lectures and tutorials. As cited in Adofo (2013), Harrison’s (2008) research on attendance to tutorials and student performance highlighted that students who attended all or most tutorials obtained a mean final grade in the course that was slightly over a full letter grade relatively higher than students who were present at none or only a

few tutorials. In a paper on why students refuse to attend lectures and tutorials (Adofo, 2013). Kottasz (2005) claims that missing lectures is an individual’s decision based on both ability and willingness to attend. Many things will impact an individual’s decision to attend a presentation. At one angle, there will be circumstances that make attendance almost impossible, while at another angle, there is no justification for refusal to attend (Kottasz, 2005). Kottasz (2005) opined that students were more concerned and strained about attending tutorials than lectures, primarily because participation was a central part of the learning process (Kottasz, 2005). Women’s education may have a significant impact on their relationships and marriages. According to Suitor (1987), the loss in happiness in marriage among full-time students and their respective husbands appears to be linked to changes in women’s home role performance over time, as well as husbands’ reactions to those changes (Suitor, 1987). Suitor conducted a study in which forty-four married mothers and thirty-three of their husbands were questioned in depth at the start and conclusion of the women’s first year of enrolment at a university to study. The study found that when women return to school, there are changes in marital happiness. Couples whose spouses were full-time students reported lower happiness in marriage over the year, while couples whose wives were part-time students reported minimal change. Husbands’ marital contentment changed significantly more than that of wives. The student’s mother’s financial circumstances may also play a role in her capacity to complete the course successfully. Mamhute (2011) discovered that financial difficulties had a negative impact on both pregnant and nursing students’ education (Mamhute, 2011). Students briefly absented themselves from various educational activities or programmes such as lectures to raise finances and/or other required materials when financial resources were insufficient to support them. Even when the student mothers did not abandon their studies and carried on as if everything was fine, such concern had an academic benefit.

#### **Support Systems Available for Student Maternal Mothers**

Fricke (2010), writing about the importance of providing adequate support or assistance for student nursing mothers who wish to breastfeed their children, stated that women and men should equally be treated (Fricke, 2010). Men and women, on the other hand, should be treated differently when treating them equally leads to inequality. Pregnancy is a good example; women get pregnant while men do not. Women’s reproductive capacity must be considered for them to have equal possibilities. If the law and society together do not take these concerns into account, women will be forced to confine themselves to the private realm if they wish to exercise their reproductive right to have children. Several women give birth and subsequently return to work or study in the public domain. Breastfeeding has several advantages,

including health benefits for mother and baby, cost savings, and the promotion of an emotional attachment between mother and her baby. If the public domain does not support a woman's desire to breastfeed by enabling her to offer her milk during her work or school day, she will be compelled to leave the workforce or school, or, more probable, she will discontinue breastfeeding, denying her newborn of the many benefits it provides. According to Pinnilla & Munoz (2005), data reveals that student-mothers' academic performance is poorer compared to that of other university students. In practice, student mothers enroll as part-time students, despite the fact that most Venezuelan state colleges do not recognize this category (Pinnilla & Munoz, 2005). Almost all of a student's mother's life situations have a detrimental impact on her academic achievement. The single factor that improves a student mother's performance is the assistance she receives from her extended family in caring for her children. Pinnilla & Munoz (2005) state that student mothers' ability to enroll in higher education largely owes to the assistance they obtain from their extended family (Pinnilla & Munoz, 2005). When asked how student mothers who bring newborns to college should be helped, several suggested the following:

- 1) Provide spacious accommodations
- 2) Whenever their babies or nannies become ill, provide them with regular transportation to the hospital.
- 3) Provide a separate room, or sick bay, for sick student-mothers.
- 4) Encourage student-mothers to utilize contraception (Banda, 2000).

The availability of breastfeeding rooms in several institutions, as given by some universities in the United States, will go a long way toward easing the obstacles student nursing mothers face. Lactation rooms, for example, are available at Columbia University to assist nursing women returning to work, school, or campus. For women who need to express breast milk while on campus, each facility provides a clean, secure, and private environment.

