Juggling Family Commitments and Responsibilities in North America: Narratives from Female African Graduate Students

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Abstract: In the realm of higher education, the pursuit of academic excellence is often accompanied by numerous challenges, especially for non-traditional graduate students. This study delves into the unique experiences of non-traditional female African graduate students in North America, exploring the intricate intersectionality of their familial responsibilities, and the obligations they bear towards their families back home with academic journey. These individuals navigate a complex web of roles and responsibilities, hence grappling with the dual demands of academic aspirations and familial ties.

Due to this, non-traditional female African graduate students face a multifaceted challenge as they embark on their academic journey in North America (USA and Canada), which makes balancing the demands of academia, the responsibilities of raising a family, and the cultural obligations to their families back home a complex puzzle. The confluence of these factors creates a unique set of hurdles that these students must navigate, which may impact their academic performance, personal well-being, and overall educational experience. However very little is known about this scholarly minority group.

This research purposed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how non-traditional female African graduate students manage the intricate interplay between their academic pursuits, familial responsibilities, and cultural obligations while pursuing education in North America to address the gap that exists in literature concerning this topic.

African feminism, which advocates for feminist ideologies and movements that are specific to the African context and which seeks to address issues of gender equality, women's rights, and social justice within African societies as well as transnationalism which examines how culture flows across borders to result into transnational hybrid identities were adopted as theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Navigating the intersectionality of academic pursuit, familial responsibilities, and cultural obligations, the study shed light on how these students balanced the demands of family responsibilities and cultural expectations alongside academia in their voices.

Qualitative research inquiry methods; thematic narrative inquiry and autoethnography methodologies were used in exploring the unique experiences of non-traditional female African graduate students in North America through a semi-structured interview. Based on the principle of data saturation, 10 participants who identified as female Africans, have a child(ren) and are in graduate school in North America (U.S. or Canada) were selec-

ted for the study through purposeful sampling. Inductive thematic analysis was used for analyzing data from the participants and the researcher's narratives for meaning-making. Findings from this research aim to inform the development of tailored support systems by academic institutions, policymakers, and support services in a way that will empower non-traditional female African graduate students by highlighting their resilience and resourcefulness to foster a sense of community and solidarity within this demographic group while providing some guidance to prospective female students. The appeal by participants about the critical need for enhanced institutional support for female graduate students with children and the advocacy for prioritizing the children of these students in university childcare facilities to alleviate the challenges associated with managing academic responsibilities while caring for their families is in the right direction. Recognizing the pivotal role that accessible and affordable childcare plays in empowering female graduate students to focus on their studies.

Researchers suggest that institutions should create more spaces for non-traditional students to share their experiences and challenges. We recommend orientation programs not scheduled for the entire student population, but another one that is tailored to the needs of non-traditional students with children. We emphasized the importance of universities actively listening to the concerns and needs of this unique minority group, particularly regarding childcare, family housing/ accommodations, and mental health programs.

Keywords: African Feminism - Autoethnography - Cultural obligation - Intersectionality - Non-traditional - Thematic Narrative - Transnationalism

[Summaries in Spanish and Portuguese in the pages 265-267]

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Introduction

In the realm of higher education, the pursuit of academic excellence is often accompanied by numerous challenges, especially for non-traditional graduate students. This study delves into the unique experiences of non-traditional female African graduate students in North America, exploring the intricate intersectionality of their familial responsibilities, and the obligations they bear towards their families back home with academic journey. These individuals navigate a complex web of roles and responsibilities, grappling with the dual demands of academic aspirations and familial ties. Understanding their experiences is crucial in fostering an inclusive educational environment and developing tailored support systems.

Statement of Problem

Non-traditional female African graduate students face a multifaceted challenge as they embark on their academic journey in North America. Balancing the demands of academia, the responsibilities of raising a family, and the cultural obligations to their families back home presents a complex puzzle. The confluence of these factors creates a unique set of hurdles that these students must navigate, which may impact their academic performance, personal well-being, and overall educational experience. However very little is known about this scholarly minority group. This study bridges the gap by unraveling the complexities by shedding light on the specific experiences of these individuals in juggling their roles and responsibilities while being graduate students and to identify potential avenues for support and academic enhancement.

Significance

This study holds significant implications for both academia and society at large. Understanding the challenges faced by non-traditional female African graduate students contributes to the development of targeted support mechanisms, ultimately enhancing their chances of academic success and personal fulfillment. By acknowledging and addressing the intersectionality of their experiences, institutions can work towards creating a more inclusive educational environment. The findings of this research may also serve as a foundation for broader discussions on diversity, equity, and cultural sensitivity within the academic sphere, which would foster a more enriching and supportive educational landscape.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how non-traditional female African graduate students manage the intricate interplay between their academic pursuits, familial responsibilities, and cultural obligations while pursuing

education in North America. By delving into their experiences, this study generated insights that can inform academic institutions, policymakers, curriculum developers, and support services in developing strategies to address the unique needs of this demographic. Additionally, the research would empower these students by highlighting their resilience and resourcefulness, fostering a sense of community and solidarity.

