

## Motherhood and ‘Studenthood’: The Lived Experiences of College Student Mothers in Samar State University

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### *Abstract*

*This study used phenomenological approach in exploring the lived experiences of student mothers in Samar State University. Fourteen (14) student mothers participated in the study. Participants met the description of a student mother: 1) A bonafide student of Samar State University; 2) a biological mother 3) single parent or married 4) had the custody of the child/ Living with her child and 5) willing to participate in the study. From the data analyses, three major themes emerged: (1) Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers; (2) Inspirations and Motivations, and (3) Coping Dual Roles. The result suggest that these student mothers experienced a challenging yet fulfilling dual role. Their lived experiences can encourage and inspire other student mothers to pursue higher education.*

**Keywords:** *Motherhood, Studenthood, Student Mother, Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers, Dual Roles.*

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### **Introduction**

Education is essential for everyone. It has been recognized as an important element in our development. Each year, thousands of students go to Universities and Colleges to pursue a higher education. College life may include meeting new people, partying, drinking and engaging in sexual activities. The highest percentage of unplanned pregnancies is among age group 18-24 years, the ages of the majority of college students. Previous research suggest that 46 percent of students who give birth attend college and raise a child (Fallon et al., 1999). According to Philippine Statistics Authorities (2013) one in ten young Filipino women aged 15-19 had begun childbearing: Eight percent are already mothers and another two percent were pregnant with their first child according to the results of the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). Among young adult women aged 20 to 24, 43% were already mothers and 4% were pregnant with their first child. These age ranges 15-19, 20 to 24 were the common age of the college students.

Caring for a child is considered a full-time job and may be very stressful on female college students if pregnancy is unplanned. Being a mother is a very demanding role and being a students is also a very demanding role. Schooling is critical to a young woman’s life, because the amount of schooling a woman obtains would affect the future aspects of her life (Brown & Amankwaa, 2007; Hofferth et al, 2001). Hence, there were advantages and disadvantages of continuing schooling while at the same time parenting a child. (Erwins, Tyer, Mellinger, 1980).

Higher education provides increased opportunity for earnings and satisfaction. However, women who pursue higher education while raising children face constant demands from two direction-school and family. This study began with the researcher's assumption that a tension exists between these two roles for women who attempt a higher education and at the same time being a mother. The way in which these two concepts interfere with or complement each other in the lived experiences of student mothers is the primary interest of the researcher.

With its main objective of exploring the lived experiences and challenges of student mothers, this qualitative study aims to understand and defined the roles, obligations and coping of student mothers under the changing, challenging and sometimes conflicting situations they are into.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study utilized phenomenological approach. It aimed to investigate the experience of student-mother - how it is be a student and a mother at the same time. A qualitative research study according to Mills and Birks (2014), aimed to examine a phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context. Phenomenology aimed to accurately describe the phenomenon without a pre-existing knowledge to a framework, but remaining truth to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). More so, using a qualitative research, the researcher would able to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).The researcher found this method most applicable to the inquiry in order to provide a comprehensive analysis on the lived experiences of student mothers.

### **Participants**

Participants of the study were identified using purposive sampling. Using purposive sampling, the researcher can choose their participants that will be fit for the study (Dever & Frankel, 2000). Fourteen (14) student mothers participated in the study. Participants met the description of a student mother: 1) A bonafide student of Samar State University; 2) A biological mother 3) Single Parent or Married 4) Had the custody of the child/ Living with her child and 5) willing to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

In gathering the pertinent data for the study, a semi-structured interview was used in collecting data. This type of interview was the most familiar strategy in collecting qualitative data (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), which helped the researcher to obtain all the necessary information needed and to allow the researchers to asked follow-up questions for clarification. The content of the interview guide were validated by three professionals who were expert in the field of Psychology. The researcher also provided an agreement that included obtaining informed consent, ensured confidentiality, time and place commitments, permission to record and publish, delineating the ethical principles of research. As to data storing methods, the researcher used note taking and dialogic form interview to reach deeper the responses of the respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

In the phenomenological analysis, the following steps utilized in analyzing the data phenomenologically were adopted from Hycner's (1985) process. These steps include the following: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; 2) listening to the interview for a sense of the whole; 3) delineating units of

general meaning; 4) delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question; 5) defining codes for categories; 6) grouping data into categories; 7) eliminating redundancies; 8) clustering units of relevant meaning; and 9) finalizing the themes to make them into meaningful concepts.

## **Results**

From the data analyses, three themes emerged: (1) Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers; (2) Inspirations and Motivations, and (3) Ways of Managing Dual Roles. The three themes- and subthemes- that emerged suggested that student mothers struggles being a student and mother at the same time. Yet, they are inspired and motivated to pursue their studies as evident in Theme 2. Theme 3 illustrates how they manage dual roles. The following sections present the major themes and subthemes.

