



Balancing Dual Roles: Lived Experiences of First-Time Single Student-Mothers in a Local College in Cebu

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383064>

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Abstract:

This study explores the experiences of first-time single student mothers, focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. The research identifies key themes related to their struggles, including financial constraints, effective time management, and maintaining a positive mindset. Financial difficulties are highlighted as a major obstacle, with single student mothers often resorting to part-time work and creative income sources to support their education and living expenses. Time management challenges are also significant, as balancing academic responsibilities with parenting duties requires meticulous scheduling and a resilient attitude. The study emphasizes the crucial role of social support and positive mindset in helping these individuals navigate their dual roles. Social interactions with friends provide emotional relief and practical assistance, while a positive outlook enables them to remain motivated despite setbacks. Overall, the study illustrates the remarkable resilience and determination of first-time single student mothers as they strive to succeed academically while fulfilling their parenting responsibilities. The findings offer insights into the unique experiences of this group and underscore the need for targeted support to help them achieve both educational and personal goals.

Keywords: Single student mothers, financial constraints, time management, positive mindset

Introduction:

Education is widely recognized as a key to future stability and is enshrined as a fundamental human right. In the Philippines, higher education plays a significant role in the country's political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. As outlined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article 14, Section 1), every Filipino is entitled to access quality education at all levels. However, not everyone has the same opportunities to pursue their desired degrees. One such group facing considerable challenges is first-time single student-mothers. These individuals strive to complete their studies not only for their own benefit but also to secure a better future for their children.

Every year, millions of students enroll in colleges across the Philippines, each with unique goals and needs. According to the Trade Union Congress (2016), there are approximately 13.9 million student-parents in the Philippines. Data from the 2015–2016 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that over 22% of all undergraduates are parents, with 70% of these student-parents being mothers and 62% single mothers. This demographic is growing rapidly in the United States as well (Advisory Committee, 2012; Freeman, 2015; Threlfall, 2015). The US Department of Education (2014) projects a 15% increase in female enrollment in higher education institutions by 2024. The majority of these student-parents are females aged 26–30 years, often single and with one child.

The challenges faced by single student-mothers are significant, and they are not unique to the Philippines. Many are motivated to complete their studies to secure stable employment, support their families, and set a positive example for their children. However, their status also affects their academic performance, particularly among those with lower economic status. Issues such as time management, parenting responsibilities, and emotional stress can negatively impact their academic progress (Taukeni, 2014; Pascoe et al., 2020; Cabaguing et al., 2017). Balancing the dual roles of student and mother often leads to increased stress, which can hinder academic achievement and raise dropout rates (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Despite these challenges, the determination of first-time single student-mothers to complete their education is noteworthy. Their personal experiences and time management skills often lead to higher academic performance (MacCann et al., 2012). Achieving a degree is crucial not only for their future but also for their children's future (Cabaguing, 2017; Bullecce and Yang, 2016; Manalang et al., 2015). The potential rewards of higher education are significant (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2017), and supporting single student-mothers through targeted programs can improve their college completion rates.

This study aims to explore how single student-mothers navigate their daily lives and overcome the challenges they face. Understanding their coping mechanisms and motivations can help higher education administrators, teachers, local government units, and peers provide better support, ultimately enhancing their educational experiences and outcomes.

Literature Review:

Single mother-students are increasingly prevalent in higher education, representing about 11% of undergraduates as of 2012, a significant rise from earlier years (Institute for Women's Policy Research [IWPR], 2017). This growth has outpaced the overall undergraduate population, highlighting a need for targeted support due to their unique challenges. Single mothers in college face substantial financial difficulties, with 89% categorized as low-income and many struggling to cover basic educational expenses (IWPR, 2017c). Financial strain, combined with high levels of unmet need, often hampers their ability to persist through their studies.

Single mother-students frequently grapple with balancing academic responsibilities with their roles as primary caregivers. The dual demands of parenting and studying can lead to increased stress and decreased academic performance (Dankyi et al., 2019; Pascoe, 2020). These challenges are exacerbated by issues such as inadequate childcare, financial instability, and limited time, which are less problematic for their peers without such responsibilities (Freeman, 2015).