Research question

The study is guided by a research question:

1. How do non-traditional female African students juggle the intersection of raising a family and their obligation(s) to their family (relations) back home while acquiring graduate education in North America?

Literature Review

The pursuit of higher education in North America has long been an aspiration for students from across the globe. Among them, non-traditional female African students bring a unique set of experiences and challenges as they embark on their educational journeys in this diverse and dynamic continent. The experiences of female African students are a complex tapestry of challenges and opportunities (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). While they may face numerous hurdles in pursuit of higher education, they build resilience and the potential to effect positive change.

One of the major challenges is cultural adjustment. Many non-traditional African students encounter significant cultural differences when they arrive in North America (Johnson, 2015). Here they don't only figure it out for themselves, but for their families they move with. One would agree that adapting to new cultural norms and social dynamics can be challenging, especially when one is older and may have more entrenched cultural values. Juggling family, work, and academics can be an intricate dance, which these students often find themselves doing. They balance multiple responsibilities, which can be mentally and emotionally exhausting (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019). Non-traditional students might struggle to connect with their younger peers due to age differences and varying life experiences. This isolation can impact their overall graduate school experience, which may hinder their academic success.

In areas of gender roles and expectations, African societies have traditional gender roles and expectations that differ from those in North America. Female graduates might face resistance or criticism for pursuing higher education and careers (Johnson, 2015). By breaking gender stereotypes and succeeding in academia and their careers, these graduates become powerful role models for other young women, challenging societal norms and advocating for gender equity. Their stories serve as a testament to the power of education in ending social reproduction, empowering individuals, and driving social change, making their journeys an inspiration for others (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017).

Balancing family expectations and societal pressures with personal aspirations can be a constant struggle. Some non-traditional female graduates may face resistance from family members who expect them to conform to African traditional roles. As educated women, non-traditional graduates can advocate for changes within their families and communities. They can promote education for females and challenge outdated norms, fostering inclusion and social progress.

Non-traditional female students often have familial responsibilities, including caring for children and elderly family members. Balancing these responsibilities with the demands of graduate-level education can be daunting (Johnson, 2015). These students exhibit remarkable determination and time management skills with the ability to navigate family obligations while excelling academically, is a demonstration of their resilience and commitment to personal growth.

While the path of juggling a graduate degree can be demanding, it allows African female graduate students to make meaningful contributions to both their families and society while achieving their educational, and career aspirations (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017). Their stories inspire and exemplify the power of determination and hard work in achieving personal and familial goals. The following describes how they manage these diverse responsibilities:

Non-traditional female graduates are masters of time management. They meticulously plan their days, allocating specific time blocks for work, family, and personal obligations. Tools like calendars, to-do lists, and time management apps become their allies in this endeavor. They recognize that unexpected challenges can arise. Flexibility is key; they adapt to changing circumstances and adjust their schedules and priorities accordingly. These women often rely on support from family members, partners, and friends. Delegating tasks and seeking help with childcare or household responsibilities allows them to focus on their careers and studies.

To support their families and meet financial obligations, they engage in careful financial planning. Budgeting and saving are essential to ensure they can provide for their loved ones, both at home and abroad. Juggling career, family, and obligations can be emotionally taxing. Non-traditional female graduates develop emotional resilience, seeking emotional support through networks, counseling, or self-care practices to maintain their mental well-being. Effective communication is vital.

Finally, these women often maintain strong cultural and community ties by actively engaging in African non-profit community activities or contributing financially to support their extended families' needs.

Theoretical Framework

African feminism and transnationalism theoretical frameworks guided the study.

African Feminism

In Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí's perspective, the essence of African feminism lies in its connection to the indigenous knowledge and traditions of the African continent. This viewpoint emphasizes the significance of grounding feminist discourse and activism in the cultural context, history, and experiences unique to Africa. However, the theory doesn't only concern women from Africa as the name may imply but is also inclusive of those living in the diaspora as many of the contributors to the literature have often lived abroad (Oyěwùmí's, 2003). Oyěwùmí's work advocates that, rather than adopting Western feminist ideologies wholesale, African feminism should be rooted in the indigenous epistemologies (also see Wiafe, 2023) and traditions of African cultures. Which could be unpacked in these lenses.

Cultural Context

Oyěwùmí underscores the importance of understanding and respecting the diverse cultures across Africa. She argues that African feminism should not be a mere imitation of Western feminist theories but should instead be deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the continent. This involves acknowledging the different belief systems, practices, and social structures that shape the lives of African women.

