



The Balancing Game: Probing the Lived Experiences of College Studying Mothers

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Student mothers handle enormous responsibilities between taking care of their child and pursuing their studies. In this study, the researchers aim to explore the lived experiences of the student mothers in reference to their dual roles. The purpose of this study is to shed a light on the lives of these young women by providing a profound understanding of their struggles, motivations, and the different stories. The conversation partners were chosen via snowball and purposive sampling, which are guided by the following criteria: a.) a bonafide student enrolled in a state university in Negros Occidental in the 1st semester of Academic Year 2022-2023; b.) ages 20 - 24 years old; c.) a biological mother to young child/children ages 0 – 6 years old; d.) single parent or married; e.) has the custody of the child/living with her child or children, and f.) willing to participate in the study. Researchers employed an in-depth semi-structured interview as a tool in gathering the data. Each student mother underwent a one-on-one interview with the researchers in order to obtain substantial information of their lived experiences. The interviews were then transcribed for data analysis. After rigorous analysis, four core themes emerged from the data. Results revealed that most of the participants experienced personal struggles, societal acceptance as well as family and

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peer acceptance. Moreover, the student mothers shared that a strong support system is something that they wish for to have that could further help them in dealing with their day-to-day struggles. To cope with the different challenges that arise, the conversation partners rely greatly on their small family, their faith, as well as their immediate families and friends. The results of this study allowed the researchers to have a deeper insight of their situation and a glimpse of what is it like being a student mother.

Keywords: Student mothers; struggles; societal acceptance; support system; motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is an art that locates women's identities in their ability to care for young children and infants (Ross, 2018). Motherhood is considered a significant turning point in life for most women but the rate of young women who enter this stage is constantly proliferating through the years to an alarming extent. Statistics have shown one in ten young Filipino women between the ages of 15 and 19 have started having children. Of these, 8% are already mothers, and the remaining 2% are expecting their first child. Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA, 2016], outlined that 43 percent of young adult women between the ages of 20 and 24 are already mothers, and 4% are pregnant with their first child. These are the age ranges: 15-19 and 20-24, where the latter is the common ages of the college students

The period between birth and age five is one of the most crucial ones for a child's development and learning. The first five years of a child's life are extremely important to their health, wellbeing, and overall course for a number of reasons (Children's Bureau, 2018). This assertion was supported by Raising Children Network [1], which concluded that at 5-6 years, children are expected to portray complex emotions, independence, establish social interaction, plenty of talk, improved physical coordination, and more. While child caring is the main responsibility for most young mothers these days, it is not really uncommon to see them go back to school and continue their education, even if it means they have to manage the arduous responsibilities of being a student and a mother at the same time [15-19]. The presence and nurturing of a mother are vital for the child's growth but pursuing a higher level of education is just as important for it is a big step towards the personal fulfillment of an individual as well as the economic development of a nation [30-34].

Being a college student while entering early motherhood concurrently comes with the rigors

of balancing dual roles and both may be very demanding as they entail an equal and intensive amount of effort and attention. Managing the roles of being a college student and a mother is a great challenge [20-23]. They might encounter a variety of obstacles, such as emotional pressures and unfavorable comments from others (Parker, 2009). Combining these two responsibilities without settling the activities over the other is a dilemma for student mothers [24-27]. For instance, when a woman takes the role of being a mother, her behavior may contrast with this and she may not give her studies her full attention [2].

In line with the implication of these matters that arise to a student mother's life, this study is designed to explore and give light on the overall experiences the student-mothers in the university have gone through as well as the different struggles they have faced during the course of time while performing those both roles [28,29]. The researchers want to delve deeper into their lives by hearing their personal and unique stories.

In exploring the lived experiences of student mothers in a State University, the researchers seek to comprehend and identify how these women deal with their responsibilities of parenting and attending school at the same time. In addition, the researchers want to find out how college student mothers cope with the different barriers they may have encountered during the course of their motherhood and how they gain support from the people around them. Since schooling requires time and attention, the researchers also want to find out if these roles hinder student mothers in pursuing their higher education in the changing situation, they are in.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the lived experiences of student mothers in a state university in reference to their dual roles as a mother and at the same time as a student.

