

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles



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ABSTRACT: The phenomenological experiences of five single mother students at a university in Negros Occidental, Philippines, are the basis for this qualitative study. They were chosen based on the inclusion requirements (a) that they are ordinary college students enrolled in a university, (b) they were at least 18 years old when they gave birth, and (c) that no nanny was caring for the child (d) has at least one child. In gathering information, semi-structured interviews were done. The obstacles these young single mothers face while they pursue their higher education are examined in this study. Lichtman's thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Results revealed four themes: the need for extra time to balance studying and parenting, uncertainty, failure to meet academic obligations, and the benefits of being a mother and a student. Therefore, it can be concluded that single student mothers with dual roles experienced many difficulties, including depression. The school should establish a support group for students juggling both roles to lessen feelings of loneliness and other anxiety.

KEYWORDS: college student mothers, student solo parent, time management, phenomenological, academic pressures, financial support

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in society by fostering one's abilities, personality, and ideas. Education enables people to realize their full potential and gives women more able to contribute to sustainable development. (*Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives - UNESCO Digital Library*, n.d.). For many, participation in higher education is seen as a pathway to success and employment. (Sicam et al., 2021) Pursuing higher education is considered one of a student's most meaningful engagements in life (Manalang et al., 2015) as it could open many opportunities for a better career and life.

According to a 2014 Institute for Women's Policy Research report, millions of students get pregnant or start having children yearly. Pregnancy often comes unexpectedly for many students, which causes disruptions in their academic progress.

According to the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), one in ten young Filipino women between the ages of 15 and 19 had started to become parents. Eight percent of these women are already moms, while the other two percent are expecting their first child. Women in their 20s and 30s who were young adults were 43% already moms, and 4% were expecting their first child. The typical age of college students was 15 to 19 and 20 to 24. College life might involve partying, drinking, meeting new people, forming new connections, and engaging in sexual interactions; these actions may be considered typical college student behavior (Quinn & Fromme, 2011). These acts may result in early pregnancy and becoming both a student and a mother.

Early mothers who are in college have a variety of difficulties since juggling both parental responsibilities and academic obligations is challenging. (Taukeni, 2014). For student mothers, juggling parenthood and school without prioritizing one responsibility over the other is a significant challenge. For instance, when a woman experiences motherhood, her behavior may differ from this, and she may not give her studies her total concentration. (Visick, 2009)

This area of research could shed light on their situations and society, particularly among academic institutions in the provinces. It would raise the awareness and understanding of school stakeholders to make decisions about educational policies geared toward a more accessible and equitable program. Hence, this study described the lived experiences of student mothers. Specifically, it sought to determine the challenges faced by student mothers in managing their dual roles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Instrument and Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher used purposive sampling, and inclusion criteria were set to identify the participants (a) that they were ordinary college students enrolled in a university, (b) that they were at least 18 years old when they gave birth, (c) that no nanny be caring

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles

for the child and (d) has at least one child. The researcher asked the help of the GAD and guidance office to determine the participants and to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' profiles.

Table 1. Participants' profile

Name	Age	Age of Getting Pregnant	Student Status	How many children/children?	EconomicSources
Deborah	yearsold	15 yearsold	Regular	1	Business
Ester	22 yearsold	20 yearsold	Regular	1	Business
Eve	21 yearsold	18 yearsold	Regular	1	None
Bethel	23 years old	22 years old	Regular	1	None
Abigail	22 years old	21 years old	Regular	1	Business

The researcher sends letters personally to the participants asking them for their full participation and willingness to be part of the study. The interview schedule and venue were set according to the participants' convenience, and informed consent was signed.

The researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire. The instrument deals with probing the lived experiences of young single mothers continuing their college degrees. This part used open-ended questions through in-depth interviews.

The interview was conducted using a conversational style with guided questions to get information from the interviewee. Materials and gadgets like mobile phones, laptops, and notepads were used to record and keep the data gathered.

