

# Navigating Dual Roles: Challenges and Strategies of Student Mothers in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The impetus for this study came from my history of being a student mother while completing my higher education, and the challenges which entailed during my studies. The study sought to discover the challenges student mothers face while attaining higher education. The study employed the qualitative research methodology and phenomenology approach. Interviews were used as an instrument. A total number of 10 participants were involved in this study. The thematic analysis analyzed the data collected. It was found that student mothers face challenges managing time, and financials, and giving less time to child care while attaining higher education. As they have a responsibility for their child, home and studies along with work outside the house made them feel stressed and unmanageable. Student mothers involved in the study were: single mothers, married mothers, and working mothers.

## Keywords

Student-Mother, Married-Mother, Single-Mother, Working-Mother, Challenges, Higher Education

## 1. Introduction

Education is known as an important developmental tool. Therefore, the importance of education in improving social, economic, and human development has a general core value. Women's education is a strategic development significance. Educated women tend to be more knowledgeable about nourishment, and healthcare and have fewer children, marry at a later age, and usually their children are healthier, should they choose to be mothers. In the formal labor market, those women

are earning higher incomes. All of these factors collectively lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty.

A long time ago, women were supposed to be responsible only for the home. They were married to raise a family and home. Historically, women were expected to remain at home, focusing on domestic responsibilities, while men fulfilled financial obligations for the household. The need of the hour has pressured women to go to the educational system and work to support their husbands in taking care of the home financially. This means that the woman now has to take care of the home and work and her academic pursuits (Yip & Maestre, 2023). This combination has brought many challenges for women. Therefore, the attainment of higher education becomes a platform for a woman to achieve her goals.

Women's education has always been a subject of complex debate. It takes insight the consideration the areas of gender equality as well as the right to get an education to eradicate poverty. Education helps men and women to claim their rights and to gather the potential they have in the social, political, and economic fields (LaBrenz et al., 2023). Education is therefore a powerful weapon that fights and lifts people out of poverty as well as playing a role as a foundation for female development towards maturity.

The position of power is for men, while women are adversely affected by the circumstances in all spheres of life. As time has changed women are capable enough to pursue their education but still being a mother at once and having major responsibilities of household, and child care along with their studies is still a point of concern (LaBrenz et al., 2023). There are some cases where men feel uncomfortable if their wives are going to co-educational institutes. And in some other cases, women might not feel comfortable to study with male students. Many barriers make a woman especially a mother think about whether she pursue her dream or not.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to focus on the challenges faced by mothers attaining higher education specifically in Pakistan. The study looked at the lives of mothers being a student and mothers at the same time and, how they manage their dual roles. The factors that affect mothers when balancing a dual role at the same time.

## 3. Research Objectives

- 1) To identify the challenges student mothers face while attaining higher education;
- 2) To identify the performance in balancing a dual role at the same time.

## 4. Research Questions

Following are the research questions guided by the study:

- 1) What challenges do mothers face while playing their role as a mother and

student at the same time?

2) How does student-mother manage their family and academic life?

## 5. Theoretical Framework

The importance of theory should not be terminated for theory is a key to growth and development in any discipline (p. 85). The theory of resiliency is used as a catalyst to provide insight and purpose regarding the challenges faced by student mothers while attaining higher education. Resiliency is defined as succeeding and flourishing despite adverse situations. Resiliency is defined as a “paradigm shift from looking at risk factors allied with challenging situations to searching for more strengths-based personal characteristics that help persons overcome adverse or stressful conditions” (p. 55).

## 6. Review of Literature

### 6.1. Importance of Education for Mothers

Education is measured as a critical aspect of women’s empowerment; it becomes a great tool in the hands of mothers. This tool can bring a drastic change to raise a new generation toward social context, specifically in developing countries where the quality of education is still the main issue for most children. Mothers are the most influential personality if we talk about children; their impact on their lives creates the most change. Her love, care, and attention bring shape in their lives and the children become adults, which they are destined to become. Since, the mother’s education and knowledge bring a life to a child’s future her education should be enough to act upon it (Gupta, 2020).

Comparing men’s and women’s rates of returning to education does not mean that their earning levels would be the same. Men have higher levels of earnings than women do. Therefore, daughters have more influence on the mother’s education than on sons, which may be a result of the traditional sexual differences of labor within the families (Hillier, 2023). The reason is mothers spend more time with daughters, especially in working on household, while fathers spend more time with sons. So, the mother’s education is always considered less attention, but their education plays the most important role in the development of both daughters and sons (King & Hill, 1995).

