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Research Article

Two Faces of a Mom: Student Mothers' Lived Experiences in a State University

Karen P. Andres*

College of Teacher Education, President Ramon Magsaysay State University-San Marcelino, Philippines

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*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

kpandres29@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and complicated life of 12 mothers who are pursuing their collegiate degree in a state university while rearing and taking care of their children. Participants met the inclusion criteria of a student mother, which includes (1) a bonafide student of a tertiary state institution; (2) a biological mother; (3) residing with her child/children; and (4) willingness to participate in the inquiry. Three major themes emerged in the participants' lived experiences, which include (1) hustles and bustles of student mothers' life; (2) driving factors of student mothers; and (3) coping mechanisms of two-faced mothers. The findings revealed that the participants faced adversities and struggles as a mother and as students and remained more steadfast and more resilient in fulfilling their dreams to finish their collegiate degree and receive a university diploma. The lived experiences of the student mothers have established implications to policies in the university, which involves the creation of daycare centers inside the campus for the children of student mothers as well as the conduct of psychosocial debriefing and stress reduction programs by the Gender and Development (GAD) office for the student mothers.

Keywords: lived experiences, phenomenology, student mother, two faces of mother, Zambales, Philippines

Introduction

Being a student mother is not a walk in the park. Pursuing one's education while fulfilling her duties as a mother is an arduous task.

Child rearing is treated as a full-time job and may be very taxing on female university students if pregnancy is unforeseen (Cabaguing, 2017). Being a mother at the same

time, a student demands a gargantuan amount of time. It is not easy as you try to exhibit two faces – being a mother and being a student. Finishing a degree is critical to a young woman's life because the time of studying a woman spends would impact her life's future (Brown & Amankwaa, 2007; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001).

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Majority of births were born to young moms aged 20 to 24 (27.3%) and to fathers aged 25 to 29 (24.7%). Moreover, babies born to teenage mothers were more than those babies sired by teenage fathers (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). This age range 20 to 24 is the common age of the college students.

Globally, several researches have been conducted regarding student mothers. These studies focused on undergraduate student mothers' experiences (Callender, 2018; James, 2019; Kensinge & Minnick 2018; Oppong & Abroampa 2018; Simon, 2020), support to student moms in tertiary education (Corfe, 2019; Dickson & Tennant, 2018), student mothers' challenges and coping strategies (Anibijuwon & Esimai, 2020; Dankyi et al., 2020; Ogunji et al., 2020; Ojo et al., 2020), academic challenges of student mothers (Tigere, 2018), and balancing academics and being a mother (Sangawe, 2020).

In the Philippines, researches regarding student mothers focused on different topics. These studies concentrated on the changing societal norms to facilitate higher education of young moms (Ato, 2018), managing dual roles of as a mother and as a student of tertiary student mothers (Cabaguing, 2017; Manalang et al., 2016), challenges of student mothers (Dasig, 2020), the motivation of single mothers to finish tertiary education (Yang & Bullecer, 2016), and the academic journey of student moms (Torres et al., 2020). The present study, however, explored the student moms' lived experiences in a state tertiary institution. A mother who pursues her education in a university while having to assume responsibilities as the light of their homes is a great risk-taker. Juggling her dual roles will never be easy.

Hence, this study was conducted to explore the lived experiences and challenges of student mothers qualitatively, how they define their roles and obligations, and their coping mechanisms to surpass the arduous, challenging and complicated life of having two faces a student and being a mother.

Method

Research design

This study identified the meaning of the lived experiences of student mothers. The

research sought to give explanations and answers to the following essential questions: 1) How will you describe your lived experiences as a student mother in a state university? and 2) What have you learned from these lived experiences?

Qualitative research designs allow for vital depth and breadth in discovering the experiences of the subjects and will be utilized as a baseline framework for this investigation. Qualitative researchers assert that no such control is possible and, further, that there are multiple realities (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The study used the phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is an inquiry to understand people's lived experiences and an effort to extract essence from these experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Phenomenological inquiry pursues to describe the participant's lived experience by detailed investigation (Seidman, 2006). In this study, the methodology focused on the phenomenon of balancing the responsibilities of motherhood and being a university student (Seidman, 2006).

