



Female Students' Off-Campus Social Challenges in Dodoma City, Tanzania

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East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences

Abstract

This study investigated about social challenges facing off-campus female students in higher learning institutions within the Dodoma City, Tanzania. The study used the cross-sectional research design and involved 96 female students who were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Data were collected using a questionnaire and an interview schedule. The analysis of data involved descriptive statistics and the thematic approach. Based on the findings, the study concludes that female students chose the off-campus residence due to various reasons, including shortage and high cost of campus hostels. Female students who resided off-campus faced various social challenges, including shortage of clean and safe water, insecurity, quarrels with landlords, long distance and unreliable electricity. Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that higher learning institutions need to work hard in securing affordable hostels that will guarantee cheaper cost and prevent students from experiencing the identified challenges.

Keywords: Female students; off-campus; social challenges; higher learning institutions; Tanzania.

How to cite: Gillo, I. O., Alex, S. and Magasha, O. (2025). Female Students' Off-Campus Social Challenges in Dodoma City, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 6(3), 12-19
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2025v06i03.0442>.

Introduction

Inadequacy of housing accommodation has been an issue of concern in higher learning institutions. This is due to an increasing number

of admission seekers on yearly basis (Varghese, 2016). In response, higher learning institutions have been struggling to provide sufficient and quality campus housing for their students, but the enrolment has always exceeded on campus

accommodation capacity (Ghani *et al.*, 2018). Following the global push to encourage female education in various parts of the world, there has been an increase of female students enrolled in higher learning institutions (Amutuhaire, 2023). This has led to inadequate infrastructure for higher learning institutions (Aluko, 2011). The available accommodations on campuses are short in supply, leading many students, including females, seeking for accommodations off-campus. Furthermore, due to costs for campus hostels, some students give preference to off-campus housing accommodation close to the school environment (Ndimande, 2018).

A number of students in African countries have opted the off-campus residence due to failure to get spaces on-campus (Razak *et al.*, 2017). According to Varghese (2016), one of the causes for off campus accommodation is the increase in students' enrolment, which leads to shortage of on-campus housing, thus creating constraints which may affect students' academic achievement. It was reported that students admitted tend to exceed the available facilities provided by institutions, inadequate funding of the educational sector does not allow the institutions to build housing for students (Chukwu, 2019).

Consequently, Chiguvu and Ndoma (2018) noted that most times the students are reported to skip or miss lectures, examinations and laboratory practicals as a result of issues emanating from the areas where they live, mostly being the off-campus residences. Particularly, frustration, frictions, conflicts, antagonism and open confrontations appear among roommates in overcrowded hostels (Chiguvu & Ndoma, 2018). Off-campus female students' problems are apparently notable, multidimensional and complicated (Lin, 2016). According to Phipps and Young (2013) and Mudau (2017), off-campus female students experience more serious incidents, including physical assault, unhygienic surrounding, lack of security in hostels and long distance than campus students, which finally cause them to fail achieve their pre-determined life and academic career goals.

According to Tesfaye and Jibat (2014), shortage of hostels is perceived to be the root cause for female vulnerability and to sexual harassment. Off campus women students'

problems are multidimensional and complicated, where the implication may extend beyond their current life to their future academic and professional careers, personal, social and economic life (Lin, 2016). At times, female students are forced to seek males' assistance for security and or financial support, which in turn increase their sexual vulnerability. As male and female students share a single room in off campus hostels, their vulnerability to pre-marital sexual and its complicated unforeseen consequences like unwanted pregnancies and sexual transmitted infections become potential risks. Chiguvu and Ndoma (2018) indicated that inadequate accommodation at higher learning institutes may negatively affect students' academic performance, as they are reported to skip or miss lectures, examinations and laboratory practicals. In addition, it causes frustration, stress, anxiety and home sickness (Chukwu, 2019).