Support systems play a crucial role in helping single mother-students navigate these difficulties. Programs like those at Front Range Community College offer essential resources, including childcare and counseling, which significantly enhance students' ability to complete their degrees (Wilburn, 2016). Similarly, government initiatives such as the Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act in the Philippines provide financial assistance and other supports to ease the burden on single parents (Gutierrez, 2024).

Research underscores the necessity of comprehensive support to address the complex needs of single mother-students. Effective programs can mitigate financial and emotional challenges, leading to improved academic outcomes and long-term benefits for their families (Cabaguig, 2017; Bullecer & Yang, 2016). Moreover, support networks, including family and institutional programs, are vital in fostering resilience and success among this group (Duddy, 2022).

Single mother-students face significant barriers to completing higher education, but with targeted support and effective institutional policies, they can overcome these challenges and achieve educational and professional goals. Continued research and policy development are essential to enhance these supports and ensure that single mother-students can fully realize their potential and contribute positively to their communities (Edwards, 2023; Vyskocil, 2018).

Methodology:

Research Design

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological descriptive approach. Phenomenology comes from the Greek words "phenomenon" and "logos," which mean "appearance" and "reasons." According to Bliss (2016), phenomenological research is a qualitative research method that aims to discover and characterize phenomena' universal essence. Fundamentally, the phenomenological descriptive approach helps the researchers gain a better understanding of the phenomena stated by the informants. The study focuses on balancing dual roles: the lived experiences of first-time single student-mothers in a local college in Cebu.

Research Environment

This study will be conducted at a local college in Cebu. This institution was created to provide accessible tertiary education for all interested students, especially less fortunate and deserving students. This particular local college in Cebu consists of three departments, which are the College of Education, the College of Technology, and the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

To acquire the required data, five first-time single mothers in a local college were chosen to partake in the in-depth interview as research informants. Thus, the research environment is secured, safe, convenient, and conducive for the participants of the study during the study.

Research Informants



The study will include five research informants who will be chosen based on specific criteria. They must be officially enrolled in the Lapu-Lapu City College within the colleges of education, information and technology, and hospitality and tourism management for the academic year 2023-2024. They must be first-time single mothers who are directly taking care of their first child and are willing to fully participate in the study's process. Any individuals who do not meet these criteria are excluded from this study, such as first-time single student- mothers who are not directly taking care of their children, single student mothers who have more than one (1) child, student mothers with spouses, and student parents.

Research Instrument

In this phenomenological study, the researchers considered the best tool for the study. The researchers utilized modified guide questions during interviews, where questions are carefully crafted based on the study's objectives and ensure that they are accurate and formal in all manners. Perhaps, before we do an interview, researchers will undergo an assessment of the informants and identify if these informants bring up a child alone, with or without a partner. If the informants meet the study's eligibility requirements, they will be included in the study. This study excludes participants who are married or in a committed relationship with the father of their child. The researchers then proceed with the evaluation and validation process to ensure researchers are in the right state to perform well during interviews and handle any potential challenges effectively.

After being approved by the validators, which are the BEED program chair, guidance counselor, and the Student Affairs Office (SAO), researchers will proceed with interviewing the selected first-time single student-mother. The modified questionnaire guide was divided into three (3) parts.

The **first part** contains questions concerning the demographic profile of the informants, such as name (optional), age, age of the child, location, economic status, and whether they are living with a partner or not. The **second part** includes questions concerning my experiences as a single mother-student attending a local college. The factors and challenges they've been through and how they affect their academic performance. What were their coping mechanisms, and how did their academic performance and well-being improve following the implementation of their coping mechanisms? As well as the advantages or disadvantages of parenting while studying and their motivations to succeed in college. The **last part** includes questions about their reflections drawn from their experiences and their advice to first-time single mothers like them.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers are given an ample amount of time to create at least three (3) research titles and defend each title, then right after they had to choose only one title. Once the title is approved by the research instructor and adviser, the researchers prepare chapters one to two for the design hearing. After the proposal hearing is the revision of the manuscript, a transmittal letter will be submitted to the dean's office for approval to conduct the study.