Indigenous epistemologies

The call to root African feminism in indigenous epistemologies implies a recognition of the wisdom, values, and ways of knowing that have been passed down through generations within African societies suggesting that, drawing on this indigenous knowledge (Wiafe, 2023) can offer alternative perspectives and solutions to address gender issues within the African context.

Traditions and Practices

Oyěwùmí advocates for an understanding of traditional African practices and their impact on gender dynamics. This involves critically examining existing cultural norms, rituals, and customs to identify aspects that may contribute to gender inequality and those that can be harnessed to empower women. It also entails challenging harmful traditions while preserving those that promote equality and justice.

Intersectionality

This viewpoint aligns with an intersectional approach to feminism, acknowledging the interconnectedness of various social categories such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and

in this research context, being a foreign or an international student. What this means is recognizing that African women's experiences are shaped by multiple layers of identity and social dynamics, and any feminist framework should address these complexities.

Empowerment through Cultural Identity

By emphasizing the importance of indigenous knowledge and traditions, Oyěwùmí suggests that African feminism can be a tool for empowerment, allowing women to assert their rights while staying connected to their cultural identity. This approach would avoid the imposition of external ideologies and, instead, encourage the development of feminist theories that resonate with the lived experiences of African women.

Transnationalism

The examination of how culture flows across borders and the emergence of transnational hybrid identities is transnationalism, now an influential and interdisciplinary field in social sciences and humanities (Quayson & Daswani, 2013). Studies in transnationalism challenged the conventional boundaries of nation-states and the stability of their borders, critiquing policy-oriented research aimed at managing and assimilating migrant populations. Scholars, in their efforts to move beyond simplistic models of linear migration and assimilation, focused on the complex web of ties and transnational connections migrants maintain with their homelands (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Blanc, 1994).

Most importantly, transnationalism highlights how the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent in ways that challenge the idea of rigid, closed-off nation-states and emphasize the need for international cooperation and understanding to address the complex issues of our globalized world. This underscores the potential for both positive and negative consequences as societies navigate this interconnected landscape.

Transnationalism thus plays a significant role in the experiences of African graduate students as they pursue higher education and navigate their academic and personal journeys in global educational pursuits. The decision of many African graduate students to pursue study abroad in North America, Europe, and Asia reflects the desire that results in borders and access to educational opportunities not available in their home countries, often leading to the blending of cultures. African graduate students living in foreign countries adopt elements of the host culture while retaining their African heritage. This cultural hybridity is evident in their daily lives, from the food they eat to the languages they speak. The harmonious living among people of different nationalities and cultures allows African graduate students to build transnational networks and form connections with classmates, professors, and professionals from various parts of the world and these networks can be invaluable for their future careers, collaborations, and advocacy.

Methodology

Qualitative research inquiry methods; thematic narrative inquiry and autoethnography methodologies, were utilized in this study to explore the unique experiences of non-traditional female African graduate students in North America as they navigate the complex intersection of familial responsibilities and cultural obligations with their academic pursuits.

Thematic narrative inquiry, as a methodology, frequently revolves around the core belief that individuals' lives are inherently narrative. By retrospectively recounting these life stories, individuals infuse their experiences with a heightened sense of meaning and coherence (Bhattacharya, 2017). The individuals through the process of storytelling, actively contribute to the creation of their life narratives, infusing them with personal insights, values, and interpretations. As a result, this research method not only functions as a methodological approach but also acknowledges the significant significance that storytelling plays in forming our perception of the world and our place within it.

Autoethnography is a study and writing approach that seeks to systematically analyze personal experiences (auto) to acquire insights into cultural experiences (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2005). This methodology calls into question traditional research methods and modes of representing people (Spry, 2001). In this autoethnography, the researchers used components of autobiography and ethnography in both the research process and the written output. As a result, the autoethnography process produced both a method and a dynamic interplay of process and product.

Some researchers continue to operate under the assumption that research can be conducted from a neutral, impersonal, and objective standpoint (Atkinson, 1997; Buzard, 2003; Delamont, 2009), the prevailing recognition among most is that such a stance is untenable (Bochner, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rorty, 1982). Consequently, autoethnography emerges as an approach that not only acknowledges but embraces subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's impact on the research process. As researchers and participants, instead of evading or presuming the nonexistence of these elements, we kept notes through the entire research process for us to reflect on our emotions thereby engaging in a continuous process of self-reflection to be sure our positionality and subjectivity didn't interfere with the data analysis process as recommended by (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Data Collect and Analysis Process

Based on the principle of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018), 10 participants who identified as female African, have a child(ren), and were in graduate school in North America (U.S. or Canada) were selected for the study through purposeful sampling.

