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ABSTRACT

The life of motherhood and student hood is a challenging task. This study describes the barriers and strategies in coping up in the life of a student-mothers. The participants of the research consist of 12 married students who are enrolled in Quirino State University Main Campus. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which aimed to investigate the lived experiences of student-mothers. Individual interviews, focus group discussion and content/narrative analysis was utilized and purposeful sampling technique was used. Revealed in the study was the barriers in their studies which include situational and dispositional while strategies in coping up with their studies are time related strategies, attitudes/beliefs, and self-worth/efficacy. With these findings, the researcher recommends, support systems could include intrusive advising, identification of an office to address problems or concerns, or the identification of an advocate or a problem solver. Use of curriculum (orientation to services) designed to inform student-mothers as to how they may successfully navigate, explore, and access university resources. Programs on mentoring, tutoring, study skills workshops, focus groups to assist the student-mothers.

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Bottles and Books: Life as a Student-Mother

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ABSTRACT

The life of motherhood and student hood is a challenging task. This study describes the barriers and strategies in coping up in the life of a student-mothers. The participants of the research consist of 12 married students who are enrolled in Quirino State University Main Campus. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which aimed to investigate the lived experiences of student-mothers. Individual interviews, focus group discussion and content/narrative analysis was utilized and purposeful sampling technique was used. Revealed in the study was the barriers in their studies which include situational and dispositional while strategies in coping up with their studies are time related strategies, attitudes/beliefs, and self-worth/efficacy. With these findings, the researcher recommends, support systems could include intrusive advising, identification of an office to address problems or concerns, or the identification of an advocate or a problem solver. Use of curriculum (orientation to services) designed to inform student-mothers as to how they may successfully navigate, explore, and access university resources. Programs on mentoring, tutoring, study skills workshops, focus groups to assist the student-mothers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is contemporary regarded not only as a tool for development, but also a right. Education helps individuals to reach their full potential and empowers women toward sustainable development (Theirworld.org., 2016). It also provides an opportunity for all women to prove

themselves personally and professionally (Zerrudo 2011). Imbong (2009) cited that education empowers women to be more responsible and productive citizens of the society. Hinton-Smith (2012), revealed that women especially the single mothers believe that education is important for them to provide a better life and future for children.

Philippine Statistics Authority reported in 2014 that among the young adult women ages 15 to 24 who experienced early pregnancy and motherhood, 21 percent are with college education while 44 percent are with elementary education. Previous studies (Brooks, 2011; Hayati, 2020b; Mamabolo, Langa, & Kiguwa, 2009; Williams, Alon, & Bornstein, 2006; Wilsey, 2013) concurred that the proportion of women in higher education has steadily increased and there is also an increase of student mothers entering HEIs, which has been a global concern. College students who are involved in early motherhood are facing various challenges as these dual roles (parenting and schooling) is not an easy task (Syuraini, 2020).

When a woman experience motherhood role, her behaviour may contrast with this, instead of focusing all her attention on her studies (Visick, 2009). Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) highlight that being in motherhood while studying is such a challenging role. They might face different barriers including emotional pressures and negative feedback from others.

The enthusiasm of their children's success is one of the reasons student mothers re-enter university. This enables them to have a worthy starting point in life, obtain study skills, and improve quality of life (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002; Rita, Muliana, & Handrianto, 2021). This was paralleled by Babineau and Packard (2006) and Mandaret and Wainwright (2010) that the most often reason for adults to re-enter to higher

education is for the betterment of their family's life chances and to be a role model for their children (Syuraini, Sunarti, & Zukdi, 2019). While Wilsey (2013) argues that it was to improve their working situation. In his study, he found that 68 percent traditional college age mothers and 57 percent older mothers revealed this reason. This proved that in spite of the challenges faced by student mothers, they are determined to chase a better living. There have been few related studies of the situation of student mothers in higher educational institutions (Brooks, 2011).

In a study by Williams, et al. (2006), the quantity of student-mothers entering universities has been increasing around the world since 1966. Early pregnancy and motherhood vary by education, wealth quintile, personal upbringing, and region. It is more common among young adult women aged 15 to 24 with less education than those with higher education (44 percent for girls with elementary education versus 21 percent for girls with college education) (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). Therefore, the existence of student-mothers raised concerns about playing the dual roles of being a mother and a student (White, 2008) especially in time of COVID-19 pandemic. Combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for student-mothers. When a woman must focus all her attention on her studies, her behavior may contrast with her traditional motherhood role (Visick, 2009). The guilt of not being present as a mother to their young children with the constant student demand of papers, exams, deadlines for submissions, and class expectations can leave student mothers exhausted and at risk for dropping out (Johnson & Skinner, 2020). There are different roles and responsibilities expected as a mother and at the same time as a student, what more, for the student-mothers. Student-mother are forced to arrange and schedule time for studying, employment, household chores, and class schedules around the care of their children (Branscomb, 2006; Christie, 2002; Dorris, 1995). The study of the Moreau et. al. 2013 also showed that student parents often describe their experience of navigating academia as a struggle,

in which time-related, financial, health and emotional problems prevail.