### 6.2. Child’s Development and Significance of Education for Mother

Educated mother ultimately develops healthier cognitive skills, which lead to the life of children at an early age. A number of research have informed that mothers who attain higher education with limited resources are more likely to engage in high-quality dealings with their children they have a great understanding of child development nowadays we can say that they have sufficient knowledge of parenting.

Research conducted at a University in New York discovered that educated mothers help their children prosper at school, not just by enhancing their educa-

tional performance but rather by structuring their behaviors and making social connections effective, which automatically leads to educational achievement (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023). Those mothers who attended minimum high school have more knowledge of the structure of schools and thus are well found with the value of learning and interacting, somewhat like speaking politely but strongly. Unlike uneducated mothers, educated mothers also engage their children in extracurricular activities in schools such as drama, fine arts, and music.

### 6.3. Certain Problems and Barriers for Student Mother

Many popular articles narrate the difficulties and certain barriers handled by student-mothers. Research conducted on student parents discovered the major three issues that occurred by this group. Retaining in the institution is the major problem; even the exact proportion of student-parents falling out remains unidentified. In the United States, “the increase in the reduction rate for former student, student mothers is one of the most severe problems in the American system of higher education today”. The other related issues consisted of the economic experienced by many student parents, shows as a result of the absence of funding for childcare and other related course cost, as well as inadequate convenience for paid work (Wainwright & Marandet, 2010). Another major issue related to retention is the deficiency of time and managing conflicts that occurred on being a student, a guardian, and sometimes a worker (Wainwright & Marandet, 2010). “Inadequate time” can also end up in inadequate commitment in the student community and, in some situations, bring out in isolation.

Burns, Scott, & Cooney (1993) found juggling family and work to find enough time to study and complete assignments hard to handle. Student parents reported that study time was only possible after the rest of the family was in bed. Another struggle for second-year students was the open-ended nature of work, like, it was difficult to find out how much was anticipated. Because of this confusion unlike traditional students, mature students have started studying without any criteria for what is an “acceptable” assignment.

While identifying the experiences of mothers in getting higher education at a university with limited financial resources. To understand the depth, twelve participants with low-income student mothers were selected who are pursuing a degree in an undergraduate program at colleges in the City University of New York. Student mothers were somehow missing, as they did not have enough social capital in that regard (James, 2018). The study provides evidence, that advocates that economic factors could affect the student’s ability to persist. As student-mothers reported, childcare support was needed the most so that they could feel easier to engage in academic activities. Even though they have childcare Centres at their school they only allow a child to enter when the mother is in the class, after the school ends the child must be picked up. This shows their frustration with such policies implemented by the university, and ultimately, their ability to have time for study shortened. Many student-mothers hide their university trips out of guilt

when they need to focus on the assignment or whenever they get home late after class (Navarro-Cruz et al., 2023).

There are a wide range of consequences that occur for young and unmarried becoming pregnant. Therefore, the student mothers had to suffer their failure to be good daughters. They had to manage to be students along with becoming a mother while handling so many practical issues such as financial and childcare support. Carrying the weight of responsibilities for both of their roles, the emotional burden of guilt and shame, absences, and failure at being a good mother makes them feel invisible. They limit their own needs and efforts to have a successful career. The feeling of unworthiness for getting help or support ultimately develops a sense of blaming themselves for their struggles. While the university culture results in pregnant and student parents feeling invisible. These students also described a pattern of interpersonal experiences in the classroom that increased their visibility but produced negative consequences.

A study conducted by Osafo and Akomaning (2017) to see the challenges faced by student-mothers and what are the coping strategies they apply. He found the student-mothers had many difficult non-academic activities to perform in their daily life at home. Exemptions from such tasks as doing farm work and fetching water, student mothers had to cook food, wash clothes, clean their homes, and especially care for their children every day. School-going children were taken to and from the school daily. Hence, the study time for mothers automatically became secondary after their home tasks. When children get sick, they put aside all their activities including academic work, and attend them at home or in the medical center (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023).