Inductive thematic analysis was used for analyzing data from the participants and researcher's narratives to make meaning from the data collected following Bhattacharya (2017). First interviews were transcribed using Otter software (Liag, & Fu, 2016). After data transcription, we looked closely at all the participants' stories to become familiar with them. Then started by segmenting the data into smaller meaningful units called codes as

recommended Wong, 2008. These codes were essential labels or tags that capture specific concepts, ideas, or patterns within the data. At this stage, the codes were often descriptive and closely tied to the data. As coding progressed, we grouped related codes based on commonalities or similarities. This process involved identifying patterns or recurring text/phrases across the data.

The codes were then grouped to begin forming subthemes. Subthemes represented collections of codes sharing a common underlying concept or idea as Nowell et al., (2017) advised researchers may generate subthemes through an iterative process of comparing and contrasting codes.

We continued to explore the data for patterns and relationships among subthemes. Where we aimed to examine how different subthemes may relate to each other, overlap, or complement one another. This step helped identify connections and insights within the data. As the process continued, the subthemes with pertinent patterns were gradually merged to form major themes.

Each theme was finally defined and given a clear, descriptive name that conveys its central idea (Nowell et al., 2017). To validate the themes, we revisited the data to ensure they accurately represented the content. Using excerpts like direct quotations and examples from the data, the evidence demonstrated themes were grounded in the data (Eldh et al., 2020). Finally, we documented the themes in the research findings and provided a comprehensive discussion of each theme (Sutton & Austin, 2015). We also kept a researcher's notes in the form of journaling through the entire research process, as this was helpful for reflexivity while considering our perspectives and biases, to be sure they don't interfere with the data interpretation and analysis process (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017).

Lastly, for purposes of respondents' validation, research findings were returned to participants for member checks to ensure accuracy and resonance based on their narratives (Birt, et al., 2016).

Findings and Discussions

The research findings are listed and discussed simultaneously based on emerging themes from the semi-structured interview. Direct quotations, reflecting the voices of the research participants, were consistently employed throughout this section.

Participants Demography

The demographics of the sampled population were ten female African non-traditional students pursuing graduate education in North America (U. S and Canada) including the researchers. Pseudonyms were used as detailed in Table 1.

Respondents	Age	Country	Number of Children	Graduate Degree
J1	33	Nigeria	2	Doctoral
J2	30	Ghana	1	Doctoral
C1	33	Nigeria	2	Doctoral
T1	37	Ghana	3	Doctoral
E1	41	Ghana	2	Masters
AM1	34	Ghana	2	Doctoral
ALB	33	Ghana	2	Masters
BF1	34	Rwanda	2	Doctoral
AW	36	Nigeria	3	Doctoral
AWM	36	Nigeria	2	Doctoral

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents. *Source – Researcher's compilation, 2023*

Arrival, Expectations, and Realities

J1: One of the first challenges I faced when I first came was that I had no one who had had the same experience as me, within my department, that I could speak to about so many challenges. So, I had to navigate those on my own, of course, people were as supportive as they could be. But unless you have experienced it, there's a limit to how much support you can provide. It's an opportunity for people to document their journeys, at or through research, or just through journaling, you know, to be able to share, because something about challenges is that the moment you overcome them, they seem like they never happened. There is also the research opportunity.

BF1*:* It hasn't been easy, because some kinds of stuff were disconnected according to the expectations my academic unit had for me. And the expectations I had for myself. So academically, the system was different from what I had in Rwanda, in terms of teaching and learning. The software that I had to navigate in Canada, and the way the assignments and everything were designed were different. So, I had to adjust myself in a short period, for me to fall in, follow through, and do what I was supposed to do. That was a double stress. Other students either did their masters here, in the same university, across Canada, or in the US, which is a bit similar to the system. I was the only Black African female who studied in Africa in that academic space.

J2: It's tough, not just being non-traditional, but also being an international student. It's tough. Here in Canada, there are lots of opportunities for domestic students. With international students, there are some limitations. And now there are so many international students looking for these few spots in this field. The competition is so intense. Sometimes it would seem like there isn't enough support. Sometimes there's also the part where you come with your partner, and they have to get into jobs, their kind of field, it's hard for them to break into that. And so, for some people, there could be a lot of financial constraints. There's a lot of demand for what you can do. And all of this is bound to affect your perfor-

mance. There are opportunities, but I don't think they're enough. I think they're limited; I think there's the idea that as an international student, they say you're supposed to know what you're going to face. And so, you must have come with all the money needed. That's often the reason why we have these limited scholarship opportunities for students. When you have permanent residence, then you stand a better chance.

