

Stress Management and Coping Strategies among Pregnant Students in Colleges of Education: A Case Study of Students in Akatsi College of Education

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Abstract: Women experience and celebrate special events in their lifetimes such as pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy brings joy for most women in Africa because it is seen to be a fulfillment of womanhood. While pregnancy is usually associated with joy, the moment is equally associated with anxiety and fear especially if it is unplanned. There is evidence that pregnant students experience stress in the traditional Universities in Ghana. The purpose of the study was to examine the level of stress and the coping strategies used by pregnant students in Akatsi College of Education, specifically in terms of campus duties, academic workload, accommodation restrictions, and ways of coping with academic activities pregnancy. The study was a case study qualitative research using a semi-structured interview. Respondents encompassed six pregnant students who are still students of Akatsi College of Education. The majority of pregnant students in Akatsi College of Education experienced stress from the school environment in relation to their comfortability in terms of food, clothing, and accommodation. Pregnant students faced stigma from colleagues. Even though the pregnant students were not suggesting to the College to be given preferential treatment, a large number of respondents wished the college allows them to either rent accommodation outside campus or be given a room meant for only pregnant students. It was realised that the majority of respondents adopted coping strategies to deal with stress on campus. There is a need for a policy direction for Akatsi Colleges of Education for pregnant students to be allowed to rent outside campus or be given separate rooms. Also, there is a need for flexibility in the style of uniform and options for pregnant students on campus to cook their own food. Counselling/GESI units in Akatsi College of Education to institute measures to identify pregnant students and prepare them psychologically.

Keywords: College of Education, Coping Strategies, Pregnant Students, Stress, Unexpected Pregnancy

I. INTRODUCTION

Women experience and celebrate certain special events in their lifetimes such as pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy brings hope and joy for most women in Africa because it is seen to be a fulfillment of womanhood. While pregnancy is usually associated with joy, the moment is equally associated with anxiety and fear especially if it is unplanned. Though pregnancy is not a disease but a normal biological process with accompanying emotional anxiety and stress, it becomes challenging when it occurs as a result of

risky sexual behaviours. In most parts of the world, motherhood is a natural phenomenon for most women. Women who plan their pregnancies usually are excited about it and have pleasant pregnancy experiences to share. One of the global trends is student pregnancy, but this situation is more noticeable in developing countries including Ghana. Pregnant students are faced with many challenges including poor academic performances, and dropping out of school due to failure to focus on their studies (Changach, 2012). Many studies have been conducted on stress management and coping strategies among pregnant students in traditional universities in Ghana (Boakye-Yiadom, et al., 2015; Dankyi, et al., 2019). However, there is limited literature on pregnant students, level of stress, and coping strategies in the Colleges of Education in Ghana.

This study examined the level of stress and the coping strategies used by pregnant students in Akatsi College of Education, specifically it dealt with the struggles of pregnant students in terms of campus duties, academic workload, accommodation restrictions, and ways of coping with academic activities and pregnancy. The findings provide results and important information for Akatsi College of Education in decision-making regarding policy direction for female students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexuality and engaging in risky sexual activities among young people especially females in tertiary institutions and colleges is a common occurrence in most parts of the world. The culture and lifestyle of students in Colleges of Education are grounds for the commencement of sexual activities for most students. Many students see college institutions as free grounds to explore lifestyles hence some indulge in sex just to follow the sexual culture while others also engage in sexual activities just for the fun of it (UNFPA, 2016).

One of the cherished values of Ghanaian culture is getting married and having children. Nonetheless, the global trend of students getting pregnant is also a common phenomenon in Ghana (UNFPA, 2016). Pregnancy in school in most instances

is unplanned, and most of the students involved are not married (Zungu & Manyisa, 2009).

