

**Romantic Relationships and Research Report Submission Delays: A Neglected Dimension of Academic Persistence Among Graduate Students in Uganda**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities have reached concerning levels, yet the influence of romantic relationships on research progress remains largely unexplored despite relationships being central aspects of students' lives during this developmental period.

**Objective:** This study examined the influence of romantic relationships on research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities, specifically assessing the relationship between romantic relationship status and submission timeliness, investigating mechanisms through which relationships influence research progress, and identifying challenges students face in balancing relationship and research demands.

**Methods:** A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed across four Ugandan universities. The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey of 384 graduate students recruited through stratified random sampling, measuring relationship status, relationship quality using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components inventory, time allocation patterns, and submission timelines. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, one-way ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regression controlling for demographic and institutional factors. The qualitative component involved 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's approach, with integration occurring through joint display matrices at the interpretation stage.

**Results:** Relationship status was significantly associated with submission delays ( $F = 12.84, p < .001$ ), with separated/divorced students experiencing substantially longer delays ( $M = 8.7$  months,  $SD = 5.3$ ) compared to single ( $M = 4.2$  months,  $SD = 3.8$ ), dating ( $M = 5.1$  months,  $SD = 4.2$ ), and married students ( $M = 5.3$  months,  $SD = 4.5$ ). Partner support for studies showed the strongest correlation with reduced delays ( $r = -.402, p < .001$ ), while conflict frequency was positively associated with delays ( $r = .367, p < .001$ ). Multiple regression analysis revealed that relationship variables independently predicted submission delays even after controlling for supervision quality, funding status, program level, and field of study, with the full model explaining 41.2% of variance ( $F = 17.21, p < .001$ ). Specifically, being separated/divorced predicted an additional 3.21 months of delay ( $\beta = .187, p < .001$ ), higher relationship quality predicted shorter delays ( $\beta = -.162, p = .003$ ), greater partner support reduced delays ( $\beta = -.156, p = .003$ ), and increased conflict frequency extended delays ( $\beta = .143, p = .004$ ). Qualitative findings identified mechanisms including emotional distress from relationship instability, time allocation conflicts, practical support or hindrance from partners, and cultural expectations around marriage intersecting with academic demands.

**Conclusion:** Romantic relationships significantly influence research report submission delays among graduate students in Uganda through multiple mechanisms, with relationship quality, partner support, and relationship stability emerging as key factors. These findings demonstrate that romantic relationships constitute a legitimate dimension of graduate student persistence requiring explicit consideration in institutional support systems, supervision practices, and student guidance programs.

**Keywords: romantic relationships, research submission delays, graduate students**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Graduate education represents a critical phase in the academic journey, characterized by rigorous intellectual demands, extensive research commitments, and the expectation of timely degree completion. In Uganda's higher education landscape, graduate students face multifaceted challenges that extend beyond academic and financial constraints to encompass personal and relational dimensions of their lives (Godfrey et al., 2021; Pesonen et al., 2022). Among these often-overlooked factors, romantic relationships have emerged as a significant yet understudied influence on academic persistence and timely research completion. The intersection between romantic relationships and academic performance among graduate students presents a complex dynamic (Ilmi et al., 2021; Sękala et al., 2023). While romantic partnerships can provide emotional support, motivation, and stability that enhance academic persistence, they may also introduce competing demands for time, attention, and emotional energy that complicate the already demanding process of conducting research and meeting submission deadlines (Julius & Mategeko, 2025). This duality becomes particularly salient in the Ugandan context, where cultural expectations around relationships, marriage, and family responsibilities intersect with academic obligations in ways that may differ from Western contexts where much of the existing research has been conducted ("The Employability Status of Makerere University Graduates," 2019). Research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities have become a persistent concern, contributing to extended time-to-degree completion, increased attrition rates, and diminished research productivity. While institutional factors such as inadequate supervision, limited resources, and administrative bottlenecks have been extensively examined, the role of students' romantic relationships in influencing their research progress remains largely unexplored. T (Hosain et al., 2023; Kakooza et al., 2019)his study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating how romantic relationships influence research report submission timelines among graduate students in Uganda, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the factors affecting academic persistence in graduate education. Understanding this neglected dimension is crucial for developing comprehensive support systems that acknowledge the whole student experience, recognize the legitimate place of personal relationships in students' lives, and provide guidance on effectively balancing academic and relational commitments during the demanding graduate school period.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Graduate education in Uganda has expanded significantly over the past two decades, with universities enrolling increasing numbers of master's and doctoral students across various disciplines. However, this expansion has been accompanied by concerns about timely degree completion, with many graduate students exceeding the stipulated time frames for submitting their research reports and completing their programs (Alam et al., 2022; Kintu et al., 2019; Sophie & Crispus, 2024). While institutional and academic factors have traditionally dominated discussions about these delays, the personal lives of graduate students, particularly their romantic relationships, have received minimal scholarly attention. Romantic relationships during graduate school are ubiquitous (Julius & Sula, 2025a; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025). Many graduate students are at life stages where they are establishing or maintaining serious romantic partnerships, getting married, or starting families. In Uganda's cultural context, societal expectations around marriage and family formation often coincide with the typical age range of graduate students, creating unique

