



## **Single Mothers in Academia: An In-depth Look at the Challenges and Resilience of Student-Mothers**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to unveil the lived experiences of student-single mothers living at Barangay Sto. Niño, Tanjay City school year 2024-2025. Phenomenology was employed in the study as a research design. With the use of purposive sampling, five participants were qualified to undergo the study. Methodically, a student interviewer was trained to interview for confirmability and bias-free purposes. Four sessions took place to achieve data saturation. Credibility-wise, the interviewer did member checking to make sure that the ideas and experiences shared by the participants during the sessions were exactly as it is transcribed and interpreted. The data gathering took place at the residential area of Barangay Sto Nino, Tanjay City since it was preferred by the participants. Moreover, consented audio recording was a big help for the researchers to transcribe the verbatim responses of the participants. Through thematic analysis, the study revealed four major themes namely, a) contemporary challenges, b) self-insecurity, c) resourcefulness and resiliency, and d) fulfillment over challenges. The finding suggests that schools and parents. And other stakeholders should continue to raise awareness about responsible parenthood.

**Keywords:** *Qualitative research; Phenomenology; Lived experiences of student-single mothers, Student mother's resiliency*

### **Introduction**

Single motherhood is a prevalent phenomenon happening in every country. Its issue is becoming a norm and is considered part of the earthly culture. But what is it to be a single mother? Single motherhood entails managing a variety of obligations, striking a balance between work and personal life, and overcoming the difficulties that come with being a single parent. Upon these obligations, these women inevitably face tremendous challenges including financial distress, negative upbringing of the child, and being judged and despised by society.

The absence of a source of income to sustain the family is one of the main problems. Single mothers are frequently the only providers for their families, meaning they are responsible for paying for everything themselves. This might be an overwhelming undertaking considering the price of rent, food, childcare, and other necessities. Single mothers may struggle to make ends meet and experience ongoing financial stress if their partner's income does not support them. Furthermore, the opportunities accessible to single mothers and their kids may be restricted by financial limitations. Relevantly, The COVID-19 recession was one such catastrophe that brought attention to the financial vulnerability of mothers. Compared to women without children and single fathers, single mothers had higher unemployment rates and were more likely to leave the workforce. Single moms' difficulties were exacerbated by growing problems with access, availability, and price of childcare. Additionally, compared to those with larger means, single mothers experienced these financial strains more severely due to their limited savings (Kent, 2022). Thus, countering this problem may seem hard for these women and adversely affect their disposition and psychological aspects. According to the study of Dharani and Balamurugan (2024), single mothers become stressed while thinking all along about how to survive and provide for their children. Moreover, single mothers not only encounter financial issues but also deal with the fact that their situation may lead to the wrong upbringing of their children. Around the world, many families must deal with the realities of single motherhood. One of the main worries is how being a single mother may affect their children's upbringing, even though it can provide its own set of difficulties. Children may struggle in several areas of their lives if there is no father figure in the family. The absence of a male role model in



the child's upbringing is one of the main problems that can result from being a single mother (*What Are the Disadvantages of a Single-Parent Family?* 2021). Anent, the lack of parenting values affects the emotional and psychological aspects of the child's life. When children feel unheard and misvalued, they tend to be annoyed and irritated and act obnoxiously (Abdullah & Nugroho, 2024). It is hard for single mothers to deal with this problem since they cannot give what they do not have but only try to give what is best for their children. Apart from financial problems, and the wrong upbringing of the child, single mothers also experienced being judged and despised by society. The ideal family structure has historically been thought to be the nuclear family, which consists of a mother, father, and children. Those who think that children require both a mother and a father to flourish may criticize and scrutinize a woman who chooses to be a single mother because she deviates from this standard. Furthermore, it is a common misconception that single mothers are careless or promiscuous (*How Does Society View Single Parents? Research Paper*, 2024).

The literature above presents the challenges of single mothers and the unfortunate events they face due to this phenomenon. However, despite the ongoing problems they encountered, the choices they made to survive matter the most. In this sense, they show remarkable fortitude as single mothers despite these challenges. Their capacity to adjust to shifting conditions is one way single moms demonstrate resilience (Rights, 2024). Today, single mothers are viewed to be resilient and brave women. The pressure and the responsibility that they are holding push them to do everything for the good of their children. This led them to encounter many trials and challenges in raising their children while they were alone in carrying the responsibility as a parent. According to the study by Martinez et al. (2022), single mothers encountered a variety of challenges, but they did not give up instead stayed brave and thought for the future of their children. Single mothers used different approaches to survive and continue to overcome despite personal and social matters. Some of these strategies are problem-centered behavior, avoidance behavior, and social support behavior (Talib et al., 2020).

