



Traversing Parenthood and Academia: The Resiliency of Student Mothers in Philippine Higher Education

Abstract: This study explored the experiences of student-mothers at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus during the academic year 2024-2025, focusing on their resilience in balancing academic pursuits with motherhood. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research began with a survey of 43 student-mothers to determine their demographic profiles (age, marital status, financial status, living arrangements) and assess their satisfaction across Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Findings reveal that student-mothers are predominantly in their early twenties, financially dependent, and often single or partnered, with most living with relatives. These conditions significantly influence their capacity to manage academic obligations while raising their children. Following the quantitative phase, 15 participants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to gain a richer understanding of their challenges and coping strategies. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed key challenges such as role conflict, financial hardship, and emotional exhaustion. However, participants also demonstrated remarkable resilience, often attributed to strong familial and social support networks and intrinsic motivation stemming from their children and personal aspirations. The study's findings were synthesized into "Dasig sa Kagabhion," a creative novelette developed using the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, designed to offer a compelling narrative representation of the student-mother experience in higher education.

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1.Introduction

The intertwining nature of academic activities is quite challenging, and this is escalated with motherhood responsibilities. The academic community focuses mainly on success, development, and never-ending competitions without providing necessary support Moghamad, A., & Alshahrani, A. (2019). Therefore, taking on motherhood along with studies is quite challenging in higher education. Student-mothers' enrolment in higher education has been increasing worldwide, as found by (Williams et al., 2006). A woman may enthusiastically embrace the dual roles of mother and student; however, undertaking these roles, even in ideal conditions, can pull one person in two directions (Springer et al., 2009). Combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for student mothers.

Women's participation in education is a determining factor for achieving societal development goals (Esia-Donkoh, 2014). As a fundamental human right, every individual



wants to avail himself/herself the opportunity of self-development, hence the existence of student mothers irrespective of their status, which is quite different from other students. Student mothers have been the largest and rapidly growing student demography in institutions of higher learning around the world since 1966 (Williams et al., 2006). This group of students is inspiring and hard-working, trying to make the most out of every available chance (National Union of Students, 2008). Thus, being a student mother coupled with the responsibility of caring for a little child should not be perceived as a hurdle to engaging in education and training (Brooks, 2012).

In the Philippines, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported in 2014 that among the young adult women ages 15 to 24 who experienced early pregnancy and motherhood, 21 percent are with college education while 44 percent are with Elementary education. (Syuraini, 2020) expressed that college students who are involved in early motherhood are facing various challenges as these dual roles (parenting and schooling) is not an easy task. However, the enthusiasm of their children's success is one of the reasons student mothers reenter university or colleges.

Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) highlight that student mothers might face different barriers including emotional pressures and negative feedback from others. Retention is a major problem, in spite of the exact ratio of student mothers dropping out which remains unknown (Moreau and Kerner, 2012). Other challenges include care-giving activities and inability of the students to graduate from school with a degree (IWPR, 2013), anger, loneliness, restlessness, skipping lectures, failing of some courses (Taukeni, 2014). With these and few other problems facing student mothers in the higher institutions, provision of a form of support should be seen as a very pertinent strategy to be adopted for alleviating their pains and sorrows.

Being a student mother entails a parallel role combination of parenting and academic activities. The intertwining of these two roles is a challenging competition considering the volume of responsibilities it forces on such students. In this study, the researchers investigated the needs satisfactions, the challenges, resilience strategies, and support mechanisms utilized by student mothers in higher education. In response to the increasing number of student mothers and the significance of higher education as a stepping stone to higher earning (Kruvelis et. al., 2017), it is equally vital to identify the challenges they face and the institutions support for them.

2. Review of Related Literature

Based on the proposed problem and objective of the study, which is to understand the resilience of student mothers, this review of related literature will compare single, partnered, and married student mothers. This study's respondents will be classified as 'partnered,' a designation that includes both married individuals and those cohabiting with partners, irrespective of whether these partners are the biological fathers of the mothers' children. This review will delve into the challenges faced by these individuals, examine their coping mechanisms, and investigate the motivations that drive them to persist in their academic endeavors within higher education institutions.

This literature review highlights student mothers' common challenges in pursuing their education. Previous research has shown a particularly significant challenge in the dual role they occupy as both caregivers and students, which leads to various difficulties, including time constraints, financial pressures, societal expectations and stigma, and emotional distress. The struggle to balance these responsibilities often results in considerable stress and fatigue as they



endeavor to achieve academic excellence while providing for their children (Gatbonton, 2021). **Time constraints.** According to findings from Johnson (2022), participants articulated their experiences as a persistent challenge in balancing their responsibilities as mothers and students. They faced difficulties in effectively managing their time and contending with financial constraints. Many reported a reduction in personal time, a decline in their social engagements (Montaño et al., 2024; Pardillo, 2023; Cabilao et al., 2024; Sicam et al., 2024; Chandler, 2010), and obstacles related to class scheduling. Furthermore, the participants believed that many of these challenges could be alleviated if they had additional time, facilitating greater engagement and a more balanced workload. Even without the duality of working or studying, parenting is a difficult job (Rionda, I. S., et al. (2021)). They must establish their priorities because their time is being divided (Paradillo, 2023). Taukeni (2014) stated that mothers have significant challenges with the shortage of time for students to spend with their kids, spouses, large families, and friends, as well as to study and finish their homework.

A prior study by Augustine et al. (2019) examined the time allocation of mothers between their children and work or educational commitments. The findings indicate that student mothers allocate approximately one hour less time to their children than non-college mothers, with a difference of 23 minutes in child-focused activities. Regarding self-care, student mothers experience an average deficit of 23 minutes in sleep and 53 minutes in leisure time, resulting in a total reduction of 76 minutes compared to their non-student counterparts. Notably, student mothers often allocate less time to their children, particularly in activities that promote child development. In a study by Li and Gou (2023), spending more time with children enhances their well-being. Both mothers' leisure time and fathers'

educational interactions positively impact children's well-being. Unfortunately, this privilege is unavailable to both single and partnered student mothers (Garingan, 2023; Andres, 2021); hence, past research shows that mothers fear this reduction in engagement may affect their children's overall experiences and well-being.