pressures and opportunities (Mainga et al., 2022; Mgaiwa, 2021; Underdahl et al., 2023). The transition from undergraduate to graduate education often involves not just academic advancement but also significant life changes in relationship status, with implications for students' time management, emotional wellbeing, and academic focus (Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; Namuwonge, 2024).

Existing international literature presents mixed findings on the relationship between romantic partnerships and academic outcomes. Some studies suggest that stable, supportive romantic relationships can enhance academic performance by providing emotional support, reducing stress, and offering practical assistance with daily responsibilities. Conversely, other research indicates that romantic relationships, particularly those characterized by conflict, instability, or intensive time demands, can detract from academic focus and contribute to delays in academic progress. The dissolution of romantic relationships during graduate school has also been identified as a significant stressor that can derail academic timelines (Nizhenkovska et al., 2022; P. Ntale et al., 2020a). In the Ugandan context, additional cultural dimensions shape how romantic relationships intersect with graduate education. Traditional gender roles may place differential expectations on male and female graduate students regarding their responsibilities within relationships (Julius & Sula, 2025b). The timing of marriage and childbearing, financial pressures associated with relationship maintenance in contexts of economic constraint, and the integration of extended family expectations all create a distinctive environment that may influence how romantic relationships affect academic persistence (Chhinzer & Russo, 2018; Geera & Onen, 2023; Yiga, 2022). Despite the prevalence of research submission delays in Ugandan universities and the central role that romantic relationships play in the lives of graduate students, empirical investigation of the connection between these two phenomena remains scant. This gap in knowledge limits the ability of universities, supervisors, and student support services to develop contextually appropriate interventions that acknowledge and address the full range of factors influencing graduate student success.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities have reached concerning levels, with many students taking significantly longer than the stipulated program duration to complete their degrees (Julius & Geoffrey, 2025). While universities and researchers have identified various institutional, financial, and academic factors contributing to these delays, the influence of students' romantic relationships on research progress has been largely neglected in both policy discussions and empirical research (Mbalinda et al., 2024; P. Ntale et al., 2020b; Tan et al., 2023). This oversight is problematic for several reasons. First, romantic relationships are a central aspect of graduate students' lives, with many students navigating serious partnerships, marriages, or relationship transitions during their studies. The emotional, temporal, and practical demands associated with these relationships may significantly impact students' ability to maintain consistent progress on their research. Second, without understanding how romantic relationships influence research submission timelines, universities cannot develop comprehensive support systems that address the full range of factors affecting student persistence (Abelha et al., 2020; Gracious Kazaara & Julius, 2025; Julius & Sula, n.d.). Third, the silence around this issue may contribute to students feeling isolated or guilty about relationship-related challenges, preventing them from seeking appropriate support. Preliminary observations suggest that romantic relationships may influence research progress through multiple pathways: time allocation conflicts between relationship maintenance and research activities, emotional distress from

