

## BALANCING MULTIPLE ROLES: EXPLORING STUDENT MOTHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES AT PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY, SOUTH LUZON

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the experiences of student mothers at Philippine Normal University South Luzon, highlighting their daily challenges in balancing the responsibilities of motherhood with the demands of teacher education. Employing a mixed-methods strategy, the study shows that these women encounter major challenges, such as overwhelming time pressures, economic insecurity, substantial academic demands, and persistent emotional strain. Though family and institutional assistance provide some help, it frequently falls short, compelling these mothers to depend on their resourcefulness through careful time management, precise prioritization, and the support of peer networks.

The research additionally emphasizes how societal norms and strict gender roles amplify their challenges, in conjunction with systemic obstacles such as rigid timings and an absence of tailored services. Ultimately, their path represents a complex blend of scholarly aspirations and maternal commitment; each class attended and test completed signifies a deep vow to achieve a brighter future for their offspring. In spite of these challenges, student mothers show incredible resilience and compassion. For enhanced support, the study suggests adopting flexible academic policies, establishing childcare-friendly environments, and offering focused financial and mental health resources to cultivate a genuinely inclusive campus

**Keywords:** Coping Mechanisms, Student Mothers, Work-Life Balance

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Balancing the dual roles of motherhood and academic pursuits presents unique challenges for student mothers, particularly within the context of higher education institutions in the Philippines. These individuals often face a complex interplay of responsibilities, including childcare, household duties, and academic obligations, which significantly impact their educational experiences and outcomes (Marandet & Wainwright, 2021). The difficulty of maintaining a stable work-life-study balance has been widely observed among student mothers, with time management, financial constraints, and lack of institutional support being the most pressing concerns (Abon et al., 2023; Taukeni, 2020).

While existing literature has explored the struggles of student mothers in other countries (Griffiths, 2020; Williams et al., 2021), there remains a lack of research focusing specifically

on their experiences within Philippine higher education institutions. A study by Abon et al. (2023) highlighted the struggles of student mothers at Quirino State University, revealing gaps in available support systems. However, no extensive research has been conducted on student mothers at Philippine Normal University South Luzon (PNUSL), particularly regarding the extent to which academic institutions accommodate their unique needs. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of student mothers at PNUSL.

## 2.0 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to investigate the lived experiences of student mothers at PNUSL, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and available support systems. Understanding these experiences is essential for developing targeted interventions that enhance their academic success and overall well-being (Moghadam et al., 2020). The findings will be useful to educators, administrators, and policymakers in designing inclusive and supportive educational environments (Olmstead et al., 2020). By addressing student mothers' concerns, higher education institutions can foster greater retention and academic success among this demographic (Xuereb, 2022).

The study will identify and analyze the specific challenges faced by student mothers at PNUSL, such as difficulties in balancing academic and family responsibilities, time management issues, financial constraints, and the effectiveness of available support systems. Previous studies suggest that flexible learning arrangements, financial assistance programs, and peer support networks can positively impact student mothers' academic experiences (Redhwan et al., 2020). By gathering qualitative insights, this research will help inform targeted interventions for student mothers at PNUSL.

The results of this study can guide action planning and policy development at PNUSL. By highlighting the unique challenges student mothers face, the findings can help institutions implement effective support services, such as child-friendly study spaces, scholarship opportunities, and mental health counseling (Kenny et al., 2023). These interventions can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable academic environment, ensuring that student mothers are given the necessary resources to succeed academically while fulfilling their parental responsibilities (Corbin & Strauss, 2021).

Balancing the dual roles of motherhood and academic life presents unique challenges for student mothers at Philippine Normal University South Luzon (PNUSL). These women must navigate academic responsibilities while managing childcare, financial constraints, time limitations, and societal expectations. Despite the presence of institutional and social support systems, the extent of their accessibility and effectiveness remains uncertain. This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of student mothers at PNUSL, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping strategies they employ, and the support systems that impact their academic journey.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic and socio-economic profile of student mothers at PNUSL?