1.2 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study primarily focused on the lived experiences of student mothers in a state university in Negros Occidental. The data were collected from six (6) student mothers with an age group of 20-24 years old and were all bonafide students enrolled in the state university in the said province in the 1st semester of Academic Year 2022, that represented the population. This study did not cover pregnant college students which are not considered as the criteria of the subjects. The main source of data was the interview, which was conducted by the researchers themselves. Each of the conversation partners was given the same questions to answer and all underwent the same process of interview.

The constraints, on the other hand, encountered during the conduct of the interviews were considered minor and were not substantial enough to affect the data collected. These include background noises such as a.) chatters of students outside the room venue; b.) a child's tantrums during the interview; c.) construction noises that interfered with the recordings especially in the audio quality and; d.) the speaking style or the vernacular speech that some conversation partners were using for they contain terms that were not easily comprehended by the researchers, thus leaving some words or phrases blank in the transcription of the interview as they were unclear to be caught. Nevertheless, all the essential data were successfully gathered and transcribed as is.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

In this research, Role theory of Linton and Mead (year) supported the overall results of this study.

The theory proposes that individuals occupy a variety of roles on a daily basis; however, these roles were inherently incompatible, given that they comprise different time and behavioral expectations. This theory probed as a model to understand how student mothers managed their dual roles in their daily lived experiences [3]. According to this theory, daily activities are conceptualized as acting out of socially prescribed roles (e.g., mother, employee, wife). Role theory looks at how social interaction is used to teach people new roles. As people interact with one another, they perceive themselves and others as occupants of specific statuses, and they learn guidelines for action. In other words, certain roles are linked with certain

social expectations that are considered appropriate for an occupant to behave (Aartsen & Hansen, 2020). Each social role has a set of obligations that a person must accept and uphold [4].

The researchers have grounded this study on the Role theory, which greatly focused on the dual roles of student mothers in relation to their families and school. Based on the themes that we have discussed, six (6) of the chosen student mothers are juggling obligations in school and responsibilities to their own families. They used to embrace planning and time-management to balance their dual roles. Using and reflecting on the premise of Role theory will provide a foundation for understanding the nature of every student mother experiences.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Below is the conceptual framework of the core themes and its corresponding sub-themes that transpired from the analysis of the conversation partners' responses during the interview. As illustrated, there were four (4) core themes that emerged from rigorous analysis. These include their personal struggles as a student mother, societal acceptance, support system, and the student mothers' motivation for continuing their education. Consequently, the first core theme which discusses the struggles they have faced in their daily lives while managing their dual roles. This consists of two (2) sub-themes that about the ordeals faced by student mothers in performing their dual roles as well as their strategies in dealing with their hectic lives. Similarly, the second core theme elaborates the experiences of the conversation partners regarding how they were treated by the society, likewise it is comprised of two (2) sub-themes that highlights their perception as a student mother in the eyes of everyone, and the degrading remarks they have received from other people. Moreover, the third core theme is where their support systems are detailed. This includes four (4) sub-themes that tackle about their partner's involvement, their family's approval, their peer's acceptance, and the resources or the additional assistance that could help them further in their situations as student mothers. Finally, the last core theme that transpired from the analysis was about the motivation of the conversation partners in continuing their studies and this is further explained by a single sub-theme which highlights their sources of strength as student mothers.