Financial pressure.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) presented data indicating that a significant number of single women live at or near poverty levels. According to their findings, 89% of single mothers enrolled in college fall into the low-income category (IWPR, 2017). Maggio (2019) examined the high costs of raising children, noting that the average household incurs over \$233,000 (13,653,975 PHP) in expenses to raise one child from birth until age 18, which amounts to approximately \$14,000 (819,050 PHP) per year for each child. "Mother-only" families are especially vulnerable to insufficient economic conditions, largely due to diminished earning potential stemming from inadequate education or training, alongside the absence of support from non-residential fathers (Ramos & Tus, 2020). This financial burden is particularly challenging for single parents, leading to several disadvantages for those pursuing higher education. For example, they often work full-time and struggle to find affordable, high-quality childcare for their children (Johnson, 2022). Moreover, IWPR (2017) reported that single mothers faced an average unmet college expense of over \$6,600 (385,578 PHP), exceeding non-parenting women by \$1,700 (99,315 PHP) and married mothers by \$2,000 (116,842 PHP).

Although the financial burden may be alleviated, it persists for married or partnered individuals, particularly in households with disabled, lower-earning, or non-earning spouses (Andres, 2021; Sicam et al., 2021; Garingan, 2023). For married partners, financial



responsibilities include managing the economic aspects of the family, including budgeting, saving, and spending. These elements are crucial for achieving financial stability and minimizing marital conflicts (Kordzanganeh et al., 2021). Consequently, conflicts and challenges emerge when these expected commitments are unmet. Individuals in partnered households frequently struggle to balance caregiving duties with academic obligations, which can lead to reduced opportunities for paid employment (Williams et al., 2022). This reliance on loans or public assistance can become particularly pronounced in families where one partner has a lower earning potential.

Economic and material risks are common reasons why nontraditional students—in this case, student mothers—drop out of college studies (Brine & Waller, 2004; Scott et al., 1996). Vyskocil (2018) highlights student narratives that reveal the significant challenges posed by the looming burden of student debt and its broader societal implications. The discourse surrounding this issue reflects a profound internal struggle regarding the decision to pursue advanced education while taking on substantial debt versus remaining at lower educational and income levels, which would involve living with reduced debt (Vyskocil, 2018).

Societal Expectation and Stigma.

According to research by Alvarado et al. (2023), a prejudiced mindset towards the student-mothers' situation seemed inevitable even in varying environments. Most of society's perceptions towards them are inclined more toward the narrative that being a mother at a young age means being disgraced, disappointed, and unable to complete their studies. Being a mother and a student simultaneously is often viewed as abnormal in universities, leading to emotional pressure and negative feedback that prioritizes studies over

motherhood; hence, they face discrimination and are labeled as unproductive by peers (Ramirez et al., 2021). The stigma associated with being a young mother can also create an environment where they feel unwelcome or unsupported (Coronel, 2020). Student mothers frequently face societal pressures to fulfill conventional caregiving roles while simultaneously striving to achieve their educational aspirations, such as remaining at home to care for their children (Montaño et al., 2024). External pressures can result in internalized stigma and feelings of inadequacy; however, some individuals use these experiences to reshape their identities, as Adams and Nelson (2014) noted. Such judgments can intensify stress levels and foster feelings of isolation. In the Philippines, cultural expectations emphasize traditional family structures, where men are typically seen as breadwinners while women are expected to remain at home. This dynamic complicates understanding single mothers' situations and often increases scrutiny of their circumstances (Alcantara, 1994).

Emotional distress.

Combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for student mothers (Vissick, 2009). Feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inadequacy often arise from the struggle to balance motherhood with academic responsibilities (Ogunji et al., 2020). Research conducted by Rousou et al. (2019) indicates that single mothers often exhibit a higher susceptibility to mental health disorders due to a lack of social and emotional support typically associated with a partner, coupled with the need to mitigate the risk of economic hardship. Furthermore, studies demonstrate a correlation between single motherhood and adverse mental health outcomes, suggesting that these individuals may experience significant moments of emotional distress. Tunajina, as cited by Dagupon and Garin (2019), articulates



that the responsibilities and challenges single mothers face can lead to feelings of depletion and distress.

Vyskocil (2018) highlighted some prominent terms that emerged as single mothers enroll in higher education: guilt and pressure. Feelings of guilt frequently arose when academic performance was subpar, or students could not attend their children's events, while pressure stemmed from the competing demands of school, work, and childcare. Many felt that, due to their non-traditional roles, there was a conflict between being a responsible parent and achieving academic success (Vyskocil, 2018). Partnered and single student mothers alike often grapple with this sense of guilt. Kubeka (2016) highlights issues stemming from life events that appear to disrupt effective mothering. Many student mothers express concerns about not living up to the ideal standards of good mothering. They cite factors such as the time spent away from their child, missing important developmental milestones, and striving to meet their child's needs at any cost. Similarly, Mayer (2009) shares instances where mothers conveyed feelings of guilt about their inability to fulfill their roles as they desire. In studies by Funiba (2011) and Sekgobela (2008), student mothers reported feelings of guilt for not meeting societal expectations of motherhood. Funiba's (2011) study revealed that these mothers were aware of societal norms and felt inadequate for not dedicating enough time to their mothering responsibilities.

Student mothers, in general, often experience an increased sense of responsibility and pressure. Based on past research, it appears particularly challenging for them to balance competing responsibilities, as they must prioritize both their children's needs and their academic commitments—each demanding careful attention and time (Alvarado, 2023;

Ogunji, 2023; Dag-um et al., 2024; Ramirez, 2021; Maluleke, 2023).

Resilience is recognized as a vital character trait that aids individuals in overcoming challenges in their lives (Ibrahim, 2018). Student motherhood can be understood as a dynamic and often positive experience, though it frequently presents challenges due to the dual responsibilities of parenting and education (Maluleke et al., 2023); hence, student mothers require support to navigate the complex interplay of these responsibilities effectively. This support is crucial for helping them cope with the demands of being both a student and a mother. Several factors contribute to their resilience in this situation, including a strong social network, effective time management and prioritization strategies, and a sense of personal fulfillment.

