

## Dual Roles: Bearing the Academic and Parental Responsibilities of Being a Student Mother

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**ABSTRACT:** *Paying attention to the experiences of student mothers in various contexts is of great importance, especially for those whose lives were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus, testing their pursuit of education while managing their mother's role. This phenomenological research study unveiled eight student mothers' lived experiences, realizations, challenges, and coping strategies. Researchers used an in-depth interview in gathering data, and upon analyzing the data, 11 major themes emerged, namely: 1) Fulfillment of Roles; 2) Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers; 3) Embracing the Value of Education; 4) Diverse Emotions of Motherhood; 5) Student Mothers' Relationship; 6) Financial Dependency and Struggles; 7) Application of Learnings from School to Their Child; 8) Divided Focus and Time; 9) Support Systems; 10) Strategies in Handling the Challenges of Conflicting Roles and 11) Standing Up and Being Strong. The findings revealed that the student mothers faced diverse experiences in fulfilling both roles.*

**Keywords:** *Student Mother, Phenomenology, Lived Experiences, Parental Role, Academic Responsibilities*

### I. Introduction

In the most recent eight-year period for national data in the United States, student parents increased by 1.1 million or 30 million percent [1]. These students have unique situations, including the added challenges of completing their degree while attaining the responsibilities of a parent, securing childcare, and earning an income [2].

As reported in a study conducted by Taukeni [3], the higher rates of female students returning to school or enrolling late in universities are mostly comprised of mothers who gave birth either in high school or during their studies. Furthermore, with the Covid-19 pandemic, Hillier [4] stated that online learning for students and working from home for parents has made it even more complex in families with student parents. Thus, student parents take part in balancing their roles as a parent and being a student where compromise of their time, needs, responsibilities, and aspirations are involved.

Pursuing one's education while fulfilling her duties as a mother requires enormous time and a demanding job [5]. In the Philippines, the cases of students who became parents in their teenage years continue to rise, leaving significant concerns. Based on the Philippine Statistics Authority [6], in every ten Filipino women aged 15-19, one has begun childbirth, in which 8% are already mothers, and 2% were pregnant with their first child, as shown by the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey. Meanwhile, among young adult women aged 20-24, about 43% already have a child, and 4% are pregnant with their firstborn. Accordingly, 15-24 were students' typical ages, especially at the tertiary level [7]. With the Covid-19 pandemic, a study conducted by the Department of

Science and Technology – National Research Council of the Philippines revealed that closures of academic institutions are one factor in increasing student mothers. Moreover, the struggles of Filipino students in fulfilling their student and mother roles are very evident as the results of DOST-NRCP also revealed the burdens like financial struggles, time management, and low education due to the demanding parts of being a parent [8].

Based on the problems cited above, the researchers conducted this study to explore further student mothers' lived experiences to manage their dual roles. The urgency to conduct this study plays a vital role in unveiling the distinct experiences of student mothers. Also, it could awaken other students to the hardships of bearing dual roles. In addition, previous studies have been done concerning this topic. However, existing related qualitative studies either focus solely on challenges or coping strategies with college students as the participants. Also, other studies focus on the interventions that educational institutions can do to help student mothers in their academic endeavors.

On the contrary, this study determined the impacts of such challenges that student mothers experienced in managing dual roles. Also, which of the two roles where the student mother directs more of her attention, does she fully fulfill her role as a student and parent.

This presented study sought to unfold and understand the experiences of student mothers in bearing dual roles, explicitly being a mother and a student. Analogously, this study also focused on how being a parent affects the academic performance of those student mothers in Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro.

Furthermore, this study was intended to give answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of student mothers?
2. What are the realizations of student mothers bearing dual roles?
3. What are the challenges of the student mothers?
4. What are the coping strategies employed by student mothers to minimize the impact of these challenges?

## **II. Research Methods**

### **Research Design**

To carry through the objectives of this study, the researchers used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. According to Jackson, Drummond, and Camara [9], a qualitative research design is generally not a hypothesis-driven design. Still, it seeks to understand and give meaning to a person's experiences in a humanistic approach. As stated by Simon [10], qualitative research also provides clear and detailed explanations of personal experiences as it mainly focuses on examining a phenomenon that has affected the lives of individuals socially or culturally [11].

Furthermore, phenomenology was also used in this research study. By definition, phenomenology is a research approach that aims to explain the very essence and gist of a particular phenomenon by exploring it from people who have experienced it and drawing out interpretations from those experiences in terms of the meanings those people bring to them [12]. Moreover, using a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, the researchers were able to unravel the lived experiences of student mothers and see how they bear the dual responsibilities of motherhood and studenthood from their viewpoints.

