

## **EXPLORING THE BARRIERS OF SINGLE MOTHER STUDENTS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION AT POLYTECHNIC COLLEGE OF BOTOLAN; THE BASIS INTERVENTION PLAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The primary objective of this study was to examine the challenges faced by single-mother students pursuing higher education, as well as the strategies they employ to manage these challenges. The participants in this research were ten (10) single mothers enrolled under the Institute of Computing Studies and Institute of Education at the Polytechnic College of Botolan during the Academic Year 2023-2024. A structured interview approach was employed to elicit responses from the selected respondents. These data were then subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes within the respondents' narratives. The findings revealed that single mothers pursuing education face numerous experiences, including time management, discrimination, the inherent challenges of college, motivational and inspirational difficulties, support system issues, financial struggles, working student dilemmas, and emotional strain. They also encounter various challenges on their educational journey, such as financial challenges, balancing responsibilities, health and childcare, emotional struggles, time constraints, and discrimination and decision-making. These single mothers overcome the barriers through their support systems, which are parental assistance, self-reliance, and educational assistance. An intervention plan was proposed to help student mothers address these challenges. This intervention aims to provide essential resources and assistance required to effectively manage their academic obligations alongside their parental duties, thereby enabling them to navigate the obstacles they encounter during their pursuit of higher education.*

**Keywords:** Single-mother students, higher education, thematic analysis, Polytechnic College of Botolan

## INTRODUCTION

Education is vitally important to students as it serves as a powerful catalyst for personal growth and development (Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020). Through education, students acquire essential knowledge and skills that prepare them to navigate the complexities of life with confidence and competence. It helps them to think huge and presents them with the resources they require that will help turn their dreams into realities (Marni & Harsiati, 2019). Education enriches their knowledge and develops their reasoning, it introduces them to reality, as well as to the need to participate in society, to become active members, and to make a positive change. Furthermore, it means that education paves the way to numerous opportunities that ultimately improve their job and monetary situations. Finally, education prepares students for the constantly changing world by developing in them the necessary skills and attitudes to make proper choices and become valuable members of society who will help to build a better future for themselves and the rest of the people.

Single-mother students endure several hurdles that essentially limit their learning such as financial problems, time deficits, resulting in social transformation, and no available child care. They may also face social isolation and prejudice (Zagel, 2020). Nevertheless, single-mother students still can cope with those challenges and be successful in getting an education if they construct a support network of friends, family, and other people; organize their time effectively; try to find the money for their needs and tuition fees and use all the opportunities of the university (Nor, 2022). It is crucial therefore to know how these single mothers who are students experience their parenthood obligations and academic pursuits. This is because apart from childcare, the girls are faced with education and most of the time, part-time employment thus, they seldom have time for personal care (Mensah et al., 2017). These resilient people show extraordinary endurance and commitment to building a better future for themselves and their children in the face of these hurdles. To negotiate the challenges of being a single mother while going to school, they could turn to family, friends, or local services for assistance (Garriga et al., 2015). As a result of their experiences, the learning environment is enhanced, and the students' studies are infused with a strong sense of purpose. Single-mother students provide a tremendous example for their children by conquering challenges and exhibiting outstanding time management abilities (Tarar et al., 2021). They also encourage others to continue their studies despite hardships. For these individuals, to achieve their academic potential and constructively impact society, inclusive and supportive settings must be created.

The existing body of research about single-mother students sheds light on a variety of obstacles they encounter, encompassing financial limitations, issues in effectively managing their time, experiences of

social isolation, and limited access to proper childcare facilities (Abd Rahman et al., 2022). These issues may have an important impact on the capacity of single-mother students to engage in higher education and attain their academic goals. Nevertheless, the advantages of pursuing a higher degree for single parents and their children might be significant. Single parents who obtain a college degree may experience enhanced income levels, improved employment prospects, and an elevated quality of life (Arcand, 2014).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

This research aimed to identify and delve into the various challenges that single-mother students encounter on their educational journey at Polytechnic College of Botolan, shedding light on the factors that potentially hinder their academic pursuits. Additionally, this study sought to uncover the barriers that these individuals employ to overcome the identified barriers and continue their educational endeavors.