#### 6.4. Single Mother and Higher Education

Pressure and burden on single mothers make them feel isolated from peers because of their maternal roles and the challenges of studies. However, the social interactions of young single mothers become limited which does not allow them to enjoy themselves with peers. Declined rate of higher education social capital influenced access to higher education. Positive and powerful social connections were imperative to increasing social capital and access to higher education (Barber, 2018).

Higher education evolution seems to be tough, particularly for working single mothers. The risk of difficulties for single mothers is high as they are busy with the responsibilities of children and studying both, which leads them to complete their course longer. As far as single parents are concerned, they are managing work, home, and family alone, this was the major problem in their choice to become mature students, and this was the group with the biggest number of barriers (major concerns were lecture timing and the providing childcare support).

Stress present in a single parent is primarily more than an average college student's academic experience. For example, they might have to plan childcare, look after sick or special needs children, feeding, assist them with homework, and take

children to doctor's appointments even with the allocation of financial resources to study to make sure their academic achievement, these are some challenges of single mother students which they face every week.

A study conducted discussed the single mothers living in New Zealand. Single mother ensures to get federal government social security in the form of parenting support and work as a tutor in university and hospitality. Whereas she receives certainly no financial support in terms of child support. The participant in the study has a strong academic background belongs to the middle class; on the other hand, she survives with financial pressure. They are facing challenges in terms of time, money, and space to study to support their capabilities to study at a post-graduate level. Constraints on parental care work are prescriptively assigned and are critical in ensuring fullness in higher education and empowering under-represented students' access to the rights of higher education.

The study conducted by Longhurst, Hodgetts, & Stolte (2012) focuses on the emotions of single "lone-mothers" goes through. The study examines the twelve lone mothers involved in higher education within two universities in two different cities of New Zealand. Conversely, single mothers in higher education are quite judged bitterly by some. The participants' faces guilt, shame, lack of tome for their children, but also pride in their achievement in study. These sentiments get overlap when the mothers discuss the feeling of guilt but also, they are making sacrifices now to make a better future for their family and children. Negotiation of these emotions construct their mental health morally and more worthy for them. Single mothers are appealing to consider as "the oppressed" or "the shamed" and the individuals who judge these ways as "the oppressors" or "the shamers" and these differences are clearly understood. Single mothers who have faced a guilt and shame can at time also inflame these emotions in others.

Family is important to first-generation students to assist with persistence; they need family support along with them as compared to non-first-generation peers; differences between fulfilling academic activities with family responsibilities were least, therefore, the was a big gap in the connections between families and institutions of these students. It has been notified that if family support for college students would be reconsidered, it allows peers and institutions to recognize the struggles of family to work with students and their parents to bring more chance in students' achievement and persistence (Williams, 2018).

Students who had strong connection with mentors and advisors on daily basis are more successful in their academics. The behaviour of staff made a big difference in their academic persistence like, helping them in their needs, caring, and getting answers of the queries, understanding, encouraging them with wise words, and spending a quality time with them.

### **6.5. Married Women and Higher Education in Pakistan**

In Pakistan women in general and especially a married women face so many barriers while getting higher education. They are not allowed to pursue towards

higher education because of social, religious, economic, and educational factors. Women is dependent on support from family, financial stability, and a perspective of husband. Conservative families think that higher education will bring out more freedom and delay in their marriage for their daughter. Personal security and educational institutes in other cities are also a barrier for married women. They are not allowed to move in another city for higher education because they must manage their family, household and even look after their children. Financial stability is another cause for a married woman, husband may not be able to bear the educational expenditures as a women herself is not allowed to do a job and pay for herself. Ultimately, the husband thinks that the women may not listen to him, and it may grant them unrestricted freedom. Time management is a big issue for married women, as she must manage her domestic tasks, which is quite more important for families in Pakistani culture. It may bring them under stress and anxiety that negatively affect their academic life (Behlol & Irfan, 2016).

Usually, female students feel hesitation from male teachers. In our society the joint family systems and bradari system where men are not enough educated so they think, if their wife is more educated than husband, she will dominate him and may not fulfil the responsibilities of family. People think that women have no need to do a job hence she should not pursue higher education. Accommodation problems due to residential facilities is an issue for a woman. University culture is getting modernized in the society. Private residential facilities are very expensive and there is no proper security arrangement. Limited transport facilities is also a major issue. Financial instability due to poverty is a barrier for higher education. There are limited separate women educational institutions, so the women face more problems in co-educational institutions because being a Muslim it is considered offensive (Naeem & Dahar, 2016).

