

EDUCATION AND MOTHERHOOD: STRUGGLES OF MOTHERS IN PURSUIT OF COLLEGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Schooling is critical to a young woman's life. This can affect the future aspects of her life. But when a woman plays the role of a student while at the same time parenting a child, then that's a different story to tell. The present study used Phenomenological Analysis (PA) to explore the struggles of student mothers in pursuit of their college education. Researchers used a semi-structured interview as a tool for gathering data. Five student mothers from Quirino State University, Diffun Campus were identified as key participants using purposive sampling and snowball technique guided by the following criteria: (a) female; (b) currently enrolled in QSU as a college student; (c) has a child/children (d) she had the custody of the child; and (e) willing to participate in the study. Researchers were guided with phenomenological analysis which includes playing the recorded transcript, encoding, re-reading of the encoded transcript, developing emergent themes, and looking for patterns across cases. After reading and analyzing of data, three major themes emerged from the data; (1) Time Management; (2) Financial Problems; and (3) Support Mechanisms.

Keywords: College student mothers, Phenomenological Analysis, Semi-structured interview.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a weapon to improve one's life. It is said to enhance the knowledge, skills, personality, and attitude of a person. Moreover, many do believe in education as a key factor that greatly contributes for an individual's success. With this, every person should have the right to quality education and a student's determination to pursue higher education is one of their most significant commitments. From a political, economic, and social view, women's education promotes equality and democracy between men and women. Educated women will become capable of earning a living and will not rely on their families or parents for their needs.

Available statistical data of the Commission on Higher Education (2018) on the enrolment by sex both for public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) for the academic year 2018-2019 showed that there was a total of 3.2 million enrollees, wherein 55.33 percent were female (1.77 million) and 44.67 per cent were male (1.43 million). More so, it was observed that the number of student mothers entering universities has been increasing around the world (Williams, Alon, & Bornstein, 2006). The Philippine Statistics Authority (2014) reported that one out of ten (10 percent) young Filipino women aged 15-19 are already pregnant based on the final report of the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey. Also, the said survey reveals that one in five (19 percent) young adult Filipino women aged 18 to 24 years are already engaged in sexual activity before they reach the age of 18 and some of them had their first intimate sexual act before marriage (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). The above-mentioned range of ages was observed to mostly constitute part of the population entering college or tertiary level. And with regards to early pregnancy, Olmstead, Koon, Puhlman, Pasley, and Fincham (2012) stated that most often than not, women were only the ones facing the consequences of such incidents whether emotionally, socially, or academically. With this, while student mothers may want to pursue higher education and be entitled to a college degree while caring for a child, their role as a mother may eventually cause college student mothers to stop pursuing higher education (Manalang, Liongson & Bayubay).

The present research study aimed to investigate the struggles experienced by student-mothers currently enrolled in Quirino State University, Diffun Campus. The result of the present study can be used by the University to come up with a plan to revise or create a curriculum that would help the student- mothers finish their college education without compromising their role as a mother. Moreover, data provided by the present study can be used to come up with strategies and programs to help the student-mothers enrolled in the university.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative using a phenomenological approach as a methodology to answer the research question. Qualitative research aims to examine phenomena that impact the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context (Mills & Berks, 2014); and phenomenological research attempts to recapture and express in a language such experiential meanings as lived through before conceptualizing, abstracting and explaining them (Manen& Adams, 2010).

Moreover, qualitative research study according to Corbin and Strauss (2015), enables the researcher to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints. A semi-structured interview with the selected participants enabled the researchers to gather data presented in this study. A thorough analysis of written notes and transcription of recorded interviews revealed the different struggles of student-mothers taking up their selected courses at the university.

With purposive sampling and snowball technique and guided by the following criteria: (a) female; (b) currently enrolled in QSU as a college student; (c) has a child/children (d) she had custody of the child; and (e) willing to participate in the study. Five (5) student-mothers from Quirino State University (QSU), Diffun Campus were selected to participate in the study. According to Smith, qualified participants for a certain study can be identified using purposive sampling. With purposive sampling, the focus of the study remains on individuals with specific characteristics in a targeted population group of interest. Moreover, it is advantageous in giving researchers an opportunity to develop as much insight as they possibly can into whatever key point is under observation or examination while still maintaining the foundation of a definite focal point/s. The selected participants having different backgrounds and environments while studying is an excellent source of data for the present study since they were able to narrate varied experiences and perspectives with regard to their struggles as student-mother taking up their college courses.