Social Network. Social support plays a crucial role in the perseverance of student mothers, enabling them to navigate the considerable challenges associated with balancing academic and parental responsibilities. Drageset (2021) defines social support as the characteristics of an individual's social network that assist in managing everyday life. Research indicates that emotional support from family and friends is instrumental in facilitating the transition to college and sustaining persistence while pursuing a degree (Cerven, 2013; Lashley & Ollivierre, 2014; Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2002). Johnson (2022) highlights that participants in recent studies identified key personnel—such as advisors, teachers, and mentors—who contributed positively to their experiences. Establishing relationships with faculty, staff, and peers fosters support networks and connections, which in turn cultivates a sense of belonging that can motivate students toward success. Sicam et al. (2021) also noted that the rapport established between a student's mother and her classmates often resulted in peer assistance with childcare



when she brought her child to school. Additionally, teachers were observed to provide flexibility regarding assignments and deadlines in such circumstances. Additionally, Cabilao (2024) emphasizes that friendships provide safe spaces for emotional expression and relaxation, helping to alleviate feelings of isolation and stress. Regular social interactions, including outings with friends, are valuable breaks from daily pressures. This balance of social engagement and individual activities is crucial for managing stress and creating a supportive environment conducive to navigating the demands of student life and parenthood.

Furthermore, a study by Kim, Jeon S., and Song J. (2023) reveals that being a single parent can lead to social marginalization for single mothers, contributing to issues such as depression and low self-esteem. Everyday experiences among single mothers foster camaraderie, reinforcing the idea that belonging to a group with shared experiences enhances feelings of support and connectedness. This finding aligns with research by Fajarwati et al. (2019), which asserts that social support is vital for boosting self-confidence when confronting life's challenges. Cultural factors also play a significant role; Elterman (as referenced by Ramos and Tus, 2020) notes that Filipinos typically maintain close-knit family structures. In this context, family members often assist—whether financially or by caring for children—while the single mother pursues her work. Emotional support from family and friends is paramount in enhancing the well-being of single mothers, as their advice and encouragement can serve as motivation, instilling hope and the belief that circumstances can improve (Ramos and Tus, 2020).

For married student mothers, their spouses often serve as a crucial source of emotional support. This support encompasses empathy,

understanding, and encouragement, which are vital for marital satisfaction and stability (Mannino et al., 2019). Research shows that spouses frequently act as the primary source of both emotional and practical assistance for student mothers. Ogunji et al. (2020) emphasized that many student mothers depend on their husbands for help with childcare and finances, significantly reducing the stress of juggling academic and parenting responsibilities. A study conducted by Dankyi and Dankyi (2023) focusing on the husbands of student mothers found that having a supportive partner involved in household duties can significantly boost the academic performance of student mothers. Partners engaging in childcare and domestic responsibilities frees up more time for mothers to concentrate on their studies, ultimately enriching their educational journey. In a study by Dag-um et al. (2024), a central theme of interpersonal relationships and support emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and family support in alleviating the stress and conflicts associated with managing dual roles. Respect between partners fosters understanding and cooperation, reducing tensions and improving conflict resolution. A supportive family, with shared responsibilities and emotional encouragement, enhances resilience among married students. This system provides practical help and emotional strength, helping students balance academic and marital responsibilities.

Time management and prioritization strategies.

As previously stated, many student mothers face a common hurdle: time constraints. A review of past literature has shown that student mothers frequently report that time is one of their most significant challenges. Many studies highlight that they often feel "chronically time-poor," struggling to balance academic responsibilities with childcare and household duties (Anane et al., 2021; Johnson, 2022;



Dankyi et al., 2019). For instance, a study found that 64% of student mothers cited time management as the most challenging aspect of their experience, indicating how crucial effective time management is for their success (Owen, 2024). Similarly, Andres (2021) found that time management is crucial for balancing roles, as student mothers must prioritize academics, parenting, and personal care. One respondent shared that to manage their time effectively, they prepare for the next day each night, ensuring their children have their pocket money and clothes ready. They also take the time to clean and dedicate an hour to reading or completing schoolwork before bed. Effective prioritization is essential for student mothers to navigate their responsibilities. Research has shown that many mothers adopt structured schedules or planners to organize their daily tasks, allowing them to allocate specific times for studying, attending classes, and spending quality time with their children (Gloria, 2020). This structured approach helps them manage competing demands more effectively.

Similarly, various studies show student participants using compartmentalization—where they focus on one role at a time—and utilizing support systems, such as family or childcare services, to alleviate some of the burdens (Taukeni, 2014; Johnson, 2022; Anane et al., 2021; Alvarado et al., 2023). The ability to compartmentalize tasks enables individuals to focus entirely on either academic work or parenting responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed by both at the same time. In a study by In Taukeni (2014), a recurring theme is that student mothers often leave their children in the care of their parents or partners in order to concentrate on their studies. As a result, they take on fewer parenting responsibilities while their parents or partners assume a greater role in raising the children. In line with this strategy, Johnson (2022) noted that respondents who create and adhere to strict schedules “label almost every hour of every day and explain

how schedules must be followed to make their lives work.”

Vyskocil (2018) emphasized that students frequently struggle with the pressures arising from conflicts between school, work, home, and childcare, identifying time management as an essential tool for success. However, unforeseen events and accidents can occur, necessitating that student mothers remain adaptable and flexible in their time management strategies. As circumstances evolve—such as a child’s illness or unexpected academic demands—they must be able to adjust their plans accordingly while continuing to meet both their academic and parenting responsibilities. Dankyi et al. (2019) found that student mothers often need to adjust their expectations regarding academic performance and participation. They demonstrate adaptability by being flexible with their study habits. To prepare for examinations, these mothers engage in group study sessions, study at night while their babies sleep, seek support from their husbands and other relatives for childcare, and arrange special classes with course tutors when they encounter difficulties with the material. Additionally, by acknowledging that they may not be able to participate in all activities as fully as their peers, they can focus on what is feasible given their circumstances. This shift in perspective can alleviate feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Kubeka, 2016).

