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Coping Strategies of Post-Graduate Student Mothers in Their Career Pursuits

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Abstract:

This study assessed coping strategies of post-graduate student mothers in their career pursuits in Kenya. Nevertheless, combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for female student parents. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the multiple roles of mothers in post-graduate studies; to learn more about the experiences of mothers who study at postgraduate level; and to analyze the effects of postgraduate study on women. Phenomenology study design was used in this study. Using a qualitative approach, the study gathered data from thirty-two female students, enrolled for post-graduate studies at the University of Nairobi, who were mothers of child (ren) eighteen years old or younger. The information gathered from student mothers was read and re-read and cull for like phrases and themes that were then grouped to form clusters of meaning. Through this process the researcher constructed the universal meaning of student mothers' experiences and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. The findings of the study revealed that student mothers experienced conflict between various role commitments they often balanced such as childcare, domestic work and academic responsibilities. In spite of the fact that adjusting childcare obligations and student roles appeared to be hard to student mothers, they surmounted these challenges with exceedingly good organization, sound time management and by receiving family support. Further, student mothers were unequivocally inspired by the yearning for individual accomplishment, and the chance to make a better future for their families particularly their off springs. This is an unmistakable observation showing that post-graduate education rewarded women with a freedom, development, pride and accomplishment, and also building up their professions or careers. It additionally furnished them with a chance to develop and build up their own capacities while bringing up their off springs. This point of view departs from the negative perspective revealed in previous studies. The study concludes that the researcher's labeling of struggles and juggles in the lives of student mothers who study at post-graduate level was not accurate. This is because while women confirmed that the experiences during their study were difficult at times, they considered it to have positive, rather than negative impact on their lives. Therefore, this study turned out to be a powerful utilization of cross-checking on the grounds that the researcher was rectified by the student mothers. The input unearthed from this research brought about an alternate understanding of encounters of student mothers at post-graduate level. This study recommends that the university faculty members should be considerate to student mothers and if possible work with the specific students to identify and address their needs. Post-graduate student mothers need to communicate with other household members of their added obligations and how they may be impacted by the learning. The government and universities should develop policies and procedures to address the unique needs of student mothers, devise programs for identifying student mothers at a higher risk of dropping out and put in place measures for their retention. Further research should compare circumstances of post-graduate mothers in different universities and faculties in Kenya. In addition, further research should explore specific family variables such as the experiences of single mothers pursuing post-graduate education.

Keywords: Motherhood strategies experiences postgraduate studies

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Experiences of post-graduate mothers can be examined against goals of women. In the book *Higher Education of Women*, Emily Davies defined the goal of women as being the best wife and mother. Davies argued that any education not central to these objectives was considered unnecessary (Davies, 2006). Rogers (1997) contends that knowledge and resources emanating from education indisputably determine the potential for socio-economic empowerment to women which results in improved and stable living standards. Education is one of the critical requirements for alleviating poverty, improving health outcomes and quality of life, reducing gender and social disparities as well as enhancing economic productivity. Education contributes to economic growth and productivity as well as to sustainability of livelihoods for national development (Rogers, 1997).

Education has played a major role in empowerment of women across the world. Muthaka and Mwangi (2002) pointed out a critical role that education plays in addressing gender disparities through its capability towards enabling women engage in development and growth of the country. Girls' education is one of the most effective ways for ending poverty in developing nations. This is because the benefits of their education are shared by individuals, their families and the society in general. These benefits include family planning, lowering infant, child and maternal mortality rates, preventing HIV/AIDS infection, increasing number of women with jobs and higher earnings.

Globally, society dictates how the role of family members should be played out according to their gender such as male and female. In Africa, gender is the social cultural construction of roles and functions performed by a person in the society. These roles determine the opportunities available to us, the roles we play and the nature of relationships we have in our communities (Ngubane, 2010). Globally, many female students enrolled for post-graduate studies experience common difficulties in organizing multiple duties and responsibilities of scholarly work and domestic chores, together with negative traditional practices (Ahrens and Ryff, 2006). Kramarae (2001) contends that women often struggle to squeeze learning into their already busy schedules of work and family responsibilities. This is because they are expected to ably take on both roles if they wish to continue with education (Lamanna & Reidmann, 2000). Many face significant barriers that make attaining a degree in a university setting challenging or impossible. These barriers continue to affect them until their role, as a student is no longer an extra duty to their private obligations and commitments (Stockdell-Giesler and Ingalls, 2007). In Africa, there is growing number of student mothers with young children enrolling for post-graduate studies. However, about 60% of these mother's face challenges in balancing their multiple roles of mother, employee and student which have potential to disrupt their academic success and performance. The main common challenge student mothers experience is lack of time to manage their multiple roles, being drowsy, weak and lonely (Tauken, 2015). This is because these mothers spend more time on child care and work more to meet their many financial obligations. They are also expected to make significant contributions in their families and in college. In this regard, their study time is consumed on caring for their families or at work thus facing difficulties in accessing post-graduate studies as they are likely to miss classes, arrive late and/or leave early.