### **Research Participants**

This study has consisted of eight (8) participants who are student mothers from Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro for the school year 2021-2022. Correspondingly, Ellis [13] asserted that a sample of 6 to 20 individuals is sufficient in phenomenological research to understand the phenomenon in-depth. Participants were identified using purposive sampling. Accordingly, purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling for qualitative research. This sampling involves selecting participants with significant knowledge and experience about the phenomenon of interest [14].

### **Research Instrument**

In this study, the researchers used a researcher-made interview guide during the conduct of an in-depth interview to uncover the lived experiences of student mothers. The researcher-made interview guide was composed of four main research questions in which the first question deals with the lived experiences of student mothers with three sub questions. The second question discusses their realizations in bearing dual roles with three sub questions. The third question that tackles the challenges has five sub-questions. At the same time, the fourth one revealed the coping strategies these student mothers employed to minimize the impact of challenges experienced, followed by three sub-questions.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative study used thematic analysis to analyze the data that was gathered. Thematic analysis is a method for studying qualitative data that comprises examining a data set for repeating patterns, understanding them, and reporting them ([15], [16]). It is a technique that helped researchers become more familiar with the data and investigate the implications of the concepts that emerge from participant testimonies ([17], [18]). As a result, thematic analysis's core action is thematization ([19], [18]).

## **III. Results**

### **Lived Experiences of Student Mothers**

**Fulfillment of Roles.** Most student mothers divert their attention to one role so that they can focus more or not be overwhelmed by other responsibilities. However, some participants confidently say they can fulfill their roles without compromising others.

Significantly, the challenges of student mothers are worth mentioning since balancing and fulfilling both roles is inspiring as they also recognize the importance of education despite being student mothers [20]. On the other hand, some participants tend to focus more on their parental roles than being students. According to Manalang, Lionson, & Bayubay [21], student mothers must sacrifice one role to attain or fulfill the other. Nevertheless, Manalang's study said that student mothers prioritize their studies rather than their motherhood, which was contrary to what this study's findings showed.

**Juggles and Struggles of Student Mothers.** Among all the other statements, it is the frequent comments given by the participants. They juggle many responsibilities and have high demands on their energy and time. Some participants experience sleep deprivation, constrained actions, and prioritization of other responsibilities.

**Subtheme 1. Constrained Actions Because Of Parental Roles.** Another phenomenon that the student mothers shared is how limited their actions are due to parental roles. Thus, limiting their time to socialize, focus on other responsibilities, and give more attention to their motherhood. Taukeni [3] asserts that single student mothers often face trials that could compromise their academic success and performance. The most common issue that student mothers encounter has limited time to manage their several responsibilities.

### **Realizations of Student Mothers Bearing Dual Roles**

**Embracing the Value of Education.** Placing more emphasis on education was one of the most frequent answers of student mothers. Nikiforidou and Holmes [22] asserted that student mothers value their new role in their studies. Further, despite their heavy task and duty in balancing motherhood and their studies, they still aim to become "good parents" and "good students" because being a good student influences them to become a better parent. Conversely, student mothers have placed so much value on education since they became parents because they see it as beneficial for themselves and their children [23]. Finishing college means so much for student mothers since it means fulfilling their family's dream and providing a good and secure life for their children [20].

**Diverse Emotions of Motherhood.** The occurrence of variegated emotions is also one of the emerging themes from the participants' responses concerning their realizations as student mothers.

**Subtheme 1. Exhausting.** Exhaustion is one of the most frequent answers of the participants. Student mothers feel exhausted because the gap between the weight of roles and responsibilities they had before when they still did not have a child and now that they have one is enormous.

**Subtheme 2. Proud.** Although one of the least mentioned emotions felt by student mothers, the feeling of proudness has also emerged as a subtheme concerning how student mothers' emotions can be diverse, bearing their dual responsibilities.

**Subtheme 3. Happy.** Like the previous subtheme, this subtheme is also least mentioned by student mothers. With this said, student mothers, aside from feeling exhausted and proud, are also happy in fulfilling the dual roles.

Simultaneously doing parental and academic responsibilities can be exhausting and complex, which can cause conflicting emotions and inflict physical and psychological strain on student mothers [24]. Besides, student mothers also find it fulfilling, thus, making them feel positive emotions such as being happy and proud. This was evident in a Filipino study [24] in 2022. Most of their participants, who are student mothers, used the Ilokano expression "*nabannogakon*," which means tired but inspired/fulfilled.