Most free-speaking interviews were used to acquire the data. Prior to the interview, the researchers explained to the subjects the goal of the study, its advantages, the interviewing process, their time commitment, and all the information gathered. When the participants agreed to participate, they were informed right away about the questions that were being provided by the researchers and were treated with confidentiality. Then informants will be given a consent form for their participation and audio recording as they sign the forms as proof that they agreed.

Each informant was asked when they were going to have free time to share their experiences through a personal interview. To proceed, informants are given the privilege to choose in what place they are comfortable to be interviewed and what time they prefer. A few informants preferred the private place and also requested confidentiality with the classroom at the nearby institution. At first, the process was unhandy, and some of the informants were too cautious about their experiences, and some were emotionally affected by the hardships of being a single student-mother. By gathering the data, the highest amount of time in the interview has reached 1 hour and 9 minutes (Strong Woman) and has the minimum time of 25 minutes and 18 seconds (Strategic Thinker). The researchers well gathered the data needed for this study and provided an assurance to each of the informants of confidentiality.

After the data collection, the researchers transcribed the informants' responses. After transcription, the results were presented to the participants in the study. The researchers asked the informants to validate their written accounts of their experiences as student- parents by signing an attestation document.

Data Analysis

In delving into the lived experiences of a first-time single student-mother at a local college, we first collect the body of information that has already been written about this intricate relationship. To establish reliable philosophical understanding, the researchers (Morrow, 2014) used Colaizzi's method for relationships. As cited in the original Colaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method (1978), which showed an active strategy to achieve the description of the experiences of a first-time single student-mother.

Beginning with the first step of Colaizzi's phenomenological method— becoming familiar with the data the researchers collected through the course of the study—the next steps involve finding relevant statements in research informants' responses through transcriptions, formulating meanings while bracketing preconceptions because the data were already collected following a thorough investigation, grouping the meanings of the meanings to themes, and finally developing an inclusive description of the phenomena based on themes. Finally, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon is developed by taking into consideration descriptions and verifying structures by going back to participants (unused steps).

Familiarization: By going through each participant's account multiple times, the researcher becomes acquainted with the data. Finding important statements: The researcher takes note of every remark in the reports that has a direct bearing on the topic being studied. Creating meanings: After carefully analyzing the important statements, the researcher creates meanings that are pertinent to the phenomenon. In order to adhere closely to the phenomenon as observed, the researcher must instinctively "bracket" his or her presumptions (though Colaizzi acknowledges that perfect bracketing is never possible). The identified meanings are grouped by the researcher into themes that are shared by all of the narratives. Once more, it is imperative to bracket presuppositions in order to minimize the possible impact of current theory. Creating a comprehensive account: the investigator composes a comprehensive and all-encompassing account of the phenomena, integrating all the themes generated in step 4. In order to produce the basic structure, the researcher distills the lengthy explanation into a succinct, concise statement that only includes the elements that are thought to be crucial to the phenomenon's structure. In an effort to confirm the basic structure, the researcher asks each participant (or occasionally a subsample in bigger studies) if the statement accurately reflects their experience. Based on the comments provided, he or she might revisit and adjust previous steps in the analysis.

In order to prove the validity of our research and to prevent misconceptions, mistakes, or conflicts that could compromise the study in the process of accomplishing it, the researcher takes an oath to deliver reliable data with accurate interpretations of the context. Additionally, researchers will make sure to offer reliable and correct data prior to publication in order to demonstrate that the results of our study may soon be applicable to different contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Research requires not only expertise and labor but also integrity and wholeness. Ethical concerns were investigated and examined throughout the inquiry. This is to recognize and protect the rights of the subjects.

Findings and Discussion:

Balancing Dual Responsibility

This section contains the accounts, narratives, and experiences of the first-time single student-mother as they balance their responsibilities as a mother and as a student in order to successfully fulfill their dual obligations, such as finishing their studies as well as raising their child, not just for their own future but for the future of their children as well. These first-time single student-mothers are composed of different curricula or courses at a local college. With this in mind, the study looked at the lived experiences of first-time single student-mothers.