Equally significant is the fact that for female students in Mensa, Ahiatrogah & Deku (2008), advice and counseling are just as necessary as extra tuition (Mensa *et al.*, 2008). The role that counseling plays in the life of these student-mothers cannot be understated as it helps them to cope with the challenges already intimated. According to Najjuma & Kyarugahe (2006), student mothers face a triple duty of productive, reproductive, and communal duty, which is likely to cause stress, worry, and, in some cases, sickness (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). As a result, it is suggested that university officials make an effort to provide counseling services expressly for student mothers to help them better manage the difficulties brought on by the problems they confront. Universities providing space for mothers to share their experiences can also assist them in identifying ways that can boost their studying. Another difficulty that prevents mothers from concentrating on their education is the absence of facilities, as they must think about their babies who have been left someplace.

University officials should explore providing housing for nursing mothers at the university or establishing daycare centers on campus to accommodate parents with young children (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). On-campus child care is the most effective strategy to address these inherent disadvantages for student nursing mothers. According to research, when student parents have access to on-campus child care, their graduation rates are much higher, and students are more likely to stay in school and graduate in fewer years with higher grades (Gasser & Gasser, 2010). Aside from these very basic acts of support for student parents, another significant project is to assist student nursing mothers in developing a campus support structure or network. This could be in the shape of a student group, a support group, or even a playgroup (Gasser & Gasser, 2010). Schools and other childcare facilities have lately sprung up to address some of the issues that working mothers face. Various crèches take infants as young as six months old and have vans that transport them daily from their homes to the school. On the other hand, according to Kwagala (1992), as described by Najjuma and Kyarugahe (2006), some mothers either take their children with them, hire domestic workers, leave their children with neighbors, relatives, and elder siblings, or send them to daycare centers (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2006). Another idea worth exploring is to build hostels that can accommodate nursing mothers, allowing those who are willing and would be able to stay on campus to do so. This finding backs up Onsongo's (2004) research on 'Promoting Gender Equity in Selected Kenyan Public Universities' which found that when students were asked what might be done to better the status of student mothers on campus, they mentioned the following:

- 1) On-campus housing for student mothers should be provided by the university. They claim that this will ensure that everyone has access to clean water and energy.
- 2) On campus, a daycare center for student mothers should be established. At a cost, mothers can have access to these services.
- 3) Reduce the fees charged to student mothers, particularly the health fees for their sick children (Onsongo, 2004).

In Africa, one coping mechanism that cannot be overlooked is family support, particularly from husbands, cousins, aunts, grandparents, and other relatives. Physical support from husbands was employed by all of the participants in a study on coping techniques used by student mothers to be successful in Occupational Therapy School. 93.3 percent of the participants employed emotional support from their husbands and peers, as well as time management measures, according to Grohman and Lamm (2009) as cited in Adofo (2013). According to the findings, 100 percent of those who had their first child in school said they relied on emotional and physical assistance from their husband and parents, as well as time management skills (Adofo, 2013). Finally, despite the hurdles, Dalian (1987) suggests that student mothers may try to rethink their responsibilities as mothers, as

well as their expectations of themselves as students, and re-negotiate the assistance or support they obtain from family and friends (Dalian, 1987). They might even change their minds about the academic system and their place within it. Any or all of these tactics may be used by a student's mother at some point.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This study sought to know how maternal mothers in teacher training colleges, taking St. Ambrose College of Education as a case study, can balance their academic work with mother-hood. The analysis of data was based on themes developed from the data collected.

### **Challenges Student Mothers Face**

The thematic areas that were identified during data collection are presented below. These are academic challenges, challenges faced at home, and other general challenges.

#### **Academic Challenges Student Mothers Face**

All the respondents mentioned that they lack concentration in class and are not able to pay full attention during lesson delivery. R1 had this to say; "Imagine being called from home to inform me that my baby is not feeling well. This makes me lose concentration the whole day". In recounting her ordeal, R3 said that she normally had to skip classes so that she could go and breastfeed her child. According to R2, she sometimes leaves in the middle of class to attend to her baby. "I get calls from my caretaker that my baby is crying, so I have to leave and attend to him; it is very difficult", she added.