Self-fulfillment and betterment. In a review of existing literature, financial challenges emerge as one of the most prevalent issues student mothers encounter. However, these challenges also serve as a significant motivation for individuals to pursue their studies. A study conducted by Brown and Nichols (2012) emphasizes that single student mothers in higher education perceive education as a vital means to break the cycle of poverty and create better life opportunities for their children. They regard their perseverance as a crucial life lesson



for their offspring, instilling values of resilience and the importance of education. Furthermore, research by Cabilao (2024) indicates that, despite facing numerous challenges, participants actively embrace opportunities to earn income, recognizing these opportunities as essential steps toward achieving a brighter future. This demonstrates considerable strength and determination. Supportive evidence is found in the studies conducted by Chandler (2010) and Navarro (2019), which collectively highlight the participants' overarching aspiration to improve their careers and living standards for themselves and their families. A common theme throughout these studies is the strong motivation for pursuing higher education, driven by financial aspirations and the desire for career advancement. Many participants underscore the significance of financial stability and improved career opportunities, while also emphasizing personal development and the intention to serve as positive role models for their children.

Maslow's self-actualization theory provides a framework for understanding human needs and motivational factors, emphasizing the importance of growth and the realization of one's potential. This theory asserts that individuals possess the capacity to be effective, enhance the quality of their lives, and ultimately achieve their fullest potential (Maslow, 1954). Previous literature supports this notion, particularly among single parents who have expressed a desire for higher levels of achievement, goal-oriented pursuits, enhanced opportunities, personal fulfillment, and the attainment of lifelong objectives (Wahl, 2018). Such motivations serve as a driving force, enabling these individuals to maintain a resilient and optimistic perspective, even in the face of challenges. A positive outlook is instrumental in sustaining motivation and focus, even amid adversity. Sammer (2018) posits that a constructive mindset nurtures

innovative behaviors, which are crucial for navigating the complexities of balancing educational pursuits and parenting responsibilities. Pardillo's (2023) research indicates that single mothers who engage in meaningful work and derive a sense of purpose report greater levels of life satisfaction (Juma & Nobert, 2023). Many student mothers acknowledge that while navigating the demands of parenting and education is undoubtedly challenging, it also serves as a significant source of motivation (Sicam et al., 2021). Participants in this body of research attested that their identities as single mothers drive their commitment to academic success. Furthermore, a study conducted by Cabilao (2024) highlighted the significance of optimism and determination in overcoming obstacles, particularly in the pursuit of education for the benefit of one's family. Respondents expressed a strong dedication to their objectives, perceiving challenges as opportunities for growth and thereby inspiring others through their positive outlook. Motivations to excel on a personal level align with Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Theory, which defines resilience as an internal characteristic (Taormina, 2015). The theory identifies four dimensions: Determination, Endurance, Adaptability, and Recuperability, all of which are inherent traits found within individuals. While everyone possesses these four components to varying degrees, the theory asserts that personal resilience can be enhanced by strengthening any one or all of these characteristics (Taormina, 2015). By overcoming obstacles, particularly in their pursuit of education for the benefit of their families, respondents demonstrated a strong determination to achieve their goals. They viewed challenges as opportunities for growth (Sicam, 2021). Through their experiences, sacrifices, and hardships, they gained valuable life lessons. Some student mothers learned to be resilient, make thoughtful decisions, and recognize the importance of continuing their

education. This positive outlook not only inspires others but also exemplifies how student mothers cultivate courage, develop resilience, enhance their endurance, and strive for excellence through their determination.

Theoretical Background and Framework

This study is grounded on (1) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and (2) Robert Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Theory.

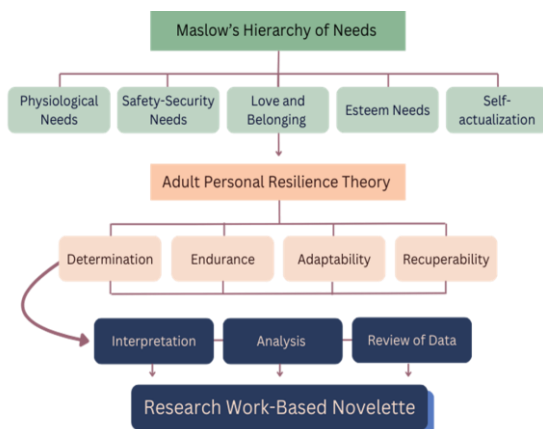


Fig. 1 Theoretical Framework of The Study

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow. It is often depicted as a pyramid with five levels of human needs, arranged in a hierarchical order: First in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is Physiological Needs which clearly indicates the basic survival needs such as food, water, shelter, and sleep. Second, is the Safety Needs which implies protection from physical and emotional harm, stability, and security. Third is Love and Belongingness Needs which involves social relationships, affection, and a sense of belonging. Fourth in his hierarchy is the Esteem Needs which magnifies self-esteem, recognition, and respect from others. Lastly, Self-Actualization which delineates the context of realizing one's full potential, creativity, and personal growth.

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Maslow. It was often depicted as a pyramid with five levels of human needs, arranged in a hierarchical order (Maslow, 1943). First in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were Physiological Needs, which clearly indicated the basic survival needs such as food, water, shelter, and sleep. Second were the Safety Needs, which implied protection from physical and emotional harm, stability, and security. Third were Love and Belongingness Needs, which involved social relationships, affection, and a sense of belonging. Fourth in his hierarchy were the Esteem Needs, which magnified self-esteem, recognition, and respect from others. Lastly, Self-Actualization delineated the context of realizing one's full potential, creativity, and personal growth (Maslow, 1943).

Robert Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Framework

Robert Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Framework was grounded in positive psychology and identified four core dimensions of resilience. The first dimension, Determination, represented the internal drive to pursue goals despite encountering obstacles. The second component, Endurance, referred to the ability to withstand stress and adversity over time. The third dimension, Adaptability, described the capacity to adjust effectively to new situations and challenges. Lastly, Recuperability denoted the ability to recover from setbacks and difficulties, thereby restoring one's psychological and emotional balance (Taormina, 2015).

Compatibility Statement

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a comprehensive view of human needs, from basic physiological requirements to self-actualization, while Taormina's Resilience Framework complements this by focusing on the psychological and emotional resilience needed to meet these needs. On the other hand, Maslow's theory emphasizes the importance of



fulfilling various levels of needs for overall well-being while the resilience framework highlights the personal strengths and coping mechanisms that contribute to well-being, especially in challenging situations. Thus ensuring that both the needs and resilience factors are thoroughly examined, leading to more targeted and effective interventions.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offered a comprehensive perspective on human motivation, outlining a progression from basic physiological requirements to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Taormina's Resilience Framework complemented this model by emphasizing the psychological and emotional resilience necessary to fulfill these needs (Taormina, 2015). While Maslow's theory underscored the importance of satisfying various levels of needs to achieve overall well-being, Taormina's framework highlighted the internal strengths and coping mechanisms that supported well-being, particularly in the face of adversity. The integration of these two frameworks ensured a thorough examination of both human needs and resilience factors, thereby informing the development of more targeted and effective interventions.