This research accumulated data from selected first-time single studentmothers to determine their experiences as they were striving to balance their dual responsibilities for their goal of raising their child to finish their studies. Additionally, the questions from this study were asked during the one-on-one indepth interview with probing questions based on their responses. The questions include, *'Can you tell me what your experiences are as a first-time single studentmother?'* and some probing questions like, *'What are the factors and challenges you've been through as a first-time single student-mother? Does it affect your academic performance? What are the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in parenting while studying? What is your motivation to succeed in college?'* and one concluding question, *'What reflection can you draw out and what advice can you give to other first-time single student-mothers like you?'* The questions were designed to capture the various narratives and accounts from the responses of the selected first-time single student-mother based on their experiences as they balance studying while parenting.

The informants of this study are selected according to the criteria made by the researchers. The researchers made coding to their names to protect their data privacy which was treated as confidentiality as well. The following are



the selected informants in a Local College in any department such as; College of Education, College of Technology and College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Our first informant in our study possesses a **'strong will'** in fulfilling her responsibilities as a student and as a mother. Fatima is a mother of a 3 years old baby boy, she's 17 years old when she had her child and she's currently 21 years old. She was in grade 11 when she found out that she's pregnant. Having a child while you're still studying is quite unacceptable in our culture. Despite the fear of others' judgement and how her parents will react, she still chose to have the baby and courageously confess her situation to her parents. Her parents' acceptance was not easily earned but at the end they still supported her in raising her child and in finishing her studies. In a few months, since she had her baby, Fatima decided to cut off her relationship with the father of her child. She believes that having an unhealthy relationship with him would not bring any good to her child. Ending their toxic relationship early is better than having her child witness it growing up. Now that she has her own child, even though her parents support her, there are things that she must take responsibility for like her own fare as she goes to school. To provide her fare, she sells food to her classmates. She had a routine, in balancing her responsibility as a parent and as a student, she leaves her child at her grandmother's house when she goes to school and when she comes back home, she'll take good care of her child. Fatima encountered hardship in her time and energy as she balanced her dual responsibility. Her responsibility in finishing her school work was challenged by the attention she must give to her child. There was a time that she gave up her rest even though she had illness just to fulfil her responsibility as a mother. Nevertheless, she still managed to pass and had a high grade in some of her subjects. Our second informant, Syde, is a **'strategic thinker'**, she's good at

strategizing in order for her to reach her goal for herself and for her child. Syde has a 2 years old baby girl, she was 20 years old when she had her, Syde is now 22 years old. Syde is supported by her parents in raising her child and in finishing her studies. She considers herself lucky to have this kind of support. The father of her child financially supported her while she was still pregnant with their child until she gave birth to her. The father of Syde's daughter was also dependent on his parents and still immature, he constantly drank or hung out with his friends. As he could not get his priorities straight, therefore she ended their relationship.

He might not be able to support them financially but he helped her raise their child physically. He goes to her house and takes care of their child while she's busy or at school. Syde experiences personal struggles of being a first time student-mother. These struggles are the rants of her parents, fulfilling her responsibility but most especially managing her time. She came up with the strategies that helped her in fulfilling her dual responsibilities. When she's at home she is responsible for taking care of her child, so when her child falls asleep she grabs this opportunity to finish all her school work. There was a time that she had to be awake at midnight just to finish her school work. There were no struggles that could hinder the dream of a strategic mind. One of the instincts of a mother is to have pride or responsibility in supporting her child on her own, but as a strategic woman Syde grabs every support that was given to her as it was an opportunity for her that helped her reach her goal. Syde did not just take her vacant time as an opportunity to finish her school work, in order for her to make this far she also took every kind of support given by the people around her as an opportunity such as the support that her parents and the father of her child gave her. Her ability to seize these opportunities demonstrate her commitment to betterment both herself and her child's future through education.