Additionally, student mothers have unique necessities and numerous obligations of family life on top of their responsibilities as students resulting to inability to fairly compete with others academically. As a result, many student mothers report more challenges like multiple roles because of the requirements of their courses and the aggressive nature of the post-graduate education. Besides, most student mothers have additional weight to demonstrate dedication to their vocation as a prerequisite which sometimes clashes with their mothering obligations. Therefore, there was need to examine the personal and institutional challenges post-graduate student mothers face in balancing family obligations, work related duties and student roles despite the many concerted efforts being made to bridge this imbalance hence the present study.

1.2. Objectives

- Investigate the multiple roles of mothers in post-graduate studies;
- Learn more about the experiences of mothers who study at postgraduate level; and
- Analyze the effects of postgraduate study on women.

2. Methods

2.1. Introduction

The study focused on coping strategies used by post-graduate student mothers in their career pursuits in Kenya. The study employed phenomenology study design which is a method for conducting qualitative studies that concentrates on the similarity of an experience in a certain group with the aim of arriving at a clear explanation of the situation of the specific occurrence (Creswell, 2013). In this study, post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were interviewed since they had firsthand knowledge on how it felt to study whilst taking care of dependent child (ren) below 18years and at the same time taking work related duties. In-depth interviews were conducted with the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers, attempted to answer two broad questions (Moustakas, 1994), what student mother experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what situation typically influenced their experiences of being in active motherhood while studying as well as taking work related duties (Creswell, 2013). The information gathered from post-graduate scholars who are also mothers was read and

reread and culled for like phrases and themes that were then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process the researcher constructed the universal meaning of their experiences and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. Overall the design was concerned with understanding and describing social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers involved in the study by capturing their lived experiences (Davies, 2001) on bringing up dependent child(ren), 18yrs and below while taking up study roles and work-related duties. These children have more demands due to their age and therefore the researcher was interested in knowing how these post-graduate scholars who are also mothers balanced study roles and work-related duties while taking care of their young child (ren).

University of Nairobi was selected purposively as the research site due to its perfect blend of all key elements of an ideal institution of higher learning. These elements made the university the perfect choice for the researcher targeting institutions of higher learning in Kenya as highlighted next. To begin with, University of Nairobi is the largest and oldest institution of higher learning in Kenya. It has six colleges namely: Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, Architecture and engineering, Biological Sciences, Education and External Studies, Health sciences, as well as college of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Nairobi, 2013). Purposive selection of University of Nairobi as an institution ensured diverse views of students from all colleges were captured. Second, the university has quality infrastructure that helps in achieving its desired goal of becoming an international centre of excellence. It has well-built premises with well-equipped classrooms, restrooms, learning centres, libraries and eateries (Magutu et al., 2010). All other necessary facilities are also available for the students within the campus like the Library and the services it offers such as reference materials. The university is also big enough to accommodate students comfortably and live up to its students' expectations. Purposive selection of this institution ensured the researcher was dealing with more relaxed students since almost all the required services are available within the institution. Third, the University main campus is conveniently located at the heart of the city of Nairobi with the nation's diverse population with the 42 different communities well represented. It is only a ten-minute walk from the Central Business District where most Government offices are located like the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS), National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and Ministry of Education headquarters. This made it easier for the researcher to access education records. From the main campus, one is able to travel to other towns and regions more efficiently. This is ideal for the researcher to travel to other campuses affiliated to this institution. The location of the seven campuses of the University in the capital city and its environs has facilitated easy access, making the university a busy hub of academic activity at all times.

Fourth, University of Nairobi being a public institution, has responded to the national, regional and Africa's high-level manpower training needs by developing and evolving strong, diversified academic programmes and specializations in basic sciences, applied sciences, technology, humanities, social sciences and the arts. It records the largest number of student admissions for degree courses per annum. The range of programmes offered number approximately two hundred (Magutu et al., 2010). Through Module II and III programmes, invaluable opportunity has been opened to thousands of Kenyans and foreigners, on a paying basis, who meet university admission requirements, but who have not been able to access university education due to restricted intake into the regular programmes that is determined by limited resource allocation by Government. These students come from different walks of life with different interests and skill sets. Purposive selection of this institution ensured diversity as the researcher will be able to capture diverse views represented by both groups regarding role strain. Fifth, University of Nairobi is within the new global market, characterized by rapid information change and intense information flow leading to management of the institutions financial and human resources as well as students. The university management determines needs and provides resources to cater for training to satisfy competence needs. It ensures personnel are informed about the relevance and importance of their activities and how they contribute to the achievement of quality objectives (Magutu et al., 2010). Last, University of Nairobi has the most qualified teachers and professors who impart knowledge to the students, in a way, that helps them understand the concepts easily. The university management is capable of managing the students and taking care of all their educational and security needs, enhancing customer satisfaction by meeting customer requirements. Therefore, the selection of this institution ensured all rounded participants and guarantees a secure environment for the researcher to conduct the research without any fears.