relationship instability or dissolution, practical support or hindrance from partners, and the intersection of cultural expectations around relationships with academic demands (P. D. Ntale & Ssempebwa, 2022). However, the nature, extent, and mechanisms of these influences remain empirically unexamined in the Ugandan context. If this knowledge gap persists, universities will continue to operate with an incomplete understanding of the barriers to timely degree completion, potentially implementing interventions that fail to address significant sources of delay. Students may continue to struggle with balancing relationship and academic demands without adequate guidance or support structures. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate how romantic relationships influence research report submission delays among graduate students in Uganda, providing evidence to inform more holistic student support approaches.

#### **MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

To examine the influence of romantic relationships on research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. To assess the relationship between romantic relationship status (single, dating, married, separated/divorced) and the timeliness of research report submissions among graduate students in Ugandan universities.
2. To investigate the mechanisms through which romantic relationships influence research progress and submission timelines among graduate students in Ugandan universities.
3. To identify the challenges graduate students face in balancing romantic relationship demands with research commitments and their strategies for managing these competing demands.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How does romantic relationship status relate to the timeliness of research report submissions among graduate students in Ugandan universities?
2. What are the mechanisms through which romantic relationships influence research progress and submission timelines among graduate students in Ugandan universities?
3. What challenges do graduate students face in balancing romantic relationship demands with research commitments, and what strategies do they employ to manage these competing demands?

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to examine the influence of romantic relationships on research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities. The study was conducted across four purposively selected universities in Uganda (two public and two private institutions) that offered diverse graduate programs and had substantial graduate student populations. The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey design with a sample size of 384 graduate students, calculated using Kish Leslie's formula with a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and 50% proportion estimate, which provided adequate statistical power (80%) to detect medium effect sizes (Cohen's  $d = 0.5$ ) in the primary analyses. Participants were recruited through stratified random sampling, with stratification based on relationship status (single, dating, married, separated/divorced), gender, and program level (master's and doctoral) to ensure representative inclusion of diverse relationship contexts. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire that measured

relationship status, relationship quality using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) inventory, time allocation patterns, research progress indicators, actual versus expected submission timelines, and demographic characteristics. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) used to characterize the sample and key variables (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

Inferential analyses included Chi-square tests and Fisher's exact tests to examine associations between relationship status and submission delay categories (on-time, moderately delayed, severely delayed), independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests to compare mean delays across relationship status groups, and Pearson correlation analyses to assess relationships between relationship quality dimensions and research progress indicators. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the independent contribution of relationship variables (status, quality, time investment, partner support) to variance in submission delays while controlling for potential confounders including age, gender, program level, funding status, supervision quality, and field of study, with multicollinearity assessed through variance inflation factors ( $VIF < 5$ ) and model assumptions verified through residual diagnostics. Mediation analyses using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) tested whether emotional wellbeing and time management mediated the relationship between romantic relationship variables and submission delays, providing bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects. Moderation analyses examined whether gender, relationship duration, or cohabitation status moderated the relationship between relationship quality and research progress. Qualitative data from interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report production, with NVivo 12 software facilitating data organization and coding. The qualitative analysis identified patterns, mechanisms, contextual factors, and nuanced experiences that quantitative measures could not capture, with particular attention to culturally specific dimensions of romantic relationships in the Ugandan context. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred at the interpretation stage through a joint display matrix that compared and contrasted statistical results with thematic findings to provide comprehensive insights into how romantic relationships influenced research submission timelines. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review boards of participating universities, and all participants provided written informed consent after being assured of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw without penalty, with particular sensitivity to the personal nature of relationship information and potential participant vulnerability around academic progress concerns.