## **7. Research Methodology**

### **7.1. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this phenomenology study was to focus on challenges faced by mother attaining higher education specifically in Pakistan. The study looked at the lives of mothers being a student and mother at same time and, how they manage their dual role. The factors that affect mothers when balancing a dual role at same time.

### **7.2. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research design. A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.

### **7.3. Target Population and Participant Selection**

The population for this study was all the mothers, including, single mothers,

working mothers, and married mothers aged between, twenty-five and fifty years, who are enrolled in the Universities of Lahore. The sample was collected using a purposive sampling technique and will consist of ten students, aged between twenty-five and fifty, who respond to solicitations to participate in the study. The purposive sampling technique is an intentional selection of informants based on their ability to explicate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon. The ten women who met the eligibility criteria comprised the sample and completed the interview (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Participants.

PSEUDONYM	MARITAL STATUS	OCCUPATION	AGE	NUMBER OF CHILD
Participant 1	Single Mother	Working	28	1
Participant 2	Single Mother	Working	43	2
Participant 3	Single Mother	Working	37	1
Participant 4	Single Mother	Working	37	1
Participant 5	Married	Homemaker	26	2
Participant 6	Married	Working	29	1
Participant 7	Married	Homemaker	28	2
Participant 8	Married	Working	31	1
Participant 9	Married	Working	38	2
Participant 10	Married	Homemaker	33	2

#### 7.4. Instrument

The interview method is frequently employed in phenomenology as it provides participants to directly share their experiences. Interview are one of the most effective method to collect data in qualitative research. For the purpose of interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol with open ended questions were conducted. "Semi-structured interviews consists of a number of key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to differ in order to pursue a response or an idea in more detail" (p. 291). One on one conversations with participants provide insight to the participant's own personal experiences and perceptions regarding the challenges faced in higher education. Interviews were the most effective way to find pattern and themes that depict the research questions.

#### 7.5. Procedure

The interview took place on a software ZOOM (COVID-19 was still around and due to this university campus is closed as per lockdown was imposed in Punjab). Participants were given date and time which suits them and, instructions were provided about how to give interview. Each participant were asked to participate in 25 to 30 minute interview that was recorded on the software, the file has been

saved on the laptop and transcribed by the researcher herself. Once the interview is recorded, the researcher went back to analyse the data. After that, the audio recording was sent to each participant to provide an opportunity to comment and review on the completed transcript. This served as a member check in the study. The recorded audio was stored on a secured laptop. Any portable storage devices such as USB drive were stored at researcher's home.

## 7.6. Data Analysis

Renner & Taylor-Powell (2003) stated “qualitative data consists of words and observations, not numbers” (p. 1). Data were analysed by using thematic analysis technique in qualitative research. Creswell (2014) described the systematic process of coding data where specific statements are analysed and categorized into themes that represent the phenomena of interest. Braun & Clarke (2006) also identified step-by-step procedure to analyse the data. The first step in the analysis entails familiarising oneself with the data, which includes reading and re-reading transcripts and noting down the initial codes. The second step involves generating initial codes across the data set. The third step is to search for the themes, the fourth step is about reviewing themes, and the fifth step is about defining and naming the themes. Finally the selection of clear extract is selected, related to the literature to generate an analysis report. Braun & Clarke (2006) report that these steps do not assume to be linear in every manner, moving from one place to another, rather, it is a recursive process with back-and-forth movements.

## 8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to focus on challenges faced by mother attaining higher education specifically in Pakistan. The study looked at the lives of mothers being a student and mother at same time and, how they manage their dual role. The factors that affect mothers when balancing a dual role at same time. The following themes and sub-themes were identified in the data. First, the theme about what motivated them in getting a higher education, and the sub-theme details the financial stability. The second sub-theme is about the better future and the third, sub-theme is about incomplete past degree. The second theme is difficulties in managing motherhood with studies. The sub-theme is about the time management, second sub-theme is financial constraints, and the third sub-theme is no child-care. Each of these themes are discussed below.

### 8.1. Motivation towards Higher Education

#### 8.1.1. Financial Stability

Participants reported that they to fulfil their dreams and now doing it for their children especially. They need to overcome with this situation and want to live a luxury life. The women's participation in a postgraduate programme could be seen as fulfilling life-long aspirations to achieve educationally and socially (Vryonides & Vitsilakisb, 2008).