ALB: I think for me it's more of the finances in terms of being an international student. I mean, a domestic person will pay 1/3 of what international students pay. And sometimes it's a little burdensome, especially when you have a family. It can be overwhelming sometimes. As you're always thinking of how to settle the next bill. So that part is a little challenging. And there are very few scholarships that are available to international students, because we have families with kids, going out to work for long hours isn't possible. Even though there are bills to pay, we still have to consider our kids and come home on time or do fewer hours, so that we can also make time for the family. And we are here without external family help, so it's just you and your spouse or alone. And you'd have to manage? So, that's the challenging part of this journey.

Juggling Motherhood, Education, and Career

E1: Leaving my family behind to pursue studies has not been easy, especially as a mother. I left my younger baby when she was just one and a half years old. Even though I have great support from my husband, mother, and in-laws, I miss my kids. I have to keep a routine of talking with them on the phone just to make sure they don't miss me and wonder a lot about my whereabouts. My sisters and sisters-in-law visit them and take them out to have fun during the holidays. Everybody is doing their best to ensure I succeed in my academic pursuit. Fortunately, I don't have financial pressure or instances to worry about sending money home because my family is supporting me with that. While I support myself with the scholarship I was awarded.

This plight was also shared by **AM1** who expressed concerns about regular travels to her home country to see her children. She mentioned, that just talking to them on the phone wasn't bonding enough, in her words

AM1: My husband and family are doing their best, but I feel I must be part of my children's life and upbringing. Unfortunately accessing child care slots and the cost involved due to their ages will be overwhelming for us. So, in some ways, I can say I haven't been a good mother enough but I'm trying.

AWM: Advocated; our family needs all the support. Especially those of us who have children. Transition is much more difficult if you are coming with your children, and we need all the support. For example, if you are a female graduate student, that means that you are surviving on a stipend and coming with your kids, I feel like if that school has any learning or early childhood centers, they can be heavily subsidized, almost free, so that these women who are pursuing higher degrees can have enough time to be able to focus on their studies. Knowing very well that their child(ren) is being well cared for gives a lot of sound mind. Not getting this childcare support doesn't order well for our emotional and mental health as well. So that's one recommendation. Another I have is the financial support,

especially for those of us who come with children to get them into the university's early childhood development will be very helpful.

J1: There are so many things to look at with this. For example, the number of children can make a difference in how things are done. I have two kids, I wonder how someone with four or six or one is navigating, you know, there are also single parents. I have the support of my spouse. So that also changes a lot of things. So, seeing how this affects people makes me feel the need for more research. There are opportunities for a lot of studies and research to be done to understand the nuances of the experiences of these groups of people and how they're navigating their challenges.

Experiences Dealing with Family (Relations) at Home

C1: I think, first of all, African remittance is very important. They are never going to understand that you're a student and don't have money. So, you are going to share from your little stipend that's not even enough for your rent and your children's child care cost. You're going to have to send money home because in the African system, the support system is not government responsibility, we don't have a strong welfare system. The support system is family members and not assisting or giving excuses for not having money is not being "human" enough.

Contrary, **to ABL**, her family understands she is a student and doesn't ask for remittance from her. She acknowledged this by explaining,

ABL: Thankfully they seem to understand. And my mother-in-law and other in-laws are also in the U.S., so, they all seem to understand that, It's not a bed of roses at the moment. They know taking care of kids is no joke in my situation. So, I just need to complete and get a job, to make a good income. So that's how it has been.

As **C1** mentioned, family is everything to an African, because that is all we have to hold on to as a people. The culturally defined roles in our community require the perpetuation of one's family lineage, so as female graduate students, we are constantly reminded to have children and not to place our studies ahead of family. Relating to this, a participant indicated that;

ABL: I did have some pressure to try for a female child from my side of the family and my in-laws too, because I have only boys. At some point, they seem to be laid back a little about that and they come back again. It's been off and on. I have two boys so I don't feel pressured at all. I come from a big family of even, so I would love to have more kids but my present situation and all the stress that comes with childbirth and care wouldn't be a good decision. Well, when it comes along the way, I will take it. But now, it's not part of my plans even with the pressure coming.

Also, one of the respondents added that,

BF1: So, one thing I want to share is that most of the time as females, Africans coming to North America, achieving what we achieve, we forget ourselves. And at the end of the day, we feel like nothing. They say you have accomplished a lot. But most people when you talk with them, feel the gap because they lost themselves. They lost themselves through the journey. So, every time we weren't in school, as a PhD student, as a PhD candidate, or as a PhD graduate, ask yourself, Am I happy? If you are not, then seek to do something else.

Discussions

This section is tailored to the emerging headings outlined in the findings.

Arrival, Expectations, and Realities

The highlight of isolation and challenges faced by non-traditional students who initially lacked a relatable support system within their new environment resonates with the universal experience of navigating uncharted territories on a personal and professional level. When there is an absence of people with shared experiences within one's department, college, or campus associations, it becomes significant to have someone who understands the intricacies of another's experiences. Which underscores the importance of a supportive community for overcoming challenges.

