GLOBAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH
(Scholarly Peer Review Publishing System)

ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE STUDENTS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) INSTITUTIONS .A CASE OF THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY (MATABELELAND SOUTH REGION).

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to assess the challenges faced by female students in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the Zimbabwe Open University's Matabeleland South Region .It was prompted by the popularity and opportunities ODL has created for women who are usually constrained to attend conventional institutions of Higher Learning. The study was anchored on the liberal feminism. A mixed method paradigm was used and the questionnaire and interview techniques were used for data collection. Thirty (30) students participated in the study. Data was presented in tables (quantitative) and in narrative form (qualitative).The study revealed that female students in ODL face challenges which include shortage of modules, unavailability of tutors, time and financial resources due to biased decision making at family level. As a result of these challenges female students in ODL submit assignments late, fail to attend tutorials and perform poorly in examinations leading to delayed completion of their studies. The study recommend that female students in ODL be given extended time to submit their work (assignments and research projects), they be offered scholarship and bursaries and that campaigns be launched to conscientise society in general and men in particular to give equal opportunities and resources to both the boy and the girl children in all their life endeavors including education.

Key words: Open and Distance Learning, Challenges and female students

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The high demand for university education in Zimbabwe as a result of the democratization of the education system resulted in a paradigm shift that gave birth to Open and Distance Learning mode .At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a single university –the University of Zimbabwe. The tremendous expansion of the education system across the board based on the Marxist –Leninist ideology adopted by the newly independent state, resulted in a stiff competition for university places. Populist programmes such as the

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Universal Primary Education (UPE), Education for All, Automatic promotion and the Tuition free primary education opened doors to those citizens who had missed schooling due to the bottle –neck system of education of the colonial regime .To this group add those who were coming from the war especially the refugees and those who were due for schooling across the board. Special mention should also go to special groups such as the girl-child including women, who had previously been disadvantaged by both the colonial and the patriarchal systems that favoured the boy –child against the girl child in educational provision.

The coming of Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe could have been a great relief to the Zimbabwean citizenry in general and to the female populace in particular. Gudhlanga et.al (2012) and Dzakiria (2013) see the opportunities open to women through participation in ODL as:

> ➢ more freedom of access, and thereby a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualification
> ➢ overcoming geographical barriers and other confining circumstances such as personal constraints, cultural and social barriers and lack of educational infrastructure;
> ➢ a cheaper alternative to pursuing a course than through conventional methods,
> ➢ less disruptive as education is   combined with work.

As a result of the above strengths of Open and Distance Learning, families (parents /husbands) may be motivated to let their daughters /spouses pursue ODL programmes. Ohene (2014) posit that the increasing demand for further studies in Ghana as well as the high cost of regular education has made distance learning a popular choice for many especially the working population. This is more evident for women as Dzakiria (2013) report that ODL promises learners access, flexibility and convenience ,especially for women as enrolment of learners have grown 10 folds in Malaysia, and more women are now pursuing higher education today than before due to the advent of ODL .In the same vein , according to Ablodun(2008) cited in   Nyawuwata (on line)there is considerable evidence from South Africa, Ghana, Egypt, Nigeria and other African countries that have significantly increased the participation of women in educational and leadership roles that the quality of their educational and political systems have improved, thanks to ODL.

In the case of Zimbabwe, Nyawuwata (online) indicates that within the context of rapid technological change and deteriorating economic conditions, the Zimbabwean education system is challenged with providing increased educational opportunities without increased budgets. The answer to this challenge is the introduction of Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

This study is centred on Open and Distance Learning that is offered by the Zimbabwe Open University .Nyawuwata (online) indicates that in Zimbabwe ODL at University level only became locally available with the establishment of the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) at the University of Zimbabwe in 1993. In 1999 the CDE transformed itself to become Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).Gudhlanga (2013) et.al note that the Zimbabwe Open University has a main central campus in Harare. In addition to this, "there are 10 regional centres conveniently established in each geo-political province of the country in order for it to be accessible to every potential student throughout the country" (Benza 2001:18)**.** Of late it has added an 11th region; called the Virtual Region which is also coordinated from Harare and caters for students who are in the Diaspora. These regions have enabled the university to decentralize and go beyond the traditional boundaries of tertiary education.