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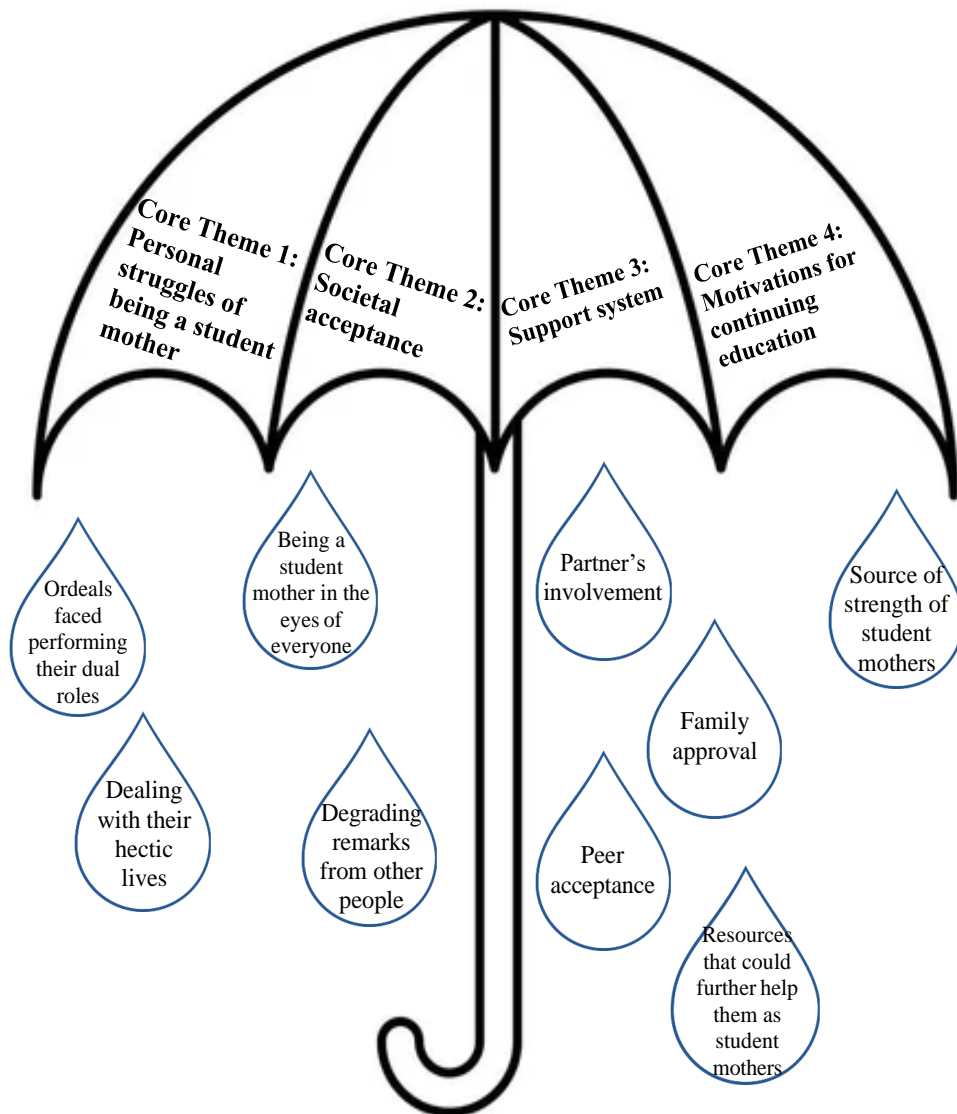


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the core themes and sub-themes

2. METHODS

2.1 Design

The research design chosen is the qualitative study with the use of a phenomenological approach. Mills and Birks [5], noted that

investigating phenomena that affect people's daily lives within a specific cultural or social context is the goal of qualitative research. In this case, the researchers want to investigate the phenomenon of being a mother and a student at the same time.

In a phenomenological study, the focus is on how people perceive a phenomenon and what they actually experienced [6]. Phenomenology approach helped in understanding the meaning of people's lived experience. Definitely, this type of approach allowed the researchers to set aside preconceived assumptions and biases as they have explored and understood the experiences of being a student mother.

2.2 Instrumentation

The main instruments utilized in collecting the data were the sets of questionnaires which were based upon a related source. These questionnaires consisted of different sets of questions that were asked in two (2) separate interview sessions with the conversation partners in the first semester of the Academic Year 2022-2023. The researchers followed a semi-structured type of interview to regulate the flow of the session. This type of interview is frequently unrestricted and flexible [7] wherein the researchers could mediate and balance the atmosphere during the interview if things inevitably get out of control. The first session of the interview focused more on getting to know each conversation partner and building rapport whereas the second session was more inclined on probing into their detailed experiences and life stories.

