

A Study of Challenges Faced and Support Systems Available for Emirati Student Mothers Post-Childbirth

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Abstract : The young Emirati female university students of today are the first generation of women in the UAE for whom higher education as become not only a possibility, but almost an expectation. Young women in the UAE today make up around 77% of students in higher education institutes in the country. However, the societal expectations placed upon these women in terms of early marriage, child-bearing and rearing are similar to those placed upon their mothers and grandmothers in a time where women were not expected to go to university. A large proportion of female university students in the UAE are mothers of young children, or become mothers whilst at the university. This creates a challenging situation for young student mothers, where two weeks' maternity leave is typical across institutions. The context of this study is in one such institution in the UAE. We have employed a mixed method approach to gathering interview data from twenty mothers, and survey data from over one hundred mothers. The main findings indicate that mothers have strong desires for their institution to support them more, for example by the provision of nursery facilities and resting areas for new mothers, and giving them greater flexibility over course selections and schedules including the provision of online learning. However, the majority felt supported on a personal level by their tutors. The major challenges which they identified in returning to college after only two weeks' leave included the inevitable health and lack of sleep issues when caring for a newborn, struggling to catch up with missed college work and handling their course load. We also explored the women's' home support systems which were provided from a variety of extended family, spouses and paid domestic help.

Keywords : student mothers, challenges, supports, United Arab Emirates

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