2.2. Sampling Design of the Study

The study adopted purposive and snowball sampling techniques in selecting University of Nairobi and key respondents respectively. Salganik et al., (2004) defines snowball sampling as a non-probability sampling technique for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. In this study, snow ball sampling method was applied to select 32 post-graduate student mothers who provided detailed data relevant to the research questions. Here, post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were involved in the referral process, and a sense of uniformity was created as all participants had similar qualifying characteristics. This sample had similar experiences, adding to the validity of the study.

2.3. Type and Sources of Data

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data to understand coping strategies used by post-graduate student mothers in their career pursuits. Primary data were on the background characteristics of the sample and how they combined multiple roles of motherhood and education. The researcher collected primary data by herself using in-depth interviews and direct observations. This allowed the researcher to have higher control over how the information was collected, thus enabling her to decide on such requirements as size of the project, time frame and goal. The information collected through primary sources was unique to the researcher/research as until published, no one else had access to it. It was direct, uncontaminated by being transmitted through another source, was up to date and more so trustworthy. In essence, the questions the researcher asked were tailored to elicit the data that helped in understanding motherhood experiences in pursuit of post-graduate studies in Kenya. In addition, primary data collected from post-graduate scholars who are also mothers enabled the researcher improve trustworthiness of the research by yielding data that was legitimate. On the other hand, primary data ensured authenticity because the facts were not overdone as the researcher did not alter any information. In this study, the primary data sources were post-graduate scholars who are also mothers enrolled for post-graduate studies at university of Nairobi and the main data collection technique was in-depth interviews. Data collection tools for primary data for this research study were in-depth open-ended interviews and interview protocol. A pseudonym (Letter R) was used to conceal the participants' identity.

2.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative procedures of data analysis were used in that individual responses were categorized and interpreted to draw conclusions. The researcher read through the transcripts and jotted down comments, notes, thoughts, and observations in the margins. Marginal notes were summarized by grouping data into various themes while assigning code labels to each section. The preliminary codes were examined for overlap and redundancy and the researcher eliminated redundant codes and collapsed similar codes, which were narrowed down to broader themes. The new list of code words was then used to examine whether these codes revealed common themes and recurring patterns. The different data sets were continuously read and analyzed to refine the categories and to ensure that no text sections was overlooked. The findings were presented prose and narrative form.

3. Results

3.1. Social and Demographic Characteristics

The study comprised of thirty-two female postgraduate students studying at University of Nairobi. Eleven were PhD students while twenty master's students aged between 25 to 58 years old. The number of children each woman had ranged between one and four children. The participants' children were aged between 1-36 yrs as indicated in table 1 that provides further demographic information about the participants and their children.

3.1.1. Organization

Organization means coordination. In this study, organization denotes arrangements made by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers around academic, family and work-related duties. Over half of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in this study complained of difficulty in balancing multiple role commitments while simultaneously studying and raising children. They felt overburdened by their complex obligations. The importance of harmonizing study with their family was being exceedingly organized and arranging their lives to meet all of their contending obligations. They worked to a strict routine, time management and proper scheduling, to focus on their studies and be available to their families. This relate with a research by Estes' (2011) whereby student parents used positive coping strategies.

First, academic duties entail responsibilities by students that occur when students take an active role in their learning and become accountable for their academic success. For this study academic duties are responsibilities performed by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers through making choices and taking actions which lead them toward their educational goals. Post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in this study demonstrated academic integrity and honesty; they attended and participated in class activities and seminars. With attention to quality of work, post-graduate scholars who are also mothers also completed their assigned work in a timely manner. They avoided making excuses for their many responsibilities and communicated in a careful and respectful manner with professors, peers, and other members of the college community. In the present study, post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were regarded as engaged learners who acted in a civil manner, respected the college learning/social environment and complied with college policies outlined in the student constitution. Some post-graduate scholars who are also mothers utilized college resources and sought help when needed, respected diverse ideas and opinions and identified, developed, and implemented plans to achieve their educational goals.