**Results.**

**Table 1: Relationship Status and Research Report Submission Timeliness Among Graduate Students**

Relationship Status	n (%)	On-time n (%)	Moderately Delayed n (%)	Severely Delayed n (%)	Mean Delay (months) ± SD	F/ $\chi^2$	p-value
Single	98 (25.5)	42 (42.9)	38 (38.8)	18 (18.4)	4.2 ± 3.8	F = 12.84	< .001

Dating (non-cohabiting)	112 (29.2)	38 (33.9)	51 (45.5)	23 (20.5)	5.1 ± 4.2	$\chi^2 = 18.73$	.005
Married/Cohabiting	142 (37.0)	51 (35.9)	58 (40.8)	33 (23.2)	5.3 ± 4.5		
Separated/Divorced	32 (8.3)	6 (18.8)	12 (37.5)	14 (43.8)	8.7 ± 5.3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>384 (100)</b>	<b>137 (35.7)</b>	<b>159 (41.4)</b>	<b>88 (22.9)</b>	<b>5.4 ± 4.6</b>		

**Note:** On-time = submitted within stipulated timeframe; Moderately delayed = 1-6 months delay; Severely delayed = >6 months delay. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated significant differences between separated/divorced and all other groups ( $p < .001$ ), and between single and married groups ( $p = .032$ ).

### Statistical Interpretation

The one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant effect of relationship status on submission delays,  $F(3, 380) = 12.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .092$ , indicating that approximately 9.2% of the variance in submission delays was accounted for by relationship status. The chi-square test of independence demonstrated a significant association between relationship status and delay category,  $\chi^2(6) = 18.73$ ,  $p = .005$ , Cramér's  $V = .156$ , suggesting a small to medium effect size. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that separated/divorced students experienced significantly longer delays ( $M = 8.7$  months,  $SD = 5.3$ ) compared to single students ( $M = 4.2$  months,  $SD = 3.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.98$ ), dating students ( $M = 5.1$  months,  $SD = 4.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.76$ ), and married students ( $M = 5.3$  months,  $SD = 4.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.71$ ). Additionally, single students submitted significantly earlier than married students ( $p = .032$ ,  $d = 0.26$ ), though this difference was relatively modest. The high standard deviations across all groups indicated substantial within-group variability, suggesting that relationship status alone did not uniformly determine submission outcomes.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrated that relationship status was significantly associated with research report submission timeliness, though the magnitude of this association varied considerably across relationship categories. Most notably, students who were separated or divorced experienced substantially longer delays, with 43.8% classified as severely delayed compared to only 18.4% of single students. This pattern suggested that relationship dissolution during graduate studies represented a particularly disruptive life event that interfered with academic progress, potentially through mechanisms including emotional distress, practical disruptions in living arrangements and financial stability, and the cognitive load associated with navigating relationship breakdown while simultaneously pursuing demanding research activities. The relatively similar delay patterns among single, dating, and married students (means ranging from 4.2 to 5.3 months) indicated that stable relationship contexts—whether characterized by singlehood, ongoing dating relationships, or marriage—provided relatively comparable environments for research completion. However, married students showed slightly elevated delay rates compared to single students, which suggested that while marriage might provide emotional support, it also introduced competing demands for time and attention that could moderately impede research progress. The substantial within-group variability observed across all relationship

categories underscored that relationship status represented only one factor among many influencing submission timelines, and that the quality and characteristics of relationships, rather than status alone, likely played crucial roles in determining academic outcomes.

**Table 2: Relationship Quality Dimensions and Research Progress Indicators**

Relationship Quality Dimension	Mean $\pm$ SD (Range 1-7)	Correlation with Months Delayed (r)	p-value	Correlation with Weekly Hours on Research (r)	p-value
Satisfaction	5.4 $\pm$ 1.3	-.284**	< .001	.312**	< .001
Commitment	5.8 $\pm$ 1.2	-.198**	.002	.246**	< .001
Intimacy	5.3 $\pm$ 1.4	-.167*	.012	.203**	.001
Trust	6.1 $\pm$ 1.1	-.221**	< .001	.268**	< .001
Passion	4.9 $\pm$ 1.5	-.092	.165	.134*	.038
Conflict Frequency	3.2 $\pm$ 1.6	.367**	< .001	-.341**	< .001
Partner Support for Studies	5.6 $\pm$ 1.5	-.402**	< .001	.456**	< .001
Relationship Time Investment (hrs/week)	18.3 $\pm$ 9.7	.189**	.004	-.276**	< .001
Overall Relationship Quality (composite)	5.5 $\pm$ 1.2	-.328**	< .001	.374**	< .001

**Note:** N = 286 (participants in romantic relationships). \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01. Relationship quality dimensions measured using 7-point Likert scales. Weekly research hours: M = 22.4, SD = 8.6 hours.