Specifically, this study endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. How do the respondents describe their experience as single mothers attending college?
2. What are the primary challenges faced by single mothers pursuing higher education?
3. What support systems or services do the respondents rely on to help them manage their roles and responsibilities?
4. What intervention plan can be proposed to help single-mother students address their difficulties in pursuing higher education?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This work was based on the principles of qualitative research, more specifically, using the narrative inquiry approach, which presented a rather rich and meaningful study of the current research subject. This design enabled the analysis of participants' experiences and views (Haydon et al., 2016) which provided a framework for understanding the difficulties seen by single mothers pursuing higher education to craft an intervention plan designed to address their challenges and difficulties in balancing parental roles and academic studies.

To acquire the needed information the researchers employed an interview with the fixed questions that helped the participants tell their stories and life experiences as single mothers and learners in the course of the research. Subsequently, the researchers gave a narration of their observations and assessments in

freestyle after conducting the interviews and the collection of narratives. Thus, using such an approach made participants' narratives focused on and highlighted the major points and issues. Thus, structuring the findings in such a way allowed to offer richer and more comprehensible insights into the life of single mothers and their choice of the complex road of higher education accompanied by their caregiver roles.

## RESULTS

Table 1 below shows the distribution of the respondents involved in this undertaken

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of the Respondents**

Department	Number of Respondents
Institute of Education	5
Institute of Computing Studies	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

### Experiences of Single Mothers Attending College

Table 2 shows the college experiences of single-mother students. Their responses to the open-ended questions identified eight themes related to this student population's challenges and successes. One of the essential skills highlighted is time management, which involves balancing childcare, studying, and possibly working. The study also reveals experiences of discrimination, highlighting the additional challenges faced by these students.

**Table 2**  
**Experiences of Single Mothers Attending College**

Theme	Theme Description	Sample Responses
<b>Time Management</b>	Balancing studies with childcare duties.	<i>"For me, it's difficult because I need to balance my time with studying and taking care of my child."</i>
<b>Discrimination</b>	Facing skepticism about the ability to manage education and parenting.	<i>"Bilang isang single mom ay nadidiscriminate kami dahil ang tingin sa amin ng ibang tao ay hindi namin kayang pagsabayin ang pag-aaral at pag-aalaga ng anak namin."</i>
<b>Challenges of College</b>	The additional obligations and responsibilities of college life pose significant challenges for single mothers.	<i>"Nakakachallenge, dahil dagdag obligasyon at responsibilidad lalo hirap ng hirap ang college."</i>

<b>Motivation and Inspiration</b>	Children serve as the driving force for single mothers to persist in their studies.	<i>"Mahirap pero kailangan kayanin sapagkat yung anak ko na ang nagsisilbing inspirasyon ko para mas magpatuloy kung nasaan na ako ngayon."</i>
<b>Support System</b>	Family support and children's inspiration help single mothers navigate their dual roles.	<i>"As a college student and single mother, my experience is that I will balance being a student and being a single mother, it's a bit difficult but I still have parents who support me and I have a daughter who is my inspiration."</i>
<b>Financial Struggles</b>	Limited resources in providing for children while studying.	<i>"Mahirap dahil hati ang oras sa pag-aaral at pag-aalaga ng bata. Mahirap ang ganitong sitwasyon kasi minsan 'di mo alam kung saan ka kukuha ng pang-provide mo sa anak mo at sa pag-aaral mo."</i>
<b>Working Students</b>	Juggling work, study, and childcare	<i>"Para sa akin, napakahirap sa akin pagsabayin ang pag-aaral at pag-aalaga ng bata. Mahirap din para sa akin dahil hindi sapat ang kinikita ko sa pagiging working student kaya minsan ay nakahingi at nakakahiram ako sa mga magulang ko."</i>
<b>Emotional Strain</b>	Enduring emotional burden from managing childcare and education alone.	<i>"As a single mother, napakahirap mag-isa lalo na sa pag-aalaga at pag-aaral ng anak ko."</i>

### Primary Challenges Faced by Single Mothers Pursuing Higher Education

Table 3 presents the primary challenges encountered by single mothers pursuing higher education, as identified in the study. Seven main themes emerged from the respondents' feedback. These themes include financial challenges, balancing responsibilities health and childcare, emotional struggles, time constraints, and discrimination and decision-making.