Pregnancies in a school setting come with stress. Jallo, et al., (2008:192) defined stress as “an imbalance between the requirements of the person-environment transaction and one’s ability to cope with it.” To Michie (2002) stress is how an individual responds physically and emotionally to happenings, circumstances, or conditions and changes in their lives. An individual's response to stress is based on his or her perception. When the individual perceives stress as negative, its effects on him/her result in anger, frustration, panic, anxiety but if the individual perceives stress as positive, it motivates the individual to see it as a challenge and work to overcome it (Jallo, et al, 2008). There are different categories of stress; the one which emanates from the school environment is academic stress which in turn leads to low retention, high dropout, and poor academic performance (Dpllard & De jonge, 2002; Kausar, 2010). There are many reasons for stress which include pressures of examination, ongoing circumstances, relationships, day to day inconveniences (Michie, 2002). Stress is profound, especially among people such as managers and students who are busy, burdened with work, and have deadlines to meet. Fresh students in the various Colleges are groups of people who are predisposed to stress due to the change of environment, college conditions, ensuring a great level of academic excellence, adapting to a substantial amount of work within a short time, and harsh learning situations (Abasimi et al, 2015).

Research conducted by Baloyi et al., (2020) evident that pregnant students experience a variety of psychological stress, comprising loneliness and emotional distress. Hong (2009) shares a similar view when he espoused that pregnant students are faced with emotional distress as a result of juggling academic work/roles as well as being pregnant simultaneously. It is evident from the literature that, girls who are not married but get pregnant out of wedlock face stigmatisation from their communities (Jeanine, et al., 2020; Phiri, et al., 2021). The College of Education system in Ghana is a bit restricted, students who get pregnant while in school have to adopt coping strategies to help them balance their academic lives and pregnancy experiences. This leads to a situation where pregnant and nursing mothers stressing to adjust to school conditions against the backdrop of a lack of facilities such as lactation rooms and other convenient places for them and their nursing babysitters (Amos, et al., 2021).

According to Yi, et al., (2005:528) “Coping involves cognitive and behavioural measures designed to master, tolerate or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts”. Coping is one of the processes that have been accepted as a critical defensive or safety factor for adolescents (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008). Coping is used as a means of facilitating an emotional outcome and ensuring, that it alters the emotional state from the start and closure of an encounter (Lazarus, 1993). Lazarus (1993:247) continued to argue that:

Coping has two functions, problem-focused and emotion-focused. The problem-focused function of coping is to change the troubled person-environment relationship by acting on the environment or oneself, the emotion-focused coping is to change either the way the stressful relationship with the environment is attended to as in vigilance/avoided or the relational meaning of what is happening, which mitigates the stress even though the actual conditions of the relationship have not changed.

Clegg’s (2009) findings corroborate that of Lazarus (1993) who identified problem-focused coping strategy, avoidance, social support, and counseling as ways of coping with stress. Avoidance coping measures is the type that is emotion-focused coping due to the fact that it involves making an attempt to avoid and prevent the feeling of distress related to stressors. (Carver, 2007).

Colleges of Education have assumed tertiary status per the Colleges of Education Act 847 of 2012. However, the system of administration is a bit restricted as compared to the traditional universities in Ghana. In the colleges of education, students are confined to the boarding house, they go out but under permission, they perform chores, they wear uniforms, food is prepared for them. The menu is determined by the colleges in collaboration with the Students’ Representative Council (S.R.C) mostly based on the fee allocation for feeding as approved by the government. Their general comportment has to meet the standards set in the colleges of education. A number of measures have been drawn for the realisation of gender equality and equity in education. At a World Conference held in Dakar in 2000, a number of measures were proposed. These measures include the right to education for all, reduction in levels of women’s illiteracy, bridging the gender gap in education, empowering of women to look after their children, and contributing to national development (Britwum, et al., 2017). The international commitment to the protection of the right and welfare of children and women made it compulsory for Ghana to make sure that beyond the policy outlines, structures of enforcement and implementation are put in place to make the school environment conducive for pregnant students and mothers to continue their education devoid of difficulty (Birungi, et al., 2015).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study design was a case study qualitative research using a semi-structured interview with the use of an interview guide for data collection. Respondents encompassed six pregnant students who are still students of Akatsi College of Education. During data collection, two were pregnant, one had delivered a week ago, and the remaining four delivered a year ago. The research employed semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 16-25 minutes each, were recorded and transcribed. This study was conducted at Akatsi College of Education which is one of the 46 public Colleges of Education in Ghana. The College enrolls a sizeable number of students from all over the country to study for a Bachelor of Education degree in Basic Education (J.H.S/Upper Primary options). It,

therefore, trains teachers to teach in the various public Basic Schools in Ghana. The college is a mixed one with a current population of 1,601 male and female students.