Nyawuwata(on line) notes that ZOU is a multi-disciplinary inter faculty institution offering degrees and non-degrees programmes through open and distance learning to youth and adult learners. At present it has six faculties that are: Arts& Education, Commerce and Law, Social Sciences, Science and Technology, and Agriculture, and Information Technology and Multi Media Centre. This study is an attempt to evaluate the challenges faced by female students in ODL in general and in ZOU's Matabeleland South unit in particular.

Conceptualization of open and distance learning (ODL)

Open and Distance Learning has been in existence over a long period of time in Zimbabwe though under a different concept. Gudhlanga etal (2012:39) posit that "Open and Distance Learning refers to a system and process of connecting students, teachers and learning resources when they are not in the same location" According to Eastmond (1995 cited in Ohene and Essuman 2014) distance education is seen as the use of print or electronic communication media to deliver instruction when teachers and learners are separated in place /or time .In the same vein, the Common Wealth of Learning(2003) defines distance education as that which refers to situations where learners are physically separated from educational provider ,communicating in writing ,(using letters, mail, e-mail, fax or computer conferencing; verbally)by telephone ,audio conferencing ,video conferencing);or in face- to- face tutorial sessions.

The salient characteristics of Open and Distance Learning is that the learners and providers of education are normally physically separated from each other. Secondly, that this mode of learning is heavily dependent upon information communication technology which bridges the physical gap through the use of letters, telephone, e-mail, fax, and video conferencing. The other key medium in Open and Distance Learning is the face-to-face tutorial sessions where learners and teachers physically come together for a learning episode reminiscent of the traditional classroom teaching and learning situation. These sessions are however kept to a minimal as demanded by the nature of these programmes in contrast to the conventional/traditional mode of learning.

Because of the variations in the provision, Open and Distance Learning has assumed difference names, hence it is also known as Distance Education (DE) and learning by correspondence. In spite of the differences in names ODL programmes are flexible, accessible and convenient to their consumers. On that note Ohene and Essuman (2014) posit that distance education or learning is an approach used by providers of education for students who study when and where it suits them best .There is continuous learning by students in this mode of education, which usually suits students who fulfill other commitments such as work, family and community. Women have been identified as the most beneficiaries of such programmes as they are always hamstrung by both domestic and child bearing obligations. Over a decade now, Open and Distance Learning has gained popularity in many countries which include Malaysia, Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria including Zimbabwe, hence the current study focusing on Zimbabwe's ODL system.

Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe

According to Nyawuwata(online) Open and distance Learning(ODL) in Zimbabwe has been in existence since 1928 where the oldest of the correspondence colleges ,Rapid Results College was founded .It was then followed by Central African Correspondence College that was founded in 1954.Then in 1980 the Zimbabwe Distance Education College (ZDECO) was established. In essence ODL at university level in Zimbabwe came into being with the established of the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) at the University of Zimbabwe in 1993.In 1999 the Centre for Distance Education transformed itself to become the Zimbabwe Open University.

Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU)

The Zimbabwe Open University was established by an Act of Zimbabwe Parliament, The Zimbabwe Open University Act Chapter 25.20 Number 12/98(ZOU, University General Information and Regulations,2007) (Bishau and Samkange:2015:95) .According to Bishau and Samkange(2015) and Nyawuwata (online) ZOU had the mission to empower people from different walks of life by developing their skills and full potential, to preserve, advance and transmit knowledge without disrupting their family and working life through distance education system. Chiome, Chakanyuka and Chabaya (2011), Bishau and Samkange (2015) and Nyawuwata (online) contend that the Zimbabwe Open University originated from the University of Zimbabwe in 1993 as a Centre for Distance Education under the faculty of education offering degrees in education to teachers who had acquired certificates and diplomas in education. The Zimbabwe Open University became a fully-fledged state University with its own charter in 1999 offering degree programmes in the fields of Science and Technology, Business Management and Law, Humanities and Social Sciences and Health Sciences (Bishau and Samkange 2015). From this humble beginning, with an enrolment of 400 students in 1993 the Zimbabwe Open University has grown in leaps and bounds to what it is today. For example at its peak in 2004 its enrolment had ballooned to over 20 000 students making it the second biggest university in southern Africa to UNISA in terms of students enrolment(Chiome et al 2011) and in 2007 the Zimbabwe Open University had become the biggest university in Zimbabwe with a total student enrolment of 19676 against the country's total student enrolment of 41000.With its national Centre in Harare (Head Office) Zou is a multi-disciplinary inter- faculty institution offering diplomas and degrees to the citizenry of Zimbabwe through open and distance learning .