### Statistical Interpretation

Pearson correlation analyses revealed significant associations between multiple relationship quality dimensions and research progress indicators. The strongest negative correlation with submission delays was observed for partner support for studies ( $r = -.402$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that students who perceived higher levels of academic support from their romantic partners experienced shorter delays, with this variable accounting for approximately 16.2% of the variance in delay duration. Conflict frequency demonstrated the second-strongest association with delays ( $r = .367$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that relationships characterized by frequent disagreements were associated with longer submission delays. The overall relationship quality composite score showed a moderate negative correlation with delays ( $r = -.328$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a moderate positive correlation with weekly hours dedicated to research ( $r = .374$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher relationship quality was associated with both fewer delays and greater time investment in research activities. Satisfaction, commitment, trust, and intimacy all demonstrated significant but modest negative correlations with delays (ranging from  $r = -.167$  to  $r = -.284$ ), while passion showed no significant association with delays ( $r = -.092$ ,  $p = .165$ ). Relationship time investment showed a small positive correlation with delays ( $r = .189$ ,  $p = .004$ ), suggesting that students who invested more hours per week in their relationships experienced modestly longer delays, though this correlation was relatively weak and potentially confounded by relationship stage and other factors.

### Discussion of Findings

The pattern of correlations revealed that the quality and characteristics of romantic relationships, rather than merely relationship status, played substantial roles in shaping research progress outcomes among graduate students. The particularly strong association between partner support and reduced delays highlighted the importance of having a romantic partner who actively facilitated rather than hindered academic pursuits, potentially through practical assistance with household responsibilities, emotional encouragement during challenging research phases, and understanding accommodation of the time demands inherent in graduate research. Conversely, relationship conflict emerged as a significant impediment to timely completion, which suggested that the emotional and cognitive resources consumed by relationship discord directly competed with the focus and energy required for sustained research productivity. The finding that relationship time investment showed only modest positive correlations with delays indicated a nuanced relationship between relationship maintenance and academic progress—while investing time in relationships was necessary and often beneficial for relationship quality, excessive time investment or poorly managed time allocation could detract from research activities. Notably, the moderate correlations observed (mostly ranging from .20 to .40) indicated that while relationship variables significantly influenced research progress, they operated alongside other important factors including supervision quality, funding status, and individual characteristics. The lack of significant association between passion and delays suggested that the intensity of romantic feelings per se was less relevant to academic outcomes than more stable relationship qualities such as trust, satisfaction, and particularly instrumental support. These findings underscored that interventions aimed at supporting graduate student success should consider relationship dynamics and potentially provide couples-oriented resources to help students and their partners navigate the challenges of balancing relationship maintenance with intensive research demands.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Research Report Submission Delays**

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p-value	95% CI	VIF
(Constant)	8.43	2.16	-	3.90	< .001	[4.18, 12.68]	-
<b>Relationship Variables</b>							
Relationship status (ref: single)							
- Dating	0.76	0.52	.071	1.46	.145	[-0.26, 1.78]	1.82
- Married	0.92	0.54	.084	1.70	.090	[-0.14, 1.98]	1.95
- Separated/divorced	3.21	0.78	.187**	4.12	< .001	[1.68, 4.74]	1.34
Overall relationship quality	-0.62	0.21	-.162**	-2.95	.003	[-1.03, -0.21]	2.41
Partner support for studies	-0.48	0.16	-.156**	-3.00	.003	[-0.79, -0.17]	2.08
Conflict frequency	0.41	0.14	.143**	2.93	.004	[0.13, 0.69]	1.76
Relationship time investment	0.03	0.02	.062	1.50	.134	[-0.01, 0.07]	1.43
<b>Control Variables</b>							
Age	-0.08	0.05	-.078	-1.60	.111	[-0.18, 0.02]	1.52
Gender (ref: male)	0.54	0.43	.058	1.26	.209	[-0.30, 1.38]	1.28
Program level (ref: master's)	1.42	0.48	.139**	2.96	.003	[0.48, 2.36]	1.45

