

# Echoes in Two Worlds: Stories of Student Mothers in ESSU-Guiuan Campus

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**Abstract**—This study explored the lived experiences of student mothers at Eastern Samar State University–Guiuan Campus during the SY 2024–2025. The research design employed in this study is a narrative inquiry, which falls under the umbrella of qualitative research. The researchers aimed to understand how student mothers balance their dual roles as parents and students, the challenges they encounter, and their coping mechanisms. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with four key informants, whose narratives revealed themes of perseverance, resilience, and transformation. The findings showed that student mothers constantly struggle with time management, financial constraints, and the simultaneous demands of fulfilling both academic and parental responsibilities. Despite these challenges, their determination to secure a better future for their children drives them to continue their studies, drawing strength from their families, partners, children, and a strong sense of purpose. Humor and optimism also emerge as mechanisms for managing stress and maintaining emotional balance. The study sheds light on the need for a greater understanding that being a student mother is not merely an act of survival but a journey of sacrifice, empowerment, and hope. It recommends that educational institutions and policymakers should provide flexible learning options such as modular instruction, asynchronous online classes, and blended learning setups to accommodate the needs of student mothers, financial aid, and mental health support to promote equity and inclusivity for student mothers.

**Keywords**— student mothers; lived experiences; narrative inquiry; resilience; coping mechanisms

## I. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is a transformative journey that extends beyond biological ties, encompassing emotional, social, and developmental responsibilities. While education is a fundamental right and a pathway to success, combining it with parenting presents unique challenges. Student mothers face the difficult task of balancing academic demands with childcare duties, often resulting in physical exhaustion, emotional stress, and financial strain. Johnsons and Skinner (2020) noted that the pressure to meet deadlines often leaves these women feeling guilty and increases their risk of dropping out.

Societal perceptions further complicate their experience. Rosewell (2021) observed that student mothers are often viewed as less committed to their studies, unlike student fathers who are seen as dedicated. This burden is intensified by cultural expectations, particularly in Asian contexts, where women are traditionally expected to prioritize household duties and caregiving (Aiston and Fo, 2021). Consequently, they face the pressure of performing multiple roles simultaneously. Dickson (2018) and Santiago (2025) emphasized that managing schoolwork, household chores, and part-time work is physically and mentally draining.

Financially, student mothers struggle to allocate resources between educational needs and family expenses (Espiritu et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2020). Despite their resilience, they often lack sufficient support systems and face criticism that education should be their sole priority (Smith, 2019). While

previous studies acknowledge these struggles, there is a need to further understand how these women navigate these challenges within the local context and what specific mechanisms help them succeed.

This research is significant as it aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and ESSU's agenda for quality education. The findings provided insights that help institutions create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, ensuring equity for all students regardless of their personal circumstances.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, key informants, sampling technique, research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, and ethical considerations.

### A. Research Design

This study employs narrative inquiry, a qualitative design that explores experiences through storytelling. It is appropriate for this research as it allows student mothers to share their journeys in their own words, providing deep insights into the meaning and challenges of their dual roles.

### B. Participants and Sampling Technique

This study utilized purposive non-probability sampling to select participants who best fit the research objectives. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including

enrollment at ESSU-Guiuan, being at least 19 years old, having two or more children, and serving as the primary caregiver, while excluding those from other campuses, under 19 years old, with only one child, or whose children are cared for by others, ensuring that data were gathered directly from student mothers with relevant firsthand experiences (Thomas, 2022).

#### C. Research Instrument

This study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data, combining predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore topics freely. This method allowed for deeper insights and richer conversations, enabling the researchers to probe further based on the participants' responses (George, 2023).

#### D. Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process began by securing official approval and obtaining informed consent from purposively selected participants. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were then conducted to gather in-depth insights, which were recorded, transcribed, and translated for analysis (Monday, 2020; Dursun, 2023).

#### E. Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed thematic analysis following Creswell's (2009) framework, which involves preparing and reviewing data, coding, identifying themes, and interpreting the narratives to understand the experiences of student mothers.