Connection and Relationship in the Study

Single student-mothers often face challenges in meeting their basic needs due to financial constraints and time management issues. Ensuring these needs are met is crucial for their well-being and academic success. Taormina's dimensions of Endurance and Recuperability help them cope with these challenges and recover from setbacks. On the other hand, the need for social support and a sense of belonging is vital for single student-mothers. They rely on support from family, friends, and academic institutions to balance their dual roles. Taormina's Adaptability dimension helps them navigate social relationships and adjust to the demands of parenthood and academia.

Moreover, achieving academic success and being recognized for their efforts boosts the self-esteem of single student-mothers. This recognition is essential for their motivation and persistence. Taormina's Determination dimension drives them to pursue their goals despite the challenges they face. Additionally, single student-mothers strive to realize their full potential by pursuing higher education. This pursuit aligns with Maslow's concept of self-actualization with which Taormina's framework supports this journey by providing the resilience needed to overcome obstacles and achieve personal growth.

Understanding the interplay between these two frameworks helps in recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by single student-mothers. It highlights the need for comprehensive support systems that address their physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs while fostering resilience through determination, endurance, adaptability, and recuperability. By integrating these frameworks, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support single student-mothers, ensuring their success in both parenthood and academia.

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Moreover, achieving academic success and being recognized for their efforts boosts the self-esteem of single student-mothers. This recognition is essential for their motivation and persistence. Taormina's Determination dimension drives them to pursue their goals despite the challenges they face (Taormina, 2013). Additionally, single student-mothers strive to realize their full potential by pursuing higher education. This pursuit aligns with Maslow's concept of self-actualization, with Taormina's framework supporting this journey by providing the resilience needed to overcome obstacles and achieve personal growth (Maslow, 1943; Taormina, 2013).

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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow introduced his theory in 1943, known as the hierarchy of needs, which serves as a motivational framework in psychology outlining five distinct levels of human needs. This theory posits that individuals are driven to satisfy their needs in a hierarchical order. Maslow viewed these needs as akin to instincts, playing a significant role in motivating human behavior (Taormina & Gao, 2013). The hierarchy progresses from the bottom upwards, encompassing five categories: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Maslow emphasized that these

needs transcend upward in a structured pattern, with the most basic needs at the foundation (Maslow, 1954). The hierarchy is frequently depicted as a pyramid, where the fundamental needs form the base, and the more complex ones reside at the top. At the lower end of this pyramid are physiological needs, which include essentials such as food, shelter, and other survival requirements, followed by the second tier, known as safety needs, which include financial security, health and wellness, and safety against accidents and injury.

The social needs, situated at the third tier of Maslow's hierarchy, encompass the longing for love and connection. Maslow (1954) characterized this need as a craving for belongingness, where the ache for companionship and kinship replaces basic physical hunger, and individuals experiencing unmet social needs may grapple with emotions of solitude, exclusion, and seclusion. Moving up to the fourth level exists a yearning for esteem and acknowledgment. Maslow (1954) defined esteem as a pursuit of accomplishment, competence, self-assurance, acknowledgment, and admiration. At the pinnacle of the pyramid lies the aspiration for self-actualization. Maslow underscored the significance of self-actualization—an ongoing process of personal growth and realization aimed at reaching one's full potential (Maslow, 1954).

A review of previous literature illustrated some of these assumptions of need and motivation, as many researchers documented how single parents prioritized their basic needs and the safety of their children over their personal goals and aspirations (Johnson, 2022). Miller (2012) observed that single-parent students placed greater importance on meeting fundamental needs like food and housing rather than pursuing higher education objectives. Moreover, single parents were prepared to forgo their higher-level needs to fulfill their children's needs (Stack & Meredith, 2017).



Kruvelis et al. (2017) linked lower-level physiological and safety needs as factors causing students to postpone their educational pursuits or withdraw from school.

In discussing esteem, Maslow (1954) spoke of esteem as achievement and self-worth. According to previous research, single parents first prioritize their needs, which are linked to their financial needs and their child's needs. Lindsay and Gillum (2018) reported that single parents believed they needed to model the values and work ethic they wanted to see in their children. According to Vyskocil (2018), the parent recognizes the guilt over the time constraints and multiple other demands that limit the financial, physical, and emotional support that they can give their children. Student parents' discursive narratives indicated internal and external pressure to be better parents and students. Student mother narratives revealed resentment regarding being exhorted to choose between being a parent and being a student when, in their opinions, they were forced to undertake both roles.

The principles of this theory will aid the study in gleaning a deeper understanding of how single parents navigate the intricate balance between meeting their fundamental needs and pursuing personal growth in the face of challenging circumstances. By exploring these dynamics through the framework of Maslow's hierarchy, the study can shed light on how single parents manage their responsibilities and ambitions, frequently prioritizing their children's well-being over their own personal goals.

Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience

To explore the coping and resiliency mechanisms of single student-mothers, this study will utilize Robert Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience framework. This framework identifies the internal aspects that empower individuals to strengthen themselves

against personal problems and navigate traumas and the various challenges life presents. Unlike many theories that focus on external influences—such as social support for children (Dumont & Provost, 1999) or spiritual influences on the elderly (Langer, 2004)—this theory emphasizes resilience as an inherent characteristic within the individual. Furthermore, the literature indicates that personal resilience is multifaceted, encompassing determination to survive, the ability to endure hardships, adaptability to changing conditions, and the capacity to recover from adversity (as cited in Taormina, 2015). Accordingly, four dimensions of adult personal resilience have been identified: Determination, Endurance, Adaptability, and Recuperability.

According to Taormina (2015), determination is characterized by an individual's willpower and steadfastness of purpose, as well as the choice to persevere and succeed. An example provided by Kuok, Chio, and Pun (2021) is someone who sets an ambitious personal goal, such as completing a marathon. Despite encountering physical exhaustion, injuries, or self-doubt during training, their commitment to accomplishing this goal exemplifies strong determination. A representative item from Taormina's resilience scale states, "Once I set a goal, I am determined to achieve it," effectively capturing this concept. This definition suggests that determination embodies a conscious or cognitive aspect of personal resilience.