In Tanzania, as it is in other developing countries, the problem of shortage of accommodation and living facilities in higher learning institution is a very common. Maslen (2012) and Chibelushi (2017) noted that the problem is high in public higher learning institutions and institutions allocated in urban centers. The Institute of Rural Development Planning and Saint John's University in Dodoma are among the higher learning institutions located in urban centers with students who live off-campus. Due to the shortage of hostels in most learning institutions, there is a mushrooming of hostels and renting houses around universities and colleges (Mukangara & Semakafu, (2014). Over 90% of students in higher learning institutions are made to seek settlements in off-campus housing (Mtani & Nuhu, 2019). Various studies related to students' accommodation in higher learning institutions have been done in Tanzania. Such include that of Mligo and Otieno (2018), Mtani and Nuhu (2019) and Mhlongo *et al.* (2021). However, little has been done on challenges facing female students in higher learning institutions residing off-campus in Dodoma City. Therefore, this study was deemed important.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This theory is largely linked to William Alonso (1964) through his Bid-Rent Theory. Alonso

applied economic ideas about land rent and accessibility to urban residential patterns (Straszheim, 1987). He demonstrated how individuals and groups compete for land based on their closeness to key urban centers and their ability to pay. According to the theory, living in a city depends on the balance between land costs and access to key facilities like jobs, schools, or universities (Alonso, 1964). Land near central locations, such as a university campus, is in high demand, and therefore, more costly. Different groups of residents are willing to pay various “bid rents” to occupy these areas, based on their income and needs. Wealthy individuals or high-income groups can pay to live closer to these central points while low-income groups often find themselves on the outskirts, where rent is cheaper but commuting costs and time increase (Straszheim, 1987).

In urban areas like Dodoma City, the theory illustrates that land near campuses is highly sought after for student housing and commercial development like shops, offices and upscale apartments. Because of this competition, prices rise and private developers usually focus on higher-paying tenants, making it hard for female students, many of whom having limited financial resources to find nearby housing. The few on-campus hostels available mean most students, especially girls, must look for off-campus options. Due to affordability issues, they often end up in distant, less secure neighborhoods, thus facing longer commutes, safety concerns and poor living conditions.

The Theory of Urban Residential Location suggests that without intervention, market forces will keep pushing low-income groups, such as some of female students-out of areas close to campus (O’Sullivan, 2012). This understanding can help shape policy and planning efforts. Possible actions include reserving land near universities for affordable students’ hostels, providing incentives for private developers to build low-cost housing for women and improving public transportation to link affordable housing with campuses. By grasping how competition for urban land works, higher learning institutions and city planners can create focused strategies to tackle the ongoing shortage of safe and affordable hostels for female students.

Methodology

This part presents the way the study took place from the general plan to the presentation of the findings. It covers the study design used, the population and sample size from which data for the study were collected, instruments used in data collection, validity and reliability of the instruments and the statistical treatment of data.

Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design. Cross-sectional design was opted in this study, since the design offers an advantage to measure the features, determinants or outcomes of a population over other variables, therefore, the researchers gathered data from a representative sample at a single point in time. The design considered both qualitative and quantitative types of data in the collection and analysis. According to Hunziker and Blankenagel (2024), cross-sectional study designs are suitable in social sciences studies since they allow data collection for causal relationship comparisons between variables with the sampled respondents at a single point in time.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised 10,036 female students from two purposely selected higher learning institutions out of eight higher learning institutions that offer various academic programs in Dodoma City. The two institutions were selected because of their high student population compared to hostel capacity and due to a notable number of female students from those universities, living off-campus.

Snowball sampling technique was applied to get 96 female students as respondents, who were residing off-campus. In addition, purposive selection of 8 key informants (four from each institution) that included four Warden officers, two Dean of students and two Admission officers considered to have much knowledge and experience on the subject matter of the study, was also done.

Instruments

Field data was collected through a questionnaire and an interview methods. The questionnaire was used to collect data from female students residing off-campus while the interview was used to collect data from key informants.

Validity and Reliability

Research instruments were tested to ensure their robustness before the actual data collection. This was done through conducting thorough evaluations, including that of face and content validity. Validity of the instruments was tested to confirm the extent to which the instruments developed appeared to measure what they were intended to measure. Similarly, the questionnaire's reliability was tested through a pilot study that was conducted to 40 students. The results indicated a coefficient of 0.83, which signified that the developed research instrument was reliable and consistent in getting the results.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics. Content analysis method was used for qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher observed ethical considerations through securing data collection permission from authorities, including the City Council of Dodoma and the

selected higher learning institutions. Additionally, consent from the respondents was requested before data collection took place. Furthermore, respondents were given assurance on confidentiality, privacy and good management of data.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion based on the specific research questions. The analysis begins with the demographics of the respondents.