### **Theme 1. Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers**

Theme 1 can be best explained by five subthemes including conflicting demands, financial problem, social stigma, feeling of guilt and inadequacy, and self-neglect. From the analysis, it can be understood that being a mother and student at the same time is no easy task. They are experiencing difficulty in terms of conflicting demands, financial problem, social stigma, feeling of guilt and inadequacy, and self-neglect.

#### **Subtheme A. Conflicting Demands**

Facing conflicting, but equally urgent demands on a daily basis is the underlying dilemma student mothers have to face. As a mother, she should be there for her child when the child seeks contact. The society expects a mother to be make her child's well-being the focus of her attention and her priority. However, being a college student, does not allow for this ideal role to be possible. As a student, they have to attend class as scheduled not when she is free. She has to study before exams, read and prepare assignments. The conflicting demands are related to time and focus. They have scheduling problems. They don't know what to prioritize first since both child care and student responsibilities are equally important for them.

Aside from scheduling problems, keeping their focus at what they are doing at any one time is difficult on their part. In school, a student mother may find herself thinking about her sick child while at home taking care of her child, her mind may be on the assignments she has to finish.

The conflicting demands on time and focus is illustrated in the following statements:

- (1) *"It is stressful- I am having difficulty scheduling my time. I need to take care of my child and at the same time I need also to attend my class, sometimes I sacrifice going to school especially when no one is available to take care of my child."*
- (2) *"I am having difficulty focusing and concentrating. I need to focus on my studies yet I am also thinking of what my child is doing when I am away, I am also disturbed if my child is sick..."*

#### **Subtheme B. Financial Problem**

Financial burden is another concern of student mother. They run out of budget most often since they need to provide for their schooling and for their child. Particularly, student mothers who are dependent on their parents, they do not know what to prioritize first. Even some student mothers who have partners who are employed are also having trouble budgeting their finances for their family and for her school expenses. The experience is illustrated in the following statement:

- (1) *"I think about money all the time... I worry a lot about our expenses, I know it will not suffice for our needs and my needs in school..."*
- (2) *"I sometimes do not make projects and requirements, just to buy food and milk for my child"*

### **Subtheme C. Social Stigma**

Some of the student mother experienced being stigmatized because they got pregnant at a very young age. In the Philippine culture, being pregnant at an early age is not an accepted norm. People may often labeled them as flirt. A stated by one student mother:

- (1) *"I feel like rejected and condemned, I am judged by other people as "malandi" because of what happened..."*

### **Subtheme D. Feeling of Guilt and Inadequacy**

Some student mothers experienced guilt because of two compromising role which they think they are having difficulty to handle, this made them feel that they are inadequate in both roles. They are guilty of leaving their child to someone else and spend more time in school. Not being there physically/emotionally with the child, rushing to get out in the house every morning, putting the child early to bed to finish school task and especially if the student mother is enjoying her schoolwork, she has to fight feelings of guilt about leaving her child. On the other hand, they also feel inadequate as a student, because they believe that their lack of time and focus on their studies can cause low remarks. The student mother quoted:

- (1) *"I feel guilty leaving her with my sister, I really wanted to take care of her but I need to go to school."*
- (2) *"I am not even performing well in my studies, I know and I am aware that I will be getting low grades because I don't have time to study."*

### **Subtheme E. Self- Neglect**

The everyday experience of student mothers involves lack of time. They spent their day for their studies and family as a result most of them complained being tired. In order to do their responsibilities as a mother, some were wife and student, they need to sacrifice their own needs. Some stated that they do not have time to enjoy with friends, go shopping, exercise and even to look on their personal grooming. As a student mother made mentioned:

- (1) *"Honestly, I lack sleep, sometimes I don't even sleep especially if my son is sick...I feel tired being a superwoman."*
- (2) *"I don't even have time for myself, sometimes I pity myself for a bad hair day, for not taking good care of myself because I am too busy to take care of them and to finish my requirements in school."*

## **Theme 2. Inspirations and Motivations**

Despite the struggle of being a mother and student at the same time, they still insist to pursue their studies. They are motivated to pursue their education for a brighter future of the child, personal growth and they have source of strength and happiness.

### **Subtheme A: Brighter future of the child**

Student mothers view the importance of education in their current situation. They believe that the only way to give a better future to their children is to finish their studies. In this way, there is an assurance that they

can get a good paying job to support and sustain the needs of the child. They wanted to have their child a better education and a comfortable life. As mentioned by one of the participants:

- (1) *“All I wanted is to give the best of everything to my child. I wanted to give him a good life and it is only possible if I can finish my studies.”*
- (2) *“I need to finish my studies whatever it takes, to give the needs of my child and be able to send him to school... I cannot depend on my in-laws forever.”*

#### **Subtheme B: Personal Achievement and Self Development**

Even if they are already mothers, they still have the desire to finish their studies and achieve their dreams. They believe that it is not too late for them to succeed. They need to prove especially to their parents that having a child is not a hindrance in the attainment of their dreams. As illustrated in the following statement:

- (1) *“I know I am too young to have a child, but it is not an excuse for me not to finish my studies and achieve my dreams... the more that I will strive to study harder...”*

#### **Subtheme C: Source of Strength and Happiness**

Student mothers sometimes complain that they are tired and having difficulty compromising two roles, yet, at the end of the day, they still feel complete and happy. They consider their child as their source of strength. They are happier and inspired now that they have a child.

