

Exploring The Lived Experiences of Single Parents in Fulfilling Their Academic Dreams

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to explore the lived experiences of single parents who are also students in fulfilling their academic dreams. The researcher's utilized the phenomenological method, which seeks to describe and delve into the essence of the lived experiences of single parents in dealing with their children and academic endeavors. Seven single-parent informants in the College of Education were selected using purposeful sampling techniques. In this study, each informant was interviewed and they provided their perceptions of their experiences as a single parent and student at the same time. These informants described their experiences through the lenses of motivation, challenges, and needs. The themes of this study included the recognition of single parent's time management, their educational aspirations, dealing with their emotional stress, and how they overcame barriers. The results reveal that single parents deal with the dual demands of parenting and academic responsibilities. Furthermore, informants show exceptional perseverance and resolve, emphasizing the necessity for support from the government and educational institutions.

Keywords: single parent, lived experiences, phenomenological, purposeful sampling, time management, educational aspirations, emotional stress, overcome barriers & education institutions

RATIONALE

Single parents, defined as those raising children without the support of a spouse or partner, are becoming more common in today's culture. Divorce, separation, desertion, or personal choice can all lead to their current condition. Regardless of the reason, single parents face several problems in balancing parenting responsibilities with personal and professional goals, particularly in the field of education. According to Duquaine-Watson (2017), college single parents frequently lack appropriate support customized to their specific circumstances, distinguishing them from other student demographics. This study seeks to evaluate the support structures that help single parents navigate their difficult lives. Despite the difficulties they face, obtaining a college degree can provide significant benefits for single parents, such as increased earning potential, better job possibilities, and improved health outcomes (Kruvelis et al., 2017). As more single parents pursue higher education, it is critical to understand the unique obstacles they face and how institutions may best support them. According to Gasman et al. (2015), ensuring equitable access to higher education requires recognizing and appreciating each student's different experiences and assets, especially for underrepresented groups such as single-parent students. Furthermore, Austin (2013) emphasizes that low-income single parents may fail to satisfy the academic criteria required to be welfare eligible, demonstrating the convergence of educational and socioeconomic issues.

This study aims to fill gaps in the literature by focusing on single-parent students' lived experiences, notably the challenges they face in balancing academic, personal, and familial duties. The findings can help academic institutions design more equitable assistance services for this under-represented group.

Finally, boosting support for single-parent students is critical not only to their academic achievement but also to their long-term ability to sustain their families (Gasman et al., 2015).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to explore the single parents' experiences in fulfilling their academic dreams at University of the Visayas College of Education, 2nd semester of School Year 2023- 2024.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of single parents who are studying in the university?
2. What are the challenges faced by single parents and how did they cope with those challenges?
3. What is the essence of their experiences?
4. What recommendations can be made based on the results of the study?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers used the phenomenological method for the study's design. A phenomenological method focusses on the basic features of a lived experience or phenomena that can be perceived or felt by people from various viewpoints (Flood, 2010). This study used a phenomenological research approach to explore their experiences and understand their ideas and perceptions while navigating the challenges of being a single parent. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the phenomenological method seeks to bring insight into human experiences.

Research Environment

The research was conducted in the University of Visayas' Mandaue, Toledo, Minglanilla, and Dalaguete campuses. The study took place at the College of Education. The researchers chose this university as the research environment because it aligns with the school's aims, particularly those stated in its vision, purpose, and goals. The researchers

did the study at the University of the Visayas, specifically the College of Education, since the researchers saw current occurrences difficulties at the university that prompted them to investigate this study.

Research Participants

The informants for this qualitative study were 7 students from the College of Education who are single parents currently enrolled at the University of the Visayas, 2nd semester of School Year of 2023- 2024. The informants included both female and male single parents. The study also included both regular and irregularly enrolled students.

Data Gathering

Preliminary Procedures

Researchers obtained authorization to conduct an interview on single parents' academic experiences, obtaining approval from the Dean of the College of Education. The IRB processed the Notice to Proceed, and a consent document was drafted. The interview involved introductory, content, and concluding questions, with no time constraints.

Actual Data Gathering

Researchers conducted a study at the University of the Visayas to understand the experiences of single parents in fulfilling their academic dreams. They interviewed students using paper, pen, and voice recorder, asking ten questions without time constraints. The study was conducted online and face-to-face, with purposive sampling used to select individuals or groups meeting specific criteria relevant to the research objective.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a semi-structured interview format to conduct their study, allowing for rich dialogue and open-ended questions. They recorded the informants'

comments using pen and paper and a voice recorder for accuracy. The interview questions were Introductory, Content, and Concluding, focusing on the informants' experiences, difficulties, and struggles. The data was collected, discussed, and transcribed to obtain the results. The interview questions aligned with the study's goals and allowed for a rich understanding of the informants' experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers employed Content Analysis, specifically Colaizzi's Method, to analyze the data in a seven-step systematic approach. This method is especially useful for assessing written or recorded information, and it is frequently used to analyze interview responses. Colaizzi's (1978) technique is well-known for offering a complete analysis that is directly related to the data at each level, leading in a clear and full knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. The is mostly based on personal experiences obtained through interviews or written materials such as diaries, blogs, and narratives.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The ethical considerations in this study are guided by the core principles of respect, beneficence, justice, and transparency, as outlined in the Belmont Report.