Through personal organization skills, post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were able to balance work and family demands. They employed proper scheduling and worked on a strict routine to focus on their studies and be available to their young families. For example, R17 declared: "although my biggest challenges in enrolling and completing my degree are mainly meeting the usual weekly school deadlines and completing projects while also taking care of my family and job, I am used to taking care of a myriad of problems all in one day due to proper time management." R18 was also organized and kept a

strict schedule for her life. However, she scheduled only a few hours each night for sleep. Personal strategy for completing school work for R1 was to work ahead. She attended her classes every day and was always double-checking her assignments and schedules. She concluded by saying: "I made sure I stayed organized to ensure that I was not left behind." The sentiments made by R17 and R18 indicate that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers who participated in this study devised coping strategies by emphasizing the importance of time management for enabling them fulfill their multiple roles when faced with myriad challenges of combining their dual roles of family responsibilities and school duties. These sentiments resonate well with a study by Bruening and Dixon (2007) which revealed that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers identified coping mechanisms to achieve success at work and quality of life with their families.

These mothers have shown resilience of thought that has maintained them through their difficulties. Most mentioned ambition, discipline, determination, and persistence. To all, an innate feeling of fortitude assisted them through the troubles of learning while bringing up children. For some post-graduate scholars who are also mothers, late afternoon hours offered the greatest chances to concentrate on scholarly work and often finalized their assignments at dusk, when they have already put their offsprings to sleep. For others, weekends were the most opportunities for them to do their college assignments. R18, for example, declared, "To ensure that I take good care of my home and children, I often don't start my class work until late in the evening when everyone else is asleep." The sentiment by R18 on prioritizing academic duties is a clear demonstration that child care responsibilities are taken with the seriousness they deserve regardless of the student mother's class or status in the society. These study findings concur with those in Marandet and Wainwright's (2010) study showing that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were often abstracted from the context of their private lives and to try and fit in at the university, some students found themselves internalizing their home situations.

In this study, other post-graduate scholars who are also mothers tried to avoid clash with traditional beliefs and ensured success in both academic and family roles. These techniques entailed downgrading motherhood tasks in the scholarly sphere and downgrading the scholar's role in domestic tasks. R26, for example, declared: "I never carried school assignment home and also tried to keep my weekends free from homework so I can spend quality time with my family. For this reason, I worked on assignments every weekday and never bothered with family issues while at school." However, my family was still the first priority for me as time with my family "re-energized" me and gave me a reason to keep up with my studies."

Second, family duties refer to parents caring for their off springs as well as family members caring for one another (Levin-Epstein, 2006). In this research study, family duties refer to home-based responsibilities by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers including childcare, cooking, ironing and taking sick children to hospitals among others. R32, for example declared: "I have forfeited a lot of time with my children in order to get through my studies. I have no time for extracurricular activities for myself. However, often at night, I help my children with their homework before I begin my own homework". Finally, work duties are general tasks and responsibilities of a position occupied by an individual in an organization. In this study, work duties were defined as responsibilities of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in their work place. Post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in this study employed different strategies to cope with their work-related assignments balancing them with family and student roles. R28 for example never left anything unfinished on her desk and worked ahead in her classes to cope with studies. She declared: "I try to work ahead, so that if something does happen at home, I don't have to worry about it or stress out too much, that I'm done or caught up." On the other hand, R13 held a part time job that took all her leisure time in order to earn extra cash to pay her fees. The acts by R13 of having an extra income at the expense of her leisure time to facilitate her studies is an indication of the selfless nature of women with multiple roles by making personal sacrifices for the sake of their families. Using leisure time for a part time job however may make the student mother more stressed.

The sentiment by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers shows that women had to address challenges resulting from academic engagements by using various coping strategies. These study findings are similar to those by Lister (2003) who investigated significance of studying by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers and found that all the mothers' free time was spent with children, doing homework and/or working. Similarly, Walkup (2005) in his research specifically on post-graduate scholars who are also mothers, found that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were engrossed with their offsprings's necessities and intensely swayed by societal anticipations about motherhood. Post-graduate student mothers at times have to forego some of what they have like leisure time in order to accommodate new roles in their lives. This is a part of negotiation in a context where everybody is expected to fulfill their assigned duties and responsibilities based on the structures and rules in the society.