Participants and selection criteria

A total of 12 student mothers served as participants of the study. The samples are purposively chosen by the researcher with the following inclusion criteria: 1) a bonafide student of a state university in Central Luzon, Philippines; (2) a biological mother; (3) living with her child/children; and (4) willing to participate in the study.

The research was conducted at the President Ramon Magsaysay State University (PRMSU) – San Marcelino Campus. The interview, participant observation and focus group discussion (FGDs) were all done in the campus.

Research instrument

The researcher made use an unstructured interview guide to explore the lived experiences of the student mothers. An observation checklist was also used as the researcher observed them in their journey as students in the campus. An FGD guide was also used for the conduct of the focus group discussion. The researcher also did photo documentation to gather more evidences of the student mothers' lived experiences.

Data gathering procedure

An unstructured interview guide was used in gathering the data. This type of interview tool is the most common method for gathering qualitative information (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006) which aided the investigator to acquire all the essential data and let the researcher ask follow-up questions for elucidation. The interview guide's content was validated by three experts who specialized in the field of psychology and guidance counselling.

Data analysis

Data analysis is "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with the findings" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Reducing the text from several transcribed interviews to single units of significant meaning, inductively rather than deductively, were the qualitative researcher's tasks. Further, the researcher must use her judgment to make decisions and extrapolate meaning from the text (Seidman, 2006). The research questions guide the analysis of the data.

Additionally, the researcher relied on her experiences, intuition and the literature to identify and acknowledge emergent themes. Analysis was interwoven throughout the research process as she observed, recorded, and made decisions about areas of focus, emphasizing the reduction of the essence of student mothers' experience successfully pursuing a higher education. Consistent with traditional coding strategies, the researcher relied on themes to emerge throughout the data collection and analysis process.

The researcher analyzed each interview recordings and scrutinized each to come up with textural descriptions and structural descriptions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Data gathered from each subject was then analyzed as primary data. The encoded interviews, and elements from observation were given codes and categories based on the extracted themes until saturation is attained.

Ethical considerations

The researcher also obtained an informed consent among the participants prior to the

investigation. The study also ensured confidentiality of the subjects. Permission to record the interview was likewise reiterated. Emphasizing the ethical guidelines of research, the investigator also observed time and place commitments. As to data storage, the researcher utilized note-taking and interview form to achieve deeper responses from the interviewees.

Results and Discussion

From the data analyses, three themes emerged: (1) hustles and bustles of student mothers' life; (2) driving factors of student mothers; and (3) coping mechanisms of two-faced mothers. The three themes and sub-themes that emerged suggested that participants struggle to be two-faced mothers, as students, and as student moms. The following sections present the major themes and subthemes.

Theme 1. Hustles and Bustles of Student Mothers' Life

Theme 1 suggests that being a student mother is full of hustles and bustles. These include (1) financial constraints; (2) relationship misunderstanding and (3) conflicting demands.

Subtheme 1. Financial constraints. Financial problem is one of the problems being confronted by a student mother. Some of the statements of the participants which reveal that being a student mother demands much money include the following:

1. *"As a mother as well as a student, budgeting is the most difficult task for me, because my partner's salary was enough only for our [primary] needs. But sometimes, it's not enough especially if there is a project and other miscellaneous in our school and also to my son's school. It can affect my study in such a way that sometimes I cannot focus to my lesson thinking whether if where am I going to get our budget for the other day."* [SM-01]
2. *"Habang nagaaral ako, tumutulong din ako sa Aeta Children's Home, isa itong tahanan ng mga aetas na tinutulungan para makapag-aral. Sa maghapon, tumutulong ako na maglinis, maghiwa, maghain at kung ano pa na pwede kong gawin para tumulong dito ay ginagawa ko. Para akong working*

student. Ito kasi yung sumusuporta sa pag-aaral ko." [SM-02]

Subtheme 2. Relationship misunderstanding.