A qualitative research approach based on a case study method was used. One strength of the qualitative approach is that it makes it possible to generate in-depth explanations of participants' thought processes and helps to emphasize the reasons a phenomenon has happened (Creswell, 2003). In this respect, qualitative research was used to gain more insight and advance a wider understanding of pregnant students' stress and coping strategies. The target population in the study was pregnant students in Akatsi College of Education. Six pregnant students were selected through purposive sampling techniques. The six were chosen because they were the ones known to be pregnant currently or had delivered but were pregnant while in school. The researchers used purposive sampling to identify the six respondents while one respondent was identified through snowballing. Two pregnant students are in level 100 and still pregnant, one in level 300, and Three (3) in level 400. Out of the six respondents, four had delivered their babies before the interview was conducted. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide. The interview guide included five sections. The first section collected demographic information on age, educational level, marital status, whether respondents planned their pregnancies or not, and religious affiliations. The second section focused on pregnancy experiences in terms of their comfortability among their colleagues in the dormitory, bathroom, food, clothing, preparation of their own food, and performance of chores on campus. The third section elicited information from the respondents about stress-related experiences on campus in terms of chores, academic activities/performance, waking up at dawn, food, clothing, finance, and relationship with peers. The fourth covered their coping strategies in relation to food, clothing, attendance at lectures and exams, dormitory, and antenatal visits. The fifth section asked respondents their views on what should be done by school authorities for pregnant students while on campus in terms of rooms/accommodation and food. The data-gathering techniques employed included obtaining permission from respondents, the use of a voice recorder, and capturing data word-for-word.

The researchers identified pregnant students on campus and made arrangements to interview them. The interviews were held on campus in an enclosed room to ensure privacy and usually lasted from 16 to 25 minutes depending on each respondent. The interview data were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically and patterns of meaning formed. The thematic analysis encompasses going through a data set to look for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006) hence the researchers familiarized themselves with the data, looked for meanings, possible patterns, and on the bases of that created codes. From the start, possible themes and sub-themes were developed, advanced, and further interpreted. This brought about various evolving themes making the researchers understand the conditions of

pregnant students and their coping strategies. The thematic analysis helped the researchers to prevent a repetition of respondents' experiences. This was done cautiously by reading and re-reading the data in order to ascertain the fundamental import and to bring out the detailed interpretation of the occurrence.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Out of the six respondents, only two (2) are married. The ages of respondents ranged from 17 - 31 years. Eight themes arose from the data analysis as stressors and the various coping strategies respondents used. The themes include comfortability in terms of accommodation, clothing and food, pregnancy and academic workload, stigma/social exclusion, respondent's expectations from the institution, strategies used to deal with the anxiety, bathing coping strategies, academic coping strategies, and clothing coping strategies.

A. Stressors

Theme 1: Comfortability in terms of Accommodation, Clothing, and Food

It has been found from the data that most of the respondents indicated they were not comfortable living among their colleagues while pregnant. This is due to the crowded/congested nature of the cubicles, colleagues wanting to watch their tummies and touch, the rooms always hot and not being able to take off their clothes when they were feeling hot. They could not eat some of the dining hall foods. They had to adjust their uniforms in order to feel comfortable in them. The following quotations below substantiate:

1.1. Comfortability in terms of Accommodation and Clothing:

... "I felt a bit uncomfortable, they were asking whether I was pregnant. I bathed alone, I did not go to the general bathhouse with them. This is because I heard not all eyes can see one's tummy when she is pregnant. The bed was comfortable, but the number of people in the cubicles did not give me space to remove my clothes. Some were eager to watch my belly, wanted to touch it. So I was not applying pomade to avoid being watched." (L 300/2)