Participant 1, single-working mother, 28, 1.

*“Being a single mother is already a big responsibility and I am myself not capable enough to bear my expenses along with my child, my job right now doesn't pay me enough so by getting higher education I feel that I will be having a good job”.*

Some participants mentioned they have no financial instability they are paying their dues alone. All the single mother reported financial constraints, those who live with husbands are quite convenient in paying their dues.

Participant 3, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*“Hhh, well you can say to improve my career and to give my child a better life. This was my motivation. I was not working before I have started working after two months when I got admission in MPhil. I am a single mother so I don't want somebody else to bear my and my daughter's expenses I knew it already that to pursue with my career I need more education and that would definitely help me achieve my goal”.*

Another student expresses the similar expectations towards her future goals.

Participant 5, married, Homemaker, 26, 1.

*“Although my husband was supportive but still, I want to earn for our better future and to do that I have to get education as much as I can. After completing my bachelors, I tried to get job, but I was so much upset (hhh) after visiting the market for the first time they paid me very less just because of my degree”.*

Participants who were married also faces financial difficulties. Their husbands were supporting them morally but some of them were not able to bear the educational expenditures of their wives. So those women reported to become financially independent so that they can continue with their education.

### **8.1.2. Better Future**

This 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to earn from both hands. To manage the house and family is becoming difficult. Mother and father both need to earn a handsome amount.

Participant 2, Single-working mother, 43, 2.

*“Ummm... Sadly (hhh) in Pakistan one cannot do much or involve much until or unless you have a degree in higher education so if you want to contribute in a society in any way you must have a degree to show your opinion. So when I decided to do something I thought why not doing more as I have done my masters already so now continued with MPhil so this is what pushes me to do more”.*

Participant 6, Married Working-mother, 29, 1.

*“I want a luxury lifestyle for me and my child too, that influenced me to study as much as I can”.*

Participant 10, Married, Homemaker 33, 2.

*“Life could never be the same if I am not doing anything now may be at some time, I must do some job to take care of family so one should have at least enough qualification to survive in that situation. Secondly, was my choice I always wanted to get higher education (feeling happy) for myself and now for my children”.*

Almost every participant from the interview reported the similar thing. Being a

mother every mother, wants a happy luxury and comfortable life for their children. One of the participants reported that she is already living a luxury life just because of her education. The above extract presents that every mother needs a better future for their own self and now for their children that is the reason for getting their education done.

### 8.1.3. Incomplete Past Degree

Those who have passion to study always find ways to get more chances of getting education. After becoming mother, you already have big responsibility of a child still a person wants to get education is a different kind of thing. The future of mothers also depict their motivation towards completing their education.

Participant 1, Single-working mother, 28, 1.

*“I feel like my past degree, means my graduation degree is incomplete I want to do specialization in a well-recognized program. Basically, I can't live without doing a job so I need to enhance my qualification for the sake of my job too”.*

In the above extract participant 1 shows that the need to complete their degree is important for their profession as well. The more you study more you get a chance to progress. Another student discussed in the interview that she also faces this problem in her professional life. To pursue her dreams, she need more education. She explains:

Participant 4, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*“I am working as a coordinator in a school, and I wanted to groom in my field and to bring more and more improvement in my career that was also influenced me to take admission in university as my past education wasn't enough, I have done master's in education but that wasn't fruitful for my professional life and I want to grow professionally (sigh)”.*

Participant 7, Married, Homemaker, 28, 2.

*“I felt that I am lacking behind from all my friends who are studying and working in different fields and pursuing their higher education. Sometimes I feel like what I have done before is incomplete maybe I should start doing my study again. So, I felt that why I am wasting a time I should give it a try. So yes, I am doing it”.*

Half of the students are regretting their decision of starting their higher education late. They reported that we should have started it earlier. Higher education has created a great impact on their life. So, to grow professionally and ethically one should complete their education.

## 8.2. Difficulties in Managing Motherhood with Studies

Student mothers values the time spent each day by fulfilling their role being a mother and student at same time. One important aspect of their managing to balance the dual role is their use of time. Time in this sense refer to the time student mothers have to achieve all that scheduled tasks. Time relates to the time being a student, time they have study, and time for self-care and other roles. The data was coded as individual interviews details the time for study and time for managing the family and house chores.