The second component, Endurance, is defined as the personal strength and fortitude that one possesses to withstand unpleasant or difficult situations without giving up. This could be both cognitive and physical. A person might be able to live through some kind of trauma to his or her corporal body, thus enduring physical suffering. But endurance can also be cognitive. Someone who has faced



personal trauma, such as the death of a loved one, yet finds ways to cope and continues to engage in life activities—like socializing with friends or participating in hobbies—illustrates endurance by showing resilience in the face of emotional pain.

The third component, Adaptability, refers to the ability to be flexible and resourceful, allowing individuals to navigate challenging environments and adjust to changing conditions. This aspect is primarily cognitive rather than physical, as one can consciously alter their thoughts and behaviors but cannot easily modify their physiological structure to suit new situations. The final component, recuperability, is defined as the capacity to recover—both physically and cognitively—from various forms of harm, setbacks, or difficulties in order to restore and reestablish one's usual condition. Taormina (2015) notably distinguishes between physical recuperability, which pertains to the biological or medical ability to heal, and the cognitive aspect, which involves maintaining positive thoughts about one's condition. In fact, many psychotherapists and counselors rely on patients' conscious cognitions as a vital tool in facilitating their recovery from the psychological effects of trauma.

The literature on resilience encompasses a broad range of topics and has been integrated into various applied fields. In the context of single student-parents, Kirkpatrick (2023) highlights that resilience is not solely contingent upon external support; rather, it is significantly rooted in internal strengths such as determination, self-efficacy, and a strong sense of purpose. Many participants expressed a deep commitment to improving their lives and those of their children, which fuels their perseverance. They conveyed a strong belief in their ability to succeed academically while simultaneously fulfilling their roles as both students and mothers. This sense of self-

efficacy and adaptability bolsters their resilience, empowering them to face challenges with confidence. Additionally, it was observed that personal fulfillment serves as a motivational factor (Johnson, 2022), influencing pursuits such as achieving a dream career, securing a better job, and obtaining a higher income. This intrinsic aspect of resilience includes ambition, a determination to grow, and a foundational belief in their capacity for advancement.

The principles outlined in this theory will facilitate a comprehensive exploration of how student-mothers can offer profound insights into their experiences and the elements of their coping mechanisms that enable them to thrive.

3. The Problem

Statement of the Problem

This research aimed to investigate the resilience of student-mothers enrolled at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus during the academic year 2024–2025. Specifically, it sought to address the research questions below and explore the creation of a novelette “Dasig sa Kagabhion,” as a reflection of the study's findings.

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. age.
 - 1.2. civil status.
 - 1.3. financial status.
 - 1.4. living arrangement; and.
2. What is the level of their need's satisfaction in terms of:
 - 2.1. Physiological needs.
 - 2.2. Safety and security needs.
 - 2.3. Belongingness.
 - 2.4. Esteem.
 - 2.5. Self - Actualization; and.
3. What are the perceived challenges of the student-mothers in navigating their student life? and.



4. How do they cope with these challenges? and.
5. What novelette can be formed based on the study?

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study offers significant implications for student mothers within the realms of literary and cultural studies, higher education, and scholarly literature.

Literary and Cultural Studies:

The research highlights the dual roles that student mothers navigate as both parents and students, shedding light on their unique challenges and triumphs. Their stories reveal remarkable resilience and underscore the multifaceted benefits of higher education—not only for personal growth but also for the betterment of their families and communities. These lived experiences resonate with the central themes of the humanities, especially literature, which often mirrors societal realities and gives voice to marginalized groups such as student mothers (Dixon, 2015). By authentically representing their experiences, the study enriches literary narratives, deepening our understanding of diverse family dynamics and informing broader cultural discourses. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of intersectionality, acknowledging how gender, race, socioeconomic status, and family structure shape individual experiences (Leon, 2015). The insights gained from student mothers thus offer a critical lens into broader social and cultural dynamics.

Readers can acquire a unique and purposeful perspective on the lived experiences of single student mothers in higher education, fostering empathy and a deeper connection to the cultural and social nuances embedded in their narratives. Readers can potentially find significance in the study's exploration of how resilience, determination, and the pursuit of

knowledge are manifested and preserved in the face of academic and personal adversity.

Student Mothers may find a source of inspiration, solidarity, and a means of expressing their own journeys through the creative and scholarly output. The narratives offer affirmation and empowerment, providing practical insights and hope for overcoming challenges while balancing the demands of parenthood and education.

Educational Institutions will be reminded of the importance of inclusive and supportive academic environments. Through the study's findings and creative representations, administrators and policymakers can foster a sense of responsibility and mindfulness toward the unique needs of student mothers, encouraging a collective commitment to equity, flexibility, and holistic student well-being.

Scholarly Literature can acquire relevant information about the intersection of motherhood, higher education, and resilience. The study addresses gaps in existing research, lending credibility and depth to academic discourse surrounding this underrepresented population and laying a foundation for future scholarship and advocacy.

Humanity as a Whole will be reminded about the enduring strength and resilience within marginalized groups. Through the narratives and creative expression of the study, human beings can foster a sense of empathy, equity, and shared human experience that encourages a more compassionate and inclusive approach to education and social development.

Future Researchers can acquire valuable resources and methodological insights at the intersection of resilience, motherhood, and higher education. The integration of qualitative research and creative expression in this study offers a template for interdisciplinary inquiry,



providing a valuable foundation for those exploring similar themes in diverse contexts such as education, gender studies, sociology, and literature.

In essence, this study not only enriches academic and literary discourse but also empowers individuals and institutions to foster more inclusive, empathetic, and supportive environments for student mothers and other marginalized populations.

Scope and Limitations

This study explored the lived experiences of student mothers enrolled at the Cebu Technological University Argao Campus. The primary focus was the use of an Explanatory Sequential design. This two-phase methodology began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data to identify the population statistics of student mothers. Following this initial phase, qualitative data were collected to explore their lived experiences, informed by the quantitative findings (Creswell et al., 2018).