Data Analysis

The recursive textual analysis guided by the three C's of Lichtman was employed to analyze the data thematically. With the consent of each interviewee, all audio recordings were made. The themes arising from their narratives were discovered using thematic analysis. All participants were informed of the findings for validation. They have therefore agreed with the study's findings. The data analysis used in this study was based on the 3 C's of analysis: from coding to categorizing concepts (Lichtman, 2006). Lichtman (2006) defected the process of data analysis in the following:

In this study, the six (6) steps in conducting data analysis as proposed by Lichtman (2006) were utilized for thematic analysis.

1. Initial coding

The researchers read and reread each interview transcript until the researchers achieved the generalizations of the interview. The researchers assigned words and phrases as a unique descriptive code.

2. Revising initial coding

The researchers reviewed the various generated codes by consolidating the codes according to the participant's experiences and challenges they encountered as they played the role of a mother and a student.

3. Developing an initial list of categories

The researchers gathered these codes into emerging categories. The researchers did this by categorizing the "significant statements" assigned under the same code into core categories

4. Modifying the initial list based on additional rereading

At this point, the researchers continued the iterative process. The researchers decided that some categories needed to be more critical than others or that two categories could be combined.

5. Revisiting categories and subcategories

The researchers reviewed the categories again, eliminated duplicates, and critically evaluated them.

6. Moving from categories into concepts

The researchers read and reread the data and saw that some concepts seemed more prosperous and powerful. The researchers now combined information from the existing literature with their new findings.

RESULTS

Four significant themes surfaced during the thematic analysis, and this theme has corresponding subthemes, which include; Theme 1, the need for extra time to balance studying and parenting with subthemes of time management, and parental obligation, Theme 2, the feeling of uncertainty with subthemes of financial problem, treatment from other people, acceptance. Theme 3 fails to meet academic obligations with sub-themes of school involvement, pressure, and grades. Theme 4 the benefits of being a mother and a student with subthemes of the source of inspiration, school excuses, and lessons learned.

Theme 1. Need extra time to balance studying and parenting

While many girls who become mothers before completing schooling consider academic qualifications very important, they may only be able to succeed in school and academically if the support they need to complete their studies is sufficient. (Chigona &

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles

Chetty, 2008)

Time Management

Single parents experienced varied difficulties, and these were primarily felt in the areas of parenting, financial management, child-rearing, and time management. (Monte-Casili, 2020)

Parenting while studying is a difficult job. They must establish their priorities because their time is being divided. According to Deborah, Ester, Eve, and Bethel, they have trouble managing their time since they must concentrate on their studies because they are in college and must also fulfill their obligations as a wife and mother. Abigail added that it might be challenging to manage their time, particularly when experiencing parenting difficulties like rage and restlessness.

Deborah: “*As a student, kadaku gd sang nag,bag,o sa kabuhi ko kay ayawan ko adjust kag tunga sa akon time. Gapulaw ko kon gab.e kay gaatipan bata pag ka ga ma eskwela pa ko*”. (As a student, my life changes drastically because of the big adjustment that I have to make. At night, I have to take care of the baby and when morning comes I have to go to the school)

Ester: “*Indi ko kainstindi ko ano unahon ko, labi nag d kon magdungan ang exam kag magmasakit akon baby.*” (I don’t know what to do especially if there was an exam and my baby is sick)

Eve: “*Gina una ko akon bata, pero indi mo man pwede mapabay.an akon pageskwela. Kabudlay tungaon ang oras.*” (I prioritize my baby but it doesn’t mean that I have to neglect my study. Its really difficult to manage the time.)

Parental obligation

The most vital sense of familial duty was experienced by young adults from Filipino and Latin American households. This situation helped explain why they tended to reside with and financially support their families and prioritize them (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). All participants agreed that being a parent and having that obligation is difficult.