Hence, the researcher aim to explore the lived experiences of student-mothers. Specifically, this study wants to describe the barriers and strategies in coping up in their studies.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the barriers and strategies in coping up in their studies.

Research Question

1. What are the barriers and strategies in coping up in their studies.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which aimed to investigate the lived experiences of student-mothers. A qualitative research study according to *Mills and Birks (2014)*, aimed to examine phenomena that affect the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context. Phenomenology is one of the qualitative research approaches that intends to accurately describe the phenomenon without a pre-existing knowledge to a framework, but remaining truth to the facts (*Groenewald, 2004*). More so, using qualitative research, the researchers would be able to connect with the subjects and to see the world from their perspectives (*Corbin & Strauss, 2015*). The researchers found this method most applicable to the inquiry to provide an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of student-mothers.

2.2 Research Participants and Sampling

The method used to identify the participants of the study was purposive sampling. The sample size was determined by data saturation, defined as the point when "no new themes are observed in the data" (*Faulkner & Trotter, 2017*). In this study, twelve (12) student-mothers were chosen to participate in the study. Participants met the criteria of the subjects: (a) student-mother enrolled at QSU; (b) ages range 19-30; and (c) has one or more dependant (s).

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The participants were instructed to answer an open-ended question by narrating and describing in their own word the barriers and strategies to cope up in their studies. The researcher administered the data gathering procedure personally and most of the participants completed the activity in about an hour. Finally, the researcher collected the outputs and serialized them as ready for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected from the participants' outputs, the researcher used the individual interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis.

In addition, the use of content analysis especially when a researcher uses gist and analyses in a study [7]. The analysis was used to identify barriers and strategies to cope up in studies.

The coding and themes determined from the data analysis were not predetermined by the researcher but emerged through the analysis process. After coding was complete, relationships were created between categories by comparing and contrasting coding from the different cases [8]. The themes that emerged were derived from the students' experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study provides a discussion of the data and findings from the individual interviews, focus group discussion, and document analysis. The data provides insight on the barriers and strategies that student- mothers describe and experience in their studies. The results are discussed and examined the barriers experienced by the student-mother participants and the strategies in coping up with their studies.

Barriers in studies

Three recurring themes emerged, these are situational and dispositional.

3.1 Situational Barriers

The term "situational" in this study refers to the circumstances and conditions described by the participants as barriers related to family, job, and financial commitments and obligations. In this study participants identified several situational barriers.

Discussion in this study presents the current conditions describing the lives of student-mothers and their perception of difficulties, uncontrollable events, or occurrences in their daily lives. Student-mother who enroll in college continue to struggle with financial commitments and obligations.

Six of the participants suffered from financial constraints. A participant (J), described a barrier that she experienced, I should make some adjustments with my allowance due to my baby's milk expenses.

Another participant (J), shared her practiced, my husband is a blind and I need to be a working student as BHW and a sales agent.

Ely (J) participant, expressed her observation, whenever my husband did not go to his work therefore we do not have enough money to support our daily needs.

Also noted by Nelia (J), another participant: I have to set aside my allowance for my son's needs ...

Barbie (S) another participant, conveyed that, I was so disturbed with my studies whenever we have family problems. Furthermore, I usually get absent with my class because I do not know how to go about it.

The situational barriers referred to the circumstances and conditions related to family and financial constraints. Cabrera et al. (1992) concluded that financial problems themselves had no direct effect on persistence; but, the indirect result of financial problems might affect students' academic and social integration and resolve to persist in college.

3.2 Dispositional Barriers

The dispositional barrier of attitude and self-perception is impacted with the juggling of multiple roles, time demands, and conflicts created pressure and conflict for some of the participants.

Nelia (J), a participant, expressed her opinion on comments with some people about her, but I need to prove to them that I will never be like this...

Ely (J), also a participant, articulated people condemn her case... I need to prove that they are wrong...

Cristy(J), another participant, assumed that, sometimes I abandoned my responsibilities as a parent because of multiple roles such as: sales agent, barangay health worker, and a student.