2.3 Conversation Partners

This study employed two sampling methods in finding student mothers to represent the population which are the snowball technique to find prospects for the interview; and purposive sampling in screening who among those prospects fit the criteria. A total of six (6) student mothers were gathered for the study. In addition, all of conversation partners have met the following criteria of the subjects: 1) A bonafide student enrolled at a state university in Negros Occidental in the first semester of Academic Year 2022-2023; 2) age 20 - 24 years old; 3) a biological mother to young child/children ages 0 – 6 years old; 4) single parent or married; 5) has the custody of the child/living with her child or children, and 6) willing to participate in the study.

2.4 Data Collection

The researchers followed a semi-structured interview in gathering the pertinent data for the study. This type of interview used to gather qualitative data is the most frequently used [8].

This method is of great use in obtaining all essential information required as this makes room for follow-up questions in case of clarifications. The researchers provided a letter of agreement that contained the conversation partners' informed consent, ensured confidentiality and preservation of private information, time and place commitments, permission to record and publish, and delineated the ethical principles of the research.

As for storing of the data, the researchers secured writing material, pen and paper, to take note of all the important information explicitly stated by the interviewees. A video recording as well as the audio recording were simultaneously carried out in the background during the entire course of the interview after obtaining the consensual agreement with the conversation partner. These ensured that all necessary information and responses are documented and transcribed verbatim.

2.5 Data Analysis

The utilization of thematic analysis to analyze the data evoked during the interview was carried out. Thematic analysis aims to categorize and distill the data into themes or essences that can then be used to create descriptions, models, or theories [9]. Considering this method, the information that was obtained from the conversation partner for each question was segregated into themes and those themes were identified through general and similar responses elicited from the conversation partners. Common experiences will be grouped and classified under their respective themes.

2.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researchers have observed its four (4) criteria. These include credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Suter [10] described credibility as the assurance of the plausibility of the findings, which corroborates the result such as conversation partner confirmative evaluation of conclusions, integration of profuse sources of evidence like interview transcripts, reflective field notes, and investigator triangulation. In order to establish the credibility of this study, the rigors during the data collection were properly observed especially during interviews. Every information drawn was based on facts, directly and explicitly stated by

the conversation partner themselves. The researchers shall see to it that all the relevant information is collected and no data are excluded.

Confirmability as suggested by Ramsey (2010), relates to how well the findings are confirmed by other sources. Likewise, objectivity (neutrality) is applied, and researcher bias is controlled in the study [10]. To ensure the confirmability of this study, the researchers eradicated any personal opinions, assumptions, and prejudices towards the conversation partner and refrained from interpreting responses subjectively that could in any way lead to the distortion of the data. Securing an audio or video recording of the interview is one way of ensuring confirmability.

Transferability refers to how well the results can be applied to other educational settings, and it is based on how similar the two settings are that are being compared (Ramsey, 2010). The comprehensive descriptions enable readers to apply information to different contexts and assess whether the study's findings hold true in other contexts (De Wet, 2010). In addressing this, the researchers described in detail the context and assumptions central to the research as well as ensuring transparency through disclosing all the data collected. The researchers ensured that the data were rich with descriptions

and were explained as specific as possible so that the person who wishes to apply the results to a different context is responsible for making their own judgment on how sensible the transfer is.

Finally, one of the elements of trustworthiness, dependability, is thought to be the quantitative equivalent of reliability and is concerned with the stability of the results over time (Ramsey, 2010; Sinkovics, et al., 2008). To address the dependability and establish reliability of this study, the researchers ensured the consistency during data collection and analysis by following a code-recode system during data reduction, and applied the peer examination and investigator triangulation of the data collected and analyzed.

The respect for the dignity of the conversation partners was prioritized, and the researchers only assessed those components that are of relevance to the study conducted. For instance, if the conversation partner opts to stop participating in the study, it would be respected and voluntary involvement would also be taken into consideration. At the end of the study, papers containing the raw data would ultimately be destroyed, shredded and electronic documents containing the recorded data would be properly disposed of.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Core themes and sub-themes on the experiences of being a student-mother

Core Themes	Sub-Themes			
Core theme 1: Personal struggles of being a student mother	Sub-theme 1: Ordeals faced performing their dual roles	Subtheme 2: Dealing with their hectic lives		
Core Theme 2: Societal acceptance	Subtheme 1: Being a student mother in the eyes of everyone	Subtheme 2: Degrading remarks from other people		
Core Theme 3: Support system	Subtheme 1: Partner's involvement	Subtheme 2: Family approval	Subtheme 3: Peer acceptance	Subtheme 4: Resources that could further help them as student- mothers
Core Theme 4: Motivations for continuing education	Subtheme 1: Source of strength of student mothers			