Deborah: “*kabudlay gid mangin ginikanan nga bata ka pa, daku gd sya nga obligasyon....*” (It’s difficult to become a parent as an early age, it’s a big obligation)

Eve: “*Gina una ko gid akon obligasyon bilang isa ka ginikanan. Gusto ko makita sang bata ko nga gina una ko ang akon obligasyon.*” (I prioritize my obligation as a parent, I want to make sure that my baby is my priority and obligation)

Abigail: “*Ang pinakadako ko subong na obligasyon ang akon bata*”. (My biggest obligation right now is my child)

Theme 2. The feeling of uncertainty

Solo motherhood was considered significant ambiguity and uncertainty since it deviated from the idealized life of having a kid in the setting of a committed relationship (Graham, 2018). All of the participants unanimously agreed that they are uncertain about their future

Financial Problem

Single-student mothers encounter substantial time and financial constraints that make it challenging to continue till graduation (Kruvelis et al., 2017). This problem is common to all participants, and it is challenging to manage their finances.

Ester: “*Biskan ga online selling ko, kulang gihapon sa amon sang bata ko, nahuya man ko sige pangayo sa ginikanan ko.*” (Although that I do online selling, it’s still not enough to sustain our needs. I cannot afford to ask help from my parents)

Eve: “*Grabe gid kabudlay kay wala pa daan ubra kag wala ko kuhaan pa additional income*”. (Life is difficult because I don’t have any income at all)

Bethel: “*Gasalig lang ko sa akon ginikanan para sa pinansyal, wala man naga support ang amay sini*”. (I am dependent with my parents on the financial side. The father of this baby didn’t support either.

Abigail: “*Daku gid akon problema pinansyal. Amon gamay na tyange daw wala na unod kay wala na ko uli capital*”. (I have a big financial problem. Our small store almost out of goods because lack of capital)

Treatment from other people

Being a mother at a young age is unusual in the Philippines. In their situation, bullying or judgment are unavoidable. However, some mother students utilize this as inspiration to toughen up and complete their education.

Deborah: “*Kis.a nahuya na lang magpa school kay gina bully ko sa akon classmate kag maybe ginakadlawan man e kon nagatalikod ako*”. (Sometimes I don’t want to go to school because my classmates bully me and maybe sometimes, they laugh at me behind my back.)

Despite the difficulties faced by student mothers, some of them do not face criticism and are accorded particular treatment by their peers. She was even assisting them in meeting their demands and managing their education.

Bethel: “*Kis.a gindala ko ang baby ko sa school, damo gd na namian sa iya. Ka cute kuno*”. (One time I bring my baby to school, many found him cute).

Ester: “*Wala ko kabatyag na gin sumpa ko sa akon classmate, gina buligan pa gani ko sa amon mga assignments*”. (I do not feel that I am being cursed, my classmates helped to work on my assignments)

Acceptance

Parents and families had unpleasant reactions to a teenage relative's pregnancy, particularly during learning about the pregnancy.

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles

Moreover, moms are unhappy that their daughters cannot practice self-control, resulting in pregnancy (Gyesaw & Ankomah, 2013). All participants had an experience that they felt their families and friends could not accept what had happened to them.

Deborah: *"Asta subong indi gihapon mabaton ni tatay nga may bata na ko. Gina angga ya man bata ko a, pero ako wala ya masyado ginasapak. Gani daw wala ko kabalo ko nano matabo sa future ko."* (Until now, my father can't accept that I have a child. He loved my baby but he seems cold to me. That's why I am uncertain about my future).

However, some participants were fortunate in that their families and friends accepted them as they were.

Ester: *"Una una, daw ginakulbaan ako magpanugid nga gabusong ako, pero sala gali akon pagpati. Nakita ko gid ang suporta sang akon pamilya kag love sa akon bata"*. (I am so anxious to tell my family that I am pregnant. But I was wrong, I saw how my family show their love and support to me).

Eve: *"Nasubuan gid akon frends kag family sa natabo pero wala ko nila gin pabay.an halin sa pagbusong asta sa pagbata ko ara gid sila. Kabalo ko na mas mayo ang future sa akon bata kon upod ko sila"* (My friends and family are saddened of what happened to me yet they are still in full support to me from pregnancy until I give birth. I am assured that my baby had good future with them.)