3.1.2. Support System to Student Mothers

Support system refers to formal or informal network of personnel and organizations that sustains individuals' growth. In this study, support system denotes a network of people who provided post-graduate scholars who are also mothers with practical and/or emotional support during their studies. Value and amount of this emotional support were diverse, but in several circumstances, it facilitated women cope with multiple roles. In this study, 27 post-graduate scholars who are also mothers reported great family support that provided the most reliable support followed by workplace where available while University failed to meet student needs. This may imply that women did not actively seek out university support because it was time consuming above their already full workloads. This finding concurs with Springer et al. (2009), that discovered

institutional issue in difficulties of combining motherhood with education, meaning, if institutions of higher learning offered post-graduate mothers more assistance, the challenges the encountered would be minimized.

Two forms of support system were identified in the study namely internal and external support systems which are elaborated in the proceeding section. Internal support are the personal or individual factors that enabled post-graduate scholars who are also mothers cope with conflicting demands of motherhood responsibilities and student roles. One of the internal support systems was strength of mind which was well demonstrated by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in this study. The most mentioned personal qualities among the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were patience, social adjustment, sacrifice and social development. *Patience* is a virtue that denotes the ability to wait for something without getting angry. Post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were well aware that waiting for long-term gratification was much better than accepting temporary instant gratification in this study. For R2, the ability to see the "bigger picture" and being persevering while putting efforts in the direction of set objectives was an innate will power that she utilized to cope with her many obligations. She declared: "I am able to take everything at a time; I patiently work with my children and also create time for my studies." Sentiments by R2 show that because of great rewards, any stress post-graduate scholars who are also mothers had a sense that harmonizing their many obligations was for a short while and therefore they could manage. In this study, social adjustment is the extent to which post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were able to balance their roles in the family and in school. R25's ability to interact socially, for example, changed a lot and that she barely had a social life as she spent most of her time studying and the remaining time revolved around her children. She declared: "I barely have my own free time for self care as I am always occupied with my studies and taking care of my children." Sentiments by R25 indicate that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were able to cope with their new challenges brought by multiple role commitments as mother and student.

For R29, her concept of a social life had changed dramatically compared to what it was before the birth of her children. She declared: "there are two things that have happened with my social life in terms of kids. First, social events require more planning and more involvement with other people for support. In addition, having young children at home has caused sleep deprivation, so there isn't as much motivation or energy to go out as there was before. Needless to say, I do have a social life, just a different kind of social life than before the birth of my children." The sentiment by R29 indicates that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in this study had a different social life due to their ability to adjust to the prevailing circumstances. This ultimately helped them to balance their multiple roles of studentship, work and family. These research findings are similar to those by Baxter and Britton (2001) in which post-graduate scholars who are also mothers responded more positively to changes in family life as were often expected to be a model of selfhood.

The other internal personal support system element was sacrifice. Sacrifice is defined as an act of giving up something that is valuable in order to get something else. In this study, the act by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers of giving up their social life and family time in order to study is a form of sacrifice. The post-graduate scholars who are also mothers identified a variety of sacrifices that were necessary in order to manage their multiple roles of family and study in relation to home and family. However, there was a common perception by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers that it was impossible to fully satisfy all of the demands placed on them. They regularly accomplished their assignments at dusk when their off springs were sleeping.

Many women spoke of fatigue and burn out that accompanied trying to balance studying and motherhood, they sacrificed sleep, time with their family and friends, to focus on their studies. They often accomplished their assignments at dusk when their off springs were asleep, or early in the morning before they awoke. These research findings concur with Vyrionides and Visilakis' (2008), where post-graduate scholars who are also mothers sacrificed sleep in order to study after their off springs had gone to bed while White's (2008), observed challenges of balancing scholarly work with household obligations. For example, R24 described the combined demands on her roles at home and work as being abundant and described the difficulties inherent in accomplishing all of her obligations. "It just can't all be done-that's the reality. I had to make choices and figure out what works for me, because it is just too much." Sentiments by R24 is an indication that conscious decisions to forego personal needs and various aspects of home-based responsibilities made by some post-graduate scholars who are also mothers noting that their situations were typical of the experience of working mothers.

For R25, she sacrificed family get together and being home early to stay with her children. She declared: "I do not have time for myself and my family as I sacrifice a lot of my personal time in order to manage work, school and home responsibilities." Sentiments by R25 show that although majority of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers shared the challenges they encountered in finding family time, they also noted the importance of creating time for their family. For R23, her particular strategy for studying involved staying up late when the house was quiet and everyone was asleep. She declared: "I get a lot of energy at that point in time when everyone is asleep. I get little sleep which seems to work for me. I don't want to say that I was unbeatable, that I didn't need the sleep, but it is maybe the pressure I have that could not allow me to sleep." For R27 she saw her goal in sight and wanted to complete it sooner rather than later. She studied whenever the opportunity arose. She declared: "I do not have any specific time for studying but I study anytime I get free time from work and family responsibilities." For R17, she sacrificed by ensuring that she did everything for everyone else, and nothing for herself in the family. She declared: "from the moment I get home, I am always running busy for my family and I am not able to take care of my needs such as sleep." These research findings concur with those of Vyrionides and Visilakis' (2008) in which post-graduate scholars who are also mothers sacrificed sleep so that they can study after their offsprings had gone to sleep while White