Core theme 1: Personal struggles of being a student mother: Core Theme 1 can be expounded in two (2) sub-themes which unravels the ordeals the student mothers have faced while performing their dual roles and their strategies in dealing with their hectic schedule. Being a mother, a student, and a responsible adult at the same time is a "great dilemma," claimed by Springer et al., [11]. The study of Dankyi et al., [12] found that student mothers face a number of academic challenges, including the lapses to regularly attend classes and participate in lectures due to fatigue, child sickness, routine baby check-ups, and the lack of breastfeeding facilities in schools.

It was also found that student mothers struggle with examinations for their attention is divergent towards taking care of the child and studying religiously for an exam. Based on the responses elicited from the conversation partners, it can be read that being a student mother is indeed an arduous task as it involves having to face different day-to-day struggles while balancing their effort, time, and attention in dealing with those. All conversation partners reached consensus in expressing that being a student and a mother at the same time is truly a bumpy journey to take.

Baby girl: There were times when I would face some difficulties to the point where you just want to surrender because you're too exhausted.

Althea: First of all, it is truly a struggle for me as a first-time mom.

Marga: Stressful. Having a child is just different compared to when you still didn't have one. Now I need to manage my time with my family, my baby, and school as well.

Cassie: First of all, since it is the first time it's very hard because you don't know where to start or what to do first.

Violet: It's very difficult, I promise.

Another conversation partner revealed that being a student mother is hard especially when her child is attached to her.

Lala: It's so hard to adjust especially if you have a close relationship with your child. It is really difficult when I couldn't come home for a week and when my mother would call me, my child would immediately find me and ask me to go home.

Subtheme 1: Ordeals faced in performing their dual roles: Juggling between priorities entails a great deal of attention and effort while facing different hurdles along the way. Indeed, as a student mother, dealing with both roles at the same time while maintaining equal focus and effort is almost impossible as they have to compromise one over the other. The student mothers revealed their personal and rather unique experiences while trying to manage their duties as a student and as a full-time mom:

Baby girl: Sometimes I feel like I'm being challenged, where it seems like you just want to surrender because --- for instance, it's the day off of [the nanny] then there is an emergency, no one would take care of my baby since my partner has a work as well. So, I would have to look for someone else who would look after [my child] so I could study properly.

Althea: It was midterm exam that time when he [baby] got hospitalized. It was midterm exam but I had to go back and forth to the hospital.

Lala: It's difficult when your child is sick and you are not with her especially if she was always used to having you by her side when she's not feeling well. She's like—she would really beg for me to come home and would make me feel worried.

Marga: In the morning, when my first class is at 7:30, I would wake up at 5 and get myself ready while he's [baby] still sleeping, soon later when I am just about to leave, wearing my uniform, he would wake up then. Since I'm breastfeeding him, I would have to stay then, so I would end up being late for my 7:30 AM class.

Subtheme 2: Dealing with their hectic lives: To be able to meet both ends, these student mothers have mastered the art of time management. They shared their own ways on how to cope with their different roles in ways like setting schedules, doing things beforehand, as well as multitasking. Their different approaches to time management are illustrated below:

Baby girl: I would set a schedule so I won't forget [my tasks] and so I can organize them properly.

Althea: I would usually do it [school works] in advance.

Lala: During weekdays when I'm at school, I would prioritize my works, activities, tasks, my role to observe in the school. I would do it all first then after, in the afternoon, around four to five up till the evening, that would be my time for my baby. My mother would call me because she [child] wants to talk to me.

Marga: During online classes, I would look after my baby. He would play while I am attending an online class. But sometimes when I couldn't really pay attention during classes, I would just focus on him. And then after that, if there are quizzes, I would study for it until I can master everything.

Cassie: [I would do it] one after another, but there are instances where I would just do it at the same moment because – if she [child] is having some tantrums – you can't just tell her "Can you stay with *Nanay* for a while?", [she would say] "No I don't want to."