### Challenges of the Student Mothers

**Student Mothers' Relationship.** Student mothers revealed that juggling dual roles affected their student and parental life and their relationship with their families. These include their relationship with their (1) child and (2) partner.

**Subtheme 1. Child.** Student mothers stated how their relationships with their children have become more intimate. They have become closer by spending time doing activities together despite being a student simultaneously. However, one participant said that it slightly affected how she handled her time with them, while another participant stated how her child relied on her too much.

**Subtheme 2. Partner.** Student mothers unveiled how their relationship with their partner strengthened, and they are more understanding of each other. At the same time, one participant expressed how she was having a hard time and faced misunderstandings with her partner regarding taking care of their child.

Student mothers encountered relationship struggles with their partners, which is evident in the study conducted by Andres [25]. Some of their participants revealed misunderstandings with their partners, which eventually affected their academic responsibilities. He also emphasized the importance and influence a father can give indirectly to their child, which dramatically influences the quality of their relationship with the student mothers. Furthermore, parents' feelings towards remote learning are mixed because some student mothers feel more connected to their children [26]. This can also be seen in the study by Öngören [27], which reveals that the pandemic period positively affects the parent-child relationship by spending more time together, sharing interests with the child, doing activities together, and having good communication with the child.

**Financial Dependency and Struggles.** Financial problems were considered one of the problems being confronted by student mothers. They were having a hard time managing their money and budgeting since they needed to provide for their schooling and their child's needs.

**Subtheme 1. Financial Dependency on the Parents and Partner.** Some student mothers stated that they do not have any difficulty with the financial aspect since their parents supported them in their expenses at school and to their child. Their partner also aided them in providing their child's basic needs.

**Subtheme 2. Managing Finances.** When it comes to financially independent student mothers, they have trouble budgeting their money for the mother and child's school expenses, child's basic needs like milk, and their daily expenses, even those who have employed partners.

Accordingly, these findings can be seen in the study of Andres [25] which revealed that financial problems eventually affected their studies as the participant said she could not focus on her lesson as she always thinks about where she will get their daily budget. The same situation can be cited in the study of Moghadam,

Khiaban, Esmaili, and Salsali [28], in which financial affairs need planning and organizing to sustain their educational expenses. Regarding student mothers who are financially dependent on their parents, Cabaguing [29] stated that they tend not to know what to prioritize first since they rely on their parents regarding academic demands and their children's basic needs.

**Application of Learnings from School to their Child.** The learnings of student mothers gained in school are very beneficial as they revealed that they apply their academic gains to their role as mothers. In that case, being a student positively influences parental responsibility as their knowledge could help them make themselves a model to their children. Also, they can use these learnings to help teach their child about basic knowledge and manners. To put it simply, a parent's education is a strong determiner of the child's development and the amount of knowledge that the child would gain [30].

Similarly, Sicam, Umawid, Colot, Dagdag, and Handrianto [31] asserted that the studies of student mothers positively influence and improve their parenting style. Furthermore, it essentially results in student mothers having broadened understanding, better communication and problem-solving skills, less defensive, sympathetic, enthusiastic, tolerant, and open toward their child.

**Divided Focus and Time.** In juggling two roles, the participants' revealed that it significantly affected their focus and time. While doing their academic duties, they cannot prevent and avoid thinking about their parental responsibility, distracting them.

In the study of Manalang et al. [7], practical problems faced by student mothers are evident such as difficulty in managing the time efficiently, including the lack of time to study, skipping classes, and unable to complete academic requirements because of their babies. In cases where student mothers have children at the primary education level, their obligation to scaffold their children is also why they have difficulty meeting their academic demands. On the other hand, some also describe skipping class lectures because they cannot focus, feel weak, and drowsy from being a hands-on mother [3]. Comparatively, a study also showed that student mothers experienced difficulties in taking care of their children, incredibly when sick. It disturbs their focus and attention, which significantly affects their studies [32].

### **Coping Strategies Employed by Student Mothers to Minimize the Impact of Challenges**

**Support System.** Student mothers acknowledged their sources of support that encouraged, motivated, and inspired them to finish their education, pursue their aspirations, and overcome life's problems.

**Subtheme 1. Family.** Student mothers expressed that they are grateful because, despite the fact that they are now parents and students, their parents continued to support and guide them. Their parents help them sustain their needs, whether educational, economical, or emotional.

