

Beyond the Double Shift: “Exploring the Emotional And Financial Strain on Single Mother Working Students”

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Abstract: *This study explores the lived experiences of twelve single mother working students in Business Administration of Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Mindanao, Philippines, examining the multifaceted socio - economic, psycho-social, and educational challenges they face. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research delves into the emotional well-being, social dynamics, and economic circumstances of twelve single mothers working students. Findings reveal that the pressures of managing multiple responsibilities often lead to emotional distress and depressive symptoms, exacerbated by limited time and resources.*

Participants consistently prioritized their children's well-being and education, frequently at the expense of their own needs. Social isolation and financial instability, stemming from varied employment situations, significantly impacted their decision-making and overall well-being. The study underscores the critical need for robust social support and financial stability to improve the lives of single parents and their children.

Ultimately, this research highlights the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions, including government social legislation, to mitigate the complex challenges faced by single parents and enable them to achieve a fulfilling quality of life.

Keywords: *Single mother working student*

I. Introduction

Single mother-working students are a hardworking person who makes their time more productive as they double their effort just to meet their long-desired success under the heat of the sun. They are classified in different ways such as married, unwed, widowed, or a victim of circumstance and possess children. Because of experiencing death or any fortuitous event results in being single. As a single mother who is a working student at the same time face challenges as we all know families come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes, it's just one parent holding down the fort, whether that's because of losing a partner, choosing to raise a child alone, or life throwing a curveball. Traditionally, we might think of single parents as those who've lost a spouse, but these days, it's a much broader picture.

Being a single parent, especially for moms, is like running a marathon with a backpack full of worries. There's the money stuff, the emotional weight, and the feeling like everyone's judging you. It's a lot to handle, and it can take a toll on both the parent and the kids. Kids in single-parent homes might miss having that other parent around, and it can affect how they see themselves and the world. It's not easy, and it adds to the everyday stresses of raising children. Money problems make things even tougher, and there's that extra pressure to live up to what society thinks a "good" parent should be.

Even though it's a tough road, love, and strong bonds are still at the heart of these families. It's just that they're often fighting against stereotypes that paint them as unhappy or struggling. They're trying their best to give their kids a good life, but sometimes it feels like they're doing it with one hand tied behind their back.

These parents are dealing with all the usual stuff, plus the added pressure of living up to strong cultural expectations. It's a constant balancing act, and it's no wonder they feel isolated and overwhelmed. We're not just looking at numbers and statistics; we want to hear their stories, see their struggles, and learn how they cope. By listening to their experiences, we can figure out how to support them better – through policies, and programs, and maybe even changing how we see single-parent families. We want to create a world where they have the support they need to live their best lives, despite the challenges they face.

II. Method

To deeply understand the experiences of single mothers working students, we conducted a qualitative study. We specifically focused on twelve (12) single mothers enrolled in the College of Business Administration in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. We gathered information through a combination of methods: in-depth conversations using a semi-structured interview guide, detailed observations recorded in ethnographic notes, and group discussions (Focus Group Discussions or FGDs). We also used open-ended questions to encourage the participants to share their thoughts freely, and we paid close attention to their behavior during the group discussions.

Throughout the study, we adhered strictly to the ethical guidelines set by the Research Ethical Board ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent before any recordings or records. Each group discussion lasted between three and four hours, allowing us to gather rich, detailed data. We then analyzed the information, looking for recurring themes and patterns to gain a better understanding of the challenges these students face.

We prioritized ethical considerations, including informed consent and respecting the Philippine Privacy Act. To ensure accuracy, we returned to the participants multiple times to validate our interpretations of their experiences. The study spanned three semesters, or eighteen months, during which we consistently monitored and observed the research environment to ensure the reliability and validity of our findings."

Results and Discussions

This study explored the twelve (12) single mother working students in the College of Business Administration of Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Mindanao, Philippines. Participants, consisting of twelve (12) mothers, represented a diverse age range from their late 20s to early 40s, and their households averaged five members.

Their journeys to single mother working students included mutually agreed separations, widowhood, being unwed, and other personal circumstances. The participants' socio-economic situations varied significantly, with many experiencing financial hardship and limited income, while some received intermittent support from extended family.

