

University of Alberta

**WOMEN'S ENROLMENT AND PARTICIPATION ISSUES
AT
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated difficulties faced by Tanzanian women considering or participating in higher education through the Open University of Tanzania and identified ways the University can enhance the participation of women by focusing on the questions: What barriers keep women from enrolling for higher education with the OUT? What difficulties do women students experience while studying with the OUT? What can the OUT do to enhance the enrollment of women? What can the OUT do to improve the learning conditions and study experiences for the women students?

A qualitative interview study was employed in seventeen regions in Tanzania with OUT women students and their non-student women friends, and OUT staff. Data were gathered from interviews, discussions, observations and documentation, while analysis of data occurred throughout the research period.

The study demonstrated that women experience institutional and societal barriers. The institutional barriers related to OUT funding shortfalls, and lack of publicity including adequate information about studying at a distance. The societal barriers were linked to cultural expectations and religious influences regarding women's roles, including the marginalization of women's concerns, patriarchal control, early marriages, and little societal support.

The study also demonstrated that women experienced personal difficulties and problems with QUT operations. The personal difficulties linked to societal lack of support, competing and conflicting family concerns and social discouragement. Operational concerns involved the OUT course delivery model, delays in assignments and feedback, limited access to resources, physical and social isolation from support services and other female students, uncertainty, lack of confidence.

Recommendations include more extensive publicity and orientation sessions, a redesign of the course delivery model and support services, increased gender awareness for OUT staff and funding partnerships to introduce new communications technologies.