#### F. Ethical Considerations

The study strictly observed ethical standards by securing informed consent and ensuring the confidentiality of all data, protecting the participants' rights and privacy throughout the research process.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of student mothers at ESSU-Guiuan using narrative inquiry. Findings revealed that their daily lives involve the difficult task of balancing academic requirements with household duties and childcare, often leading to stress and fatigue. They are primarily motivated by their love for children and the desire to provide a better future, strengthened by strong support from their families and spouses. The main challenges they face include time management, financial constraints, and the pressure of overlapping responsibilities. To cope, they rely on patience, discipline, effective time management, and engaging in small income-generating activities to sustain their education and families. Ultimately, they view their journey as one of sacrifice, growth, and resilience, proving that motherhood and education can go hand-in-hand.

#### A. Lived Experiences of Student Mothers

The findings reveal that the daily lives of student mothers are defined by the constant struggle to balance academic responsibilities with household duties and childcare. Their routines are often exhausting, involving managing time between attending classes, doing schoolwork, and caring for

their children. Despite experiencing stress, fatigue, and social pressure, they remain resilient, viewing their journey as an intertwined path of sacrifice, personal growth, and hope for a better future.

#### B. Factors Influencing Continuation of Education

Student mothers are primarily driven to continue their studies by their deep love for their children and the aspiration to provide them with a better life. Their determination is further strengthened by strong support systems, particularly from their spouses and family members who assist with childcare, finances, and emotional encouragement. For them, education is not just a personal goal but a meaningful act of sacrifice and empowerment for their family's future.

#### C. Challenges Encountered and Support Systems

The main challenges faced include time management issues, financial constraints, and the difficulty of prioritizing either schoolwork or children's needs. They often have to make difficult decisions, such as missing classes or requirements to care for sick children or entrusting them to relatives. However, the practical and emotional support received from their husbands, parents, and peers serves as a vital foundation that helps them lighten their load and persist despite the difficulties.

#### D. Coping Mechanisms

To manage their dual roles, student mothers employ strategies such as patience, self-discipline, and strict time management, often adjusting their daily routines to accommodate both studies and parenting. Many also engage in small income-generating activities or businesses to supplement their finances. Their ability to be resourceful and creative in handling daily demands demonstrates their strong commitment and resilience in fulfilling their responsibilities.

#### E. Meaning-Making of Experiences

Ultimately, these women view their experiences as a transformative journey that shifts their priorities from personal ambitions to securing a brighter future for their children. Despite the physical, emotional, and financial hardships, they find meaning in their struggles, seeing them as a testament to their love and dedication. They perceive their role not as a hindrance but as a source of strength, proving that with determination, motherhood, and education can successfully coexist.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the multifaceted journey of student mothers as they navigate the intertwined responsibilities of education and parenthood. Their lived experiences reveal both the struggles and triumphs of balancing dual roles, often marked by challenges in time management, financial constraints, and societal expectations. Despite these obstacles, they continue to persevere, drawing strength from their families, partners, children, and even from their own sense of purpose and determination. Humor, resilience, and strong support systems serve as vital coping mechanisms that help them manage stress and turn hardships into growth.

Ultimately, their stories underscore that being a student mother is not merely about survival but about love, sacrifice, empowerment, and the unwavering pursuit of a better future for themselves and their children.

Student mothers often belong to a marginalized part of society, carrying the heavy responsibility of both education and motherhood while receiving little attention or support. Their struggles are real, but so is their determination, which makes it vital for schools, communities, and policymakers. To recognize their unique needs, by providing targeted interventions such as flexible schedules, financial assistance, and accessible support systems, we not only ease their burdens but also empower them to fulfill their dreams and uplift their families.

This narrative inquiry study explored the lived experience of the student mother at ESSU-Guiuan during the 2024-2025 school year. The findings highlight the voices of student mothers, emphasizing not only their struggles but also their resilience, sacrifices, and aspirations. It illustrates how they manage the challenging balance between academic responsibilities and parenting. Beyond the hardships, the study reveals their moments of joy, pride, and personal growth, demonstrating how their dreams and love for their children continue to inspire them. Ultimately, the study portrays student mothers as strong, determined individuals whose journey exemplifies perseverance, hope, and the relentless pursuit of a better future for themselves and their families.

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