So, I can't do anything with it.

Core Theme 2: Societal Acceptance: Society may have their own expectations based on the different perspectives they believed in. Social acceptability is delightful and satisfying, it provides a sense of security, which fosters self-esteem. But being a student mother in a society, everyone has different perspectives. These young mothers already carry a tremendous weight on their shoulders and on top of that, they have to deal with the judgment and unavoidable prejudice from others. More often than not, they have been crucified for having a child at such a young age. They were no longer unfamiliar with expressions like "*sayang yung pagkabata*" (literally what a waste of youth) and "*ayan kasi hindi ginamit ang utak*" (literally see what happens when you don't use your head) (Ferrer & Sevilla 2019).

The second core theme tackles societal acceptance towards student mothers' experiences. The two (2) sub-themes discussed are being a student mother in the eyes of everyone and degrading remarks from the other people. Based on the responses of all conversation partners, they have encountered societal evaluation and judgments of any forms as they perform their dual roles. Several people criticize, degrade, and discriminate against them,

yet they continue to fulfill their responsibilities and refrain responding to prejudice. Their experiences are expressed in the following statements:

Baby Girl: I transferred here [CHMSU] because it was deemed not acceptable there [previous school] being like that [pregnant].

Althea: They assumed that I might be unable to finish [education], that I struggled a lot, there is always a stigma once you have a child.

Lala: Others firmly believed that I should get married first.

Marga: They tend to degrade; they tend to put you down.

Violet: [Others say things] like "[she] won't be able to finish schooling since [she] prioritized doing reckless things instead."

One of the conversation partners stated the contrary that some individuals had a positive view to student mothers like her.

Cassie: I think, being strong – is something that will always come into their minds – "Wow, she's already mother and yet she can still handle being a student."

Subtheme 1: Being a student mother in the eyes of everyone: Prejudiced mindset towards the student-mothers' situation seemed to be inevitable even in varying environments. Student-mothers reckon that most of the society's perception towards them is inclined more to the narrative that being a mother at a young age is someone who is disgraced, a disappointment, and unable to complete their studies. Three (3) of the conversation partners stated that negative judgements towards their situation weren't uncommon as they transitioned being a student mother. The experiences of conversation partners are expressed in the following statements:

Althea: They thought I would be unable to finish [college].

Violet: They saw me as a disgrace.

Marga: They looked at me as someone who is a disappointment.

Subtheme 2: Degrading remarks from other people:

The public has already established a stereotypical point of view towards the student-mothers as they collectively treat this phenomenon as a taboo and for the student-mothers, receiving derogatory remarks from others seemed just like another normal day. Three (3) of the conversation partners shared that other people in the community perceived them as someone who is inept in pursuing their education or even someone who will do nothing but to continuously just bear children. Their experiences are expressed in the following statements below:

Althea: They said “You might not able to finish your studies, you might just continue giving birth to another [child].”

Lala: I have to be the one to get my modules from the school, so whenever I go to the campus, since my baby bump has become bigger, they looked at me from head to toe.

Cassie: I would hear things like “Will she even be able to finish her education? Since she has a child already?”

Core Theme 3: Support system of the student mothers:

Another core theme that emerged from the in-depth interview was the importance of having a support system. Maintaining balance between academic and parenting responsibilities is exhausting, and in some cases, it is perceived as challenging and difficult to deal with when you are a first-time mother. Regardless of the fact that their new transition in life is tiring and stressful, yet they continue to pursue their education despite the obstacles they experienced. Generally, student mothers have a number of tasks to do at school and at home. Being a mother is already a full-time job, so it is tiring and stressful when deadlines and responsibilities overlap. Additionally, student parents are more likely than traditional students to say that their likelihood of dropping out of college is caused by financial difficulties [13]. To carry out the tasks at hand, they need a support system to be the pillar of their situation when things get rough. This core theme can be further explained by the following sub-themes: partner's involvement, family acceptance, peer acceptance, and the resources that could further help them as a student.

Lala: My mother has the biggest role in helping me take care of my child so that I can manage

my time here at school. I didn't encounter any difficulties because I have my mother who can assist most of the time – she really helped me a lot.