- 1.1 Age, year level, and civil status

- 1.2 Living arrangements and childcare support availability
- 1.3 Employment status and financial resources (e.g., income, 4Ps membership, scholarships)
- 1.4 Number and ages of children
- 1.5 First-generation college student status
2. What are the primary challenges faced by student mothers at PNUSL in balancing academic and family responsibilities?
  - 2.1 Time management difficulties and academic workload
  - 2.2 Emotional and physical well-being in relation to academic stress
  - 2.3 Household and childcare responsibilities affecting study time
3. How do time management strategies and financial constraints influence student mothers' academic performance?
  - 3.1 Impact of employment and financial struggles on school-related expenses
  - 3.2 Strategies used to manage time and academic workload effectively
4. What types of support (institutional, familial, or social) do student mothers receive, and how do they influence their academic success and well-being?
  - 4.1 Awareness and accessibility of institutional support (e.g., scholarships, academic assistance, flexible policies)
  - 4.2 Role of family, peers, and community in providing emotional and practical support
  - 4.3 Effectiveness of these support systems in reducing academic and personal stress
5. How do societal expectations and personal responsibilities shape the academic experiences of student mothers at PNUSL?
  - 5.1 Perceived societal and family expectations regarding motherhood and education
  - 5.2 Experiences of emotional pressure related to balancing student and parental roles
  - 5.3 Ways in which student mothers navigate these expectations to continue their education

### **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

This study utilized a mixed-method design to systematically analyze the academic challenges and coping mechanisms of student mothers in higher education, aligning with the need to understand their lived experiences in a structured manner. Through surveys and interviews, the

study gathered in-depth data, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing their academic performance and well-being.

### 3.2 Participants of the study

Table 1 presents the demographic and personal profiles of the 34 student-mother respondents at Philippine Normal University South Luzon, who answered the survey through Google Forms. The majority are single (29 out of 34), live with their families (19), and are non-PWDs, while a notable portion (12) are working students engaged in part-time, full-time, or freelance jobs. Additionally, the table reveals that student mothers face varying living conditions, with some renting for proximity to school or financial reasons, and their children's ages range from infancy to six years and above, reflecting their diverse caregiving responsibilities alongside their studies.

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n=34)
<b>Sex</b>	Female	34
<b>Civil Status</b>	Single	25
	Married	9
<b>Are you a PWD Member?</b>	Yes	0
	No	34
<b>Current Living Situation</b>	Living alone	1
	Renting/Boarding	8
	Living with parents/relatives	13
	Living with a partner's parents' house	1
	Living with Spouse / Partner	11
<b>If renting, how long in current place?</b>	N/A	22
	Less than a year	7
	1-2 years	1
	More than 5 years	3
	2 Months	1
<b>Primary Reason for Living Situation</b>	Living with partner: with partner and self-support	1
	Living with parents: Financial support	13
	Living with parents: Caregiving responsibilities	4
	Renting: Independence	5
	Living with partner	1
	I'm married	1
	Living with spouse and daughter	1
	Too far to go back home	1
	Renting: Financial necessity	5
	Living with partner and child	1
	Renting: para malapit sa campus	1
<b>Satisfaction with Living Situation</b>	Yes, satisfied	25
	No, dissatisfied	9
<b>Are you a Working Student?</b>	Yes	12
	No	22
<b>Nature of Work (If Working Student)</b>	Part-time	5
	Full-time	1
	Freelance/Online Work	28

<b>Type of Work (added based on the survey)</b>	online seller/ staff in catering	1
	N/A	26
	Tutor	1
	Baking	1
	Still looking for a job	1
	Tindera	1
	Promodiser	1
	cashier	1
<b>Monthly Income</b>	3,000 - 4,999	2
	1,000 - 2,999	3
	Below 1,000	3
	Not a working student	25
	Not sure	1
<b>First Generation</b>	Yes	21
	No	13
<b>Member/Recipient of 4Ps</b>	Yes	5
	No	29
<b>Scholarship Recipient</b>	Yes	6
	No	28
<b>Scholarship</b>	Kamulathan Scholarship	1
	Gov. Angelina Helen Tan Scholarship	1
	Albarracin	1
	Reyes Scholarship	1
	N/A	30
<b>Scholarship Stipend</b>	6,000 - 10,000	1
	5,000	1
	5000 and below	1
	N/A	31
<b>Number of Children</b>	4	1
	3	1
	2	4
	1	21
	None	7
<b>Ages of Children</b>	13 years or older	1
	7-12 years	12
	4-6 years	8
	1-3 years	9
	Under 1 year	4
	N/A	5

### 3.3 Research instruments

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the challenges student mothers face in balancing academics and family life, the influence of time management strategies and financial constraints on academic performance, the support systems available and their effectiveness in assisting student mothers, and the impact of societal expectations on their educational journey.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the qualitative data, wherein responses were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes aligned with the research questions. To analyze the demographic profile of the participants, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to provide a clearer understanding of their background and circumstances.