Apart from a lack of concentration and attention, it was also realized that student mothers did not have enough time for personal studies. Early and late lecture schedules affected the students greatly. This is how R10 narrated her story;

"Madam, to be frank with you, I get home very tired, and have to take care of my baby. I don't even get enough time for myself, because I am not able to study for the next day".

One respondent said that there was a time she slept very late because she needed to put the baby to sleep, only for her to miss a quiz the following morning. A respondent mentioned her inability to attend tutorial classes. This is what she had to say; "Whenever a Tutor schedules a tutorial in the evening, I am not able to attend because I have to be with the baby at home" (R 6). Another respondent out of stress said this;

"Ever since I delivered and brought my baby to school, I have not been able to participate effectively in any group activity given in class, and worst of all, I am always behind time in submitting assignments." (R7).

#### **Challenges Student Mothers Face at Home**

This research question explored home-related challenges that student mothers in St. Ambrose College of Education face. The participants were asked to mention some home-related problems that affect their studies in the College. During the interview, one respondent made

it known that she had nobody to help take care of her baby. This was how she put it; "In my case, because I have nobody to take care of my baby, so it is very difficult to do simple house chores. Also, whenever I plan to study at home the baby cries for my at-tention. I then have to leave my books and attend to him" (R9). A respondent aptly stated; "Immediately I get home after school, I resume full responsibility of taking care of the child. This makes it difficult for me to keep up with school work sometimes" (R12).

#### **Other Challenges Student Mothers Face**

Under this research question, the researchers sought to investigate if there are other challenges faced that do not fall under either academic challenges or challenges faced at home. The following are the responses of the respondents. Some of the challenges respondents gave were difficulty in getting accommodation, transportation to and from campus, and financial challenges.

Almost all the respondents complained about accommodation. That is getting a comfortable place off campus to stay while they take care of their babies since they were not allowed to bring the babies to stay on campus. R10 had this to say; "The very first challenge I faced was to find a place to rent since I delivered three days right after school had reopened". Another respondent complained about finding a nanny for the baby while she was away in school.

One other challenge these student mothers faced was the issue of transportation. "I didn't get a place close to campus, so I had to be moving to and from campus every day. Just imagine the distance and the cost involved"; she recounted, (R1).

The majority of the respondents spoke about financial challenges. This is what one of the respondents had to say;

"I am faced with financial challenges. This is because whatever money there is, it is divided into two. Part is used to cater to my needs and the other is used to take care of the baby. This makes it very difficult for me since my parents are the ones who take care of me. Life as a mother and a student at the same time is difficult".

Another respondent said that things were difficult financially to the extent that her school fees, at the time of the interview, had not been paid.

#### **The Impact of the Challenges Faced by Student Mothers on Their Academic Life**

All the respondents agreed that the challenges they faced had a grave effect on their academic life. R1 emphatically said that her CGPA has decreased tremendously to the extent that if care is not taken, she might end up graduating with a third class. One respondent has this to say; "I used to be a first-class student, but since I got pregnant and delivered, it is very sad that I can no longer boast of being a first-class student" (R4). Some of the respondents claimed that there were times they had to re-write some papers because they could not make the pass mark.

### **Coping Strategies Student Mothers Employ**

Here, the respondents were asked how they could manage or balance their roles as mothers and students at the same time. The responses given showed that most of these student mothers had some sort of assistance. They either hire a nanny or their mothers and partners offer to cater to the children while they go to lectures. R13 for instance answered the question by saying this; "I can cope because I have some help. My mother came to Akwamu with me, so that while I am away in school, she will babysit my child". Another respondent made it known that her partner helps to take care of the child. One respondent, however, had something different to say, "Madam, it is very difficult for me to blend these two roles., am not able to cope very well, and this puts a lot of stress on me" (R4).