To counteract this barriers, various strategies used by the participants. Participants transitioned into college by the use of support systems and the motivation that they were told they could go to college. These student-mothers had college aspirations because their strong belief that they deserved a better life and education was the key to a better life. "Student mothers tend to be really hard workers and are determined to get the job done so will work hard, in spite of all the obstacles.

3.3 Strategies to cope up in studies

Student-mothers in this study described three strategies: (a) time related strategies, (b) attitudes/beliefs, and (c) self-worth/efficacy.

3.4 Time Related Strategies

Time related strategies described by the single mothers such as time management, and quality time with their child. Additionally, student-mother are forced to arrange and schedule time for studying, employment, household chores, and class schedules around the care of their children (Branscomb, 2006; Christie, 2002).

Time management was the first strategy that participants described as strategy to successfully

fill the roles as student-mother. This held constant across the groups and within each group. The strategy of time management emerged as the "premier" and leading effective strategy for participants.

The above responses of the participants emphasized the value of time. Managing time is an issue that draws attention of married students. Time management is a great challenge on the part of married students in doing household chores, school assignments, requirements and other activities.

This supports the claim that, meeting individual students' needs [34], to find out the reason for missing classes, time scheduling of activities and providing constructive feedback to students [35] are the other recommended strategies advised by previous researchers.

However, poor time management was found to be associated with academic stress by other researchers [36]. Good time management skills involve prioritization of activities and judicious usage of time available for organization of the tasks to be completed. Time management was found to determine academic performance [36]. Moreover, those with sound time management behavior were found to have fewer psychological and physical symptoms related to stress [36]. Close to half of the students had notable weaknesses in their time management skills [37].

In addition, female students had significantly better active problem scores under coping behavior. They were hence more mature and composed than the male in analyzing the center of the problem in a calm and optimistic manner, and in finding solutions for the same. Females were also found to be better at time management compared to their male counterparts [36,38].

3.5 Attitudes/Beliefs

The attitude/belief identified as strategies in this study is a strong religious belief or faith in God.

The above statements imply a strong faith in God. This finding approves which indicate that spiritual maturity is an important attribute [49]. But then

again, church going also benefited students because churches often offer positive role-models for students [50].

Likewise, immigrants often used religion as a way to cope with different types of stressors and challenges [51]. The belief in a higher power, or God, gave student participants a sense of control to deal with the challenges they faced. Religiosity and spirituality were accessible constructs to the student participants because these beliefs were integrated into their daily lives by their families of origin.

Self-worth/Efficacy

Student-mothers in this study demonstrated a strong sense of self-worth and a value within themselves and a steadfast commitment to overcoming obstacles that they encountered in college. All of these strategies were effective in helping students balance the competing demands in their lives as college students.

School mentors counterbalance negative incidents by inspiring optimism and self-confidence in students who are overloaded [47]. To meet objectives, the student participants organized their lives in ways to accomplish the end results, despite enduring troubles along the way [48].

According to *Lei (2010)*, individuals have different motivations in pursuing something. It could be intrinsic or extrinsic. In this case, the studentmothers had their intrinsic motivations. They decided to continue with their professional growth because they wanted to show to their families and other people that they could do it despite the challenges. More so, they wanted to secure the future of their children by getting that diploma which could give them better opportunities in finding a good job. This motivation of student- mothers according to *Wilsey (2013)* realizes their self-fulfillment and goal attainment. Thus, *Mckeown et al., (2002)* were correct after they emphasized that education is seen to be relevant by student-mothers to attain their human desires.

IV. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

This study has contributed to the knowledge base on the barriers and strategies identified by student- mothers' life in their studies. The barriers are situational and dispositional barriers while the strategies identified by student- mothers in coping with their studies are time related strategies, attitudes/beliefs, and self-worth/ efficacy.

University can benefit if they are able to provide and identify the informal and formal systems of support for student-mothers. Student-mothers in college would benefit from the identification of mechanisms that foster within the student an understanding of how to navigate the formal and informal systems within the institution. These support systems could include intrusive advising, identification of an office to address problems or concerns, or the identification of an advocate or a problem solver or go to person.

Use of curriculum (orientation to services) designed to inform student-mothers as to how they may successfully navigate, explore, and access university resources. This fluid curriculum could be in the form of a web site that student-mothers can access on an "as needed" basis.

Programs on mentoring, tutoring, study skills workshops, focus groups, in place to assist the student-mothers learner in addressing barriers endured as they attempt to persist in college.

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