Student mothers also face misunderstanding in terms of relationship, relationship with their husbands and even with their children. In consonance, the following responses are related to this subtheme:

1. *"Ang di pagkakaunawaan ng mag asawa ay sadyang nakaaapekto sa isang inang nag-aaral. Lalo na kung naitataon ito sa panahon ng examinations o quiz. We cannot concentrate or we can't focus in our examinations or even when it is just a quiz because we are thinking our problems and we cannot avoid it."* [SM-01]
2. *"Masakit sakín kasi parang nag-iisip din siya [husband] ng hindi maganda. Minsan nag-aaway kami kasi nahihirapan din siya na magadjust sa lahat ng bagay tapos gusto niya nang umuwi. Siyempre nagsisimula na akong magaral nun kaya sobrang hirap sakín lalo na hirap pa ng kalooban na iniisip ko, ako lang ba yung nangangarap nang maayos na buhay para sa pamilya ko."* [SM-02]

Subtheme 3. Conflicting Demands. Another underlying dilemma that student mothers face is the conflicting but equally urgent demands of being a student and a mother.

Sample statements made by the participants relative to this sub-theme follow:

1. *"Ganyan ang buhay ko bilang studentang ina sa araw-araw pero ang malala kong magkaroon nang sakit sinuman sa amin tatlo talagang tutulo ang luha ko at tanging DIYOS lang ang aking kinakapitan."* [SM-03]
2. *"Mahirap din pagsabayin ang pag-aaral at ang pagiging nanay kasi lahat asikasuhin mo lahat pangangailangan ng mga anak ko halos minsan nag-sasabay sabay ang mga project na ginagawa ko kaya minsan gabi na o maaga ako gigising para gawin ko ang mga project namin at mga report ko sa school."* [SM-04]
3. *"May oras pa na kapag magpapahinga ako sa hapon at may mga assignments na dapat tapusin, pinipilit ko matulog yung anak ko*

para hindi siya manggulo sakín. Minsan napapaliyak ako pero hindi ko pinapakita lalo na sa asawa ko kasi dati kapag sinasabi ko na nahihirapan ako, sinasabi niya sakín, "gusto mo yan eh." [SM-02]

Student mothers experienced dilemmas in terms of financial support, misunderstanding in the relationship with their partners and even with their children, and the conflicting demands of being a housekeeper and a student in the university. This finding is parallel with the several studies (Cabaguing, 2017; Manalang et al., 2016; Yang, & Bullecer, 2016) which provide a fundamental understanding of the challenges encountered by college student-mothers in performing their role of motherhood and being students.

Theme 2. Driving Factors of Student Mothers

Despite of the afflictions and adversities in life, the student mothers are very eager and enthusiastic to pursue their education and obtain a degree. They have the driving factors for their (1) child's better tomorrow, (2) for self-esteem and personal success and (3) serves as panacea to their life's difficulties.

Subtheme 1. Child's better tomorrow. The student mothers are studying mainly for their child's better tomorrow. They want to inspire their children that the education is a passport out from poverty.

The following responses from the participants stressed this sub-theme:

1. *"Minsan nahihirapan na din ako kasi nga lahat trabaho ko minsan gusto ko na gumive up pero nagtitiis ako paara sa anak ko na makatapos ako at mabigyan ko siya ng magandang buhay..."* [SM-04]
2. *"Going to the bed late and waking up early is hard but for my kids' future, it's alright."* [SM-05]
3. *"Pero kinakaya ko dahil hindi lang naman to para sa sarili ko kung hindi para na din sa kinabukasan ng mga anak ko."* [SM-12]
4. *"Nag-aaral ako ngayon para sa future ng anak ko at para makatulong ako sa asawa ko pagdating ng panahon."* [SM-02]

Subtheme 2. Self-esteem and personal success. To enhance their self-esteem and self-worth is the primary objective of most student mothers to pursue their education despite their age and being a student mother. Most of them shared that they want to prove to the people and the society that having a child is never a hindrance from getting a degree in college.

The following statements along this theme include the following:

1. *"Mahirap pero kailangan namin magtiis para makapagtapos."* [SM-06]
2. *"....Pero pinapaintindi ko nalang na konting tiis nalang at makakagraduate na ako at pagaaralin ko naman siya [husband] kasi gusto ko pati siya makapag-aral din para hidi siya minamaliit ng ibang tao."* [SM-02]
3. *"Dati hindi ko na naisip na mag-aral, gusto ko lang plain housewife, pero nung nakita ko yung hirap talaga ng buhay na hindi ka nakagtapos ng pag-aaral, nagsikap talaga ako at hopefully, God willing next school year ay makagraduate ako."* [SM-02]

Subtheme 3. Panacea to Life's Difficulties.

Being a student mother is demanding yet the fulfilment is priceless. The participants considered it as a panacea to life's difficulties – you learn in the school as a student and you learn in life as a mother.