### 3.5 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from PNUSL's research ethics board, ensuring that all ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's objectives and voluntarily agreed to take part. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses and safeguarding personal information. Moreover, voluntary participation was upheld, allowing respondents the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 2: Challenges, of Student Mothers at PNUSL**

Research Question	Factors/Challenges	Frequency (n=34)	Percentage (%)
1. Challenges in Balancing Academic & Family Duties	Time management difficulties and academic workload	33	97%
	Emotional and physical well-being due to academic stress	23	68%
	Household and childcare responsibilities affecting study time	28	82%

### 1. Challenges in Balancing Academic and Family Responsibilities

#### 1.1. Time Management Difficulties and Academic Workload

97% of student mothers reported struggling with time management due to balancing coursework, deadlines, and family responsibilities. The constant pressure of fulfilling academic and parental duties leaves them with little time for personal well-being.

#### Student Experiences:

"I barely have time to study because I need to take care of my child and finish household chores."

"Juggling assignments and exams while attending to my child's needs is extremely exhausting."

#### 1.2. Emotional and Physical Well-Being Due to Academic Stress

68% of respondents expressed that the mental and emotional burden of managing school and family life affects their overall well-being. Many experience burnout and anxiety as they struggle to meet academic expectations while caring for their children.

**Student Experiences:**

“There are nights when I can’t sleep because I’m thinking about school and my responsibilities at home.”

“The stress from school and home responsibilities makes me feel emotionally and physically drained.”

**1.3. Household and Childcare Responsibilities Affecting Study Time**

82% of student mothers shared that childcare and household duties significantly limit their study time. Many have difficulty finding uninterrupted hours to focus on academic tasks.

**Student Experiences:**

“I have to study late at night when my child is asleep, which affects my energy the next day.”

“Household chores take up so much of my time that I can’t focus on schoolwork.”

**Table 3: Influences, Support Systems, and Societal Expectations of Student Mothers at PNUSL**

Research Question	Factors/Challenges	Frequency (n=34)	Percentage (%)
2. Influence of Time Management & Financial Constraints	Impact of employment and financial struggles on school-related expenses	9	26%
	Strategies used to manage time and academic workload effectively	15	34%

**2. Influence of Time Management and Financial Constraints**

**2.1. Impact of Employment and Financial Struggles on School-Related Expenses**

26% of respondents indicated that financial difficulties hinder their academic progress. Some student mothers work part-time to support their studies, which adds another layer of responsibility and stress.

**Student Experiences:**

“I have to work while studying, but the money is barely enough for tuition and school needs.”

“Sometimes, I can’t afford materials required for school, so I just borrow from my classmates.”

**2.2. Strategies Used to Manage Time and Academic Workload Effectively**

34% of student mothers reported adopting various time management techniques to balance their academic workload. They often set study schedules, prioritize tasks, and seek flexible learning options.

**Student Experiences:**

“I plan my day carefully, setting specific times for studying, household chores, and childcare.”

“I take advantage of online resources so I can study whenever I have free time.”

**Table 4: Support Systems, of Student Mothers at PNUSL**

Research Question	Factors/Challenges	Frequency (n=34)	Percentage (%)
3. Support Systems & Their Influence	Awareness and accessibility of institutional support (scholarships, academic assistance, flexible policies)	26	76%
	Role of family, peers, teachers, and community in providing emotional and practical support	15	44%
	Effectiveness of these support systems in reducing academic and personal stress	9	26%

### 3. Role of Support Systems in Academic Success and Well-Being

#### 3.1 Awareness and Accessibility of Institutional Support

76% of respondents acknowledged the existence of institutional support, such as scholarships and flexible academic policies. However, many were either unaware of these resources or found them difficult to access.

Student Experiences:

- “I wish there were more programs for student mothers, like flexible deadlines and child-friendly spaces in school.”
- “I only learned about scholarship opportunities late, and I missed the chance to apply.”