The cases of single motherhood will be the foundation of the topic in this research, yet it will focus on single mothers who are at the same time, students. Moreover, these women are currently residing at Purok 1, Barangay Sto Niño, Tanjay City year 2024. Relevantly, the present study aims to investigate the lived experiences of student-single mothers in academia. The result of the study will be the basis for recommendations for awareness for young women to arrive in their decision-making and for future researchers to dig deeper into the relevant topic but with a different approach. Moreover, this study addressed the following questions.

1. What is it like to be a single mother and the same time a student?
2. What are the challenges single mothers face?
3. How do single mothers overcome their challenges?
4. Based on the result of the study, what recommendation can be made?

## **Methodology**

This section explains the research design, location, participants, tools used, data collection methods, and ethical considerations of the study.

### **Research Design**

This research utilized a phenomenological approach, a method that aims to understand the essence of experiences by exploring how individuals interact with and perceive the world (Biemel & Spiegelberg, 2024). Given the growing number of single mothers seeking higher education and entering the workforce, the researchers used this design to delve into the lived experiences of single mothers in academia. By exploring the challenges and resilience of these student-mothers during the school year 2024-2025, the study sought to gain deeper insights into their unique journeys. Thematic analysis was employed to identify codes and themes that illuminated their experiences.

### **Research Locale**

Selecting an appropriate research location is crucial for any investigation, as it can greatly affect the results and conclusions drawn from the study. It is important to identify a site that aligns with the aims and objectives of the research. In this context, the research setting for this study is the residential area of Purok 1, Barangay. Sto Niño, Tanjay City. Additionally, the participants live close to the school, choosing to study and work in a way that suits them best. Consequently, the participants selected their residential areas because they felt at ease and uninterrupted during the personal interviews.



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## **Research participants**

Research participants play a crucial role in contributing valuable information and data to researchers and are indispensable in various research projects, experiments, surveys, and interviews. The researchers in this study utilized purposive sampling techniques, also known as judgmental or expert sampling, where participants are deliberately selected based on their expertise to meet the study's objectives rather than randomly. This method allows researchers to focus on individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the study, making it suitable for personal interviews with well-defined research goals. In the context of the study, the participants will be single mothers who are studying either high school or college.

## **Research Instrument**

A research instrument is a tool that helps in collecting and analyzing data for a study. The current study used interview guide questions with open-ended questions. Also, a student interviewer was trained by the researchers to conduct personal interviews with participants for confirmability purposes. This enables the study to distance itself from researchers' bias and concentrate solely on the participants' feelings and experiences. Additionally, the researchers were tasked with documenting information per the participants' consent. The interviewer was adaptable and willing to ask probing questions for improved results. For credibility purposes, the trained student went back to the participants for member checking. To ensure the utmost accuracy of the ideas exchanged during the personal interview, it was important to verify their intended meaning as expressed by the participants. Additionally, this process allowed for any overlooked points to be revisited, ensuring a comprehensive discussion. This creation was crafted by the student interviewer following each interview session. Thus, it was necessary to conduct eight sessions to ensure that the data had reached saturation.

## **Data Gathering Procedures**

The data-gathering process in this study consisted of three steps: pre-gathering, during-gathering, and post-gathering. During the pre-data collection phase, researchers established the eligibility criteria for participants. To prevent researchers' personal bias, a student was trained to conduct interviews with participants in a focused personal interview for confirmability. Afterward, the participants were provided with an invitation letter from the adviser and school head for orientation. In addition, the collection of data included the researchers asking for participants' permission to record data during the sessions. Lastly, in the post-collection of data, the researchers transcribed the individuals' comments exactly as they were spoken. The trained student conducted follow-ups with the subjects after the initial transcription to verify accuracy and alignment with their experiences. This was done to verify if the responses accurately represented the participants' intended meanings. The interview took place weekly on Thursdays at 4.00 in the afternoon. The initial methods were repeated systematically until data saturation was reached during the eight sessions at the same location. This provided researchers with the opportunity to show the accuracy and reliability of the data. After collecting data, the researchers reviewed the transcripts and identified key phrases to create codes and themes. The investigators ensured that the acquired information would only be used for teaching, research, and innovation purposes.