Violet: I have this one classmate who really understood me since then, even when I didn't have a baby yet.

Marga: He [partner] supports me all the way, then why should I waste it? He's always the one who pushes me to keep going, especially when I already feel so exhausted.

Subtheme 1: Partner's Involvement

Facing the daily hurdles of being a student mother is a difficult thing to do. These roles can be stressful and complicated to handle. Partner's involvement is necessary as they will motivate their partner to keep going every day. They will serve as the pillar of strength to the student mothers. Partner's involvement in the life of the student mothers may entail financial and support of their decision to continue their education. Financial support is really a big help to sustain the needs of the child as well as the mother's schooling requires finances for various reasons. Based on the data gathered, four student mothers stated that their partner is very much willing and supportive of their decision to continue their studies as well as their role of being a father to their child.

Althea: He reassures that he will be the one to provide for all the finances needed so that I can focus on my studies.

Lala: He motivates me especially when I am feeling down and restless, telling me to take things slowly.

On the contrary, there are two student mothers who only received financial support from their partners or the father of their child for a short period of time. Cassie only received financial support during her second trimester up until she gave birth to her child whereas Violet had only received something once, the first and last sustenance to buy her needs.

Cassie: He felt like my schooling will only be a burden to him if we'll live together.

Violet: That was the first and last sustenance that he gave while I was 7 months pregnant.

Subtheme 2: Family approval

Most student-mothers are hesitant and nervous to inform their family that they are expecting a baby. Almost all six (6) student mothers state that their families were so disappointed and angry as soon as they found out. Family approval is hard to earn at first but it takes a slow process for them to digest the unexpected news.

Violet: They were so disappointed because they expected me to finish my studies first.

Marga: My relatives who bought me school supplies, who also helped finance my studies were very disappointed at me. Because they thought of me as an intelligent woman and I can just achieve all of my dreams.

Lala: When my father had learned about me being pregnant, he was so enraged that he blamed my mother for letting me engage in romantic relationships. But when they visited me, he wasn't that mad anymore. Instead, he was actually happy seeing his granddaughter. In fact, they helped me in taking care of my child and I am thankful for that.

Subtheme 3: Peer acceptance

Student-mothers face adjustments in different areas of their lives. Aside from the support from their partner and family, they also have to deal with their peers as part of their social group. Student-mothers spend a greater amount of their time in school, so peer acceptance of their situation somehow matters. Their responses to the peer acceptance-related questions were a wide range of reactions, such as shocked, easily accepted, angry, and the likes. To further explain how their peers reacted to student-mothers, the statements below go as follow:

Baby Girl: My friends somehow limit their interactions with me, knowing that I am now in motherhood.

Cassie: They were angry at first, but few days passed, they started to show their concerns to me –asking how I was, and how my pregnancy was going.

Althea: I feel like they felt pity for me in my situation –but I don't want to be pitied.

Baby Girl: So, I was a transferee before, my classmates would praise me and give

compliments like, "That's a good thing. You're still trying to continue your studies despite having a baby."

Subtheme 4: Resources that could further help them as student-mothers

Resources are vital for student mothers to achieve their goals, whether it would be emotional support or financial assistance from people who care for them and want to see them fulfill their dual roles. All conversation partners stated that they need emotional and financial support. Three (3) of the conversation partners mentioned that they need emotional support to cope with their difficulties and struggles, as it makes them feel better and more capable of dealing with situations. Furthermore, two (2) of the conversation partners stated that providing financial assistance to student mothers would be beneficial to their education as well as in their everyday finances. The responses of conversation partners are expressed in the following statement:

Baby Girl: Emotional support and we need someone to talk to.

Marga: Support---support system, if you don't have support system you will be depressed,

Cassie: The people who... that you can say you can trust.

Lala: Financial aspect. Since it's hard to manage [expenses] (laughs*).

Violet: Financial perhaps. It's very difficult to be honest like--- hoping that there would be scholarship opportunities for us [student mothers].

One of the conversation partners stated that as a student mother, be emotionally strong, have patience and trust in the God

Althea: They need to strengthen their emotions, have patience, and then faith in the Lord.