### 8.2.1. Time Management

Participant 4, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*“Same as I told you my child being neglected by me. I had a lot pressure especially of assignments like teachers pressurize for submission within a given timeframe and if you submit late sometimes they don't accept it. I was working plus I am mother and along with that I have to submit my assignments sometimes I can't cope up with the given timeframe besides that sometimes I was in hurry to submit and don't bother to look at it once and obviously that wasn't up to the mark”.*

Participant 6, Married Working mother, 29, 1.

*“My thesis supervisor is a British man he lives in England, so the time difference was another issue I have to be on his time although he is very much cooperative and he is such a young man he also understand my situation he gives me extra time whenever I want. But still sometimes I wasn't able to do my work even after having enough time”.*

Participant 9, Married Working-mother, 38, 2.

*“My children suffered a lot (H) and so did my husband. He was very much cooperative, but we haven't got time to talk about even important things. So we used to discuss the things on call. Early morning, I go to work as I am a school-teacher, and coming back home I cook for my family and then go to university to attend classes and mostly I came back at 8pm or 9pm so sometimes my husband was sleeping when I come back and sometimes I had gone to sleep so I didn't find time for my family (hhh). When I got any assignment, I had never find time to complete it even if I really want to”.*

The above extract shows that how much a time has become a major issue in handling daily life. Just because the women have become mother and she already has a big responsibility of a child so the studies has become a major issue for them. They also illustrate that even having extra time still they find difficulty in submitting and making assignments.

### 8.2.2. Financial Constraints

Being financially stable is another challenge for student mothers. Not all mothers are living a wealthy life so to study they have to manage their finances by supporting themselves. Even though students reported that their husbands are supporting them but still they have to do work to bear their university dues.

Furthermore, students discussed about how much it was important for them to do a job because they were financially weak. Moreover, single mothers are the most who faces financial difficulty.

Participant 2, Single-working mother, 43, 2.

*“Financially... yes definitely when you are studying so most often in cases you want that you improve yourself financially because you are looking for a better job opportunity. You may increase your finances by doing job may be a part time job with studies as I am myself a single mother”.*

*“Here in the case, she was financially stable but that was because of the scholarship she got because of her last result in her master's otherwise it was a big prob-*

lem for her. She added:

*So basically, financially constraints were that actually positive in a sense I was getting scholarship on my Master's merit and even my daughter is getting scholarship Masha Allah so if I won't getting scholarship I may not be taking admission".*

Participant 3, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*"My finances were managed by my mother my master's degree has been funded by her I have paid for one semester other three semesters fee were paid by her including admission and everything. You can say this is a sense of relief or privilege that I have my mother who supports me financially as well as morally. But still, I feel like this a burden on your head because at this stage you are independent enough and you feel like this is my responsibility why someone else is fulfilling it, so you can say this might be sense of guilt or responsibility as I should be the one doing it rather than someone else".*

Like this participant 4 expressed her guilt of not able to pay for herself. This support from family has become a sense of guilt for them.

Participant 4, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*"My mother is paying my dues although my whole family is very supportive but still that guilt in my heart always makes me feel bad (sigh). I should be the one to support my parents, but time has taken that advantage from me. But I am trying to bear my most of the expenses by doing job".*

Two from the five student mothers who are married found a financial difficulty while doing their studies. They expressed in a way, at that time they become exhausted and regret their decision.

Participant 5, Married, Homemaker, 26, 2.

*"There was a time when I regret my decision because I was so exhausted (Ahhh) being a mother and being wife, I was not able to handle those responsibilities. There comes a time when my financials were disturbed that was another issue I faced. So, I regret my decision and want to quit my studies (mmm). The above extract clearly shows that financial constraints for the single mothers were the big issue they had to do job for the sake of money. On the other hand, married women also face such kind of a problem. Not every mother is able to do three tasks at same time, working, studying, and managing home".*

### **8.2.3. No Child-Care**

For every mother the most important thing for them is their child and all of the students reported that they are completing their higher education because of the better future for their children. But this decision has ended up the time for their children. All the respondents felt guilty about not giving proper time to their children.

Participant 3, Single-working mother, 37, 1.