The third informant is known to be **'fearful.'** Ann has a 1-year-old baby girl, she was 18 when she had her, now Ann is 21 years old. After knowing her pregnancy, Ann decided to hide it to anyone as she feared others' judgement and most especially to how her parents would react and accept her situations. Her fearfulness made her labor her child on her own. She successfully gave birth to her child by herself through searching on the internet and applying knowledge of the gained information. When her parents knew, they accepted her and her child and supported her in raising her child and in finishing her studies. The father of her child doesn't have the willingness to take responsibility and doesn't give any type of support to their child. The challenges she encountered in balancing her responsibilities as a student and as a mother are financial crises and time management. Choosing the path in focusing on her studies while raising her child, made her dependent on her parents financially. Therefore, it's a pain for her as a mother when the whole family is challenged financially, as she thinks that it was her who is supposed to be responsible to support herself and her child but she could not do anything about it. She also struggles in managing her time, there are times where she needs to give up her responsibilities in school to fulfil her responsibility as a mother. For instance, when no one is available to take care of her child at home during class time, she would be absent at school. Despite facing numerous challenges, she defies the odds and maintains the determination and vision to pursue college and achieve academic goals. She's Independent and fiercely determined to succeed. This woman made a promise to her family that if she finishes college and finds a job that makes a stable income, she will pay back the support and struggles encountered to her family. She's focused on finishing her studies, getting the degree and having a stable job in order for her to effectively provide a bright future to herself and her child.

Loucelyn, the fourth informant, is recognized as an **"Independent Woman."** She became a mother at the age of 21 and continued her studies while supporting her child, who is now in ninth grade. Lucil has always been



dedicated to self-support and responsibility, showing a heart for helping others in need. Her motivation to pursue her education stems from her desire to support her daughter's dream of becoming a doctor and to prove her capability to achieve a degree without the father's assistance. Despite the separation from her child's father when her daughter was one-year-old, Loucelyn independently supported her child emotionally, physically and mentally. To sustain their daily expenses, she ventured into business and managed her time efficiently to balance work, studies and motherhood responsibilities. Additionally, Loucelyn supported her nieces' education, with one of them now an engineer. She possessed the spirit of an independent woman for she embodies different qualities that define her strength, resilience and unwavering commitment to living life on her own terms. She exudes self-assurance, makes decisions independently, bounces back from setbacks, advocates for herself, finds creative solutions, inspires others, embraces change, values financial stability, manages emotions effectively and faces challenges with courage.

Maria, the fifth informant, is a 26-year-old mother to a 7-year-old daughter, living with her new partner, they parted ways with her partner before due to his vices. Even though it was painful for her, she decided to break up with him because she did not want her child to witness her parents fighting in front of her. It is better for her child to grow up without a father than to grow up with both parents but in a very toxic environment. Maria was recognized as an **"Appreciative Woman"** because she expresses gratitude towards her parents and partner for their unwavering support in balancing the responsibilities of motherhood and education. Maria values the emotional support, encouragement and understanding they provide during challenging times, such as managing additional responsibilities at home, childcare support and assistance with household tasks while she focuses on her studies. She reciprocates their support by being attentive and supportive, ensuring they feel valued and appreciated. Recognizing the importance of this support in her success, Maria is motivated to persevere and excel in both her academic pursuits and parenting responsibilities.

Theme 1: Dual Responsibility

The theme of dual responsibility highlights the complex role of first-time single student-mothers who juggle the demands of parenthood with the challenges of academic life. This theme was explored through interviews with five informants, revealing that these women face significant responsibilities in both domains.

Sense of Responsibility

The concept of dual responsibility refers to the need to balance obligations to both a child and academic commitments. Single student-mothers must manage childcare, household duties, and family relationships while also attending classes, studying, and completing assignments. This dual role demands excellent time management, prioritization, and self-determination.

The first subtheme, sense of responsibility, reflects how these women understand and embrace their obligations. For instance, one informant shared, "I'm thinking of my future. If I don't finish my studies, it's more tiring. I have a son to support, so I will never drop out no matter how tired I am." This sense of duty motivates them to persevere despite challenges.