- (1) *“Though it’s very tiring, at the end of the day, I just looked at my daughter and I feel okay”*
- (2) *“My daughter is my source of happiness, inspiration and strength. I can do all of this for her.”*

### **Theme 3. Coping Dual Roles**

Having dual roles is hard according to the student mothers. But, they believe that they can make it because of their support of other people, they have discipline and can manage their time wisely, and along the way they learn how to prioritize.

#### **Subtheme A: Support of Other People**

Student mothers stated that their current situation was hard. But because of their support system which includes their family, friends, classmates, some have partners, they can still manage their dual roles being a student and a mother. They are financially and morally supported.

- (1) *“I am thankful that my parents are very supportive, they are providing us our needs...”*
- (2) *“My mother takes good care of my child whenever I’m in school, I am grateful that despite what happened to me she is still there...”*

#### **Subtheme B. Time Management and Priority**

Having dual roles is a tough job. Student mothers make it sure that inspite of the busy schedule they have, they can still manage to do each role without compromising the other. They have learn to manage their time wisely. They instill discipline in their selves. They make sure that they have time for their child and giving them all their needs. Thus, taking time to study and comply all school requirements. Both family and studies are their priorities. Though sometimes it means prioritizing one from other, they find ways to meet both ends.

- (1) *"I know how to prioritize things... I find it hard but I see to it that I can manage well my time."*
- (2) *"Time management is the only solution to my everyday struggle as a mother and student at the same time."*

## **Discussion**

Results of the present study showed the emergence of three major themes emerged that would described the lived experiences of college student mothers, these are (1) Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers; (2) Inspirations and Motivations, and (3) Ways of managing dual roles.

In the first major theme which is the juggles and struggles of student mothers, the participants talked about how difficult managing dual roles. This study was supported by Taukeni (2014). He asserts that the main challenges of student mothers were the lack of time to manage studying and parenting roles. More so, Marandet and Wainwright (2010) also reported one of the main issues of student with dependents was time and timing. Student mothers need to sacrifice one role just to fulfill the other role.

The second major theme focused on the motivations and inspirations of student mothers. Though they may experience difficulty being a student mother, they also shared their motivations and inspirations that keeps them going. The hope that by finishing their studies they can give their child a brighter future and at the same time achieve their personal dreams. According to Lei (2010), motivation varies from different degrees of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic motivational factors found to be at work with most students include the desire to be involved, curiosity, challenge, and social interaction. In this study, it refers to sense of fulfillment in the achievement of their dreams. Extrinsic motivational factors include compliance (to meet another's expectation, to do what one is told); recognition (to be publicly acknowledged); competition; and work avoidance (avoid more work than necessary). Present study reveals that student mothers' external motivation is to give her child a brighter future because it is her responsibility as the mother.

Moreover, the third theme discusses on how student mothers cope up with dual roles. They have their support system and they know how to prioritize and manage their time. In a study by Naomee (2013), it reports the responding families of student mothers which includes grandparents, siblings, uncle and aunt played a significant role on the children. Thus, whenever they got time they usually played or spend leisure time with them and sometimes they also tried to teach different things to the children. The grandparents, mostly taught manners and values to the children. Moreover, Johnson and Nussbaum (2012) mentioned that students having multiple roles used the task-oriented coping strategies. This study supports the claim of the participants that they know how to prioritize and manage their time which means that they make direct actions to decrease the level of stress of a student mother.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides a description of the lived experienced of student mothers. Student mothers experienced juggling and struggling in their attempts to be both the mother they want to be and the student they know they can be. Hence, student mothers are motivated and inspired at the same time. They are strengthened with the presence of the people who support them in their journey and they have the ability to manage and cope with the demands of being both a mother and a student. It suggest that these student mothers experienced a challenging yet fulfilling dual role. Their lived experiences can encourage and inspire other student mothers to pursue higher education.

## Recommendations

1. The University must design a program that can cater to the needs of student mothers such as scholarship grants.
2. The University through the Office of the Guidance Services should conduct a seminar for student mothers that can tackle time management and developing one's self.
3. Interview family members, teachers, friends and other people which the participants is interacting with to fully grasp how student mothers manage their dual roles.
4. Further studies and in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of student mothers is recommended.

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