Theme 3. Failure to meet the academic obligation

Single parents who attend college or institutions may need help since they frequently need to prepare to start the rigorous academic schedule program (Johnson, 2022). Participants had difficulties in struggling with their studies, as narrated by them

School involvement

Deborah: *"Pagkatapos ko klase, need ko na magpuli kay may baby pa ko nga atipananon. Kon may mga group practice or mga school activity indi gd ko ka join ya."* (After my class, I have to go home because I have a baby to take care of. I cannot join any group practice or school activity)

Ester: *"Wala na ko time para mag intra pa sa mga school activities kadamo na sa akon ulubrahon sa balay kag may bata na ko nga gina bantayan"*. (I don't have time to join school activities since I have plenty of work to do at home and baby to take care of).

Bethel: *"Kis.a maka join pero mas laban nga indi ko ka join sa mga school activities. Most of the time gapuli ko dayon"*. (There are times that I can join them, but most often, I cannot join school activities.)

School Pressure

Deborah:

Ester: "Pressure sa life, pressure pa Katama sa school." (Life pressure, then I am still pressured to school.)

Eve: Ok lang man nga may baby ko a kay gadula gani akon kakapoy, pero ang indi ko maagwanta ang pressure sa school. Kis.a indi na ko makakuha test.(It is ok for me to have my baby she is the source of my strength. What I cannot endure the pressure from the school. I missed some test sometimes)

Bethel:

Abigail: *"Ang need bala nga kilanlan mo nga makapasar kay kahuluya nga may baby ka na indi ka kapasar, pressure gid ko ya para ma kakuha sang nami nga grade."* (The need to pass because I have already a baby so I am pressured to have good grades.)

Theme 4. Benefit from being a student and a mother

Single mothers who work meaningfully and feel purpose in life report higher levels of life satisfaction (Juma & Nobert, 2023).

Source of inspiration and motivation

Parenting while going to school, according to several student mothers, is undoubtedly difficult, but it also serves as motivation (Sicam et al., 2021). Participants agreed that their status as single mothers motivates them to work hard and finish schooling.

Deborah: *"Kabudlay man e, pero kon makita ko akon bata kag ginikanan gaka motivate ko nga mag successful sa life"*. (Life is hard, but every time I saw my child and parents, I felt motivated to be successful in life).

Bethel: *"Akon pamilya ang rason para makatapos ko sa akon pag eskwela"*. (My family is my motivation to finish schooling)

Being excused from school and other responsibilities

Ester: *"Gina, excuse lang man ko sir sang mga teacher sa test kag gina tagaan special work assignment, kisa gani wala na lang may ipadala pa na money para kay baby na hatag ni miss."* (My teacher excused me from the test and gave me a particular assignment and sometimes she did not bother at all. She even gives me money for my baby)

Lesson learned

Mothers of college students have life experience. They learn valuable things about life through their experiences, giving up, and struggles. Some student mothers discovered the value of finishing their education, how to be strong, and how to make thoughtful decisions(Sicam et al., 2021). When asked about the lessons they learned from being young single student mothers, these are their answers:

Deborah: *"Indi magpadali dali"*. (Don't rush decisions)

Ester: *"Ang paghigugma ara lang da, pero kon magpadala mabusong gid ka."* Hahahaha (Its ok to be in love, but if you rake the relationship seriously you'll be pregnant)

Eve: *"Panumdumon gid mayo ang kada desisyon"*. (Think many times before making a decision)

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles

Bethel: “*mangin mabakod kag indi magpadala sa problema*”. (Be strong and don't get easily affected by your problems)

Abigail: kay nadasma, bangon kag magpadayon ... (Stand strong when stumbled)

DISCUSSIONS

Despite being the most significant and fastest-growing student demographic in higher education institutions, single-student mothers' experiences in academia still need to be studied, despite the expanding literature on women's experiences in higher education. (Vyskocil, 2018). This situation was due to the increased number of single parents enrolling in college, which opened up additional prospects (Sicam et al., 2021). Several themes have been developed: Theme 1, the need for extra time to balance studying and parenting. Theme 2, the feeling of uncertainty. Theme 3, failure to meet academic obligations. Theme 4 benefits from being a mother and a student.