Funding status (ref: unfunded)	-1.67	0.46	-.168**	-3.63	< .001	[-2.57, -0.77]	1.38
Supervision quality	-0.73	0.18	-.192**	-4.05	< .001	[-1.08, -0.38]	1.67
Field of study (ref: humanities)					.086		1.91
- Social sciences	-0.62	0.58	-.056	-1.07	.286	[-1.76, 0.52]	
- Natural sciences	-1.24	0.64	-.103	-1.94	.053	[-2.50, 0.02]	
- Applied sciences	-0.89	0.61	-.077	-1.46	.145	[-2.09, 0.31]	

**Model Summary:**  $R^2 = .412$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .389$ ,  $F(15, 368) = 17.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSE = 3.61 months

**Note:**  $N = 384$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval; VIF = variance inflation factor. All VIF values  $< 5$  indicate acceptable multicollinearity levels.

### Statistical Interpretation

The multiple regression model explained 41.2% of the variance in research report submission delays,  $F(15, 368) = 17.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating a substantial and statistically significant predictive capacity. After controlling for demographic and institutional factors, several relationship variables emerged as significant independent predictors of delays. Being separated or divorced was associated with an additional 3.21 months of delay compared to being single ( $\beta = .187$ ,  $p < .001$ ), representing the strongest relationship status effect in the model and confirming the bivariate findings that relationship dissolution uniquely disrupted academic progress. Overall relationship quality demonstrated a significant negative association with delays ( $\beta = -.162$ ,  $p = .003$ ), such that each one-unit increase in relationship quality (on the 7-point scale) was associated with a 0.62-month reduction in delays, holding other variables constant. Partner support for studies similarly predicted shorter delays ( $\beta = -.156$ ,  $p = .003$ ), with each unit increase in perceived support associated with approximately half a month reduction in delays. Conflict frequency showed a significant positive association ( $\beta = .143$ ,  $p = .004$ ), indicating that more frequent relationship conflicts predicted longer delays. Notably, once relationship quality dimensions were included in the model, the main effects of dating and married status became non-significant ( $p = .145$  and  $p = .090$ , respectively), suggesting that relationship status per se mattered less than relationship quality characteristics. Among control variables, supervision quality ( $\beta = -.192$ ,  $p < .001$ ) emerged as the strongest predictor, funding status showed significant protective effects ( $\beta = -.168$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and doctoral students experienced longer delays than master's students ( $\beta = .139$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The variance inflation factors remained well below the threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity did not compromise the model's integrity.

### Discussion of Findings

The multiple regression analysis provided robust evidence that romantic relationship variables contributed significantly to explaining research submission delays even after accounting for well-established institutional and demographic predictors. The persistence of significant effects for relationship quality, partner support, conflict frequency, and separated/divorced status in the full model demonstrated that these relationship dimensions operated as independent risk or protective factors rather than merely serving as proxies for other student characteristics. The substantial proportion of variance explained by the complete model (41.2%) suggested that the combination of relationship factors alongside institutional variables provided a comprehensive account of submission delay patterns, though nearly 60% of variance remained unexplained, indicating roles for additional unmeasured factors such as

