



## FEMALE MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATE; DOES MARRIAGE AFFECT THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN A SAUDI UNIVERSITY?

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**ABSTRACT...Objective:** Our aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of marriage, pregnancy and child bearing on the academic performance of the female medical students in Saudi Arabia. **Study design:** A cross sectional survey study. **Methods:** A batch of 53 female medical students on the fifth class at college of medicine, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia in May 2013 answered a questionnaire about the effect of marriage on medical study. **Results:** Thirty-nine percent of married female medical students got a worse grade than before marriage, while 30.5% got better grade (39%), and the remaining percent got the same grade. **Conclusion:** Marriage in itself doesn't affect the academic performance but it is largely dependent on the individuals involved. Marriage supports them emotionally and socially.

**Key words:** Academic performance; female medical undergraduates; married students; Saudi Arabia

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### INTRODUCTION

Although the first author taught three batches of fifth year female medical students ENT course in Saudi Arabia and 10 batches in his home country Egypt, he did not face a lot of pregnant medical students as he faced the year batch 2012-2013. For his surprise as well is that their level of ENT medical knowledge is much better than previous undergraduate batches. Then a question arose in his mind: are married female students' grade point averages (GPAs) better or worse than their unmarried peers?. So, our aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of marriage, pregnancy and child bearing on the academic performance of the female medical students in Saudi Arabia.

Marriage and child bearing play a very important role in the traditional Arabic and Islamic countries especially in gulf area. Females in these areas usually marry in early young age (16-20 year old). Females study medicine usually graduates at age of 24. This age makes their choice of good marriage difficult. So, most of families accept

marriage of their female medical students during their academic years, although, they know the additional burden of marriage, pregnancy and child bearing on their academic performance. Unfortunately, there are little published studies about this burden.

Some married female students feel guilty about not being available to their children especially at examination periods. Conflicts also can arise when the husband can't tolerate the less involvement of the married student in the family life responsibilities.

As previously reported, the married female student undergoes three phases after marriage. First phase, they will be occupied by the academic study and when they realize that their family life has suffered as a result of their study, they will try to be available for the family at the expense of study (second phase). Later on, most of the married female students will find a balance between study and family responsibilities to get graduation<sup>1,2</sup>.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

A batch of 53 female medical students on the fifth class at college of medicine, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia in May 2013 answered a questionnaire about the effect of marriage on medical study. Twenty three of them were married and answered a questionnaire of 15 questions (figure 1). Another questionnaire of 3 questions were answered by 30 single unmarried students (figure 2).

## RESULTS

Age of marriage range was between 16 and 24 years with a mean of 20.5 year of age (table I). Their period of marriage ranged from 7 months up to 8 years with a mean of 3 years (table II). Four of them got two kids, eleven got one child. The kids were 10 males and 9 females. Two of the female medical students attended the final written exam in their 36 weeks of pregnancy, another two were at 16<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy and two were 10 days after delivery. Twelve were married to relatives (9 to cousins). Five of their husbands were working on the medical field (2 physicians).

Most of them appreciated their husbands as pushers for their study (21 of them 91.5%). Their mothers were taking care of their kids in 12 out of 17 (70.5%).

Seven got a better grade than before marriage (30.5%), while 9 got worse grade (39%). Twelve (52%) wished if they have not been married before graduation. Ten mentioned that marriage was a beneficial as regards studying (43.5%).

Seventeen of unmarried students feel that their married colleagues are happy as regards studying (57%) but 16 (53.5%) feel that the level of study of married colleagues becomes worse after marriage.

On declaring the final ENT marks, single female medical students got better grades than married students as shown in table 3 and figure 3

### Figure-1. Questionnaire for married female students

### Questionnaire about effect of marriage on female medical students

1. What was your age at marriage?
2. How long have you been married?
3. How many kids do you have? Their sex and age?
4. Are you pregnant or not? If yes, which week?
5. Is your husband working in the medical field or not? If yes, is he physician or not?
6. Is your husband relative or not? If yes, what degree?
7. Was your husband a pushing factor or depressor as regards studying?
8. Who is taking care of your kids?
9. Was marriage a pushing factor or depressor as regards studying?
10. If a sincere colleague asked you an advice regarding her marriage before graduating, do you advice her getting married or better to wait?
11. Was your grade last year better or less than a year before?
12. Did postpartum period affect your study or not?
13. From your marriage experience as regards studying, which of the followings do you prefer:
  - a. I wish I would not have been married till I was graduated
  - b. I wish I have been married many year before time of marriage as it was beneficial
14. Are you going to apply for postgraduate degree or are you postponing it after your kids getting bigger?
15. Was marriage beneficial or not as regards studying?