Today the Zimbabwe Open University operates through the country's ten geo political regions (comprising of Harare Metropolitan , Bulawayo Metropolitan, Midlands, Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, Masvingo, Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West, and has an eleventh region called the virtual region to cater for those in the Diaspora). At its most basic level, open and distance learning takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap (Nyawuwata: online).With such a flexible learning programme adult learners in general and women in particular should be the most beneficiaries of the Zimbabwe Open University. Based on the assumption that women have embraced the Open and Distance Learning

mode which usually suits students who fulfill other commitments such as work and family, this study intends to assess the challenges faced by female learners in Zimbabwe Open University's Matabeleland South region.

Statement of the problem

The advent of Open and Distance Learning mode in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world has been viewed as a panacea for women who had been constrained of time, accessibility and financial resources to pursue conventional education. To this end Dzakiria(2013) posit that the female population often outnumber the male population on DE programmes .This high female population on DE programmes may be understood from the unique mode of delivery ,which fits females with their multiple roles as career and family women and at the same time have to upgrade themselves. As such, all things being equal, more women than men should embrace the Open and Distance Learning offered by the Zimbabwe Open University. This study therefore is an attempt to assess the challenges faced by female students in open and distance learning (ODL) institutions in the Zimbabwe Open University's Matabeleland South region.

Research questions

The study was executed through the following research questions.

> ➢ To what extent do household chores affect female students in ODL?
> ➢ Do child bearing and child care obligations affect female students in ODL?
> ➢ How does decision –making mechanisms at family level affect female students in ODL?
> ➢ How do patriachical values affect female students in ODL?
> ➢ What strategies can be used to solve the challenges encountered by female students in ODL?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to assess the challenges faced by female students in ZOU's Matabeleland South region with a view to recommending strategies to ameliorate the predicament bedeviling female students in Open and Distance learning.

Significance of the study

The study will highlight the plight of female students in ODL so that the challenges revealed can be attended to by the policy makers in order to improve their lot. Secondly other researchers may use this study as a launching pad for their studies with a view to close the gaps left by this study.

Assumptions of the study

In carrying out this study it was assumed that:

- female students participating in ODL meet a host of challenges which make their learning very difficult
- respondents will be found willing to participate in the study without conditions
- Respondents will honestly and timeously respond to the questionnaire issued to them.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature reviewed in this study reveal that female students in ODL encounter a host of challenges which make their learning constrained. These are detailed below.

- ### Instructional Material Challenges to DE Students

Dzakiria (2013) discovered that instructional material was a problem for distance educational students. It was revealed, instructional materials come to students late; in some cases books do not come at all .As a result students have to make photocopies in spite of

having paid fees. This scenario could result in students performing poorly in both their course work and examinations. It could also weigh heavily on their financial resources as they end up making double payments.

- ## Financial Challenges

Gudhlanga e t al (2012) posit that participants to their study pointed out that it was not easy to raise money for fees .Women tended to be the last in families' financial packing order. Priority one was paying fees for children .For married couples, if the husband wanted to pursue studies, husbands gave themselves second priority. In the event that funds were still available, and then women were considered. Such bias negatively affected many dimensions of female ODL students' education including transport fares to attend tutorials and fees payment.

- ## Balancing Responsibilities/Multiple Roles –Mother, Wife, Employee and Student Against Time Constraints.

Dzakiria (2013) and Gudhlanga eta l (2012) confirm that the learners' utmost struggles in ODL completion is attributed to managing their responsibilities as parents and professionals or work related issues. Adult female learners often felt burdened by taking care of children and other family members at the same time as working and continuing with their education. Gudhlanga e t a l (2012) indicate that after performing all the duties tied to their roles women seem to be pressed for time when it comes to their university studies ,as a result some end up missing assignment submission deadlines ;failing to submit assignments, submitting sub -standard assignments ,failing to attend tutorials and group discussions, obtaining low marks in their assignments ,ill prepared for examinations, performing badly in their examinations thus forming the greater percentage of students who repeat courses.

- ## Affordability and Accessibility of ICT

Mafa and Ndudzo (2014), Gudhlanga e t al (2012 and Dzakiria (2013) reveal that the majority of students working or living in rural areas do not have access to the internet since these areas are not networked or connected. They also argue that the cost associated with the purchase of ICT gadgets such as laptops are prohibitive. It was also observed that while most participants had internet compatible cell phones, the cost of procuring data bundles from service providers such as ECONET and TELECELL were beyond their financial capacity.