"I was not comfortable at all. No privacy especially in the bathroom. In the bathroom everyone wanted to see my tummy, touch it or feel it, what is in it, and how it feels like. I was not comfortable with it." (L 300/3)

"Not comfortable at all, they needed not to see my tummy. I was not comfortable with it." (L 300/3)

... "I don't like the straight white with the belts and the black skirt and white blouse. Some of the school uniforms are not comfortable, but some are comfortable so I try to wear a particular one all the time." (L 100/1)

"I have sewn a bigger one... The uniform and the house dress, I was not feeling comfortable in them" (L 300/2)

"I was wearing the uniform, but I pulled up the top and could not close two buttons, my skirt too I could not close the zipper well. I was not comfortable with the uniform." (L 300/4)

From the extracts above in terms of accommodations, half of the respondents were stressed due to the nature of accommodation facilities. This assertion aligns with the work of Amos, Amoako et al., (2021) when they argued that pregnant students stress to adjust to accommodation facilities on campus. It is also evident that the style of the prescribed uniform for female students is not comfortable for pregnant students as a result they had to make alterations or sew entirely new ones.

1.2. Comfortability in terms of Food:

"It's somehow okay just that if I take rice I don't feel okay so I don't take it" (L 100/1).

"No, I do not eat all because I do not like banku and kenkey. I like ampesi which is not part of the menu, but I take the rice sometimes." (L 100/2)

"At times I did not like the food prepared at the dining hall. Sometimes I vomited after eating the food I got from the dining hall, so I had to go and buy a different one." (L 300/2)

"When I was pregnant, I went to the hospital I was told I was anaemic so I had to be eating more iron food to get more blood. So I was buying more food to help me get more blood." (L 300/3)

"I bought my own food, sometimes too Rev. Sister would give me food, I was always craving for home food, I was not comfortable with the dining hall food. I vomited when I ate the dining hall food" (L 300/4)

It is evident that pregnant students with pregnancy cravings demand foods that the dining hall does not provide. As a result, they resorted to buying their own food outside than taking the dining hall food. Some claimed they vomited and did not feel comfortable taking the food prepared at the dining.

Theme 2: Pregnancy and Academic Workload

Apart from the accommodation, food, and clothing stress, the majority of responses showed that academic activities served as stress because of combining it with antenatal visits and pregnancy experiences (Michie, 2002; Abasimi et al., 2015). Most respondents stated that they found it hard to study because they felt sleepy while studying. Three respondents described the challenges below:

"Sometimes when it is time for Supported Teaching in School STS, I walk to my school because it is in town, so I get so tired if I come back I will sleep very well before I can be fine." (L 100/1)

"I feel lazy to learn because I feel sleepy always. So I fear that perhaps it will affect my performance." (L 100/2)

"Academically it affected me. For example, when I was studying for my quiz about 'children's literature' yesterday, I was studying and breastfeeding my baby and dozing off because I was tired. But I had to study and take care of my baby as well. It is stressful because I was doing so many things at the same time that needed my attention" (L 300/1).

"I got scared of getting low performance when I was pregnant so it made me learn harder. My performance was better than when I was not pregnant. But when I delivered, I was referred because of the child care and studies" (L 300/2).

"I felt so anxious, from the cubicle to class, climbing the stairs. I was so scared because learning was difficult. At that time I was stressed because anytime I took the book I was thinking about the pregnancy and the same time examination. So I could not concentrate more on the book. In terms of the Physical Education (P.E) course, we were doing micro-teaching so we had to perform the practical. I was not left out in the individual teaching. I did the practical too, I went to the field and did what everyone did. Due to the stress during the practical micro-teaching, the next day I delivered my baby due to the physical activities I performed the previous day." (L 300/3)

"I was scared my grade will fall and my grades fell drastically because I could not learn properly. It really affected my performance." (L 300/4)

From the above extract, it could be seen that most respondents revealed they experienced some level of stress as a result of combining two things together which resulted in them performing poorly in their examinations (Dpllard & De jonge, 2002; Kausar, 2010). However, the fear of failure and its stress motivated some to learn to prevent them from failure.