(2008) talked of a double burden of managing household roles with their studies. The last personal quality of the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers is self-determination. This is the process of making decision for oneself without influence from outside. In this study self-determination was defined as the ability of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers to control their own lives and to make decisions regarding their multiple roles. For example, R25 was determined, with or without help, not to rely only on parents or friends. She declared: "I find other forms of support through personal commitment to studies but not necessarily burdening my parents who did so much for me and this is now their time to rest."

External support is the second component of student mothers' support system. External support signifies the support sought by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers from other sources apart from self. It includes family, university and employer support. In many cases, it was the quality and quantity of external support to post-graduate scholars who are also mothers that enabled women to cope with multiple roles. Post-graduate scholars who are also mothers actively sought and found adequate support from someone else including spouse, parents, friends, house helps and university. The sources of support for the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers include family and peers, university administration and employer. These sources are explained in the following section. Family and peer support is defined as an integrated network of community-based resources and services that strengthens parenting practices and the healthy development of children. In this study, family support denotes the assistance given to them by their spouses, parents, friends and house helps. Family provided the most reliable support to post-graduate scholars who are also mothers covered in this study. For example, R5 was very excited sharing how her husband understood that the role of the student can conflict with traditional mothering roles. She declared: "my husband is one of a kind, he never complains over my absence at home but instead understands that mothering roles can conflict with student roles." R17's husband provided additional help with the children and if her school and her husband's work schedules conflicted her neighbours were willing to help with childcare. Sentiments by R5 indicate that post-graduate scholars who are also mothers who participated in this study had supportive spouses. This helped them to manage multiple responsibilities. They described role of the spouse as a support in terms of lessening the impact of time-based conflicts and understanding that the women's role as homemaker was impacted by their academic and professional demands. A study by Kirrane and Buckley (2004) revealed that in reducing conflict between work and family life, spousal support is an important factor.

No one felt they were completely alone although the level of external support was different for each participant. For instance, although R29 was single and had no spouse to turn to for support, her parents provided the necessary support for her. She declared: "my parents are always there for me when I need any assistance with the children". For R13, she worked hard to create a support system through her spouse. She declared: "My husband is always there for me and assist me both in child caring and also in other domestic chores, which are very helpful indeed." Support provided to post-graduate scholars who are also mothers was very important to their studies and young families. This is supported by findings in a study by Thorstand et al. (2006) that revealed that both practical and emotional support provided by husbands was important to the student. Single mothers on their part enjoyed support from peers, siblings and relatives. The second source of support enjoyed by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers was University support. This involves the range of University provision in terms of personal, academic development, understanding of University practices, employability, and sense of community. To students with study difficulties and those who wish to develop ability to study effectively, academic support was offered. University support in this study refers to a range of University provision intended to help post-graduate scholars who are also mothers maintain and improve their wellbeing. In this study some post-graduate scholars who are also mothers mainly relied upon individual faculty staff members. For R13 her university supervisor was a key supporter during her studies. She declared: "My supervisor is always there for me to answer technical questions and offering guidance in both academic and professional matters." R13's supervisor was a constant supporter in scheduling study time and planning her time down to get all the assignments done due to the nature of her work and busy family schedule. Findings of this study shows that availability of supports varied amongst the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers as each noted individuals who served as a resource and in some way, helped them to manage personal and professional stressors.

In supporting post-graduate scholars who are also mothers in their studies, adaptability from the faculty and personnel were critical. However, majority of the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers who participated in this study complained that especially in terms of time scheduling and timetabling predominantly in regards to task targets and deficiencies to take care of ailing youngsters the university admission as an institution failed to meet their needs. For example, R20 did not utilize any services from the university and she never found university responsive to her needs especially the financial assistance and when she had personal questions, she had no one to communicate to. She said however that she was happy with the overall experience at the university. While appreciating the learning received, she added that she was the reason overall for her success. She declared: "I am very determined and that when it come down to it, I am responsible for my own achievement." For R32, she did not choose to use the academic support and student services offered such as library services due to her busy schedules. She declared: "I did not actively seek out university support because it was time consuming above my already full workload." Sentiments by post-graduate scholars who are also mothers indicate that many did not get the university support during their studies in balancing their multiple roles of school, home responsibilities and work-related duties. These findings differ with those of Springer et al (2009) who concluded that if institutions of higher education afforded mothers more support, the troubles that they encountered could be abated.