Another informant described her routine: "When it was online class, it was just okay. I'd take my child to my grandmother's house in the morning, and she'd bring my child back after my classes." This commitment illustrates how they adapt their schedules to meet both academic and parenting responsibilities.

Commitments

The second subtheme, commitments, underscores the dedication these women demonstrate in fulfilling their dual roles. Commitment involves consistent action towards meeting responsibilities, reflecting a deep sense of duty. As one informant put it, "Every morning I take my child to my grandmother's house, and after my class, she brings my child back home. Despite the challenges, I cannot say I am struggling."

Commitment is vital for student-mothers, as they need to balance their academic and parenting roles effectively. One informant noted, "During the night when I don't have any classes, I'm very hands-on with my child." This dedication ensures that despite their busy schedules, they remain engaged in both their studies and their child's upbringing.

Balancing these responsibilities involves overcoming obstacles such as financial strain and lack of support. As one informant mentioned, "My parents support my baby with milk, but it's tough without financial help, even for transportation fees." Yet, they persist in their commitments, using strategic planning and hard work to manage their responsibilities.

The dual responsibility theme reveals the significant challenges faced by first-time single student-mothers as they strive to balance their academic and parenting roles. Their sense of responsibility and unwavering commitment are crucial to their success. Despite the difficulties, these women manage to achieve high academic performance and maintain strong family bonds, demonstrating remarkable resilience and dedication. Balancing the needs of their child with their academic goals requires careful planning, time management, and a robust support system. Their ability to fulfill these dual roles highlights both the challenges and the rewards of being a student-mother.

Theme 2: Perseverance to Reach the Goal

The second key theme emerging from the interviews with first-time single student-mothers is their remarkable perseverance in achieving their goals. This perseverance manifests through two main subthemes: self-determination and social support.

Self-Determination

Self-determination plays a crucial role in the journey of first-time single student-mothers. Each of the five informants demonstrated a strong sense of determination, essential for balancing their dual roles of student and parent. Self-determination involves making autonomous choices and managing one's life effectively (Cherry, 2022). For these student-mothers, the drive to complete their studies is not solely for personal benefit but also to secure a better future for their child.

One informant highlighted the importance of focusing on long-term goals despite immediate challenges, stating, "I'm thinking of my future. If I don't finish, it's more tiring not to finish. I cannot find a stable job because I don't have a degree. Then, I already have a son. It's for the future, not just for me, but also for him. I will never drop out no matter how tired I am" (T3-FW-64-68). This sentiment reflects the profound motivation that a child can provide, shifting the focus from personal aspirations to family welfare.

The sense of responsibility that comes with motherhood has intensified their commitment to education. Many informants noted that their priorities have shifted, leading them to value graduation over high grades. For instance, one student-mother mentioned, "Now, I can't focus; my grades are just around two. What matters to me is to graduate" (T4-IW-164-166). This shift in focus underscores how the added responsibilities of parenting have redefined their academic goals.

Social Support

Social support is another critical factor that supports the perseverance of single student-mothers. A robust support network helps them navigate the overwhelming challenges of balancing their academic and parental responsibilities. According to Drageset (2021), social support encompasses the characteristics of one's social network that aid in coping with everyday life.

Support from family and friends is invaluable. One informant expressed gratitude for her parents' understanding: "I'm thankful to my parents... They really understand when I need them to look after my child because I have many tasks to complete" (T1-SW-06-07). Similarly, support from siblings can be crucial, as illustrated by another informant who appreciated her sister's encouragement: "My sister kept saying that I should continue with what I have already started" (T3-FW-59-62).

Moreover, the presence of supportive partners or friends can significantly enhance emotional well-being. One student-mother shared, "My current partner encouraged me to go to school. He is the one I cried to about everything" (T5-AW-63-66). This emotional backing is essential for maintaining motivation and managing stress.

First-time single student-mothers exhibit remarkable perseverance, driven by self-determination and reinforced by social support. Their determination to achieve academic and personal goals, motivated by the need to provide a better future for their child, is a testament to their resilience. Additionally, having a solid support network helps them manage the complex demands of their dual roles, ultimately aiding them in reaching their goals and ensuring a brighter future for both themselves and their children.