*"Currently when I am giving her time there are lot things going around my mind actually that was a free time which is other than my responsibilities so you know in your free time still you think. Think about okay how to streamline the*

*things which are left and you have to do so it's like even if you are not working and studying your mind is constantly running which is quite unfair for that child (mmm). Even now you are spending time with her but still your mind is somewhere else (ahhh) is like you are taking away her right and your mind is not present”.*

All the working student mothers faces this challenge they have totally neglected their child.

And this has created a serious impact in their life.

Participant 9, Married, Working, 38, 2.

*“<Yeah> Time has ended up for my children (sigh). And it has created very bad impact on my children's education. When I started university, my daughter was going in pre-school the things which she has learned already I wasn't found time to made her revise all those things it was her basic foundation year where her base was developing for her whole life and because of my busy routine she has become zero in everything and I am facing this issue till now (hhh)”.*

Similar is the situation expressed by another student.

Participant 10, Married, Homemaker, 33, 2.

*“Unfortunately, (mmm) I am not giving plenty of time to my children. One thing I would like to change is to reduce the assignment load being done from home. If this happens it would be such a relief (hhh)”.*

The above extract draws on the student's response concerning the care at home. For almost every student faces this challenge from the day they have started their university, their children had suffered a lot. Although they always have somebody at home to take care of their child but still the connection between a mother and a child is broken. No one else could perform them responsibilities a mother can do. Some mother responded that, there are always in a hurry to go back home just to visit their children. Some mothers face COVID-19 pandemic during their studies, but that wasn't even fruitful they discussed about the work-from-home and online classes has tighten their routine and still they couldn't manage to break this chain.

## **9. Discussion**

This study comprises of single mothers as well as married women having one or more than one child. Those mothers are the only provider to their children. Some of the mothers have grown up child and they too are getting higher education. Those mothers have need more finances as compared to those who have children going to school. The better future financial stability and as it has been discussed all the student mothers are working and to grow professionally, they needed to complete their higher education.

On the other hand, student mothers living with their husband also need to get educated for their child and their better future. Education means not only better economic prospects in the future, but also more cultural capital (Ji, 2013). Here in the case, student mothers discussed that they want to become something which made their child feel proud and they believe that education will help them to pur-

sue their dreams. An educated mother could produce additional fostering and better environment for child's improvement, for example, better parenting, have sufficient economic inputs, better understanding of knowledge and high competence in social capital investment.

In this research every student mother desired to have a better future for their child. Children educational level in the family depends more on the educational level of parents, so this factor highly affects the family relationships and the successful development of children. Financial stability also increases the chance of better future, here in this 21<sup>st</sup> century the competition is very high. Both male and females are working to fulfil their needs, and to fulfil those needs both are working and playing their part to support each other.

Some mothers reported that before starting their higher education they thought that they can manage their studies and home easily but with the passage of time they feel regretted with their decision because they found themselves so much occupied with their child. Although, they have always somebody at home for their children but as we know mother herself is a teacher to her child, a mentor and everything. Since, most of the student mothers have child below aged 10 so they have found really difficult to manage their time. All of the student mothers reported that time management has become the major issue in their academic career. They found very less time for their studies, as some researchers also discussed the same issue in their study. Time management is a big issue for married women, as she has to manage her domestic tasks, which is quite more important for families in Pakistani culture. It may bring them under stress and anxiety that negatively affect their academic life (Behlol & Irfan, 2016). Other than Pakistani culture, mothers are born with responsibility. In this study every student mother faces the same issue of submitting late assignment and here in one case, either they have no time to submit assignment on time or that assignment was not up to the mark. Students argued as their assignment was not "acceptable" even not for them. The reason for not having enough time for studies was also because of the student mothers are working.

The participants in this study disclosed their experience of having no child-care during their studies. This has created a very bad impact on their child's future. While the student mothers have always somebody at home with their child, but they reported as something is missing in their brought-up. The mothers face extreme stress and while studying they felt like they should not have started their higher education as their child were already left out. Their absence from home negatively affects their child's mental health. Student mother of infant or toddler faced less problem, while mother of grown-up child faces this situation the most. One of the students' mothers reported that, whenever she need to go to visit her university her children got upset and disturbed. Student mothers in this study agreed upon the same thing, they want to give their child more time but unfortunately, they couldn't manage to do that. The results of this study clearly indicated that student mothers had lived up their life while attaining higher education with

so many challenges.