- ## Technophobia

Gudhlanga e t al (2012) argue that urban based participants had access to ZOU 's regional centre's ICT facilities as well as from private cafes, however the challenge seemed to be that most elderly female students lacked skills to manipulate computers in search of information. This was exacerbated by the participants' phobia for ICT.

- ## Non-Supportive Spouses

Gudhlanga et al (2012) indicate that some participants mentioned lack of understanding on the part of their spouses; others explained that their spouses deny them the opportunity to attend group discussions, and to seek advice and guidance from male tutors. They (Gudhlanga etal 2012) also revealed an incident when a female student related that she was finding it difficult to revise for examinations, since the husband continuously came from the bedroom to switch off lights as a way of telling the wife that she had to come to bed .The husband did not understand that the only time when the wife could study was when the children had retired to bed.

- ## Non-Supportive Supervisors

Gudhlanga etal (2012) reported that most rural based students complained that since most tutorials were being conducted on Saturdays, it was not always easy to get permission from their supervisors to leave their duty stations on Friday mornings (most buses from the rural areas leave early in the morning to urban centres. Therefore if women were to be released after school on Friday, there would be no more transport to urban centres, where tutorials are normally conducted.)

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Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is viewed as the mainstream feminist theory. Dekker and Lemmer (1991), Haralambos and Holborn (1991) and Weiner (1994) cited in Moyo (2003:67) see liberal feminism as a

> "more moderate approach on gender issues. Liberal feminists aim for equality between men and women. In bringing about this, they advocate for gradual change in the political, economic and social system, because they believe that nobody benefits from gender inequality".

Liberal feminists rest their case for equality on the premise that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to pursue life, liberty and happiness hence the advocacy for equal rights between men and women. They believe that women deserve equality with men because they have the same capabilities as men. They see women's subordination as resulting from gendered norms (socialization patterns) rather than from biological and sex differences; hence they focus on equal opportunities in education, political, social and economic domains before the law including voting, property and reproductive rights between men and women.

The nature of the liberal feminist theory and the methods used for campaigning for equal rights between men and women was found relevant to this study; hence the liberal feminism theoretical framework informed and appropriately guided this study to its logical conclusion.

3.   METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed method research. Mixed methods research calls for the researcher to mix or combine quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language in a single study (Samanyanga and Ncube:2015.) Creswell (2012) defines mixed methods as a procedure for collecting, analyzing and combining both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem.

The use of mixed methods research is justified by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) in that it leads to the collection of data through different strategies, approaches and methods in such a way that the mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non overlapping weaknesses. Mixed methods research is therefore about combining the strengths of qualitative research to bolster those of quantitative research or vice versa in order to successfully resolve the problem at hand. In this study, the mixed methods approach was used to collect data through a questionnaire and interview techniques.

Population of the study

The target population of the study was all the female students in ZOU Matabeleland South region of 2015.

The sample and sampling procedures

The study used the purposive convenience sampling procedure to choose a sample to participants in the study. Tichapondwa (2013:124) posit that,

> The primary consideration in purposive sampling is your judgment as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study… You as a   researcher only go to those people who in your opinion are likely to have the required information and will be willing to share it with you.

Using this technique the study was   able to choose thirty (30) students to participate in the study.

Data collection instruments

The study used the questionnaire and interview techniques for data collection. Twenty (20) students completed the questionnaire and ten (10) were interviewed. The use of both the questionnaire and interview techniques allowed the study to achieve both instrument and data triangulation. These data collection techniques complied with the needs of mixed methods.

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Data presentation

The data was presented in tables, pie charts and in narrative form in compliance with the dictates of the mixed methods paradigm. This allowed for clarity of data presentation thus paving the way for good analysis and interpretations. Data was presented section by section according to respondents and finally mixed on findings.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Questionnaire

Reasons for Choosing to Study with Open and Distance Learning.

The reasons for studying with Open and Distance Learning institution are presented on table 1 below.

Table 1: Reasons for Choosing to Study with ODL.