Theme 3: Stigma or Social Exclusion

The data analysis revealed that most of the respondents experienced stress due to stigma from colleagues and also broken relationships because some colleagues shun their company (social exclusion).

The following extracts described such phenomena:

"Some of my colleagues shunned me. Their attitude was bad, and they were gossiping a lot. So I never liked the way they excluded me. So it stressed me a lot. The guys too were watching me, pointing their fingers at me." (L 300/4)

"Everyone heard I was pregnant in the school. They were trolling me. But I ignored them and avoided those who were stigmatising me. Some of my friends even stopped talking to me because I was pregnant even colleagues who were close shun me because I got pregnant." (L 300/3)

"Yeah they were gossiping, but it did not bother me. Because they don't know my age, I am 28 years so I think I'm old to get pregnant. Besides they don't know how I do my things, I am married so I did not mind them." (L 300/1)

"Yes, I do feel sometimes they gossip about me. There was a time I caught some of them but I just turned around and watched them know I have heard what they said about me. I feel shy because I'm pregnant at my age (17 years). I wish I was older before being pregnant but due to my age I feel shy being pregnant." (L 100/ 1)

From the above extract, it has been revealed that most pregnant students experienced stigma as a result of gossip, rejection from colleagues, and strained relationships leading to loneliness (Baloyi et al., 2020). Besides, it is also revealed that one of the respondents expressed that she experienced stress/anxiety within herself due to her age getting pregnant. She taught she was too young to be pregnant at age 17.

Theme 4: Respondent's Expectations from the Institution

When it came to respondents' expectations from their College in terms of creating a congenial atmosphere and freedom for the pregnant student, a large proportion of respondents expect the College to provide flexibility in terms of accommodation and also allow them to cook their own foods. This is suggesting de-boarding the college system to some extent to make it flexible for students who are pregnant to stay outside the campus and attend lectures. The extract below attests to that:

"Yes, this is because it is not everyone in the cubicle that is having a 'good eye' so we need to protect ourselves. Sometimes I forget myself I leave myself naked among my colleagues, so it is my school mother that alerts me often to wear clothes. But if we were given a cubicle alone as pregnant women I think, it will prevent that" (L 100/1).

"Yes I wish, the perfumes irritate me, I'm also the first close to the door, so when they open the door there is no privacy. I wish I get more privacy. I wish accommodation space should be provided for all pregnant students."(L 100/2)

"Some of us are grown up so it is not bad when the pregnancy occurs. We are adults so if an accommodation can be made available for pregnant women, if anyone is pregnant the person won't think of aborting. If the conditions are good on campus and it happens that one is pregnant they won't feel like aborting. At my age, 28 years waiting to complete before having babies? I'm even married." (L 300/1)

"They have to provide a small room for pregnant women. This is to prevent others from watching my belly. The room is so hot sometimes I feel like removing my cloth but I could not due to being watched." (L300/2)

"They should allow pregnant women to rent outside when they are pregnant to have their privacy and good nutrition. Also, have time for themselves, sometimes mood swings, so if one can enjoy her privacy it will help." (L300/3)

"Getting a room for pregnant ladies will be fine so they can enjoy their privacy. Due to other students watching the tummy" (L 300/4)

The above data showed that most pregnant students wished they were given separate rooms so they can enjoy their privacy and also prevent a situation where other students continuously watch their bellies. It is evident from the study that some pregnant students experienced mood swings thus they wished the College gives them the opportunity to rent rooms outside the campus. It was also revealed that restrictions on accommodation on campus were a reason for some students aborting their pregnancies. Thus the school should provide them with cubicles separately from non-pregnant students will make them feel more comfortable. Some of the respondents also revealed they are married, so it is not wrong for them to get pregnant. Additionally, some were of the view that they are old enough to get pregnant while in school.