**Subtheme 2. Almighty God.** In their responses, student mothers indicated that the Almighty God guided them in overcoming life's challenges. God is their primary provider and source of strength to face the challenges they encounter on a regular basis.

**Subtheme 3. Partner.** A student mother introduced her husband as another source of support in this theme. Her spouse is always at her side, cheering and inspiring her to pursue her goals.

**Subtheme 4. Child.** In this subtheme, a student mother has presented her child as her sole source for everything. Her child is her motivation to continue studying and overcome the daily hurdles she confronts.

The findings correlated to the prior study conducted by Xuereb [33]. Accordingly, the most common sources of support for women students with family duties are their family and friends. As per the findings of Kubeka's [34] study, student mothers' reactions to the help they received from their family and friends were favorable. On the other hand, participants mentioned their relationships as a source of support in addition to their families. According to Ogunji, Nwajiuba, and Uwakwe [35], most student mothers said their spouses are their primary source of help. Husbands assumed responsibility for their wives' welfare, including their education and well-being, resulting from this social expectation.

Finally, participants in this study mentioned their child/children as a source of support, which is the same as the results of other studies, such as Smith's [36] study which revealed that the participants' children are their primary motivators and can aid in the retention and completion of student mothers if given enough assistance.

**Strategies in Handling the Challenges of Conflicting Roles.** Student mothers revealed that in handling the difficulties of juggling two roles, they employed strategies that would lessen the weight they faced.

**Subtheme 1. Time management.** Managing the time efficiently was the most recurrent answer of the participants. The ability to do time management, explicitly prioritizing what is more critical tends to be a significant factor among student mothers to balance their tasks. In addition, efficient time management helped them make sure that they performed their parental and academic responsibilities, respectively.

**Subtheme 2. Multitasking.** Aside from time management, another strategy employed by a student mother also indicates multitasking. Accordingly, simultaneously performing parental and academic tasks also aids in handling the challenges of dual roles.

Student mothers would have to adopt and employ coping strategies to survive while efficiently fulfilling their dual responsibilities without compromising one of the two roles [37]. Further, Kent [38] asserted that time management and multitasking skills are essential in coping with the hectic schedules and strenuous tasks of student mothers.

In the study conducted by Cabaguing [29], student mothers understood the essence of planning and giving utmost priority to the most relevant and ignoring unnecessary tasks. The abilities of student mothers to plan, organize, and coordinate their parental and student duties are critical in bearing dual roles Salsali [28]. Comparably, Kouri, Guertin, and Shingoose [39] supported that multitasking has always been a part of narratives among student mothers. Working on two or more tasks simultaneously, repeatedly switching between tasks, and doing two or more tasks at a fast pace are situations where multitasking occurs. Doing things quickly seems to be an excellent factor in order for the academic life of student mothers to not conflict with their parental role [32].

**Standing Up and Being Strong.** Being a student mother is not an easy job. Having a strong mind and determination are the attributes that student mothers have shared about their strengths to overcome their challenges of simultaneously bearing dual roles.

The result was consistent with the study previously conducted by Bosch [40] who claimed that all of his participants showed mental toughness that helped them manage home and school issues. The majority mentioned determination, strong-willed, disciplined, high-achieving, persistent, and ambitious. The women mentioned an inner sense of drive that helped them get past the obstacles of studying with children in each narrative. Another article from Gatbonton [41] showed student mothers' will to continue for the sake of their child. Adolescent moms' meaningful life experiences inspired them to have a more positive view, which could act as a springboard for self-improvement.

#### IV. Conclusion

This study showed that student mothers face diverse struggles, most specifically their limited and restricted actions due to their academic and parental role in their day-to-day experiences. Anent to that, it was revealed that some of the student mothers, although having a hard time balancing their dual responsibilities and roles, were still able to fulfill their parental and academic workloads. Aside from that, the participants also disclosed their realizations as student mothers, emphasizing how important education is now that they have become parents and seeing education as a vessel to give their children and family a secure future. They also mentioned that being a student mother can make them feel distinctive, conflicting emotions such as being happy, tired, and proud.

Furthermore, student mothers also face challenges as they bear their dual roles, and these include how their relationship with their child and partner was affected because of their multiple responsibilities. Difficulty in managing educational and familial finances and division of their focus and time were also some of the challenges mentioned by the student mothers. Moreover, to ameliorate these challenges, student mothers employed coping

strategies, including time management and multitasking. Student mothers also said support systems like their family, partner, child, and the Almighty God, which help them be more driven in continuing their studies. Lastly, student mothers indicated that their vehement will and determination also assisted them in overcoming their challenges.

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