Respondents' Demographics

Table 1 shows that a bigger portion (42.7%) of respondents were aged between 17 and 19 years while a smaller portion (7.3%) were of 26 years and above. The rest of the respondents were in the age groups of 20-22 (36.5%) and 23-25 (13.5%). The results indicate that most respondents were young, in their teenage years, implying they may have limited experience with decision making. This also suggests that housing initiatives should address specific needs and obstacles of younger students.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency (N=96)	Percent
Age of respondents		
17-19	41	42.7
20-22	35	36.5
23-25	13	13.5
26 and above	7	7.3
Level of study		
Basic Technician Certificate	28	29.3
Technician Certificate	16	16.6
Diploma	23	23.9
Bachelor	27	28.1
Master's Degree	2	2.1
Number of students living in a room		
1	34	35.5
2	47	48.9
3	13	13.5
4 and above	2	2.1
Time lived at off-campus residence (Years)		
<1	49	51.0
1-2	34	35.4
3-4	10	10.4
5 and above	3	3.2

Table 1 further shows that 29.3% of the respondents were studying at the Basic Technician Certificate level, 28.1% at bachelor degree level and 23.9% at diploma level. Only 2.1% were at the masters' degree level of

education. In terms of number of students living in a room, 48.9% were living two by two. 35.5% lived alone, 13.5% lived three by three and 2.1% were four and above in their rooms.

Results on time lived at off-campus residence indicate that more than a half of the respondents (51%) were having less than a year time residing off-campus, 35.4% had between one to two years, 10.4% had three to four years lived at off-campus and very few (3.2%) had lived for five years or more time at off-campus during their higher learning studies.

Research question 1: What are the causes for female students to reside off-campus in higher learning institutions?

This research question sought to establish causes for female students to reside off-

campus. Table 2 show factors that made female students to reside off-campus. A large group of respondents (70%) indicates that a reason for residing off-campus was shortage of hostels.

Therefore, shortage of hostels in higher learning institutions is a major factor behind female students living off-campus. These findings are in line with Duangpracha (2012), who reported that the growth of university student's population is outgrowing the accommodation facilities in higher learning institutions.

Table 2: Causes of Female Students Residing Off-campus.

Causes	Frequency	Percent
Shortage of hostels	68	70
Hard Campus rules and regulations	32	33.3
Personal interest	27	28.1
Poor Security	27	28.1
Poor hygienic status	28	29.1
High accommodation cost	25	26.0
Lack of female facilities	26	27.0

Table 2 further shows that 33.3% of the respondents were pushed to reside off-campus because of hard institutional rules and regulations. Some of the rules and regulations mentioned during an interview schedule include time limitation, cooking prohibition and restrictions for visitors and guests. These findings are similar to those of Bekurs (2017), who found that strict rules lead to negative response to readiness for students to reside in hostels. The interviewed respondents reported to be uncomfortable with rules and regulations, which prompted their decisions to reside off-campus. One of the respondents was quoted saying:

... I found hard staying in campus hostels because I was uncomfortable with rules and regulations. Here, I am free to do things that are not allowed in campus hostels, such as cooking for myself and also freedom of welcoming friends and relatives at any time, something which is not allowed in campus hostels" (Interview with Female student from St. John's University, 2022).

Personal interest among female students is among the causes for female students to prefer off-campus residence as 28.1% of the respondents revealed the factor as a major

reason. Finding shows some of these interests are such as privacy, which is not possible to have in campus hostels. Similarly, Sen and Antara (2018) pointed out that students who opt to stay off-campus are free on their own stuffs of interest.

Regarding security conditions 28.1% of the respondents resided off-campus to be in a better position of protecting their property. Students reported that on campus hostels do not guarantee security of personal stuffs. In line with the current study, Azevedo *et al.* (2022) reported robbery, physical assault and theft as common issues in hostels. These findings corroborate with those by Asiedu (2022), who reported that insecurity is associated with high population, certain locations, particularly certain rental places.

Table 2 shows that 29.1% of the respondents indicated that they resided off-campus due to poor hygienic status, such as unclean toilets and bathrooms, which are shared by a large number of students. Hygienic status is a very crucial factor to health sensitive students.