The following statements along this theme include the following:

1. *"Ang pagiging nanay ay isang mahirap na responsibilidad. Sabi nga nila, walang time out, walang break, madalas laging overtime, pero priceless, at worthy kapag nakita mo lahat ng bunga ng pagiging isang nanay."* [SM-06]

The study found out that despite of the adversities experienced by the student mothers, they have personal motivation and inspiration that drive them to become a better mother and at the same time become a responsible student. They mentioned that in order to accomplish their dual roles, they get their drive from their children, from their inner selves and from the perks of being a student mother. Failure to achieve college completion

does not only affect their future but also the future of their children to be (Ato, 2018).

Theme 3. Coping Mechanisms of Two-Faced Mothers

Being a two-faced mother is difficult. Having to comply with the university's course requirements as a student and having to fulfil your duties as a mother at home is never easy. But with the student mothers' (1) support circle, (2) their way of managing time and (3) considering the first in the list, the student mothers cope up with life's challenges and adversities.

Subtheme 1. Support Circle. The student mothers' current situations are hard and difficult, but because of their support circle, they manage to fulfil their being a student mother.

The following responses from the participants stressed this sub-theme:

1. *"My husband do any work than he can. Even though that he is a pastor sometimes he do farming and driving a tricycle for hire just to support other expenses."* [SM-07]
2. *"Napakaswerte ko sa aking asawa dahil napakasupportive niya sa pag-aaral ko. At higit sa lahat lage kaming naglalaan ng oras para magkaroon kami ng time na magbonding."* [SM-02]

Subtheme 2. Management of Time. The student mothers commonly mention wise time management that they do so that they will be able to accomplish the tasks at hand.

Sample statements relative to this theme include the following:

1. *"Ang ginagawa ko pag nagsasabay lahat ng mga ito hinahati ko ng maigi ang aking oras upang di ko mapabayaan ang pamilya at ang pag-aaral ko. Sa gabi inaayos ko na lahat ng gamit ng mga anak ko baon nila kinabukasan mga damit para sa umaga di sila mahuli sa school tapos naglilinis na din ako sa gabi. Pagktapos ng mga gawain ko sa gabi nagbubuklat na ako ng notebooks at libro magbabasa ng isang oras."* [SM-10]

2. "Nakapagenroll ako at sobrang laki ng naging adjustment naming mag-asawa at pati narin ang anak namin sa lugar at sa mga schedule na binigay saming magasawa." [SM-02]
3. "Ang hirap budgetin ng oras. Maraming sakripisyo, pero beyond that may magandang bunga." [SM-02]

Subtheme 3. First in the List. Priority must be given much consideration. This is how most of the student mothers do to cope with the challenges of being a student mother.

The following statements along this theme include the following:

1. "With our vacant period, even that for us ito ay sayang, wala kaming choice just to stay at school waiting for the next period. Sometimes, worth it naman because we are spending this time to do our assignment on other subject and sometimes it serve as our review time." [SM-01]

The findings of the study revealed that the student mothers have a multitude of coping strategies in order to fulfil their obligations both as a student and as a mother. They cited that support system is their main source of strength and encouragement. They also mentioned that sound time management helps them to balance their dual roles. And lastly, they shared that prioritization must always be done in order to avoid conflicts and problems later.

Student mothers are motivated by the belief that having reached college graduation would bring them success in life (Yang & Bullecer, 2016). Further (Ato, 2018) reiterated in her study that policy makers must be proactive in determining starting points for improvements in the Philippine higher education sector and in adopting appropriate measures towards the full realization of the right to education in an equitable manner for all females.

Teachers and non-teaching staff may be fully vigilant on the incidence of verbal bullying in the classrooms and university premises that may affect the mental health (Rogayan, 2019) of the student mothers and to prevent social stigma against these student mothers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants faced adversities and struggles as a mother and as students and remained more steadfast and more resilient in fulfilling their dreams to finish their collegiate degree and receive a university diploma.

The student mothers' lived experiences have established implications to the creation of daycare centers inside the campus for the children of student mothers as well as the conduct of psychosocial debriefing and stress reduction programs by the Gender and Development (GAD) office for the student mothers.

Further studies may involve more student mothers coming from different regional contexts in the Philippines.

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