#### 3.2 Role of Family, Peers, and Community in Providing Emotional and Practical Support

44% of student mothers reported that emotional and practical support from family, friends, and community members significantly helped them manage their responsibilities. Support systems include childcare assistance, encouragement, and financial help.

Student Experiences:

“My family helps me take care of my child when I have exams, which is a huge relief.”

“Having friends who understand my struggles as a student mother makes me feel less alone.”

#### 3.3 Effectiveness of These Support Systems in Reducing Academic and Personal Stress

26% of respondents believed that having a strong support system reduced their academic and personal stress. However, the effectiveness depended on how much support they received and whether it was consistent.

Student Experiences:

“When I get help with childcare, I can focus better on my studies.”

“Without my support system, I would have dropped out already.”

**Table 5: Societal Expectations of Student Mothers at PNUSL**

Research Question	Factors/Challenges	Frequency (n=34)	Percentage (%)
4. Societal Expectations & Personal Responsibilities	Perceived societal and family expectations regarding motherhood and education	8	27.6%
	Experiences of emotional pressure related to balancing student and parental roles	9	31.0%
	Ways in which student mothers navigate these expectations to continue their education	7	24.1%

#### 4. Societal Expectations and Personal Responsibilities

##### 4.1 Perceived Societal and Family Expectations Regarding Motherhood and Education

27.6% of student mothers felt pressured by societal norms and family expectations that prioritize their roles as mothers over their education. Many experienced discouragements when pursuing higher education.

Student Experiences:

- “Some people say I should stay home and focus on being a mother.”
- “There’s an expectation that mothers should put their children first, making me feel guilty about pursuing my degree.”

##### 4.2. Experiences of Emotional Pressure Related to Balancing Student and Parental Roles

31.0% of respondents shared that the emotional strain of fulfilling both student and parental roles was overwhelming. Feelings of guilt and self-doubt were common.

Student Experiences:

“I always feel guilty that I’m not spending enough time with my child because of my studies.”

“There are times when I feel like I’m failing as both a student and a mother.”

##### 4.3 Ways in Which Student Mothers Navigate These Expectations to Continue Their Education

24.1% of student mothers employed different coping strategies to continue their education despite societal and personal pressures. These include seeking external support, improving time management, and staying focused on their academic goals.

**Student Experiences:**

“I remind myself that finishing my degree will provide a better future for my child.”

“I make sacrifices, like reducing my social activities, so I can manage my responsibilities better.”

#### **4.1 Implications**

To enhance the academic experiences and well-being of student mothers at PNUSL, it is recommended that the university develop an organization, implement more flexible academic policies, such as extended deadlines and hybrid learning options, to accommodate their unique needs. Establishing child-friendly study spaces and expanding financial aid programs can also alleviate some of their burdens. Additionally, strengthening institutional support through mentorship programs, mental health counseling, and peer networks can provide student mothers with the necessary guidance and encouragement. Faculty members should also be sensitized to the challenges faced by student mothers, fostering a more understanding and accommodating academic environment. Lastly, collaboration between the university and government agencies should be explored to provide additional financial and childcare support, ensuring that student mothers receive the assistance needed to succeed academically while fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study highlight the significant challenges faced by student mothers at Philippine Normal University South Luzon (PNUSL) as they navigate the demanding roles of both parenthood and academia. Time management difficulties, academic workload, financial constraints, and the emotional toll of balancing responsibilities emerged as key barriers to their academic success. The study also revealed that while institutional, familial, and social support systems exist, their accessibility and effectiveness vary, leaving many student mothers struggling to cope with their dual roles. Despite these challenges, student mothers demonstrate resilience by employing various coping mechanisms, such as strategic time management, peer support, and late-night study sessions. However, the persistent burden of societal expectations, household responsibilities, and limited institutional support often exacerbates their stress, impacting their overall well-being and academic performance. Addressing these concerns through targeted interventions is crucial to ensuring an inclusive and supportive learning environment for student mothers at PNUSL.

#### **5.1 Statements and Declarations**

The authors wish to disclose that this study has non-financial interests arising from the direct application of the research. The authors further declare that they have not been involved in any form of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, or abuse (SEA), including any complaint, allegation, or conviction related to such misconduct. During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors reviewed and edited the content and take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Review Committee of the university. The research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. The ethics approval code for this study is approved.

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