The final source of external support for the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers was employer support. This is defined as the assistance offered to post-graduate scholars who are also mothers by their employers as they studied. To manage the high fees and other needs as they studied, majority of the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers were employed to meet their financial stability need. Majority noted that their bosses hardly supported their studies. However, to some, their employers were very encouraging and motivated them to carry on with their studies. For example, R23's employer was very encouraging and a huge motivator. She declared: "my boss made it very easy for me to continue with schooling beyond my master's degree by supporting me all through. She gave me time off anytime I needed to attend a class and also by allowing me to do schoolwork during work hours. My boss is also studying for her PhD at the same time, and she thought if she could do it, so could I. Sentiments by R23 indicate that external support from the boss facilitated the student mothers' performance both at school and home. Age of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers played a key role on how they coped with balancing multiple roles. For example, R17's age had an impact on her studies in pursuing her Master's degree. She realized that she could not quite relate to everything younger students talked about while working on group projects. She also found they were not as serious about their schooling as she was and that her everyday problems were unlike theirs. The experiences of student mother R17 imply that balancing multiple role commitments while simultaneously studying and raising children is challenging too many women. Marital Status of post-graduate scholars who are also mothers significantly influenced the support they received in both ways. The single parents had no partners to support them but they have house managers and other relatives who supported them as they studied. Those with spouses received support from their partners both emotionally and financially and these affected each student mother differently.

Although R17's husband was initially supportive, he felt that he should be the sole economic support for the family and that R17 should take care of all the home and childcare responsibilities. If laundry was not done or she was doing homework after the kids were in bed instead of spending time with him, he complained. R17 declared: "Although my husband is supportive, I really believe it is all on me, since I am the one to do the work, so I'm the one that has to put into my head that you need to press forward and keep doing this and get it done. I constantly tell myself that I can't quit or give up but instead, get everything done." R5's husband never complained of her absence while studying but he instead understood her roles quite well. She declared: "My husband is one of a kind, he never complains over my absence at home but instead understands that mothering roles can conflict with student roles." Sentiments by R5 indicate that her husband is an example of men who give their women a chance to get empowerment but at the same time feel that they should be good mothers to their off springs. Although R23 was married, she also received support from her boss. She declared: "When I mostly felt like giving up on my studies due to stress, my boss pushed me to keep trying. My boss has an attitude of family first and I felt fortunate to have had a job that was so accommodating." Sentiments by the post-graduate scholars who are also mothers indicate that availability of support vary amongst post-graduate scholars who are also mothers with each woman having individuals who serve as a resource and in some way, help them to manage personal and professional stressors. A study by Romito et al. (2007) revealed that to cope up with the challenges of managing multiple roles positive association had been *shown* between women in employment and social and personal adjustments. Availability of a support system or lack of it to post-graduate student mothers is dependent on the results of how they negotiate with other concerned parties. The negotiations are on structures, rules and resources allocated. Post-graduate student mothers who take time to negotiate well end up with a better support system than those who do not