### **Role Played by St. Ambrose College of Education to Help Mitigate These Challenges**

From the interviews conducted, it emerged that the school plays a very important role in mitigating the situation of these maternal mothers. Some of the responses from the students are as follows. According to a respondent, her hall tutor was very helpful. "She always counseled me and helped me figure out how to blend my role as a mother and a student. I re-member when I was pregnant and sometimes couldn't eat food from the dining, my hall tutor allowed me into her home to eat", she confessed. Another respondent expressed her grat-itude to the school authorities for allowing the student mothers to stay out of campus to be able to cater for their babies. One other respondent has this to say; "Most often, you are ex-empted from doing housework in the school when you are pregnant". In the view of R2, exeats are given them to go home when they need be, especially during the times they are pregnant. To her, this helps them a great deal. It also emerged that some tutors took their time to go over lessons some student mothers missed in the course of taking care of their babies.

The respondents however raised some concerns on the support they get from the school. According to them, the school can build a block or a structure for nursing mothers. This will help them not miss out greatly on things going on in school.

### **Analysis**

Responses from them indicate that these student mothers in St. Ambrose College of Education face several academic challenges which include lack of concentration and attention, insufficient time for caregiving, and inadequate time for private studies. This finding is supported by Engenti and Omoruyi (2011) and Banda (2000), who were of the view that attending to their newborns and focusing on their academics most often made them lose concentration and attention (Engenti & Omoruyi, 2011) (Banda, 2000). This finding is also confirmed by Andres and Finlay (2004) who mentioned lack of time for studies as a serious academic challenge nursing mothers face

(Andres & Finlay, 2005). This challenge is a result of the compact nature of the school's curriculum. Usually, the academic timetable is loaded such that a little break is given to students. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult for nursing mothers to get enough time to study their notes and do individual readings in addition to childcare and maintenance.

From the numerous discussions on home challenges faced at home, it would not be out of place to suggest that respon-sibilities such as home management and child safety result in serious stress for nursing mothers studying at St. Ambrose College of Education. Nonetheless, Egenti and Omoruyi (2011) indicate that the inconvenience or stress that nursing mothers experience makes them feel psychologically ill-disposed to-wards their study (Engenti & Omoruyi, 2011).

Deducing from the narratives of other challenges facing student mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education, it can be said that these mothers face a lot of financial constraints because all of them interviewed do not work. So, they solely depend on their parents and partners for support, and in some cases, this kind of support is not forthcoming. This substan-tiates what Mamhute (2011) discovered, that financial dif-ficulties had a negative impact on both pregnant and nursing students' education (Mamhute, 2011). The case of student mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education is not an ex-ception to this discovery. It must be noted, however, that the students, in this case, do not have any source of income, and this makes it more difficult for them when it comes to finan-cial demands.

From the various data gathered on the effects of the challenges on the academic life of student mothers, it emerged that the performance of these student mothers is not en-couraging or anything to write home about. This particular claim is in line with the research made by Harrison (2008) as cited in Adofo (2013) that, students who were present at all or most tutorials attained a mean final grade in the course that was slightly over a full letter grade higher than students who attended none or only a few tutorials (Adofo, 2013). Pinnilla & Munnoz (2005) established that student-mothers academic performance is poorer than that of other university students (Pinnilla & Munoz, 2005). In the case of student mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education, some of these mothers had to go through the trouble of re-writing some trailed papers.

It was revealed from the discussions that these student mothers depended mostly on supports from their mothers especially, their siblings and partners in some cases. Grohman & Lamm (2009) in their study realized that emotional support from husbands and friends, and time management strategies were used by 93.3% of nursing mothers. Some of the re-spondents in this study however claimed that they found it very difficult to cope or blend their roles as students and then mothers. The role conflict effect is evidenced in this situation, where students are not able to cope very well.

From the findings, it was known that the management of St. Ambrose College of Education helps the student mothers in diverse ways. Some of which is allowing them to stay outside campus to properly take care of their babies. Also, the school makes sure that they (student mothers) are not exempted from activities that will help improve their academics. Counseling student mothers is one service given to help student mothers' situation. It was revealed however that the student mothers wish there could be a facility on campus where they could stay because moving to and from campus always adds up to their stress. This finding backs up Onsongo (2004) research on 'Promoting Gender Equity in Selected Kenyan Public Universities', which found that when students were asked what might be done to better the status of student mothers on campus, they mentioned that On-campus housing for student mothers should be provided by the university (Onsongo, 2004).