High Accommodation cost was reported by 26% of the respondents as a factor for deviating from the university hostels. It was

revealed that off-campus residences offer affordable vacancies. During interview one respondent reported, "... We are staying two students in a single room where it is possible to pay rent and earn living because we are sharing the costs with my roommate" (Interview with Female student from IRDP, 2022).

These results agree with Ghani *et al.*, (2018), who found that affordability determines the students' choice over the residential places in higher learning institutions. Sibusiso and Racheal (2021) found that where rental rates are prohibitively high, students will obviously look for lower rent house options available.

The findings reveal that 27% of the respondents reported that limited female facilities was a factor that made the female students to choose to stay off-campus. Azevedo *et al.* (2022) reported that students from more affluent backgrounds tend to prefer living off-campus, where they can access special facilities.

Research Question 2: What are the social challenges that faced off-campus female students in selected higher learning institutions?

This research question sought to establish social challenges experienced by off-campus

female students in the selected higher learning institutions as indicated in Table 3. The essence of this research question is to examine the non-academic difficulties which are experienced by female students who resides at off campus for understanding them and proposing policy recommendations for intervention.

Insecurity was the leading challenge that faced the female students who resided off-campus, as reported by 74.0% of the respondents. The students argued that their residential areas were not safe and secured because they lived very far from police stations or in congested residences. Furthermore, there were many cases that faced female students, such as invasion since many of the houses did not have gates. During an interview session, one of the respondents was recorded saying, "...there is no police station near houses to most of the areas where off-campus students reside, and many of the houses do not have gates or security guards" (Interview with Dean of student from St. John's University, 2022). These findings are in line with Mudau (2017), who found that university students residing off-campus experience insecurity cases.

Table 3: Social Challenges Facing Female Students Living Off-campus

Social Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Insecurity	71	74.0
Shortage of clean and safe water services	47	49.0
Domestic quarrels with landlords	33	34.4
Long Distance to institution	17	17.6
Unreliable electricity	16	16.7

Shortage of clean and safe water attracted 49% of the responses. One of the respondents was quoted saying, "...water has been disconnected for two months now and we are not sure when the problem will be resolved because we have huge water debt and still many of us were not paying" (Interview with Female student from IRDP, 2022). Similarly, Owolabi (2015) noted that off-campus students experience low water supply. Azevedo *et al.* (2022) reported that lack of water has serious effects on students' attendance rates and academic performance and this could cause even the best students to lose momentum as they deal with diseases and hygienic issues.

Domestic quarrels with landlords was reported as a challenge as revealed by 34.4% of the

respondents. This is because some of the house lords were very cruel, especially during the end of contracts, when students were required to pay to renew their contracts. The results revealed that the conflicts between students and their landlords affected the students as they were frustrated hence, failing to concentrate in their studies.

Furthermore, long distance was indicated as a challenge by 17.6% of the respondents. Long distance to the institutions caused other challenges, such as robbery and raping threats, when moving. The experience further caused students to skip study periods. These findings are similar to those by Chiguvi and Ndoma (2018), who found that most times, students missed lectures, examinations and laboratory

practical sessions due to long distances from hostels to the universities.

Finally, unreliable electricity was a reported challenge as indicated by 16.7% of the respondents. The findings of Adebisi *et al.* (2017) and Chiguvu and Ndoma (2018) revealed that unreliable electricity supply led to students' poor performance. During an interview session, one of the respondents was recorded saying, "...it is hard to study privately at my living place, as some days we lack electricity due to reluctance to pay" (Interview student from St. John's University, 2022). Therefore, unreliable electricity was a serious challenge faced by the female students who resided off-campus.

Conclusions

The study concludes that female students chose the off-campus residence due to various reasons, including shortage and high cost of campus hostels. Other challenges included hard rules and regulations, poor security, high accommodation cost and limited facilities. Furthermore, different social challenges faced the off-campus female students. Those include shortage of clean and safe water, insecurity, quarrels with landlords, long distance and unreliable electricity. Therefore, many factors caused the female students to reside off campus and the choice to stay off-campus resulted numerous social challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that higher learning institutions need to work hard in securing affordable hostels that will guarantee cheaper cost and prevent students from experiencing the identified challenges.

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