N=20		
Reason	**Freq**	**%**
It is cost effective and affordable	7	37
Allows one to work and study at the same time	6	30
It's convenient –allows one to study in the comfort of home &family	4	20
It is flexible	2	10
Limitless places (places are many –not limited)	1	5
Total	**20**	**100**

The data on table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents (37%) indicated that they chose to study with Open and Distance Learning because it is cost effective and affordable.30% indicated that it allows them to work and study at the same time. The other reasons are that it is convenient 20%, flexible 10% and that places are limitless 5%.All in all Open and Distance learning is very convenient and affordable to women learners as portrayed by the respondents.

Is It Exciting or Challenging to Study with ODL

The responses of the respondents on this aspect are shown on table 2 below.

Table 2: Responses on Whether Studying with ODL Exciting or Challenging.

N=20			
Item	**Freq**	**%**	
Exciting	4	20	
Challenging	16	80	

According to data on table 2 above, the majority of the respondents (80%) revealed that it is more challenging than exciting to study with ODL. This confirms that although Open and Distance Learning is convenient and affordable to women it comes with challenges.

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Evidence of Existence of Challenges Encountered by Female Students in ODL

The respondents further highlighted the evidence of the existence of the challenges encountered by female students as outlined in table 3 below.

Table 3: Evidence of Existence of Challenges Encountered by Female Students in ODL.

N=20				
Challenge	**Responses**			
	Agree		**Disagree**	
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Female ODL students submit projects late	12	60	8	40
Female ODL students fail to attend tutorials	13	65	7	37
Female ODL students submit assignments late	11	55	9	45
Female ODL students delay completing their studies	12	60	8	40
Female ODL students submit poor quality work	4	20	16	80
Female ODL students frequently defer their studies	13	65	7	37

The data on table 3 above outlined a number of indicators of the evidence of challenges encountered by female students which show that they submit research project late (60%),they fail to attend tutorials (65%),they submit assignments late(55%),they delay completing their studies (60%) and that female students frequently defer their studies(65%) .Respondents however refuted that female students submit poor work (80%).

Effects of Culture on Female ODL Students

One of the challenges that women in Open and Distance Learning face is embedded in culture as is shown on table 4.

Table 4: Effects of Culture on Female ODL Students

N=20				
Effects of culture on female ODL students	**Responses**			
	Agree		**Disagree**	
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Decisions at family level favour men against women	11	55	9	45
Child bearing care negatively affect female students	17	85	3	15
Household chores deprive female students of time	14	70	6	30
Financial resources are first allocated to men, child then to women	11	55	9	45
ODL students drop out of their studies due to pressure from household chores	14	70	6	30
Female students in ODL take longer to complete their studies due to lack of support from spouses	11	55	9	45

The study respondents indicated that culture negatively affected their studies as shown on table 4 above. The respondents indicated that family decisions at family level favour men against women (55%), that child bearing and child care negatively affect their studies (85), household chores deprive them of time to concentrate on their studies (70), financial resources are first allocated to men, children and then the women (55).This bias has a combined effects of delaying the completion of the studies and the increase in pressure from household chores. Gudhlanga etal (2012) argue that for married couples the first priority are fees for the children, if the husband wanted to pursue studies, husbands gave themselves second priority. In the event that funds were still available, and then women were considered. This kind of arrangement negatively affected many dimensions of female ODL students' education including transport fares, fees to attend tutorials and fees payment.

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5. QUALITATIVE DATA

Challenges Faced by Students in ODL

A plethora of challenges were raised by the study participants as outlined below.

Time Constraints

The study participants indicated that time was the greatest challenge they were experiencing in their lives as ODL students. One of the participants (student A) remarked that, *it is very difficult to balance time for work, learning (tutorials, assignments and examinations) and family obligations. This results in students submitting substandard work especially on assignments which need a lot of research time.* Gudhlanga e t a l (2012) indicate that after performing all the duties tied to their roles women seem to be pressed for time when it comes to their university studies ,as a result some end up missing assignment submission deadlines ;failing to submit assignments, submitting sub -standard assignments ,failing to attend tutorials and group discussions, obtaining low marks in their assignments ,ill prepared for examinations and performing badly in their examinations ,forming the greater percentage of students who repeat courses.

Unavailability of Tutors

Equally challenging is the unavailability of tutors during tutorials .This makes learning very difficult as tutorials are an important mode of learning in Open and Distance Learning. Participant C had this to say, *at times tutors do not avail themselves for tutorials when you need them most, and this becomes a challenge because you would need their assistance in areas you do not understand in the module. This compromises the performance of students in both assignments and examinations.*

Unavailability of Modules

In most cases and courses modules are in acute short supply, at times they delay or do not come altogether. This is confirmed by one participant (student D) who said,

> the most challenge is on the module, the module for financial accounting as an example is obsolete, accounting principles change every six months, hence this module should be reviewed every six months to keep abreast with international trends .As a results the students had to use ACCA, CIMA and CIS modules which came with added costs.