Theme 1. Need extra time to balance studying and parenting.

(Taukeni, 2014) says that moms have significant challenges when they shortage of time for students to spend with their kids, spouses, large families, and friends, as well as to study and finish their homework. Mitchell et al. (2001) argue that, unfortunately, as dedicated as single mothers are to both their children and their education, in the end, the time crunch can have devastating effects on their relationship with their children. Students face many challenges during their studies. Some of them describe skipping lectures, feeling weak, drowsy, and lacking consideration in classes, and one of the students failed her module.

Two subthemes appear in this study, including (1) Time management and (2) parental obligation. Cabaguing (2017) discovered that prioritizing tasks and managing time are two ways to manage the roles of student mothers. Despite their busy schedules, they ensure they can manage each duty because family and studies are equally important. All of the participants agreed that it was indeed challenging to balance studying and parenting.

Theme 2. Feeling of uncertainty

Three themes emerge in this central theme, including (1) financial problems, (2) treatment from other people, and (3) acceptance. Participants are unsure about their future because of their financial situation and how society perceives them. Most single parents needed help paying for their children's basic requirements, including nutritious food, clothing, and school expenses. They attempted to reduce spending most frequently on clothing, food, and social and recreational activities (Noronha, 2016). Financial support from families and friends matters, especially among single-student mothers

Supports from families, partners, and friends are essential to help student mothers. Griffiths (2002) stated that available people such as family members, friends, and partners who support them are crucial in helping them to cope with their experiences. Student mothers stated that they can still manage the student and mother role when financially and morally supported by family, partners, classmates, or friends. Our study concurs that student mothers are getting financial, physical, emotional, and moral support from their teachers and classmates or friends, partners, parents, and relatives. However, there is no mention of the institution's support for them.

Theme 3. Failure to meet the academic obligation

When minor children are present while attending school, especially if they have special needs or medical conditions, the roles of student, parent, breadwinner, and caretaker are hampered, which frequently hinders the success and academic efforts of single-parent student mothers (Vyskocil, 2018). Pressures to perform academically and achieve satisfactory academic progress are added to those they already feel from their home and child-rearing responsibilities (Malima & Akech, 2017). Single young student mothers are often bombarded with how to avoid failure in their academic performance. Their school involvement in curricular and non-curricular activities is being affected.

Theme 4. Benefit from being a student and a mother.

Young single-student mothers have much responsibility, yet they can benefit from their situation in life (Sicam et al., 2021). Their situation in life becomes the source of their inspiration. This situation is the same with Cabaguing's (2017) findings that they persist in continuing their education despite the challenges of being both a mother and a student at the same time. They are inspired to continue their education for the child's future and personal development so they have a source of enjoyment and strength.

Another subtheme from this study revealed that school excuses become an advantage and the lessons they learned as a single young mother. These findings were supported by Griffiths (2002), who said that via their general experience, individuals obtained specific skills and understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences of single-student mothers having dual roles enrolled in higher education are the main subject of this study. According to the research, student mothers encounter difficulties managing their multiple roles due to time management issues, academic issues, and financial issues. Despite these difficulties, there are also silver linings along this line, such as it motivates them to work harder to finish their schooling. It is noted in this study that proper time management is the answer to making their work

SCHOOL CRIBS A Phenomenological Examination of the Challenges Single Student Mothers Experience to Manage Their Dual Roles

lighter and more accessible. Although being single student mothers is complex, the support and acceptance of family and friends help them endure the hardship.

However, this study has some limitations, like all participants came from the same higher institutions and were limited only to five participants. Moreover, it has been noted that the school where they are enrolled has no explicit support system for this single student mothers.

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