The mention of encountering a different educational system, including unfamiliar software, assignments, and overall education design different from the African experiences, underscores the complexities of adapting to a foreign academic and social landscape. The need for a rapid adjustment to align with the new expectations adds a layer of stress, which may create a dual challenge that demands both academic and psychological resilience for students, especially those families.

The participant's acknowledgment of the necessity to balance work commitments with family responsibilities underscores the intricate juggling act that many international students with families must perform. The reflection on the isolation experienced by these female parent students without external family help in a foreign country, emphasizes their commitment to maintaining an academic, family, and work-life balance. While juggling all these even in the face of financial constraints, reflects the non-traditional female student's resilience and determination to prioritize family despite the demanding circumstances.

Juggling Motherhood, Education, and Career

The sacrifice of a mother being away from their young child, who for example is just one and a half years old, underscores the profound personal cost associated with academic pursuits for non-traditional female African graduate students in North America. The commitment to maintaining regular communication through phone and video calls reflects these students' dedication to ensuring that the child(ren) does not feel their absence acutely, which helps create a sense of connection despite the physical distance.

Involvement of extended family, with sisters and sisters-in-law taking the children on outings during holidays, demonstrates a collective effort to provide a supportive and enriching environment for the kids while their mother is away for studies. This support system demonstrates the communal nature of the African community, with each family member playing a role in supporting and facilitating the daughter/daughter-in-law's or sister/sister-in-law's education.

This passionate appeal by **AWM** sheds light on the critical need for enhanced institutional support for female graduate students with children. The advocacy for prioritizing the children of these students in university childcare facilities to alleviate the challenges associated with managing academic responsibilities while caring for their families is in the right direction and also revolves around recognizing the pivotal role that accessible and affordable childcare plays in empowering female graduate students to focus on their studies.

Experiences Dealing with Family (Relations) at Home

The mention of the absence of a robust welfare system in most African countries underscores the reliance on family networks for financial assistance. This lack of a government safety net adds an extra layer of responsibility on individuals, making the act of sending money home not just a financial obligation but a cultural and familial expectation deeply ingrained in the social fabric. This sheds light on the financial pressures faced by African students abroad, particularly in the context of remittances and the expectations associated with familial support, even from a limited stipend from which they are grappling with the challenges of covering rent and childcare costs.

Participants' reflection on relations with family in their country offers a glimpse into the cultural significance of family within the African context, particularly emphasizing the importance of family as a cornerstone of identity and continuity. The notion that "family is everything" articulated in the findings underscores the deep-rooted cultural value placed on familial bonds, seen as a crucial anchor for individuals within the African community. Talking about African cultural roles and societal expectations from family life, particularly for married females. The response revealed a challenging situation where there's a constant reminder not to focus too much on studies (doing a master's and Ph.D.) but to prioritize making and raising a family instead. This reflects the cultural importance placed on continuing the family line in most African societies. However, it's important to balance familial expectations and personal considerations, acknowledging the stress associated with childbirth and childcare with the present circumstances of being a student in North America away from home and the potential challenges that come with it.

Recommendations

Researchers suggest creating more spaces for non-traditional students to share their experiences and challenges. We recommend orientation programs not scheduled for the entire student population, but one that is tailored to the needs of non-traditional students with children. We emphasized the importance of universities actively listening to the concerns and needs of this unique minority group, particularly regarding childcare, family housing/accommodations, and mental health programs.

Institutions should conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of institutional support for female graduate students with children, focusing on enhancing childcare accessibilities within university settings. This research should specifically investigate the effective-

ness of prioritizing children of female graduate students in university childcare facilities, potentially offering heavily subsidized or almost free services. The study should explore how such support contributes to the academic success and overall well-being of female graduate students, with a particular emphasis on the emotional and mental health aspects. Additionally, the research should assess the feasibility and implications of providing financial support for female graduate students with children to enroll their children in university early childhood development programs. This investigation should aim at providing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing institutional support systems and addressing the unique challenges faced by female graduate students with children in their academic pursuits.

New and aspiring African non-traditional female graduate students should set realistic, achievable academic and personal goals to reduce stress and maintain a healthy life balance by creating a schedule that includes study time, work hours, family time, and self-care activities that are helpful to build mindfulness and stress management. To succeed as a non-traditional graduate student and maintain sanity, it is important to set clear boundaries between academic, work, and personal life to avoid being overwhelmed.

In addition, as more African women with children continue to enroll in graduate school, it is sacrosanct for universities abroad to create programs or support teams for their spouses to make them feel at home, so they remain in the right frame of mind. to continue to support their wives who are schooling. University communities have programs for spouses of students, but they are geared toward women whose male spouses are students, leaving men with wives who are students feeling sidelined.