Theme 3: Challenges and Struggles

The third theme identified is the challenges and struggles faced by single student-mothers, with subthemes focusing on financial constraints and effective time management. These subthemes underscore the significant obstacles these individuals encounter in balancing financial stability with academic responsibilities.

Table 1: Subthemes on First-Time Single Student-Mothers' Challenges and Struggles

Subthemes	Key Informants
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Financial Constraints	Informant #1 Strong woman
	Informant #4 Independent woman
Managing Time Effectively	Informant #1 Strong woman
	Informant #2 Strategic woman
	Informant #4 Independent woman

For first-time single student-mothers, starting higher education while managing parenting responsibilities is both transformative and challenging. Balancing academic duties with childcare, coupled with financial constraints, creates a unique set of difficulties that require resilience and determination. The dual demands of coursework and childcare often overwhelm these individuals, leading to stress and significant life adjustments.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints emerge as a primary challenge for single student-mothers. Meeting financial needs encompasses covering both living and educational expenses, which is particularly tough for those with limited resources. Research indicates that a significant proportion of single mothers in college experience low incomes, with many living at or below the federal poverty level (IWPR, 2017). Freeman (2015) highlights that while financial stress is a common issue among students, it is especially burdensome for single parents.

Informants reported substantial financial difficulties, such as managing transportation and daily expenses without sufficient support. One informant shared, "It's hard when your parents don't support you financially... That's why I work hard in selling to help with my transportation fees every day" (T1-SW-31-32). Another noted, "He supports us monthly... but 3,000 is not enough for transportation and daily expenses" (T1-IW-48-49). These experiences reflect the multifaceted nature of financial strain, where single student-mothers often resort to supplementary income sources to manage their financial obligations.

Studies, such as those by Levinson et al. (2018), confirm these challenges, noting that limited financial resources and the lack of affordable childcare significantly contribute to the financial strain experienced by student-mothers.

Managing Time Effectively

Effective time management is crucial for single student-mothers, who must juggle academic responsibilities with parenting duties. Balancing these roles is challenging, as described by Fernando (2019), who notes that the difficulty often lies in the lack of time for academic tasks due to caregiving responsibilities.

One informant explained, "When I return home, I need to care for my baby and can't do my tasks immediately. I stay up until midnight to complete my work" (T2-OW-22-25). The need for a structured schedule is essential for managing both academic and parenting responsibilities effectively. Proper time management helps reduce stress and ensures that both responsibilities are met.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (2017) emphasizes that single student-mothers face significant obstacles that impact their ability to persist to graduation. However, effective time management and personal determination often lead to higher academic performance despite these challenges (MacCann et al., 2012).

Addressing the financial and time management challenges faced by single student-mothers is crucial for their academic success. Providing additional support and resources can help them manage these dual responsibilities more effectively, enhancing their ability to achieve educational and personal goals.

Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges

The fourth theme explores how first-time single student mothers overcome their challenges with determination and perseverance. This theme highlights the resilience these individuals demonstrate as they navigate the demanding roles of both student and parent. Two key subthemes, "striving to earn a living" and "maintaining a positive mindset," illustrate the strategies and attitudes these mothers employ to surmount obstacles and achieve success.

Table 2: Subthemes of First-Time Single Student-Mothers Overcoming Challenges

Subthemes	Key Informants
Striving to Earn a Living	Informant #1 Strong Woman
	Informant #4 Independent Woman
Positive Mindset	Informant #1 Strong Woman
	Informant #2 Strategic Woman



	Informant #3 Fearful Woman
	Informant #4 Independent Woman
	Informant #5 Appreciative Woman
Socializing	Informant #1 Strong Woman
	Informant #2 Strategic Woman
	Informant #4 Independent Woman

Striving to Earn a Living

First-time single student mothers exhibit remarkable resilience as they balance the dual demands of education and parenthood. These mothers often face financial hardships, yet they pursue various means to support their educational and living expenses. Two informants shared how they engage in part-time jobs and small-scale selling to meet their needs. As one informant stated, "I work hard in selling to help with my transportation fees every day" (T1-SW-32). Despite the challenges, they embrace each opportunity to earn money as a crucial step towards a better future, demonstrating strength and determination.