## **Ethical Consideration**

During the study, researchers followed ethical procedures. The researcher obtained informed consent from the subjects and provided explanations. The consent form outlined the study's objectives and informed participants that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any point. Participation was voluntary. Second, the researchers provided participants with an explanation emphasizing the importance of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their identity. The participants were represented by a code to protect their identities. Finally, the researchers clarified that the participant master list was only available to them. In this regard, the school's review board strictly observed the policies and procedures for conducting research, especially in the protection of the research participants/respondents. With the researchers' ethical practice, the board officially allowed the researchers to conduct their studies.

## **Results and Discussions**

The section summarizes the study's main findings. The experiences of single mothers who are living at Purok 1, Barangay Sto Niño, Tanjay City, in the school year 2024-2025 were brought to light by applying thematic analysis to create codes and themes. The researchers were able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences that each of these single mothers experienced during their struggles in life.



Table 1: Thematic map of the lived experiences of student-single mothers in Barangay Sto. Niño, Tanjay City school year 2024-2025.

**Theme 1: Contemporary Challenges**

| Codes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Themes                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Looking for someone to take care of their children<br>Bringing the child to work or at school<br>Problematic of money<br>Stressful obligation<br>Continuing work despite the bodily condition<br>Hard to borrow money from neighbors | Contemporary Challenges        |
| Doubtful of raising a child<br>Felling small<br>Doubtful to survive schooling                                                                                                                                                        | Self-Insecurity                |
| Looking for part-time jobs<br>Saving for future use for children<br>Making small businesses sustain daily needs<br>Staying strong and firm                                                                                           | Resourcefulness and Resiliency |
| Proud to raise their children<br>Able to send children to school<br>Felling happy seeing children grow with love and care                                                                                                            | Fulfillment over Challenges    |

Being a single mother and at the same time, a student leads to a heavy obligation to hold onto. These women inevitably suffer the consequences of their situation. The theme of the contemporary challenges of student-single mothers describes the responsibilities and struggles they encounter in their lives. Due to their financial problems, they needed to find a job while studying to support the basic needs of their children, and as a direct result, they also looked for somebody to take good care of their child aside from their immediate family or if there was no choice, bring the child to the workplace or even at school. Working so hard as their propriety while studying seemed difficult and no matter what their health conditions, the obligation to provide and the necessity to work and study at the same time is undeniably a challenging aspect of being a student-single mother. To understand better this theme, the participants highlighted their responses.

Participant 1 said, " *I can that any parent can find that having a sick child can be very stressful and upsetting, but single mothers are particularly under strain. It is our responsibility to arrange for their care, to take time off work to care for them, and to make all the decisions regarding their rehabilitation and course of treatment. Being separated from your ill child just exacerbates the concern and anxiety that come with being a single mother. Knowing that your child is ill and that you are not there to console them, hold their hand, and give them comfort and assurance that everything will be alright can be devastating. It never changes.*"

Participant 2 said, " *Every parent wants to give the best for their child. Their goal is to guarantee the happiness, health, and well-being of their child. But for some parents, particularly those who are struggling financially, this can be a very difficult chore.*

Participant 3 said, " *Every day, as a single mother struggled to make ends meet and provide for her family's necessities. The single mother was often concerned about how she would be able to raise her children because she had little money from her part-time work and no help from her children's missing father.*

Participant 4 said, " *I had to overcome numerous difficulties as a single mother to support her kids. She put out a great effort to make sure they always had adequate food, despite the challenges. She persevered through the difficulties and gave up a lot, even going without food so that her kids could eat. She worked long hours to earn a pitiful wage, getting up early every day to go to work. To make ends meet, she took on several jobs and put in long hours. She suffered both physically and psychologically, yet she never voiced any complaints. She was prepared to go to any lengths to provide for her children, knowing that their welfare came first. She sometimes went without food or eating.*

Participant 5 said, " *Being a single mother has its challenges. Raising a child on your own presents several difficulties, particularly in terms of money. It can be difficult to find a means to support both you and your child, but some people*



*rise to the challenge and go above and beyond to support their families. One such man is a single parent who works constantly to obtain money to sustain his child. Even in the face of many challenges and setbacks, he never quits up. He still needs to work hard to make ends meet, even after being offered a job. In fact, due to their financial difficulties, he frequently must bring his child to work.*

This summary highlights that being a student-single mother has undeniably corresponding obligations and responsibilities. But taking all these responsibilities constitutes a challenging part for these women. From the financial constraints, job opportunities, and physical and mental health, these women continually experience and without having an option, they need to juggle work and study. As highlighted by the participants, they look for other resources to support and care for their children while looking for jobs and studying (Gault & Gault, 2020). Thus, the theme describes the theme of contemporary challenges of student-single mothers.