1. The researchers protected the informants' dignity and privacy by ensuring voluntary involvement and fair treatment. Informants were fully aware of the study's goal and had the option to withdraw at any moment.
2. All informants were treated equally, ensuring that there were no bias or unfair practices during data collection or analysis. Purposive sampling was utilized in the study to ensure that only relevant participants were

included: single parents enrolled at the University of the Visayas.

3. Informants were informed about the study's objectives, data gathering processes, and rights. Consent was secured from participants and necessary authorities before to conducting the research, ensuring clear communication throughout.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This section presents the interview results based on the objectives and participant responses to the questions.

Theme 1: Time Management

Time management is critical when learning new things, and maybe expertise applicable to each viewpoint of your life. Planning and managing your time will help you in the future with school, work, and other projects.

Prioritization

Prioritization is how you give hierarchy to tasks based on their importance and how early you need to complete them. When you go through the prioritization process, your energy, time, attention, and focus are also prioritized from top to bottom to the task at hand.

"If you are in a relationship just like what I went through before, I was in a relationship that does not support me pursuing my college degree, the reason of our separation. Technically, but what I did because my end goal is to earn a degree for my child's future." Informant 3

Flexibility and Adaptability

Flexibility means that one is always open to new possibilities, viewing situations from different angles, and taking action that takes account of the needs of all involved rather than just children or parents (Vaghasia, 2022). Adaptability enables us to navigate

through challenges without becoming overwhelmed.

"I am now a freshman, I do have time to focus on adapting to college life and when I get home, I need to tend the needs of my kids and feed them on time." Informant 5

Single parents effectively manage their time, balancing school responsibilities and personal life. Despite challenges, effective time management remains crucial for productivity and a sense of balance in their lives.

Theme 2: Educational Aspirations

The pursuit of educational goals is a strong motivator for single parents. Setting concise, realistic goals allows individuals to focus their time and resources more efficiently, increasing their chances of success. This technique is consistent with past research, which shows that clearly stated objectives are critical for academic accomplishment and personal improvement (Seay, 2014).

Balancing Education and Parenting

Balancing study and motherhood take significant effort and attention. Informants stated that maintaining a disciplined routine is crucial to good time management. Many parents used certain days for academic activities while saving weekends for their children's needs, demonstrating their dedication to both tasks.

"It's harder for single parents because we don't have anyone to help us our obligations in concerning our children. We have to comply also at school so it's very hard." Informant 5

Some of the single parents' informants balance their education and parenting by utilizing their time wisely. They set time to do their academic endeavors and they also set time to tend the needs of their child. It is a big impact that a single parents know their priority, so in that way they can balance well their education and parenting responsibility.

“Gi balance jud naku pag ayo like Monday to Thursday diba ang klase niya dili man sad fully loaded after ana sa akong klase is mga kids akong atimanon. (I will really balance it well, like from Monday to Thursday, I need to go to school and I am not is not fully loaded, so after my class, I will take care of the kids.)” Informant 1

Theme 3: Emotional Stress

Emotional stress is the experience of negative emotions, such as worry, in the setting of a physiological stress response, which includes circulatory and hormonal alterations. Emotional stress occurs when an individual believes he or she lacks sufficient personal resources to properly handle situational expectations (Lazarus, 1996).

Relationship Struggles

Relationship problems occur when two individuals who are together no longer have a connection or understand each other. The single parents’ informants are also dealing with their own relationships. Some single parents come from toxic relationships that they are trying to forget; as they move forward in life, they are teaching their children the importance of understanding and choosing the appropriate person to be with.

“Actually, gikalimtan na jud nako akong past dili nako ganahan kay lisod jud akong nakaraan. Actually, nag part ko sa abusive relationship or toxic sa una so for the future mother or single mother no dapat mo choose proper man or choose man wisely nu. Mao na jud na atong kapuyon lisod jud basta abusive atong laki kay kita ra jud maglisod promise.” (Actually, I have completely forgotten my past because I don’t want to remember it anymore because my past was really difficult. Actually, I was part of an abusive or toxic relationship before, so for future mothers or single mothers, you should choose the right man or choose wisely.) Informant 7

Single parents are carefully considering their personal relationships to avoid affecting their child. They emphasize the importance of being a good example, overcoming struggles,

and doing what’s best for their child’s future, demonstrating bravery and responsibility.