However, the study acknowledged certain limitations within its scope. It primarily focused on student-mother participants at Cebu Technological University's Argao Campus. Additionally, the study explored what student parents faced based on their responses without delving into broader political aspects. The study was limited to the narratives and experiences of the selected student mother participants and did not encompass the perspectives of non-student mothers

4. Research Methodology

Reflexivity Statement

As undergraduate researchers at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus, we are deeply rooted in the academic and social fabric of South Cebu. Over our years on campus, we have observed a steady rise in the

number of student-parents navigating lecture halls and library aisles. This trend sparked our curiosity, not just as scholars but as peers sharing classrooms with individuals balancing parenthood and academia.

Our commitment to understanding their experiences grew stronger after encountering national data from a World Health Organization-funded study: approximately 15 million single parents live in the Philippines, with 95% being women (World Health Organization, 2022). These figures struck a chord with us, echoing the quiet struggles we witnessed daily among classmates juggling infants and textbooks. Yet, despite these staggering numbers, the stories of single student-mothers—their resilience, sacrifices, and triumphs—remained conspicuously absent from academic literature and campus policy discussions.

To bridge this gap, we designed a phenomenological study focused on single student-mothers enrolled at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus during the 2024–2025 academic year. By centering their narratives, we aimed to amplify voices often overshadowed by societal expectations and institutional challenges. Through in-depth interviews and participatory methods, we sought to document not only their academic hurdles but also their innovative strategies for harmonizing motherhood and education.

Through this study, we sought to make a substantive contribution not only to the corpus of academic research but also to the broader landscape of Philippine Literature by foregrounding the frequently marginalized narratives of student-mothers. These accounts serve as compelling evidence of the resilience, steadfast determination, and enduring fortitude exhibited by these women as they



negotiate the intersecting demands of higher education and single parenthood.

Beyond its scholarly objectives, this research represents an earnest appeal for heightened recognition, deeper empathy, and proactive advocacy for a community that often endures significant challenges in relative silence. By illuminating these previously underrepresented experiences, we aim to stimulate critical discourse and cultivate a more profound appreciation for the pivotal roles that student-mothers fulfill within both academic institutions and the wider society.

In essence, it is our hope that this work will not only enrich academic dialogue but also inspire meaningful social engagement and policy consideration, thereby affirming the invaluable contributions of student-mothers to the fabric of Philippine education and culture.

Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research paradigm, specifically employing an Explanatory Sequential Design as delineated by Creswell et al. (2018). The methodology was structured in two distinct phases. The initial phase involved the systematic collection and statistical analysis of quantitative data to ascertain the demographic prevalence and characteristics of students who are single mothers within the target population. This quantitative inquiry provided a foundational statistical framework upon which the subsequent qualitative phase was constructed. In the second phase, qualitative data were gathered to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of single student-mothers, with the qualitative sampling and questioning strategies being informed by the patterns and trends identified in the quantitative results. The qualitative analysis was conducted utilizing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, which facilitated the identification and interpretation of salient

themes and patterns emerging from the participants' narratives. This approach enabled the research to move beyond mere statistical representation, uncovering the underlying factors, contextual dynamics, and nuanced experiences that elucidate the quantitative findings.

Furthermore, the research design was augmented by the incorporation of a phenomenological perspective, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of individual cases encompassing single mothers as individuals, within family units, or as part of other relevant social configurations. Data were triangulated from multiple sources to enhance the validity and depth of the findings, thereby supporting the development of both single and multiple case studies as warranted by the data. This integrative approach not only combined quantitative and qualitative evidence but was also informed by the prior establishment of theoretical propositions, as recommended by Leonard (2019). Collectively, these methodological choices ensured a robust and holistic examination of the research questions, yielding insights that are both statistically grounded and richly contextualized.

Quantitative Phase

The initial phase involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data to identify the population statistics of student-mothers. The quantitative phase provided statistical data on the profile of student-mothers, including age, address, living situation, financial status, time management skills (measured through a standardized questionnaire), and their needs satisfaction with their educational experience (measured on a 1–5 scale). After the initial phase of collecting the statistical data, it will be organized, reviewed, and screened using the Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) is a measure of internal consistency, it quantifies how closely related the items are as a group, essentially indicating



how well the items measure the same latent variable. This provided a statistical overview and helped in understanding the scope and scale of the issue. Moreover, quantitative data offered a broad perspective and helped in identifying patterns and trends. It provided a solid foundation for the subsequent qualitative phase.

Qualitative Phase

On the other hand, the second phase of the study focused on gathering qualitative data to better understand the real-life experiences of student-mothers. This phase built on the results from the first, quantitative phase, and aimed to explore the patterns that were observed earlier. Using thematic analysis, the qualitative phase examined the main challenges, needs, and ways student-mothers cope with their situations. The mixed-methods approach made it possible to test the null hypotheses by looking at how different factors—such as academic performance, social support, financial stress, coping strategies, and resilience—are related. In summary, the qualitative data offered detailed insights into the experiences and challenges of single student-mothers, helping to explain the results found in the quantitative phase by revealing important background details and context.

Thematic Analysis Framework

After the aforementioned phase, Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis Framework was utilized, as this framework guided the qualitative analysis by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. In addition, thematic analysis allowed for a systematic and rigorous examination of qualitative data, helping to identify meaningful themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. With this in mind, the proponents also used the phenomenological approach, which involved a thorough examination of individual cases, including student mothers as individuals, families, or

other relevant units. Information was gathered from various sources to form a comprehensive conclusion.

The aforementioned study was taken into consideration because case studies provided an in-depth understanding of specific instances, allowing for a detailed exploration of the complexities and unique aspects of each case. This approach complemented the mixed-methods design by adding depth and context to the findings.

Furthermore, the study will follow the MEAL Method (Main Idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link) to construct the data analysis for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study. The MEAL Method ensures that the construction and synthesis of the ideas are in a logical order, and prevent the paragraph becoming unfocused or covering multiple topics by keeping each paragraph centered on one core argument.

In its simplest form, the research design integrated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure a holistic understanding of the experiences of student mothers in the academic context. The integration of both methodologies ensured a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of single mothers in the academic context, as combining quantitative and qualitative data provided a broad and deep view of the research problem. Quantitative data offered breadth, while qualitative data provided depth. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a more nuanced and complete understanding of the research questions.