### Figure-2. Questionnaire for unmarried female students

### Questionnaire about effect of marriage on female medical students

1. Were your married female colleagues happy or not as regards studying?
2. Was their study level better or worse after marriage?

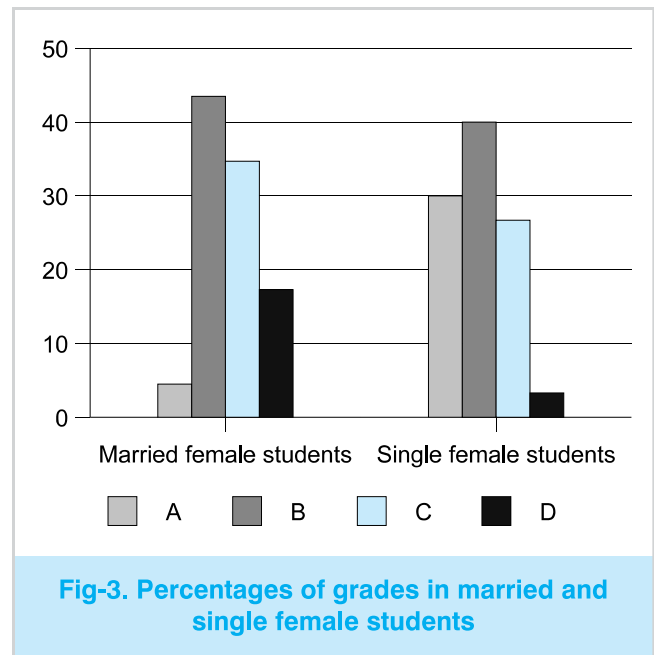
3. What do prefer, marriage before or after graduation?

**DISCUSSION**

Most of Saudi families accept marriage of their female medical students during their academic years, although, they know the additional burden of marriage, pregnancy and child bearing on their academic performance. However, most of the married female students stated that marriage in itself doesn't affect the academic performance but it is largely dependent on the individuals involved. Some married female students stated that marriage has helped them perform better in studying. Others said that studying is not always easy.

Our study shows that there is no effect of marriage on their medical study. This is in line with another study which reported that married students tend to be more diverse in their motivations for attending college and have had experiences in life that broadened their general outlook<sup>3</sup>. However, a Nigerian comparative study of marriage on the academic performance of the female medical students concluded that there was a significant difference between married and single students with more resit examinations for unmarried students<sup>4</sup>.

A British study in 2001 explored the data for all students graduating from all UK universities in 1993. In their analysis married students (men and women) do better than unmarried students<sup>5</sup>. There is little data on this issue in the Gulf region; however, Al-Mutairi in 2010 reported that married students at the Arab Open University outperforming their unmarried counterparts<sup>6,7</sup>.



Age of marriage	16-year old	19-year old	20-year old	21-year old	22-year old	24-year old
Number of students	1	5	5	5	6	1

**Table-I. Age of marriage**

Period of marriage	12 months	18 months	24 months	36 months	48 months	60 months	One st. each: 7, 11, 34, 72, 96 months
Number of students	2	2	5	4	2	3	

**Table-II. Period of marriage**

Grade	A	B	C	D
Married students	1 (4.5%)	10 (43.5%)	8 (34.7%)	4 (17.3%)
Single students	9 (30%)	12 (40%)	8 (26.7%)	1 (3.3%)

**Table-III. Final ENT grades**

## CONCLUSIONS

Marriage in itself doesn't affect the academic performance but it is largely dependent on the individuals involved. Marriage supports them emotionally and socially.

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The  
greatest happiness  
is to know the source of  
unhappiness.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