## 10. Recommendations

Researching the experience of student mothers could contribute to the creation of effective university strategies and programmes to help student mothers achieve their dreams. The findings of this study about the experience of student mothers develop the knowledge we have about the contemporary mother. This could be used to develop university policies to assist students.

Current and previous research stated in this study highlights the experience of student mothers who are currently pursuing their higher education. Students, who went through the same experience but left the university because of having a child, were therefore not included in the study. Further research could explore the challenges that these ex-students face.

Future research could also explore the effective strategies to overcome these challenges faced while attaining higher education. Secondly, students which fall pregnant while attaining higher education and how the responsibility of studies affect their health should also be explored.

## 11. Conclusion

The research identifies multiple factors that make the lives of student mothers challenging, particularly as they balance the dual roles of motherhood and education, often alongside work. Key influences include their motivations for pursuing higher education, such as securing a better future, financial stability, or completing prior education, and the significant challenges they face, like financial constraints, time management struggles, and inadequate childcare. Single mothers were especially burdened as sole providers, while married mothers often juggled work and household responsibilities. The support systems, primarily from husbands, family, and occasionally empathetic teachers, played a crucial role in their ability to continue their education, though universities generally lacked institutional support. The study highlights the impact of these challenges on their academic performance, family dynamics, and personal well-being. Despite these hardships, the resilience of student mothers, driven by their aspirations for their children's better future, allowed them to persevere. Their university life before motherhood was joyful and carefree, but after becoming mothers, it turned stressful and isolated, with little time for social or extracurricular activities. Those with older children faced fewer challenges than mothers of infants or toddlers.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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## Appendix A

### Interview guide

- 1) How do you perceive a word “mother”?
- 2) What influence you the most in applying for university?
- 3) How would you explain your experience being a university student?
- 4) What difficulties encountered while being a student?
- 5) How do you manage your family life with studies?
- 6) What has changed the most in your life being a student?
- 7) Do you feel you are having enough time for childcare? If you want to change something, what it could be?
- 8) Do you think the university staff and administration is aware that you have a child? Why? Why not?
- 9) Have you told your peers that you have child?
- 10) Do you get support from your family, friends, and community?
- 11) Does University provide some sort of support for you being a mother?
- 12) What could the university do to make your life easier and comfortable?
- 13) In your opinion, do you think you took the right decision?

## Appendix B

### Participant Consent Form



School of School of Social Sciences and Humanities

#### Consent to participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: A study of Challenges Faced by Mothers While Attaining Higher Education

Researcher: Hareem Fatima, MPhil Scholar in the Department of Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities at University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Supervisor: Dr. Sajid Masood, Assistant Professor, Advisor PhD Programs, Department of Education

You are invited to participate in this research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information below provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.

#### Important Information You Need to Know

You are being asked to participate in research study “challenges faced by mothers while attaining higher education”. The purpose of this study is to identify what challenges student-mothers face while attaining higher education. The study comprise of a research that will be collected through interviews.

Following is the eligibility criteria you may check:

- A mother having one or more children and aged between 25 to 50 getting higher education;
- Studying in Universities of Lahore fall 2019 to 2021.

If you are volunteer to participate than you are warmly welcome. This interview will take your 20 to 25 minutes. The project might bring some risks which are unknown. Participant might feel insecure, mild emotional discomfort while discussing the issues related to their life experiences. Participants are highly motivated and encouraged to answer the question by staying at their level of comfort. You may choose to skip a question if you feel discomfort.

Benefits to you as a study motivate and encourage student mothers to go with a flow and complete their studies. Benefits to the society as many other women who have a fear to manage this dual role might get motivated.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide

whether to participate in this research study.

**Why are we doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to identify challenges faced by mothers while attaining higher education.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a mother having one or more children, age 25-50, and studying in Universities of Lahore.

**What will happen if I take part in this study?**

If you choose to participate you will complete one individual interview for 25 to 30 minutes.

The interview will be recorded on phone call using a phone recorder. The interview will also be transcribed. You will be provided the opportunity to review and comment on your completed transcript. The audio and transcription will be stored within secure Google Drive and only research team members will be given access privileges to the Google Drive folder(s), wherein the research data will be saved in a secured laptop. Any portable storage devices used will be stored at home of the researcher.

**How will my information be used after the study is over?**

The data collected will not be shared, however, findings may be circulated at conferences or in journals.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this study?**

You will not get paid to participate in the study.

**Consent to Participate**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.