### **Theme 2: Self insecurity**

Being a single mother who is also a student can be difficult and daunting. These mothers must balance the pressures of continuing their studies with the duties of raising a child alone. Student-single mothers frequently experience emotions of insecurity because of this ongoing juggling act. Fear of not being able to sufficiently provide for their child is one of the primary causes of self-insecurity among student-single mothers. In this theme, the self-insecurity of student-single mothers is manifested by the way they look at themselves reflecting on the difficulties and heavy obligations carried upon their shoulders. Comparison, feeling small, and insecure to other women are evident in this theme. These insecurities are expressed by the participants.

Participant 1 said, " *I frequently feel overburdened and anxious about supporting my kids as a single mother. I've been having financial difficulties lately, which has left me feeling helpless and uncertain of what to do.*

Participant 2 said, " *It's difficult to be a single mother. The difficulties of raising kids alone can make me feel inadequate or low on myself at times. However, I've grown to understand that my value as a person is not defined by my status as a single mother.*

Participant 3 said, " *Women are under more and more pressure to meet specific standards of physical attractiveness in today's culture. Some girls who feel that their value is correlated with their appearance may experience feelings of insecurity because of this pressure. These girls could battle with their self-esteem and feel the need to continually look for approval from others.*

Participant 4 said, " *I cried because I am no longer sure if I could finish my studies. It makes me feel inferior to the situation I have.*"

Participant 5 said, " *I am insecure with other women because they have a partner who lives in their family, and they are a complete family.*"

As highlighted by the participants, student-single motherhood can develop self-inferiority where their insecurities lurk. It is undeniable that these women, due to obstacles in raising their children and providing their children's necessities, feel small and sometimes compare themselves to the worthiness they have as a woman and as a person. This led them to feel uncertain about their way of raising their children (Tismstaff, 2023). Moreover, doubts about succeeding in schooling were also emphasized by the participants. As highlighted by the participants, student-single others are worried about whether they can continue their studies despite the hard nature of their situation. Thus, all the responses of the participants highlighted the theme of self-insecurities.

### **Theme 3: Resourcefulness and Resiliency**

Among the hardest things a woman may go through is becoming a single mother. In addition to being solely accountable for the upbringing of their children, they also must deal with the challenges of daily existence in the absence of a spouse. This theme defines how student-single women transcend obstacles and show remarkable resourcefulness and resilience to support their families and build better futures for their kids. The resourcefulness of single mothers is among their most impressive traits. Whether it is figuring out how to stretch a limited budget, working several jobs to support their kids, or looking for local resources. Moreover, they also demonstrated resilience by investing in small businesses to sustain daily needs. Thus, resilient student-single mothers showed the ability to bounce back from difficult situations and adapt to change. It is a crucial characteristic for single mothers, as they are often responsible for the well-being of their children without the support of a partner. By maintaining a positive



outlook, single mothers can see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles (Taylor & Conger, 2017). This theme is supported by the participants' responses.

Participant 1 said, "*Being a single mother is difficult, particularly if you're having financial difficulties. In my case, my aunt helps me to support the needs of my child and me as well. She also helps me make a small business for our daily sustenance.*"

Participant 2 said, "*I could say that as a single mother, you need to be stronger enough to battle the challenges in life. For my part, I needed to look for part-time jobs although it is difficult. I did this because I wanted to save for the future of my child.*"

Participant 3 said, "*I worked long hours at a minimal-wage job, just making enough to pay the bills and other needs. Also, I always make a point to save even a little for future purposes.*"

Participant 4 said, "*As a child, I witnessed my mother working many jobs to make ends meet. To make sure we had a roof over our heads and food on the table, she put in a lot of overtime. Even though she was worn out and fatigued when mom came home late at night, I recall seeing her grin as she put us to bed. My mother never allowed us to witness her struggles, no matter how many tragedies she endured. Even if it meant going without, she always made sure we had all we needed. Her selflessness and unrelenting resolve helped me understand the genuine significance of hard effort and sacrifice.*"

Participant 5 said, "*Life as a student-single mother is quite difficult but being strong is the only choice you have to survive with your kids. There were times when I wanted to cry but I always believed that I could find ways to overcome all the challenges.*"

These responses highlighted by student-single mothers demonstrated their resilience and resourcefulness by being optimistic and strong in life. They find ways to sustain their daily needs and for future purposes. Their prime motivations are their dreams for their family and children despite single parenthood. Moreover, they also wanted to have a stable career in the future. In some cases, some mothers are at the same time students. These women deal with difficulties that frequently make going to college appear unachievable. But as they manage the challenges of juggling their jobs as mothers, students, and frequently the breadwinners, single mothers in academics show amazing tenacity and resolve. They attempt to reconcile their responsibilities as caregivers and students, and single mothers in academia confront difficulties and barriers (Kamau, 2020). These women show amazing fortitude in juggling the rigors of academics with taking care of their children.