A semi-structured interview was used in collecting data. Guide questions were formulated in relation to the research problem. The participants were asked open-ended questions allowing discussion with the participants. By doing so, the researchers were able to obtain the necessary information needed and ask follow-up questions for clarification. Interviews were started by obtaining basic demographic information from the participants. After which, open-ended questions with regards to their (1) life before having a child; (2) reason for deciding to go on their schooling after giving birth; (3) struggles as student mothers (4) motivation to go on with their studies, were asked.

Prior to the interview, subjects were informed about the purpose of the present research. More so, they were asked for their most convenient time and place for the interview and preferred mode of administering the interview - whether to have it one-on-one with a researcher or if it would be alright to have it with the group. So far, all the participants have agreed to take the interview with the group of researchers. The researchers administered the interview and made sure that the participants were able to freely speak and express their experiences. While one of the researchers do the interview, the other member of the group took notes of the important details. And with

the consent of the participants, the conversations were recorded for transcription purposes.

After the interviews, the recorded conversations were transcribed, printed, and photocopied. Copies of the transcripts were distributed among the researchers. After the distribution of transcripts, the researchers once again listened to the recorded interviews while reading along the finished transcripts for verification and corrections. After this, the data analysis started by reading the transcripts a number of times to immerse themselves in the data. While reading, the researchers also took notes of the important remarks and highlighted particular information that was found significant in answering the research question. After multiple times of reading the transcribed data, taking down notes, and re-reading the said notes, significant statements that form a common idea after analysis was categorized into individual emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to know the struggles of college mothers in pursuit of their college education. The results indicated that being a mother and a student is such a challenging task but the support system behind these challenges keeps them going. From the data analyses, three themes emerged: (1) time management, (2) financial problems, and (3) support mechanisms.

Time Management

Having the role of a mother and student is a difficult task. The participants talked about waking up early in order to fulfill the morning responsibilities at home before going to school. The problem with time management can be illustrated by the following statements:

- (1) "Mahirapibalanse ang time saanaksapag-aarallalo 'pag may mga activities, projects, kaya gisingakohanggang alas dose para matapos lahat the school activities" (It's difficult to manage time for my child and schooling especially if there are activities and projects, that's why I'm awake 'till 12 am just to finish school tasks.)
- (2) "Nagkakaroon lang kami ng bonding ni baby 'pag gabi. Taposgigising po ako ng quarter to five, taposmaramipa pong gagawin, magluluto, taposkahitmaaga 'yongsasakyanhintayanparin ng mgataodito. Ang hiraptakasanni baby" (We can only have bonding moments with baby at night. Then I have to wake up early around quarter to five, I have so many tasks. I cook. Then even if I am early, people here wait for others for transportation.
- (3) "Idi umakar kami jay C* (referring to their new home), kanayunakngamaladaw. Nagrigatnukwatoras mi. Ajay pinagitulod mi kini L*** (referring to her child) ken

ajaypinagrubwat mi ngaduwa. Itulod mi ni L*** jay C* Elementary School tapossumrekak met.” (When we transferred to C*, I was always late. It’s hard to manage our time. We first send L*** to school then I’ll go to school after.)

- (4) “Ang hirap lang po early parenthood, mahirap po mag-cope up marami po dapatgawin kay L* (referring to her child), i-pe-prepare mo pa siya, taposi prepare mood niyataposi-pre-prepare sarilimosyemprebagopumasok. Kelanganmoi-manage yung sarilimo at the same time yung duties mo as parent, ang hirap mag-manage ng time”. (It’s hard to be engaged in early parenthood, it’s hard to cope up with things to do with L*, prepare her, prepare her mood then prepare yourself before going to school. You need to manage yourself at the same time your duties as a parent. It’s so hard to manage time).

The result supported the claim of Taukeni (2014) that the main challenges of student mothers were the limited time to manage schooling and parenting roles. More so, Marandet and Wainwright (2010) also reported one of the main issues of students with dependents was time and timing.