**Table 3**

### Primary Challenges Faced by Single Mothers Pursuing Higher Education

Theme	Theme Description	Sample Responses
<b>Financial Challenges</b>	Financial struggles in managing both education and childcare expenses.	<i>"Financial because there is something to pay for the school and, of course, the needs of my son." - R1</i>
<b>Balancing Responsibilities</b>	Difficulty in balancing academic and parenting responsibilities.	<i>"I experienced a difficult challenge, how can I keep up with school activities, where do I leave my child every time I go to school, and how do I explain to my instructors when I sometimes miss school." - R2</i>
<b>Health and Childcare</b>	Challenges related to the health and care of the child.	<i>"Pag-aalaga, minsan walang nagbabantay so obligadong lumiban sa klase. Pinansyal, dahil mas pinaglalaanan ko ng pera ang anak ko para sa mga kinakailangan nya." - R4</i>
<b>Emotional Struggles</b>	Emotional challenges faced by single mothers.	<i>"Financial, emotional, yung tipong di ko alam kung saan at paano ako makakahanap ng pangangailangan ng anak ko, sasabayan pa ng family problem." - R5</i>

<b>Time Constraints</b>	Limited time for self-care and personal interests.	<i>"Single mothers often have limited time for themselves as they prioritize their children's needs." - R6</i>
<b>Discrimination and Decision-Making</b>	Discrimination and challenges in decision-making.	<i>"Descrimination at pagbabalanse ng oras. Kapag nagkakasakit ang bata, nahihirapan akong magdesisyon kung papasok ba o hindi." - R10</i>
<b>Financial Challenges</b>	Financial struggles in managing both education and childcare expenses.	<i>"Financial because there is something to pay for the school and, of course, the needs of my son." - R1</i>
<b>Balancing Responsibilities</b>	Difficulty in balancing academic and parenting responsibilities.	<i>"I experienced a difficult challenge, how can I keep up with school activities, where do I leave my child every time I go to school, and how do I explain to my instructors when I sometimes miss school." - R2</i>
<b>Health and Childcare</b>	Challenges related to the health and care of the child.	<i>"Pag-aalaga, minsan walang nagbabantay so obligadong lumiban sa klase. Pinansyal, dahil mas pinaglalaanan ko ng pera ang anak ko para sa mga kinakailangan nya." - R4</i>
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## Support Systems of Single Mothers

As shown in Table 4, the study's findings reveal the support system of single mothers, with three main themes identified from the respondents' responses. These themes include parental assistance, self-reliance, and educational assistance.

**Table 4**  
**Support Systems of Single Mothers**

Theme	Theme Description	Sample Responses
<b>Parental Assistance</b>	Seeking help and assistance from parents	<i>"Yes, to my parents because I really can't handle my responsibilities without anyone to help me. Financial education is another one; it helps me with my personal expenses and what I will need in school." - R2</i>
<b>Self-Reliance</b>	Choosing self-reliance and avoiding additional problems	<i>"Hindi, kailangan ko lakasan loob para iwas sa dagdag na problema. Tulad ng paghingi mo ng tulong, may mga tao na kahit di naman ibang tao sayo ibababa ka nila." - R3</i>
<b>Educational Assistance</b>	Support from external resources	<i>"My family supports me even in my studies, it's a big help to me because they never get tired of teaching me and so that I can. Right now the educational assistance is helping me because I can use it in my studies." - R6</i>
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## Summary of Results