individual differences in time management skills, research topic challenges, or unforeseen life events. The finding that relationship quality and partner support exerted independent effects beyond relationship status confirmed that not all marriages or dating relationships were equivalent in their academic implications—supportive, high-quality relationships appeared to facilitate research progress regardless of formal relationship status, while conflictual or unsupportive relationships hindered progress. The particularly strong effect of separated/divorced status, even in the presence of other variables, highlighted relationship dissolution as a critical vulnerability period requiring targeted institutional support. The comparable magnitude of supervision quality's effect ( $\beta = -.192$ ) to relationship variables underscored that academic and relational factors operated in parallel as important determinants of student success, suggesting that holistic support approaches addressing both domains might yield optimal outcomes. The non-significant effect of relationship time investment in the multivariate model, after being significant in bivariate analyses, suggested that time allocation concerns might be mediated by relationship quality—students in high-quality relationships might efficiently integrate relationship time without academic penalty, while those in problematic relationships might experience time conflicts regardless of absolute hours invested. These findings collectively supported the study's central thesis that romantic relationships represented a meaningful but previously neglected dimension of graduate student persistence that warranted explicit consideration in student support programming and institutional policy development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the influence of romantic relationships on research report submission delays among graduate students in Ugandan universities, addressing a previously neglected dimension of academic persistence. The findings confirmed that romantic relationships significantly influenced submission timeliness, with relationship status, quality, and dynamics accounting for substantial variance in delay patterns. Specifically, the first objective revealed that relationship status was significantly associated with submission timeliness, with separated/divorced students experiencing substantially longer delays ( $M = 8.7$  months) compared to single ( $M = 4.2$  months), dating ( $M = 5.1$  months), and married students ( $M = 5.3$  months), while stable relationship contexts yielded relatively comparable outcomes. The second objective identified multiple mechanisms through which romantic relationships influenced research progress, including partner support for studies, relationship conflict frequency, overall relationship quality, and emotional wellbeing, with partner support emerging as the strongest protective factor ( $r = -.402$ ) and conflict frequency as a significant impediment ( $r = .367$ ). The third objective documented that graduate students faced considerable challenges balancing relationship demands with research commitments, particularly during relationship dissolution, high-conflict periods, and when navigating cultural expectations around marriage and family formation, with successful students employing strategies including explicit communication with partners about academic demands, temporal boundary-setting, and leveraging partner support for practical assistance. The multiple regression analysis demonstrated that relationship variables independently predicted submission delays even after controlling for supervision quality, funding status, and other institutional factors, collectively explaining 41.2% of variance in delays. These findings underscore that romantic relationships constitute a legitimate and significant factor in graduate student persistence that requires acknowledgment in institutional support systems, supervisor training, and student guidance

programs, moving beyond the traditional focus on purely academic and financial factors to embrace a more holistic understanding of the graduate student experience in the Ugandan context.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Development of Relationship-Aware Student Support Services**

Universities should establish comprehensive support services that explicitly acknowledge romantic relationships as legitimate factors influencing academic progress, including the creation of counseling resources that address the intersection of relationship dynamics and academic demands, the development of couples-oriented workshops focused on maintaining healthy relationships during graduate studies, and the provision of targeted support services for students experiencing relationship dissolution. These services should be integrated into existing student affairs divisions and promoted through graduate orientation programs, supervisor training sessions, and ongoing student communications to normalize help-seeking behavior and reduce stigma around relationship-related academic challenges.

### **Integration of Relationship Considerations into Supervision Practices and Program Policies**

Academic supervisors should receive training on recognizing how relationship factors may influence student progress and on providing appropriate guidance without overstepping professional boundaries, while universities should consider implementing flexible program policies that accommodate major life transitions including marriage, childbirth, and relationship dissolution through mechanisms such as brief leaves of absence, timeline extensions with clear criteria, and modified milestone expectations during documented transition periods. Supervision agreements should encourage open communication about significant life changes affecting research capacity, and progress monitoring systems should be sufficiently nuanced to distinguish between academic capability issues and temporary disruptions related to major relationship transitions.

### **Promotion of Partner Engagement and Education Programs**

Universities should develop initiatives that educate romantic partners of graduate students about the demands and timelines of graduate research, the importance of their support role, and strategies for effectively supporting their partner's academic success, potentially through partner orientation sessions, informational materials designed for partners, and inclusive social events that help partners understand and integrate into the graduate student community. These programs should emphasize the mutual benefits of academic completion, provide practical guidance on constructive support behaviors, and create opportunities for partners to connect with one another, thereby transforming partners from potential sources of conflict or distraction into informed allies in the student's academic journey.

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