Non-traditional students should participate in enjoyable hobbies and activities to relax and recharge. Connect with fellow students, professors, mentors, and support services on campus or online while remembering to share experiences and seeking guidance to alleviate feelings of isolation. Even though it's important to plan to remain focused in the nonacademic pursuit, also recognize life may throw unexpected challenges. Be adaptable and adjust schedules and expectations accordingly. This is called self-compassion. Also, understand that asking for extensions or accommodations is okay if needed and always incorporate short breaks into study routines to prevent burnout.

Lastly, female student parents shouldn't hesitate to discuss challenges with loved ones or a mental health professional; it's okay to share vulnerability to remain sane for your good self, the children, and those you're struggling to succeed. We acknowledge the multifaceted roles of African non-traditional women can be daunting, so, when need be, take advantage of academic advising, writing centers, and tutoring services in your institution to enhance academic performance and reduce stress.

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Resumen: En el ámbito de la educación superior, la búsqueda de la excelencia académica suele ir acompañada de numerosos desafíos, especialmente para los estudiantes graduados no tradicionales. Este estudio profundiza en las experiencias únicas de las estudiantes graduadas africanas no tradicionales en América del Norte, explorando la intrincada interseccionalidad de sus responsabilidades familiares y las obligaciones que tienen hacia sus familias en sus países de origen con su trayecto académico. Estas personas navegan por una compleja red de roles y responsabilidades, luchando así con las demandas duales de aspiraciones académicas y lazos familiares. Debido a esto, las estudiantes graduadas africanas no tradicionales enfrentan un desafío multifacético al embarcarse en su trayecto académico en América del Norte (EE. UU. y Canadá), lo que hace que equilibrar las demandas de la academia, las responsabilidades de criar una familia y las obligaciones culturales hacia sus familias en sus países de origen sea un rompecabezas complejo. La confluencia de estos factores crea un conjunto único de obstáculos que estas estudiantes deben sortear, lo que puede afectar su rendimiento académico, bienestar personal y experiencia educativa en general. Sin embargo, se sabe muy poco sobre este grupo minoritario académico. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo proporcionar una comprensión integral de cómo las estudiantes graduadas africanas no tradicionales gestionan la intrincada interacción entre sus aspiraciones académicas, responsabilidades familiares y obligaciones culturales mientras persiguen su educación en América del Norte, para abordar la brecha existente en la literatura sobre este tema. Se adoptaron como marcos teóricos el feminismo africano, que aboga por ideologías y movimientos feministas específicos para el contexto africano y que busca abordar cuestiones de igualdad de género, derechos de las mujeres y justicia social dentro de las sociedades africanas, así como el transnacionalismo, que examina cómo la cultura fluye a través de las fronteras para resultar en identidades híbridas transnacionales. Navegando por la interseccionalidad de la búsqueda académica, las responsabilidades familiares y las obligaciones culturales, el estudio arrojó luz sobre cómo estas estudiantes equilibraron las demandas de responsabilidades familiares y expectativas culturales junto con la academia en sus propias voces. Se utilizaron métodos de investigación cualitativa; la investigación narrativa temática y las metodologías de autoetnografía para explorar las experiencias únicas de las estudiantes graduadas africanas no tradicionales en América del Norte a través de una entrevista semiestructurada. Basándose en el principio de saturación de datos, se seleccionaron 10 participantes que se identificaron como africanas, tienen uno o más hijos y están en la escuela de posgrado en América del Norte (EE. UU. o Canadá) mediante muestreo intencional. Se utilizó el análisis temático

inductivo para analizar los datos de los participantes y las narrativas de la investigadora para la construcción de significados. Los hallazgos de esta investigación tienen como objetivo informar el desarrollo de sistemas de apoyo adaptados por parte de las instituciones académicas, los responsables de políticas y los servicios de apoyo de una manera que empodere a las estudiantes graduadas africanas no tradicionales al resaltar su resiliencia e ingenio para fomentar un sentido de comunidad y solidaridad dentro de este grupo demográfico, al tiempo que proporcionan orientación a las futuras estudiantes. El llamado de los participantes sobre la necesidad crítica de un mayor apoyo institucional para las estudiantes graduadas con hijos y la defensa de priorizar a los hijos de estas estudiantes en las instalaciones de cuidado infantil de la universidad para aliviar los desafíos asociados con la gestión de responsabilidades académicas mientras cuidan a sus familias va en la dirección correcta. Reconociendo el papel fundamental que el cuidado infantil accesible y asequible desempeña en el empoderamiento de las estudiantes graduadas para centrarse en sus estudios. Los investigadores sugieren que las instituciones deben crear más espacios para que los estudiantes no tradicionales compartan sus experiencias y desafíos. Recomendamos programas de orientación no programados para toda la población estudiantil, sino otro programa que se adapte a las necesidades de los estudiantes no tradicionales con hijos. Hicimos hincapié en la importancia de que las universidades escuchen activamente las preocupaciones y necesidades de este grupo minoritario único, especialmente en lo que respecta al cuidado infantil, la vivienda familiar/acomodaciones y los programas de salud mental.