“So, basically akong siyang gi pili over the relationship because I think when you stand on your own btaw, syempre single parent ka naa kay anak nga gi nurture so you have to show your child that you can stand alone. You know, do things you want to do basta para lang sa imohang future, so I want to show her that bisan pag siguro the bad side of it, ma ruin ang relationship but I can show her that even if her alone kaya ra. (So, basically, I chose my studies over the relationship because I think when you stand on your own, of course, as a single parent with a child to nurture, you have to show your child that you can stand alone. You know, do things you want to do, as long as it’s for your future. So, I want to show her that even if the relationship may be ruined on the bad side of it, I can show her that she can still manage on her own.)” Informant 3

Lack of Support

Single parents struggle to support their children’s needs and work, often without parental support. This leads to emotional stress as they balance academic pursuits and childcare, causing emotional distress for their informants.

“Wala, ako rajud siya gi manage like gi briefing lang jud nako akong kaugalingon nga makaya rajud ni nako though there are sometimes dili najud siya makaya kay labi na mga finances, like kanang wala ga support ang father sakong anak dayon ako ray ga trabaho.” (None, I just mange it and brief myself that I can handle it my own. Although there are times when I can’t handle it, especially with the finances (without the support of father) so I also work and sometimes my family (sister and mother) help me. I just motivated myself that I need to achieve my dreams and goals for my child.) Informant 2

Most of the single-parents experience having an emotional stress because they don’t have a partner where they can lean on, especially when they are having a hard time. In this study, the researchers found out that emotional stress is one of the factors that the

single-parents are battling in fulfilling their academics dreams.

Theme 2: Educational Aspirations

Overcoming barriers involves recognizing and addressing obstacles that hinder progress or achievement, demonstrating a positive attitude and a positive approach to both academic and personal aspects, thereby fostering personal growth.

Coping Mechanism

Single parents face balancing responsibilities, utilizing coping mechanisms to reduce unpleasant emotions. They divide their time between school and child care, with some prioritizing their child's needs. They also use their child as an inspiration and remind themselves to be positive, as negative thoughts hinder personal growth.

“What I did was basically a time management and focus on my energy and on my goal since I can stress and also can think about negative things but I will always think of things that I want to achieve instead of lurking around the negatives ones because it won't help me grow.” Informants 3

Positive Parenting

Positive parenting involves a continuous relationship between a parent and their child, involving care, education, leadership, communication, and meeting their needs consistently and unconditionally. Single parents often inspire their children, despite challenges, by being hands-on and enjoying life.

“I want to share as a student and also as a parent kay dira ka maka experience ug sobra ka kapoy, kasakit ug hilak kadaghan. Dira sad nimo ma enjoy ang life as a human. Taga adlaw ka naay kusog tungod sa imong anak.” (I want to share as a student and also as a parent because there you can experience extreme fatigue, pain, and tears. There you can also enjoy life as a human. You become

strong every day because of your child.) Informant 6

Single parents confront a wide range of obstacles, including time management, emotional stress, and a lack of support. Despite the challenges they faced, single parents shown great resilience by prioritizing their children's futures, making precise goals, and being adaptable in handling their obligations. They believe that positive parenting methods will teach their children the value of perseverance and hard work. This demonstrates single parents' courage and commitment as they seek to provide a better future for themselves and their family.

CONCLUSION

The study's outcomes suggest that students who are also single parents exhibit extraordinary tenacity when confronted with challenges. They navigate an array of obstacles, exercise immense patience, and exert considerable effort and bravery to reach their educational objectives. These students encounter numerous difficulties, including juggling academic duties with childcare and dealing with financial constraints to fulfill their children's requirements. They undertake notable sacrifices in their educational endeavors, often managing the rigorous demands of school and childrearing with scant assistance. Their dedication is apparent in their approach to organizing time, budgeting resources, and maintaining emotional health, all while endeavoring to create a consistent and supportive home for their offspring. Such individuals show exceptional perseverance and resolve, emphasizing the necessity for enhanced support from society and educational institutions to assist them on their concurrent paths of education and parenthood.

RECOMMENDATION

The researchers would like to recommend the following:

1. Understanding the effects of being a single parent might become useful. To help single parents learn how to plan for their child, the

parenting association in the community can host a seminar on family planning that includes more discussions and solutions.

2. Numerous schools and institutions provide grants intended exclusively for single parents. These scholarships can assist with the cost of books, tuition, and other educational expenditures. The Expanded Solo Parent Welfare Act grants full scholarships for this program to those single parents.

3. Community Colleges and Universities: A number of academic establishments provide courses or other initiatives specifically tailored to assist lone parents. These initiatives might offer child care services, flexible class schedules, and academic guidance specifically designed with single parents in mind.

4. For further study, the researchers will recommend these studies for future researchers:

a. A comprehensive study of Single Parents' Journey through Academic Achievement

b. Investigating the Academic Pursuits of Single Parents in Higher Education

c. Empowering Parenthood: Academic Resilience Among Single Parents

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