### Summary

This study sought to explore the challenges faced by student mothers in tertiary institutions in Ghana, especially the St. Ambrose College of Education and their related impact on the education of these students. The study revealed that student mothers are faced with a lot of challenges. Some of these challenges were that these student mothers in the tertiary institutions lacked concentration and attention. They also had inadequate time for caregiving and insufficient time for personal studies which normally affected their academic performance. Some student mothers claimed that though it was against their will, they were sometimes forced to move out during class sessions to attend to their young ones. This difficulty emanates from the compressed nature of the school's curriculum. Apart from this, the academic calendar of the College is such that there are intermittent breaks, which in the case of these student mothers should be an opportunity where they could catch up on lessons they missed by revising their notes. This is however not the case since these mothers go home and their attentions are focused on their babies. It is therefore difficult for nursing mothers to find time to study their notes and do individual readings coupled with childcare and maintenance.

It was further revealed that responsibilities such as home management and child safety accounted for significant stress for nursing mothers studying at St. Ambrose College of Education coupled with financial problems. All student mothers interviewed indicated that they depended solely on either their parents, siblings, or partners for financial support. These people who provided financial support are the same people these student mothers relied on so they could cope as students and mothers. Some student mothers however engaged the services of nannies.

The major finding of the study had to do with the negative impacts of being a student and a mother at the same have on the academic performance of student mothers of St. Ambrose College of Education. From the study, it came to light that there was a drastic decline in the academic

performances of the student mothers. This is because student mothers find it difficult to concentrate during class hours because of divided attention. They are therefore not able to understand or grasp what is being taught in class. More so, these student mothers are not able to meet deadlines which goes against them sometimes. Some of them also had to go through the trouble of re-writing some papers because they could not make the pass mark for those papers.

With regards to the role St. Ambrose College of Education played in all these, student mothers confirmed that the College had helped a lot. The school provided counseling services to these student mothers and also made sure they included them in all activities as long as their academics were concerned. The school also allowed them to stay off campus so they could properly care for their young ones. In contrast to this, student mothers suggested that it would have been a nice idea if the school builds facilities for nursing mothers on campus so that the stress of moving back and forth will be reduced.

### CONCLUSION

Childbearing, nursing, and parenting whilst being a student should not be a hindrance to successful education at the tertiary level.

Nonetheless, it is unfortunate that the research reveals that student mothers in St. Ambrose College of Education face numerous challenges that end up hindering their academic success. Some of the challenges they face include lack of concentration during class hours and inadequate time for personal studies which led to poor academic performance. These went to the extent of having some of them re-sit for their papers.

As a result of these challenges, these student mothers had to adopt some strategies to cope with the situation. While some of the student mothers rely on their parents, siblings, and partners for support, others go in for the services of nannies to take care of their babies while they study in school. Apart from this, the student mothers rely solely on these dependents for financial support since most of them are not working. Academically, they rely on their colleagues who are academically sound to help them study.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the study, the researchers see it appropriate to make the following significant recommendations.

It is strongly recommended that the Colleges and all other tertiary institutions provide a permanent structure that will serve as a lactating as well as resting room for the student mothers, where these mothers can breastfeed and rest while on breaks. This place can also be where the nannies will help take care of the babies while their mothers are in class. This could go a long way to lessen the academic frustration faced by these student mothers.

There is also the need to intensify counseling services in the school, especially for new mothers so that they can be able to cope well with their roles as students and mothers

effectively. This is because combining motherhood with being a student can be stressful. Thus, the counseling services offered would go a long way to orient these student mothers to have a different perception about their situation.

It is also recommended that the National Commission for Civic Education in Ghana, especially that of the Dormaa East District should intensify the education on parenting, especially single parenting. In this way, people would be made aware of the stress and frustration involved in raising a child single handedly.

### Abbreviations

CGPA: Cumulative Grade Point Average

R1: Respondent 1

R1: Respondent 2

R1: Respondent 3

R1: Respondent 4

R1: Respondent 5

R1: Respondent 6

R1: Respondent 7

R1: Respondent 8

R1: Respondent 9

R1: Respondent 10

R1: Respondent 11

R1: Respondent 12

R1: Respondent 13

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