B. Coping strategies

Theme 5: Strategy used to deal with the Anxiety

Some respondents indicated that they resorted to avoiding and ignoring as a way of coping with stressors like stigma and gossip. This helped them to live with their colleagues while pregnant. The following extracts corroborate that:

"I ignore them a lot, first I used to feel shy of the staring but now I ignore them." (L 100/1)

"Yeah they were gossiping but it did not bother me because I ignored them." (L 300/1)

"Firstly, everything starts from the mind, so I made up my mind to avoid and not to think about those who gossip about me."(L300/1)

From the above, it is shown that half of the respondents used avoidance and ignoring as ways of coping with the stressors on campus related to stigma. This made them able to stay on campus while pregnant. This finding supports that of Yi, et al., (2005); Carver, (2007); Clegg, (2009); Lazarus, (1993) when they argued that avoidance is a strategy people adopt to cope with a stressful situation.

Theme 6: Bathing Coping Strategies

It is evident from the study that most respondents due to their religious background believed it is not 'every eye' that is supposed to watch one's tummy while pregnant. Thus, in order for them to cope with the situations in the cubicles and the bathrooms, they either woke up early to bath, wore light dresses to cover up while bathing, or faced the walls while

showing their backs to their colleagues when bathing. The following quotes validate this:

“At the bathhouse, I turned my back towards my colleagues or bath before them” (L100/1).

...“after bathing, I was not applying pomade to avoid being watched” (L 300/2)

“I bathed early, I was wearing a particular dress while bathing with my colleagues just to prevent them from seeing my belly.” (L300/3)

“I woke up early to bath” (L 300/4).

It is revealed that, because the college system is a boarding system, pregnant students have to devise coping strategies to counter some stressors in the system. Some of the coping strategies which were evident from the data are bathing early before others wake to go to the bathroom, wearing some light dresses to cover up while bathing in the midst of non-pregnant students to avoid being looked at or watched constantly, and also turning the back towards non-pregnant students while bathing. It is evident that religion and culture play a role in pregnant students' way of thinking. Almost all respondents believed that it was not 'every eye' or person that is supposed to watch one's belly.

Theme 7: Academic Coping Strategies

Students come to school purposely to acquire knowledge and to be trained to be professional teachers. Though some of the females were pregnant, it was evident from the data that a large proportion, devised coping strategies to help them to cope with their academic activities and examinations. Below are quotations that substantiate:

“I feel afraid of failure of my examination, so I do wake up to learn at dawn.” (L 100/1)

“When I go for STS (supported teaching in Schools) I have to sit down always to feel comfortable.” (L 100/2)

“What I have planned is if I have lectures I will leave the baby with my sister and come for lectures. If I don't have lectures too, I will come for group discussions to help me pass my exams well especially coming to campus to learn in the afternoon.” (L 300/1)

“Concerning studying, I found it hard to sleep at night so I was studying when I could not sleep to make up for lectures I have missed.” (L 300/3)

The above quotes showed clearly that most pregnant students adopted coping strategies in regard to academic work. However, the majority of them also indicated how pregnancy affected their academic work in terms of missing lectures due to antenatal visits leading to low performance. The above findings corroborate the works of Dpllard and De jonge, (2002) and Kausar (2010) when they argued that pregnancy affects the academic performance of students. The quotations below affirm that:

“I was scared my grade will fall and my grades fell drastically because I could not learn properly” (L 300/4).