Through participant observation, it became evident that these single parents faced substantial socio-economic challenges. A recurring theme emerged during the study, which participants consistently articulated as follows:"

Theme 1

"Kung nasayud lang unta ko nga dili diay sayon ang mahimong usa ka inahan nga nag -eskwela samtang nagtrabaho, dili unta ko magpasubok ug magpasakit niining walay kapuslanan nga situwasyon sa akong kinabuhi. Ug kini ako gyud nga gimahayan, labi na sa mga panahong mihinumduman nako, diin mabati nako ang labihang kakapoy. Sa matag adlaw nga akong ginapaningkamotan isip usa ka inahan ug usa ka amahan nga nagpas-an sa bug-at nga krus ug mag-atubang sa mga hagit sa kinabuhi, sakit kaayo nga palandungon, apan nahitabo na kini, ug ang panahon dili na mobalik pa."

Translation

[If only I had known that being a mother while studying and working is not easy, I would not have subjected myself to this painful and purposeless situation in my life. And I truly regret this, especially during the times I remember, when I could feel the overwhelming exhaustion. Every day, I strive as both a mother and a father, carrying the heavy cross and facing life's challenges. It's very painful to reflect on, but it has already happened, and time cannot be turned back.]

It was clear from the participants' words and actions that they carried a heavy burden of regret and self-stigma. During our time with them, we saw physical signs of their emotional pain, a reflection of past experiences that still

impacted their current lives and financial situations. They often revisited their teenage years, revealing a sense of 'if only' and a feeling that they were trapped in a cycle of struggling to provide for their children.

Their actions and unspoken words spoke volumes. They were silently pleading for help, longing for some kind of support system to ease their burdens. These mothers, in particular, were heroically trying to meet all their children's needs, often at the expense of their well-being. This constant pressure to provide led to stress and even signs of depression, which aligns with previous research by Andrade, C., & Fernandes, J. L. (2021).

Our study confirmed that financial worries, especially budgeting, were a major source of stress for these single parents, affecting both them and their children. Despite these challenges, their unwavering dedication to their children was evident, a commitment also seen in other studies, Ceneciro, C. C. (2023).

The reality of low income and poverty was a significant stressor for these single parents, directly impacting their mental health, Muslihat et al. (2020). The financial strain they experienced increased their risk of depression. In their own words, the ten participants described it like this:"

Theme 2

“Sukad nga nag-inusara ko sa pag-atiman sa akong mga anak, ang inyong makita karon mao ra gyud na akong naa. Niwang na kaayo sila tungod kay kabalo ko nga wala sila’y igong nutrisyon, apan wala ko’y mahimo; dili ko magpangawat. Usahay, usa ra ka pagkaon ang among mahimo sa usa ka adlaw. Naulaw usab mi nga pirmi mangayo og tabang; pasalamat gani mi kung adunay pista sa among lugar o kung adunay maghatag og pagkaon, kay moadto ko aron mangayo para sa akong mga anak. Usahay, maglabada ko, magkuha og kahoy, o bisan unsang trabaho nga makitan ko aron makakwarta ug makapalit ug bugas, bisan walay sud-an. Ilado na kaayo mi sa among barangay tungod kay pirmi ko magpangayo bisan gamay ra.”

Translation

[Since I have been raising my children on my own, what you see now is all that I have. They have become very thin because I know they don't have enough nutrition, but I can't do anything about it; I won't steal. Sometimes, we can only afford one meal a day. We're also embarrassed to always ask for help; we're just grateful if there's a local festival or someone provides food because I go there to ask for something for my children. Sometimes, I do laundry, gather firewood, or take any job I can find to earn money just to buy rice, even if we don't have any side dishes. We've become quite known in our barangay because I always ask for help, even if it's just a little].

The stories shared by this single-mother working student revealed a wide range of financial situations, with some managing through self-employment or juggling multiple jobs, a reality supported by previous research (Asah, 2021). However, for the participants in this study, their lived experiences painted a picture of immense hardship. They spoke of feeling both blessed and betrayed by life, experiencing fleeting moments of good fortune amidst constant struggle.

Securing necessities, particularly food, was a daily stressor, impacting their well-being and decision-making. This constant worry sometimes led to emotional detachment from their children and negatively affected the children's academic performance. Despite their best efforts to manage their time and balance work with parental duties, the persistent financial strain often derailed their focus and sense of direction.

Our research also uncovered significant educational challenges. Children from these households frequently missed school or dropped out altogether. Teachers reported that many children came to school hungry and lacked basic educational supplies. As one student poignantly stated, 'We cannot eat and feed our empty stomachs by paper and pencil.' These realities highlight the powerful influence of socioeconomic factors on educational opportunities.