Financial Problems

The financial burden is another concern of the student mothers. They run out of budget because they need to provide for their schooling and for their child. Even the student-mothers who have their partners also experience trouble in budgeting for their family and their school expenses. Redhwan and his colleagues (2009) stated that the financial status of students was one of the most associated factors related to the causes of stress for college students. The experiences can be illustrated in the following statement:

(1) “Balon ko 75 pesos, mabitin ta nagaduti modules. Agbalunaknukwainnapoy pang- ngaldaw ta agbudgetakti pang 15 pesos ngasidaen. Madi aknukwaagmermeryendan. (My allowance is PhP75. It is not enough because we have many modules. I have to pack cooked rice for lunch and budget PhP15 for viand. I won’t have merienda anymore.)

(2) “Bumulbuludak jay classmates ko nu kwatikwarta, taposbayadak nu makaluwag”. (I borrow money from my classmates and if I have enough money, I pay them.)

(3) “Kelanganmotalagangi-budget lahat, ung para kay baby at mgapangangailangansa school. Madalas, nakakastress.” (You need to budget it all, for baby and for school needs. Most often, I’m stressed).

The result supports the claim of Kenny and his co-researchers (2007) that financial issues were of the most important factors affecting mother students' abilities to complete their educations successfully. Moreover, Xuereb (2014) also mentioned that financial stress was one of the most common reasons that students reconsidered continuing their education.

Support Mechanism

Key relationships with families and partners, in particular, have been influential to the participants in the pursuit of College education despite the struggles. As stated by Moghadam and his colleagues (2017), support may come from the student's husband, family members, university professors, or classmates. One Participant declared: "nabayag nan ibagbagani A*** (referring to the partner) ngaagtuluyak kaya lang ket adda ubing ko bakamadikmaasikaso, ngemkayatna gamin agadalak, isuitultuloy ko latta, uray nu narigattibiag". (He has been telling me to continue my education but I have a child to take care of, still, he insisted. That is why I'm continuing my education even if life is hard.) This statement supports Fuller and Paton (2007) study that social and personal conditions can act as either facilitators or barriers against the condition to continue to educate. The result of this study showed that these conditions act as facilitators in the pursuit of college education as they continue to motivate the participants.

In addition, Wainwright & Marandet (2010) emphasized that familial support can empower student mothers and reduce the impact of the student role on maternal and family life. All of the participants emphasized that they get their strength from their children.

One of them said, "Sarili ko din talaga ang paghuhugutan ko ng suporta at lakas ng loob. Saka sa future ng baby ko para ipagpatuloy ang pagaaral" (I really gather my strength from myself and for my child's future to finish schooling). Two of the participants in the study also stated, "Lahat silang kapatid ko nakatapos kaya gusto ko din sanamakatapos" (All of my siblings have already finished their college degrees so I also want to graduate).

The result revealed that participants' support system can be their intrinsic desire to motivate themselves and pursue a College education. According to Lei (2010), there are different motivations students bring to learning. It 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. 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).

Individuals who are motivated intrinsically tend to develop a high regard for learning course information without the use of external rewards or reinforcement. On the other hand, individuals who are motivated extrinsically rely solely on rewards and desirable results for their motivation, i.e., exams and grades.

In line with the respondents' motivation and support in continuing higher education one participant said, "Si mother nagsusuportaakingpagaaral. Siya ang nag-aalaga kay baby kapagwalaako at si A*** (referring to her partner) naman ang nagtratabaho para sa amin." (My mother supports my schooling. She takes care of my baby when I am not around and my husband works for us). This supports the claim of Griffiths (2002) that having available people who positively support them, including family members, friends, and partners, seems vital in determining how well mothers cope with these struggles.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

Based on the results of the study, the researchers conclude that, participants struggle in managing their time for their dual role as mothers and students and that they are being challenged financially- facing difficulty in budgeting their finances.

Student-mothers experienced limited time to manage schooling and parenting roles. Also, limited financial support served as a challenge and struggle. Even so, these struggles experienced by them can be eased or overcome through the support they are experiencing from their family together with motivations coming from both extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

The result of this study highlights some potential priorities for future research in this field. First, is to interview family members, faculty members, friends, and other people whom the participants are interacting with, to be able to fully understand the situation and to fully assess the needs of the student-mothers.

The University through the Guidance and Counseling unit should consider conducting seminars for student-mothers that would tackle topics on time management, developing one's self and other relevant related topics to cope up with the struggles faced by student-mothers in the university.

Moreover, the University should adopt a curriculum plan to help the student-mothers finish their college education without compromising their role as a mother.

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