Palabras clave: Feminismo africano - Autoetnografía - Obligación cultural - Interseccionalidad - No tradicional - Narrativa temática - Transnacionalismo

Resumo: No campo do ensino superior, a busca pela excelência acadêmica é frequentemente acompanhada por inúmeros desafios, especialmente para os estudantes de pós-graduação não tradicionais. Este estudo mergulha nas experiências únicas de estudantes africanas não tradicionais em pós-graduação na América do Norte, explorando a complexa interseccionalidade de suas responsabilidades familiares e as obrigações que têm para com suas famílias em seus países de origem com sua jornada acadêmica. Essas pessoas navegam por uma complexa rede de papéis e responsabilidades, lidando assim com as demandas duplas de aspirações acadêmicas e vínculos familiares. Devido a isso, as estudantes africanas não tradicionais em pós-graduação enfrentam um desafio multifacetado ao embarcar em sua jornada acadêmica na América do Norte (EUA e Canadá), o que torna equilibrar as demandas da academia, as responsabilidades de criar uma família e as obrigações culturais para com suas famílias em seus países de origem um quebra-cabeça complexo. A confluência desses fatores cria um conjunto único de obstáculos que essas estudantes devem enfrentar, o que pode impactar seu desempenho acadêmico, bem-estar pessoal e experiência educacional geral. No entanto, pouco se sabe sobre esse grupo minoritário acadêmico. Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo fornecer uma compreensão abrangente de como as estudantes africanas não tradicionais em pós-graduação gerenciam a complexa interação entre suas aspirações acadêmicas, responsabilidades familiares e obrigações culturais enquanto buscam a educação na América do Norte, para preencher a la-

cuna existente na literatura sobre este tema. O feminismo africano, que defende ideologias e movimentos feministas específicos para o contexto africano e busca abordar questões de igualdade de gênero, direitos das mulheres e justiça social dentro das sociedades africanas, bem como o transnacionalismo, que examina como a cultura atravessa fronteiras resultando em identidades híbridas transnacionais, foram adotados como quadros teóricos que orientaram o estudo. Navegando pela interseccionalidade da busca acadêmica, responsabilidades familiares e obrigações culturais, o estudo lançou luz sobre como essas estudantes equilibraram as demandas de responsabilidades familiares e expectativas culturais junto com a academia em suas próprias vozes. Métodos de pesquisa qualitativa; investigação narrativa temática e metodologias de autoetnografia foram utilizados para explorar as experiências únicas de estudantes africanas não tradicionais em pós-graduação na América do Norte através de uma entrevista semiestruturada. Com base no princípio de saturação de dados, 10 participantes que se identificaram como africanas, têm um ou mais filhos e estão na pós-graduação na América do Norte (EUA ou Canadá) foram selecionados para o estudo através de amostragem intencional. A análise temática indutiva foi utilizada para analisar os dados das participantes e as narrativas da pesquisadora para construção de significados. Os achados desta pesquisa visam informar o desenvolvimento de sistemas de apoio adaptados pelas instituições acadêmicas, formuladores de políticas e serviços de apoio de uma maneira que empodere as estudantes africanas não tradicionais em pós-graduação, destacando sua resiliência e engenhosidade para fomentar um senso de comunidade e solidariedade dentro deste grupo demográfico, além de fornecer orientação para futuras estudantes. O apelo das participantes sobre a necessidade crítica de um maior apoio institucional para as estudantes de pós-graduação com filhos e a defesa de priorizar os filhos dessas estudantes nas instalações de cuidados infantis da universidade para aliviar os desafios associados à gestão de responsabilidades acadêmicas enquanto cuidam de suas famílias está na direção certa. Reconhecendo o papel fundamental que o cuidado infantil acessível e acessível desempenha no empoderamento das estudantes de pós-graduação para se concentrarem em seus estudos. Os pesquisadores sugerem que as instituições devem criar mais espaços para que os estudantes não tradicionais compartilhem suas experiências e desafios. Recomendamos programas de orientação não programados para toda a população estudantil, mas outro programa adaptado às necessidades dos estudantes não tradicionais com filhos. Enfatizamos a importância de que as universidades ouçam ativamente as preocupações e necessidades deste grupo minoritário único, especialmente em relação ao cuidado infantil, habitação familiar/acomodações e programas de saúd mental.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo Africano - Autoetnografia - Obrigação Cultural - Interseccionalidade - Não-tradicional - Narrativa Temática - Transnacionalismo

[The translations of the abstracts were supervised by the author of each article.]