Beyond financial and educational struggles, the participants also revealed a deep sense of emotional distress, a 'wreckage of their past' that continued to impact their present lives. Their health and wellness, or lack thereof, served as a testament to the 'storms and stresses' they endured while fulfilling their parental obligations. In their own words, they described it like this:"

Theme 3

“Aduna koy dakong panginahanglan sa tambal nga gireseta sa doktor, apan tun god sa kawad-on, usahay malimtan na lang nako kini. Dunay panahon nga bation ko nga mura ko og matumba tungod sa kalipong, ug dayon mosunod ang pagbati nga mura ko og mawala sa akong kaugalingon. Siguro, kini tungod sa kakulang sa pag-atiman sa akong kaugalingon ug ang kawalay kapas nga makapadayon sa pag-adto sa doktor, tungod sa kakuwang sa kwarta. Maayo gani kay gihigugma gihapon ko sa Ginooug bisan pa sa tanan nga kalisod, hangtod karon buhi pa gihapon ko”.

Translation

[I have a great need for the medication prescribed by the doctor, but due to poverty, I sometimes forget to take it. There are times when I feel like I might collapse because of dizziness, and then I feel as though I am losing myself. Perhaps this is due to the lack of care for myself and the inability to go to the doctor because I don't have money. Fortunately, I am still blessed by God, and despite all the hardships, I am still alive].

The stories shared by the single mother working student during our group and individual conversations painted a deeply concerning picture. Their experiences revealed risky physical behaviors, with potentially long-term consequences for their well-being and future opportunities, as well as those of their children. This recurring pattern of hardship places their lives at significant risk.

Immediate and comprehensive support is crucial. This support must come from both within their family networks and from responsible institutions. They need more than just immediate relief; they require a lifeline. Addressing their immediate need to feed their families is paramount, but they also need sustainable programs for psycho-social healing. These programs would serve as vital ‘vitamins and medicine’ to combat the effects of social stigma.

The core challenge for this single-mother working student is to achieve a fulfilling life, a 'quality of life,' which is intrinsically linked to their ability to connect with others. They expressed profound loneliness, limited social interaction, and the constant burden of social judgment. These challenges were consistently highlighted during our group discussions. In their own words, the ten participants shared this common theme:"

Theme 4

“Lisud kaayo mahimong ginikanan mag-inusara nga sa pag padako sa mga bata tungod kay ang tanan nga ilang panginahanglanun ikaw ra isa mag sulbad ug mag baguud. Ug ang ilang pagpakiglambigit kanila sa ilang mga isig ka bata lisud kaayo kay adunay mga pulong ngausahayimong ma dunggan nga maka pasakit kanimo. Sa imong pagka ginikanan usab murag kumuton ang imong kasing-kasing kay murag aduna kay sakit nga mananakud. Wala kapay kwarta, wala pa gyud kay balay, wala pa gyud kay dungug nga nabilin, wala pa gyud kay kalambigit sa pag matutu sa mga bata sa ilang pagpadaku”

Translation

[It's incredibly challenging to raise children alone. Their basic needs are hard to meet, especially when you're on your own. And then, there's the pain of seeing your children labeled and discriminated against by their peers. It breaks your heart.

There are times you overhear hurtful words, words that belittle you, and it feels like your heart is being crushed. It's as if you're carrying some kind of contagious disease that others want to avoid. You

feel stripped of everything – money, a stable home, your sense of pride. You feel utterly alone, with no one to help you guide your children as they grow].

The shared narratives of the single mother working student revealed a consistent theme of discrimination and rejection, a finding supported by previous research. The lack of adequate family and external support contributes to feelings of loneliness and an overwhelming sense of self-reliance. Despite these significant obstacles, these parents

consistently prioritize their children's education, even when socio-economic instability severely limits their ability to cover educational expenses, sometimes at great personal sacrifice.

The educational, socio-economic, and psycho-social challenges faced by this single-mother working student serve as powerful motivators for their children to pursue schooling. Within the cultural context of Mindanao, Philippines, education is viewed as a pathway to liberation from poverty. Even the absence of necessities, such as money and housing, does not deter their commitment to education. They maintain optimism, believing that travel distances, limited school resources, and infrastructure challenges can be overcome.