The journey to financial stability is challenging, but these mothers confront it head-on. They tackle every obstacle with unwavering resolve, viewing each challenge as an opportunity for growth. As another informant expressed, "No matter what, I will strive. It's up to me, as long as my body can handle it" (T4-IW-124). Their efforts underscore their commitment to achieving educational and financial independence, proving their resilience and dedication.

Positive Mindset

Maintaining a positive mindset is crucial for overcoming the multifaceted challenges faced by single student mothers. A positive outlook helps these mothers stay motivated and focused, even amidst adversity. According to Sammer (2018), a positive mindset fosters innovative behavior, which is essential for navigating the difficulties of balancing studies and parenting.

One informant shared, "In order to succeed in college, I keep thinking every day that I need to finish this course for my baby's future" (T2-SW-69-74). Embracing optimism allows them to face setbacks with resilience and determination, viewing challenges as opportunities for personal growth. Another informant noted, "I won't stop even if I'm very tired; it's for both our futures" (T3-FW-67-68). This positive mindset not only empowers them to overcome obstacles but also inspires others.

Socializing

Socializing is a vital coping mechanism for single student mothers. Connecting with friends provides emotional support and relief from the stresses of balancing education and parenting. One informant described, "When I get along with friends, especially those I trust, I feel relieved and less anxious" (T1-SW-104). Friendships offer a safe space for emotional expression and relaxation, helping to alleviate feelings of isolation and stress.

Regular social interactions, such as outings with friends, can serve as a valuable break from daily pressures. For instance, one informant mentioned, "I need to go out with friends once a month to discuss recent happenings and divert my attention from fatigue" (T2-SW-53). This balance of social engagement and solo activities helps manage stress and provides a supportive environment for navigating the demands of student life and parenthood.

The experiences of first-time single student mothers demonstrate the profound impact of determination, resilience, and a positive mindset in overcoming challenges. Their stories reveal how financial perseverance, optimistic outlooks, and social support contribute to their success, offering hope and inspiration for others facing similar obstacles. Their journey underscores the strength of the human spirit in achieving academic and personal goals despite significant challenges.

Conclusion:

This study delves into the complex realities faced by first-time single student mothers, highlighting their unique challenges and the strategies they employ to navigate their dual roles. Through an exploration of key themes such as financial constraints, effective time management, and the process of overcoming obstacles, this research underscores the resilience and determination these individuals demonstrate.

The findings reveal that financial constraints are a significant hurdle for single student mothers, often necessitating creative solutions like part-time work and small-scale entrepreneurship to meet educational and living expenses. Despite these financial challenges, these mothers persist with a remarkable level of dedication and resourcefulness, driven by the desire to secure a better future for themselves and their children.

Time management emerges as another critical challenge. Balancing academic responsibilities with parenting duties demands not only careful scheduling but also a positive mindset. Single student mothers who maintain an optimistic outlook and effectively manage their time are better equipped to handle the stresses of their dual roles. Their ability to remain focused and motivated in the face of adversity plays a crucial role in their academic and personal success.

The study also highlights the importance of support systems and socialization. Engaging with friends and building a network of support provides emotional relief and practical assistance, helping single student mothers manage the pressures of their responsibilities. Social interactions offer a necessary respite from the demands of parenthood and education, contributing to overall well-being and resilience.

First-time single student mothers navigate a complex landscape of financial, time management, and emotional challenges with a profound sense of determination and perseverance. Their stories are a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of positive mindset and social support in overcoming obstacles. This study not only sheds light on their struggles but also highlights their capacity to triumph over adversity, offering valuable insights into the experiences of a growing and significant segment of the student population. By understanding these challenges and the strategies employed to overcome them, educators, policymakers, and support organizations can better address the needs of single student mothers, ultimately fostering an environment where they can achieve both academic success and personal fulfillment.

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