This scenario compares well with Dzakiria (2013) who discovered that instructional material was a problem for distance educational students. It was revealed, instructional materials come to students late; in some cases books do not come at all .As a result students have to make photocopies in spite of having paid fees.

House Chores

The participants indicated that household chores pose a challenge to female students in Open and Distance learners. One of the participants (student F) remarked that:

> as a working student you would want to attend tutorials, do assignments prepare for assignments over the weekend but house hold chores such as , gardening, washing, child care ,cooking and cleaning demand your attention as well. At the end of the day you are forced to abscond your school work resulting in poor preparation for examinations and assignments and submitting half baked assignments due to pressure from home.

In this light, Dzakiria (2013) and Gudhlanga eta l (2012) confirm that the learners' utmost struggles in ODL completion is attributed to managing their responsibilities as parents and professionals or work related issues. Adult female learners often felt burdened by taking care of children and other family members at the same time as working and continuing with their education. Similarly Livingstone(2004 in Amondi, 2010:61) contend that" domestic duties which are still expected to do for their families take significantly more time and energy than those that most men expect and want to do.

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Child Bearing and Child Care Responsibilities

Study participants revealed that child bearing and child care responsibilities are a headache for most of the female students in Open and Distance Learning. They cited the discomfort, pain and demands of pregnancy, hectic demands of child care and even disturbances by children during reading times. Participant G, had this to say;

> when you are pregnant you are unable to do your best (because at times one is not felling well) in terms of assignments, attending tutorials and even preparing and writing of examinations. At times the time for delivery coincides with examination writings, hence you are forced to defer the examinations, thus extending the duration of the programme.

In the same vein Jones(1993;Kimmel, 2004; Mark, 1981; Witmer,1995 in Nan-chi Tiao (2006:39) observe that, "*although women today can pursue their own studies and careers, they are still expected to put their families first because no matter how good they are at the work place home is still "their" primary job."*

Uncooperative Spouses

The study participants revealed that some of their spouses are uncooperative. They do not support their educational endeavors; instead They are frustrating them with their jealousy tendencies**.** The majority of the participants indicated that their spouses are un cooperative, they demand their attention while busy with their studies and in order to protect their marriages they have no option but to put their school work aside. One participant(student F) retorted that:

> I engaged a male private tutor to assist me with my mathematics course in psychology but my husband suspects I am in an illicit affair with this man and HE queries why I did not engage a female private tutor. He therefore keeps a close watch on me and the tutor which disturbs my peace of mind and concentration on the course.

This point compares well with Gudhlanga et al (2012) who indicate that some participants mentioned lack of understanding on the part of their spouses; others explained that spouses deny them the opportunity to attend group discussions, and to seek advice and guidance from male tutors.

Cultural Values and Decision Making at Family Level

African values are seen to be a stumbling block to the liberation of women in general and to their participating in education in particular. One of the participants (students E) said;

> there is no sharing of household and child care duties, hence as a woman you are burdened by both school work and the house hold chores. To make matters worse my husband does not eat food cooked by a maid, hence I am forced to cook everyday while I need to attend to my studies. This really puts me under intense pressure resulting in poor performance in my studies.

Dorsey(1996) cited in Chabaya et al, (2013:239)explains that "from an early age daughters are groomed for their marriage roles of wives, mother and food provider…and they are conditioned from an early age to believe that a woman is inferior to a man and that her place is in the home. They are socialized to see themselves as less equal to men".

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above findings, the study recommends that:

- Female students in ODL institutions are given extended deadlines for submitting assignments and research projects.
- Campaigns are launched to lobby men to assist their spouses with domestic chores to enable them to cope with their studies.
- Campaigns are launched to lobby men for shared decision -making at family level.
- Government of Zimbabwe and civic society offer bursaries and scholarships for women in Open and Distance Learning.
- Campaigns are launched for equal opportunities in all spheres of life between the girl and the boy children.
- There be effective communication at household level between couples to bring trust between couples.
- There is deliberate campaign for the removal of oppressive patriarchal values which oppress women.

- There be more research in the field of Open and Distance Learning with special attention to women's plight.

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