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting these families and creating a nurturing learning environment. However, the most significant challenges for this single-mother working student remain financial security and the pervasive psycho-social 'storms and stresses' that erode community morale. They expressed deep concern about a perceived moral decay, where 'those who are learned are the ones putting down the dignity of others,' highlighting a sense of injustice and societal breakdown."

III. COMPREHENSIVE DISCUSSIONS

Single-mother working student arises from various circumstances, including widowhood, separation, or personal choice. It often carries societal stigma and places significant duties and responsibilities on the individual. Ideally, strong support systems within families, communities, and institutions should be in place to uphold the well-being of all family structures. While the traditional union of a husband and wife is valued, it's also crucial to acknowledge that circumstances beyond one's control can lead to single parenthood. In such cases, government and non-governmental organizations should provide essential support to ensure these families can thrive and achieve a good quality of life.

However, interventions through social legislation that focus on dissolving marriages should be carefully considered, as they can potentially disrupt family and community bonds. Instead, the focus should be on empowering single parents to become beacons of strength and resilience, demonstrating love and compassion. We should aim to support them in creating fulfilling lives, despite the challenges they face."

Translation

[Ang mga single mother nga estudyante naggikan sa lain-laing mga kahimtang, lakip naang pagka-balo, panagbulag, o personal nga pagpili. Kasagaran kininagdalaogstigma gikan sa sosyedad ug nagbutang og dagkong mga obligasyon ug responsibilidad sa indibidwal. Angayngaadunaylig-on nga mga sistema sa suporta sa sulod sa pamilya, komunidad, ug mga institusyon aron mapangga ang kaayohan sa tanang klase sa pamilya. Samtang ang tradisyonal nga paghiusabanaugawagiisip nga bililhon, importante usab nga ilhon nga ang mga kahimtang nga dili makontrol sa usa ka tawo mahimong magdala ngadto sa pagka-single nga ginikanan. Sa ingon nga mgakaso, anggobyernoug

mga non-governmental organizations kinahanglan maghatag og hinungdanon nga suporta aron masiguro nga ang mga pamilya makalingkawas ug makab-ot ang maayong kalidad sa kinabuhi.

Bisan pa, ang mga interventsyon pinaagi sa sosyal nga lehislasyon nga magtutok sa pagbungkag sa kasal kinahanglan nga pagatimanon og maayo, tungodkaykinimahimong maguba ang mga panaghiusa sa pamilya ug komunidad. Imbes, ang fokus kinahanglan magtutok sapagpanggaug pagpalig-on sa mga single nga ginikanan aron mahimong mga simbolo sa kusog ug kabaskog, nga nagpakita og gugma ug malasakit. Kinahanglan nato silang suportahansapaghimog mga malipayong kinabuhi, bisan pa man sa mga hagit nga ilang ginaatubang].

IV. Conclusions

Single mothers working students, in particular, face significant challenges: socio-economic hardship, emotional distress, and obstacles to their children's education. These struggles often stem from past traumas and lead to feelings of depression, as they struggle to balance their many responsibilities with limited time and resources. The constant pressure to provide for their children's basic needs makes it difficult to achieve a fulfilling life.

We must create a society where single mothers are not subjected to hatred, greed, or abuse of power. Instead, they should be supported in pursuing their dreams, despite the scars they carry. They need time and space to heal from

their pain and rebuild their lives."

Translation

Ang mga single mother's nga estudyante, labi na, nag-atubang ug dagkong hagit: kalisod sa pinansya, emosyonal nga kabalaka, ug mga babag sa edukasyon sa ilang mga anak. Kining mga pakigbisog kasagaran nagsugod gikan sa mga nangagingtrauma ugnagdalasapagbatingadepresyon, samtang sila nagapaningkamot nga balansehon ang ilang daghang responsibilidad ubansalimitado nga panahon ug mga kahinguhaan. Ang kanunay nga presyur sa paghatag sa mga bataakang panginahanglan sa ilang mga anak naglisod sa pag-angkon ug usa ka malipayong kinabuhi.

Kinahanglan nato maghimo ug usa ka sosyedad diin ang mga single mothers diliipailalomsa pagdumot, kahakog, o abuso sa gahum. Imbes, sila ang angay suportahan sa pagtuman sa ilang mga damgo, bisan pa man sa mga samad nga ilang dala. Nagkinahanglan sila ug panahon ug lunaaron mag-ayo gikan sa ilang kasakit ug pag-uswag pag-usab sa ilang kinabuhi.

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