#### **Theme 4: Fulfilment over Challenges**

The task of being a single mother is difficult enough, but it becomes considerably more difficult when you also must be a student. To find fulfillment in both parts of their lives, student single mothers must balance the demands of parenting their children with continuing their education. In theme, one of the key aspects of fulfillment for student single mothers is the sense of accomplishment that comes with successfully balancing their roles as a parent and a student. Despite the many obstacles and challenges, they face, these mothers can persevere and succeed in both areas of their lives. This sense of accomplishment can be incredibly fulfilling and can help student single mothers feel proud of themselves and their achievements as they watch their children grow despite the absence of a partner. This is substantiated by the participants' responses.

Participant 1 said, "*She may need to put in long hours or work several jobs to make ends meet, yet she never complains. She is aware that any sacrifice she makes for her children's betterment is worthwhile.*"

Participant 2 said, "*A single mother is one of these women; she is a single mother who has been parenting her child alone since her spouse abandoned them when the child was a newborn. Despite her obstacles, Single mother is committed to giving her child a secure and fulfilling existence. She puts in long and hard hours as a full-time nurse at a nearby hospital. But she never moans and prioritizes her child's needs above anything else. Single mother not only works, but she also does all of the housework. She handles everything on her own, handling everything from cleaning and cooking to bill payments and errand running. She is an expert at multitasking and is frequently spotted folding clothes and assisting her child with schoolwork while preparing dinner.*"

Participant 3 said, "*Being a single mother meant that I had to balance managing the home, working, and caring for my child. I decided to give my child's education priority despite the numerous demands on my time and attention. I*



was aware of how crucial education would be in influencing my child's future and I wanted to give them every chance. Although it wasn't simple, working to fund my child's education was worthwhile. I worked longer hours, looked for higher-paying jobs, and made personal sacrifices to make sure my children had everything they needed for academic success. I understood that I was investing in my child's future when I supported their education.

Participant 4 said, "She is resilient and unwavering in the face of the difficulties she encounters as a single mother. She is confident that her children will benefit from her sacrifices and that her efforts will ultimately be rewarded.

Participant 5 said, "She is committed to providing her kids with the greatest life possible, despite the difficulties that come with being a single mother. She will stop at nothing to ensure that they can continue their education, knowing that it is the key to their success in the future.

Striking a balance between student-single mothers and their roles as students and childcare providers presents special difficulties in their context. These difficulties seemed impossible to overcome but these women demonstrated resourcefulness and resiliency due to the optimism that they constantly displayed. As highlighted by the participants, they felt fulfillment despite the contemporary challenges encountered in their way. Being able to send their children to school and provide for their needs made them feel fulfilled. Moreover, they are happy to see their children grow with them despite the absence of a partner or spouse to help them raise their children. Indeed, being a student mother depicts so many challenges but seeing their children safe and happily grow with their guidance and care, is enough reason to continue striving for life and the future.

## Conclusion

The findings concluded that single mothers encountered a variety of challenges in meeting both responsibilities as a parent and as a student. Undeniably, they experienced financial constraints due to fewer job-seeking opportunities, bodily conditions, and job-seeking concerns, and thus this heavy obligation contributed to the stress of these women. These contemporary challenges adversely affect their emotional aspect where they feel self-insecurity. Due to heavy responsibilities and constraints, student-single mothers feel small about themselves and doubtful in their journey as students at the same time. Despite these challenges, these women displayed resourcefulness and resilience. Raising children by their means is crucial. However, this does not stop them from continuing and surviving their lives as student-single mothers. As evident, these mothers showed incredible mechanisms to find ways. Looking for part-time jobs, investing in little businesses, and staying strong is what they do to survive as student-single mothers. Although they continuously encounter and battle for challenges, seeing their children grow happily under their care and love, and being able to save money for their future, is their greatest fulfillment as mothers. Thus, the findings suggest that schools and communities should hold orientations and awareness in responsible adulthood and parenthood. Furthermore, for research purposes, the results suggest that other researchers may focus on single fathers as a variable and complement it with the use of methods other than phenomenology.

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