S.N	Age	Degree	Degree Specialization	Marital Status	Religion	No. of Kids	Age of Children	College	Family Support	Additional Notes (Balancing Gender Roles)
R1	32	Master	PPlanning	Married	Protestant	1	2	CEES	Support	Family duties greatly affect by study
R2	33	Master	Sociology	Married	Protestant	2	9 and 5	CHSS	Support	Time and work overload constraints
R3	47	Master	CD	Married	Protestant	2	18 and 10	CHSS	No Support	Disappointments from Department
R4	38	Master	CD	Married	Catholic	4	15,11,9,11	CHSS	Support	Ability to balance conflicting roles
R5	34	Master	Finance	Married	Catholic	2	9 and 7	CHSS	Support	Coping well with studies
R6	29	PhD	Finance	Married	Protestant	1	4	CHSS	Support	Challenged by Financial constraints
R7	32	PhD	Anthropology	Married	Protestant	2	8 and 3	CHSS	Support	Exhaustion from conflicting tasks
R8	33	Master	H.R	Married	Protestant	1	2	CHSS	Support	Baby reduces my concentration
R9	44	Master	P Planning	Single	Protestant	2	15 and 17	CEES	Support	Conflicting roles reduces study time
R10	35	Master	CD	Single	Protestant	1	3	CHSS	Support	Money is the problem
R11	44	PhD	Finance	Married	Catholic	2	15 and 13	CHSS	No Support	Insufficient reading time
R12	47	PhD	Nursing	Married	Protestant	4	23,20,17,9	CHS	Support	Supervisor has issues with my tribe
R13	37	Master	CD	Married	Protestant	4	13 and 10	CHSS	Support	Uncooperative/unfriendly lectures
R14	34	Master	Strategic Mnt	Married	Catholic	2	6 and 9	CEES	Support	Unsupportive employer
R15	32	Master	CD	Married	Protestant	1	1	CHSS	No Support	discouragement from my department
R16	43	PhD	Bus Admin	Married	Catholic	3	21,17,13	CHSS	Support	Ability to balance Conflicting roles
R17	33	Master	Sociology	Married	Protestant	2	9 and 5	CHSS	No Support	Guilt of squeezed family time
R18	29	Master	P Planning	Married	Protestant	2	5 and 3	CEES	Support	Coping well with roles
R19	32	Master	Sociology	Married	Protestant	1	7	CHSS	No Support	Ethnicity is a big Challenge
R20	58	Master	Disaster Mnt	Married	Protestant	4	36,32,31,18	CHSS	No Support	Money issues is my challenge
R21	28	Master	Journalism	Single	Catholic	1	3	CHSS	Support	Coping well with roles
R22	35	PhD	Journalism	Single	Catholic	1	12	CHSS	Support	I prioritize work school then family
R23	38	PhD	Education	Married	Protestant	3	9,6 and 3	CEES	No Support	Great Support by employer
R24	46	PhD	P Mnt	Married	Catholic	2	13 and 9	CEES	Support	Coping well with roles
R25	35	Master	Bus Admin	Married	Protestant	2	5 and 3	CHSS	No Support	Demands from family roles
R26	34	Master	Architecture	Married	Protestant	2	6 and 3	CAE	Support	Challenges from children
R27	40	Master	Sociology	Married	Protestant	4	16,12,8,4	CHSS	Support	challenge in balancing roles
R28	44	Master	Law	Married	Catholic	2	13 and 8	CHSS	Support	Unable to balance Roles
R29	31	PhD	Bus Admin	Single	Protestant	2	4 and 1	CHSS	No Support	Difficulties combining roles
R30	25	PhD	P Mnt	Single	Protestant	1	2	CEES	Support	Difficulties in paying fees
R31	28	Master	C. Change	Single	Catholic	1	2	CBPS	Support	Money issues is my challenge
R32	46	PhD	Finance	Married	Protestant	3	16,12,8	CHSS	No Support	Guilt of squeezed family time

Table 1: Showing Summary of Demographic Information on Participants and Their Children

4. Discussion

Findings of this study show that although studying while raising children involves a lot of juggling; this led the researcher to consider the strategies used to do this successfully.

4.1. Organization

Although difficulty in balancing multiple role commitment was reported while women simultaneously studied while raising children, majority women spoke of feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of their loads. The key to balancing study with their family was being extremely organized and arranging their lives to meet all of their competing commitments. They worked to a strict routine, time management and proper scheduling, to focus on their studies and be available to their families. This relate with a research by Estes' (2011) whereby student parents used positive coping strategies.

4.2. Sacrifice

Majority women spoke of fatigue and burn out that accompanied trying to balance studying and motherhood, they sacrificed sleep, time with their family and friends, to focus on their studies. They often worked late into the night when their children were asleep, or early in the morning before they awoke. These research findings concur with Vyrionides and Visilakis' (2008), where student mothers sacrificed sleep in order to study after their children had gone to bed while White's (2008), spoke of a double burden of juggling family roles with their studies.

4.3. Individual Factors

Participants demonstrated strength of mind that sustained them throughout their challenges. Most mentioned ambition, discipline, determination, and persistence. To all, an inner sense of determination helped them through the difficulties of studying with children.

4.4. Support System

Quality and quantity of this support varied, but in some cases, it was this support that enabled women cope conflicting roles. Family provided the most reliable support followed by workplace where available while University failed to meet student needs. This may imply that women did not actively seek out university support because it was time consuming above

their already full workloads. This finding concurs with Springer et al, (2009), that discovered institutional issue in difficulties of combining motherhood with education, meaning, if universities offered mothers more support, the difficulties that they faced could be eliminated.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on coping strategies used by post-graduate student mothers in their career pursuits in Kenya. These study findings confirm although experience of combining motherhood and postgraduate education involved challenges, motivation and a lot of sacrifice, student mothers were committed to their education and believed that the challenges of combining their studies and motherhood were balanced out by providing her with tangible and intangible rewards. Results demonstrated that women were able to cope with the demands of combining motherhood with education by resolving the tension by employing "positive coping" strategies. This is contrary to findings by Lynch's (2008 that indicated that student mothers employed "negative coping" strategies.

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