“...when I delivered, I was referred because of the child care and studies.” (L 300/2)

“Academically it affected me. Yeah, it was stressful. For example, when I was studying for my quiz on "children's literature" yesterday, I was studying and breastfeeding my baby and dozing off because I was tired. But I had to study and take care of my baby as well.” (L 300/1)

“I feel scared of low performance in the exams because I find it hard to study.” (L100/2)

Theme 8: Clothing Coping Strategies

In the College system, all students wear uniforms. Thus, everyone that is a student in any college of Education in Ghana must conform to wear uniforms. It is due to this reason that pregnant students develop coping strategies to help them fit in their uniforms. The quotations below attest to that:

“I sewed my own dress with the uniform fabric because the skirt was not comfortable.” (L 300/3)

“I have sewed a bigger one. I wish I had an option to have sewn dresses that were so comfortable for me rather than wearing the uniform.” (L 300/2)

“I don't like the straight white with the belts and the black skirt and white. Some of the school uniforms are not comfortable, but some are comfortable too so I try to wear a particular one all the time. Sometimes I try to hide the pregnancy by wearing a pullover over the dress.” (L100/1)

The above extracts showed that respondents indicated they adjusted their uniforms and sewed their own styles with the uniform fabric in order to fit in the uniform and feel more comfortable as well.

V. DISCUSSION

Pregnancy for most women is a blessing irrespective of when and where it happens. This study is a case study about six pregnant students whose ages ranged from 17-31. The study revealed that out of the six respondents only two are married, the remaining four are not married. Out of the six respondents, one delivered just a week before data collection; 3 delivered a year ago and 2 are presently pregnant and will deliver in the course of the year. In regards to their ages, all are adults except for one who is an adolescent. The study revealed that all respondents did not plan their pregnancies, even the married ones among them. This revealed that marriage was not a determinant of the timing of pregnancy and parenthood. It is revealed in the study that, all respondents are Christians however, their religious affiliations did not have much impact in regards to preventing them from engaging in premarital sex. However, the study revealed that religious and cultural beliefs played a role in the way pregnant students think and behave on campus. In this study, it was evident that the majority of pregnant students in Akatsi College of

Education undergo stress from the school environment in terms of accommodation, food, and clothing. It is also evident that most of the respondents faced stigma from colleagues, as were reported in the works of Jeanine, et al., (2020) and Phiri, et al., (2021). Similarly, the majority of the respondents experienced academic stress as well. Literature has shown that most Colleges of Education in Ghana have limited facilities in terms of accommodation which adds up to stress-related experiences for pregnant students.

It was evident from the responses that though pregnant students adopted coping strategies to help in their academic work, the school environment coupled with pregnancy-related stress and child care negatively affected their academic performance (Dpllard & De jonge, 2002; Kausar, 2010). Pregnancy in an academic environment comes with some challenges, in the midst of the challenges; pregnant students adopted coping strategies to help them cope. It was realised that pregnant students resorted to using avoidance and mental discarding of stigma (Lazarus, 1993), buying their own foods, covering up while in the bathroom and dormitory, and making alterations to their uniforms to cope. It was also observed that some of the respondents, bathe early before their colleagues wake up or wear light clothes in the bathrooms and the cubicles to prevent being watched by others constantly. In terms of academic work, it was evident some proportion of them woke up early to study or joined study groups to catch up with what they have lost during antenatal visits or when they missed lectures.

The study revealed that though the pregnant students are not suggesting to be given preferential treatment, the majority of the respondents wished the college allows pregnant students to either rent accommodation outside campus or be given a room meant for only students that are pregnant so they can enjoy their privacy.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that pregnant students in Akatsi College of Education experienced stress ranging from accommodation issues, food, clothing, academic, and stigmatisation from Colleagues as a result devised coping strategies to counter stressors on campus. The study suggests the need for counseling for pregnant students as soon as they are identified to help them get prepared psychologically for challenges they may face and develop strategies in advance to cope with the challenges. The study also highlights the need to allow pregnant students to rent outside campus or be given a separate room from non-pregnant students. This will help them to prepare their own meals to satisfy their cravings and also help them enjoy their privacy as pregnant students.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A policy direction for Akatsi Colleges of Education for pregnant students to be allowed to rent outside campus or be given separate rooms to occupy, flexibility in the style of uniform for pregnant students, and options for pregnant students on campus to cook their own food. Counselling/GESI

units in Akatsi College of Education to institute measures to identify pregnant students and prepare them psychologically to accept their situation and devise coping strategies in advance to lessen the stress of pregnancy and academic work.

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