Core Theme 4: Motivations and inspiration for continuing education: This theme encapsulates the driving forces that the student mothers have in the pursuit of their goals. Undoubtedly, the situation of being a mother does require utmost effort and patience as well as being a student

mother. The responses evoked during the in-depth session of interviews truly attest to the fact that attending to both duties is a no easy task. According to Van Rhijn et al [14], student parents' visions of their future selves were shared and inspired by the significant others and loved ones in their lives. The findings for this theme reached a consensus based on their subjective responses where all have elicited the same answer and that is gaining strength from their own small family especially their child. This provides an insight of how their child has played a big role in their lives. The driving force that comes from their child pushed them to do the things that were seemingly difficult in other people's eyes. The need for motivation of these student mothers is important for it will help them keep themselves grounded, goal-oriented, and to live a life with purpose. This theme is further simplified into another sub theme that aims to give emphasis on their own personal source of strength.

Althea: I would reckon – I'm doing this not for myself, but for him [baby].

Lala: Even though I am in this situation, I still dream of graduating, so I want to be like – same as my friends - even though I am in this kind of situation at least I could prove that I can also keep up with them and can finish my studies too.

Marga: I want to have a stable job in the future and I desire to have an income of our own, a house of our own, and that we don't have to rely on our parents anymore.

Cassie: So, I could achieve my dreams in life despite already having a child. My studies need not to halt just because I already have a child.

Violet: I relish to be-- somehow, he [child] has something to be proud of like "My mother is a college graduate" and I want to provide him a better future as well.

Subtheme 1: Source of strength of student mothers: Being a mother alone is already of a great challenge as it could bring a lot of stress and pressure to the mother while taking care of her child. But choosing to continue school while carrying the responsibility of being a mother at the same time doubles the amount stress and pressure that they have to encounter with loads of school works and the like. Having someone to

rely on and gain strength from is important for them to hold themselves on the ground and not lose their way. The student mothers reveal their sources of strength in the following:

Baby girl: As a student and a mother, I'm gaining my strength every time I look at my husband and my baby, especially every time my child smiles.

Althea: I think through my baby. That although it's hard being a mother, he is the one who gives me strength to be able to live another day and do my best in school for him.

Lala: It's the times when I would feel down and seemed like I couldn't do it anymore but then I would only gather my strength again from my baby whenever I see her smile.

Marga: My baby, and my boyfriend since he's the one who finance us.

Cassie: My daughter, it's only her. Especially when I would come back from school and would come home tired, I would see her smile and then you would hear her go "Mamaaa", my tiredness would then be relieved.

Violet: Only through my baby, and of course God, I am always thankful to god.

4. CONCLUSION

This study allowed the researchers to explore the experiences of being a student and a mother at the same time. The responses evoked and the personal undertakings shared during the interview sessions provided an in-depth understanding of the struggles they have encountered as well as a glimpse of their different personalities and outlooks in life.

The researchers were able to derive a conclusion that the roles of the student mothers are undeniably difficult to handle. Regardless of the varying environments they grew up in, they all share almost, if not, the same sentiments. Furthermore, in spite of all the negative public opinions, they still hold on to their strong conviction and dedication to pursue their aspirations in life. Especially their families who unconditionally accepted them as they are and

helped them in their endeavors. Although, not all conversation partners have a partner who is as supportive and as involved as the others, some of these student mothers still successfully managed to juggle between their time and perform their duties as a student and a single mother at that.

The major takeaway from this present study is to be sensitive and open-minded to the student mothers because no one can really tell the hardships they went through. One cannot judge their experiences and overall character just because of their perceived mishaps. Moreover, despite of the fact that they already have a child at such a young age, they can still achieve the things that a normal student of their age can do in order to have a brighter future not only for themselves but also for their own little family, and that alone is already something that can be proud of for such young women like them.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

The following ethical considerations in this study were firmly considered, (a) The conversation partners were briefed with a set of instructions that contains the study's goals and objectives, (b) Participation shall be voluntary. Thus, informed consent shall be given prior to the data collection to make sure that research is ethically conducted, (c) In data collection, the researchers highly prioritized maintaining confidentiality by using made-up pseudonyms to protect the conversation partners from any harm.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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