1. The respondents described a variety of experiences they faced as single mothers pursuing college education, with eight key themes emerging: time management, discrimination, challenges of college, motivational and inspirational, support system, financial struggles, working students, and emotional strain.
2. Single mothers pursuing higher education face numerous challenges, including financial challenges, balancing responsibility, health and childcare, emotional struggles, time constraints, and discrimination and decision-making. These seven key themes highlight the complex obstacles these mothers encounter on their educational journey.
3. Single mothers' support systems, according to their accounts, fall into three key categories: parental assistance, self-reliance, and educational assistance. These themes demonstrate the diverse ways single mothers build and utilize support systems for themselves and their families.

An intervention plan was proposed to help student mothers address their challenges in pursuing higher education (Appendix F). This intervention plan aims to help student mothers navigate the obstacles they encounter during their pursuit of higher education. The objective of this initiative is to supply these women with the essential resources and assistance required to effectively manage .

## DISCUSSION

This study covers the challenges or barriers faced by the single mother college students. In the study, every one of them have different struggles, and they should have support systems in order to survive with this situations. There are three keys categories, the parental assistance, self reliance and educational assistance.

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the preceding conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. Single-mother college students can benefit from tailored time management workshops, resources, academic support services, guest speakers, dedicated advisors, financial aid offices, career counseling services, and emotional support groups. These services can help them balance academic, personal, and parental responsibilities, organize schedules, track progress, and find support. Additionally, arranging guest speakers and panel discussions can provide inspiration and motivation. Financial aid offices and

career counseling services can also help single mothers explore flexible career paths and networking opportunities.

2. Parents of single-mother students can play a crucial role by advocating for additional resources and support. Educational programs for parents should include information about the specific challenges faced by single-mother students and strategies for offering effective support. Educating parents about these challenges will enable them to better assist their daughters and advocate for necessary changes in educational institutions.
3. Instructors should be provided with training to better understand the unique struggles of single-mother students. This understanding will help them offer appropriate support and create inclusive classroom activities that accommodate the needs of single-mother students. Encouraging faculty to adopt flexible policies and understanding practices can improve the academic experience for these students.
4. Guidance counselors should be equipped with resources and training to identify and support single-mother students effectively. This includes providing access to childcare, financial aid, and academic guidance. Facilitating seminars and training programs to empower teachers and staff to support single-mother students will enhance their ability to offer comprehensive assistance.
5. To facilitate the academic pursuits of single mothers, it is recommended that higher education institutions, school administrators, and policy makers provide the following: financial counseling services, flexible class schedules, affordable childcare facilities, committed advisors, adaptable assignment due dates, a support network, and policies that explicitly prohibit gender and parental discrimination. Establishing a campus atmosphere that upholds the principles of diversity and inclusivity can facilitate scholastic achievement, individual welfare, and self-empowerment, thereby yielding mutual advantages for single mothers and their families.
6. Individuals, organizations, and communities can assist single mothers in establishing and utilizing comprehensive support systems in the domains of parental assistance, self-reliance, and educational assistance by directing their attention toward the aforementioned suggestions. This will empower individuals to effectively navigate the challenges associated with solitary parenthood and contribute to the improvement of their families and their own futures.
7. Future research should employ a comprehensive approach to understand the diverse challenges faced by single-mother students. Begin with qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore internal issues like guilt, stress, and identity conflicts. Investigate how these emotional complexities intersect with the practical obstacles encountered in various academic settings, such as

financial limitations, childcare options, and institutional policies. Additionally, researchers should analyze demographic factors, including respondents' age, the number and ages of their children, their course of study, and academic performance, to identify how these elements influence their educational experiences. Comparative studies can highlight specific challenges and variations across different environments. To move beyond mere identification of problems, future research should evaluate targeted interventions. Consider strategies such as flexible work schedules, on-campus childcare, peer mentoring programs, and tailored financial aid. These insights will support the development of effective solutions, enabling single-mother students to better manage their responsibilities and achieve their academic goals.

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