Environment

The research was conducted at Cebu Technological University—Argao Campus, located on Ed Kintanar Street, Lamacan, Argao, Cebu, Philippines. As of the academic year 2024–2025, there were approximately 4,700 students and 400 faculty and staff



Fig. 2 Map of Cebu Technological University-Argao Campus

Research Participants

The study participants were student-mothers from different colleges at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus. The colleges included the College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Technology and Engineering, College of Forestry, College of Agriculture, and College of Hospitality Management and Tourism. The researchers identified at least fifteen (15) student-mothers coming from the 14 programs offered by the university. Specifically, the study catered to five (5) respondents from each year level, starting from second-year students up to fourth-year students, considering their residency in the institution to add credibility to the data gathered.

Based on the initial survey, the total population of student-mothers was identified as 81. During the first phase of data collection, 43 respondents participated in the survey. Subsequently, for the second phase, 15 student-mothers were chosen to take part in the in-depth interviews, having been selected based on the relevance and clarity of their responses during the initial phase.

While this study sought to achieve a comprehensive and holistic representation of student-mothers across all colleges and

academic programs at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in the participant selection process. The researchers undertook diligent efforts to invite student-mothers from each of the fourteen programs offered by the university. However, during the phase 2 of our data gathering, some potential participants respectfully declined to take part in the study, citing personal, academic, or other equally significant reasons.

The research team fully respected these decisions, recognizing the fundamental importance of voluntary participation and the ethical imperative to uphold individual autonomy. Consequently, there is limited or, in some cases, no representation from certain programs where student-mothers opted not to participate. This limitation was carefully considered during the data analysis and interpretation stages, and the findings are presented with full transparency regarding the scope and representativeness of the sample. Despite these constraints, the study nonetheless offers valuable insights into the experiences of student-mothers within the institution, while rigorously adhering to established ethical research standards.

The participants were first briefed on the purpose of the study and then given a consent form containing all the clauses related to the research. Afterward, they underwent an initial survey with their full consent. The study remained open to any additional participants who were willing to join, provided that they were student-mothers.

Criteria for Consideration as Student-Mothers

1. Parental Status: The individual must be a biological or adoptive mother of at least one child. This includes those who have legal custody or guardianship of a child.

1.1 Must currently be responsible for the care and upbringing of the child(ren), either directly or indirectly.



2. Enrollment Status: The individual must be currently enrolled as a student at Cebu Technological University - Argao Campus, either full-time or part-time. This ensures that the participant is actively engaged in academic pursuits.

3. Age Requirement: While there may not be a strict age limit, it can be beneficial to focus on those who are typically within the age range of 18 to 35 years, recognizing that many student-mothers may fall within this demographic.

3.1 No upper age limit is specified, as long as the participant meets the other criteria.

4. Educational Level: The individual should be pursuing an undergraduate degree or equivalent level of education. This criterion helps to focus the study on those navigating higher education challenges.

5. Living Arrangement: The criteria may include stipulations regarding living arrangements, such as whether the student-mother resides with her child(ren) or has alternative childcare arrangements, which can impact her academic experience.

6. Self-Identification: Participants should self-identify as student-mothers, acknowledging their dual roles and responsibilities in both parenting and education. This subjective criterion allows for inclusivity and recognizes diverse experiences.

7. Willingness to Participate: Must voluntarily agree to participate in the study and provide informed consent after being fully briefed on the purpose, procedures, and potential risks/benefits of the research.

Quantitative Phase

The initial quantitative phase involved gathering precise statistical data on the population of student-mothers enrolled at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus during the academic year 2024–2025. This was accomplished through stratified random sampling, which ensured that various subgroups of student-mothers were adequately represented in the sample. The proponents of

the study collected numerical data regarding their satisfaction with needs and resilience, utilizing Taormina's Four-Part Measure of Personal Resilience and Taormina and Gao's Five Need Satisfaction Measures. These instruments were employed to capture the core experiences of the participants in relation to their satisfaction levels and resilience, aligning with the major objectives of the study.

This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing the well-being and resilience of student-mothers, providing valuable insights into their unique challenges and needs.

Qualitative Phase

For the qualitative phase of the study, the researchers selected a minimum of fifteen (15) participants through purposeful sampling from those involved in the initial quantitative phase. These participants participated in in-depth interviews designed to explore their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies as student-mothers. The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, which facilitated the identification of recurring themes that captured the lived experiences of the participants.

Purposeful sampling proved appropriate for this phase, as it enabled the researchers to intentionally select individuals with specific, relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Schreier, 2018). Participants included both volunteers and individuals recommended by prior participants, all of whom were student-mothers enrolled at Cebu Technological University – Argao Campus.

To ensure ethical integrity, all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any adverse consequences. This ethical safeguard reinforced the study's commitment to voluntary participation and respect for individual autonomy.



The themes derived from the thematic analysis contributed significantly to the development of a novella, which aimed to encapsulate the resilience and lived experiences of student-mothers. This creative output sought to enrich scholarly understanding of their unique challenges within an academic setting and to serve as a medium for advocacy, awareness, and empathy.

Data Gathering

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically utilizing an Explanatory Sequential Design. The data-gathering procedure was conducted in two distinct phases.

The first phase, the quantitative phase, involved the administration of a structured survey to collect data on the profiles of student-mothers, including their age, civil status, financial status, and living arrangements. In addition, the survey assessed their levels of satisfaction across various needs—physiological, safety and security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization—using a Likert scale. A statistically significant sample size was determined, and participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across diverse backgrounds.

The second phase, the qualitative phase, followed the quantitative analysis. Taormina's Four-Part Measure of Personal Resilience and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of the survey respondents to gain deeper insights into their perceived challenges and coping mechanisms. These interviews focused on understanding the personal experiences and narratives that explained and enriched the findings from the quantitative phase. Data from both phases were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the resilience of student-mothers at Cebu

Technological University – Argao Campus during the academic year 2024–2025.

This two-phase approach facilitated a robust analysis by combining numerical data with in-depth personal narratives, thereby enhancing the overall understanding of the academic and personal challenges faced by student-mothers and the strategies they employed to navigate their educational journeys.

Data Analysis

In this research, the initial quantitative phase focused on the treatment of survey statistics. As the study utilized Likert scale-type questions, the data collected were analyzed using measures such as the mean and standard deviation. The results obtained from the population statistics guided the researchers in the selection of fifteen (15) participants for the subsequent in-depth interviews.

Moving onto the qualitative phase, the recorded data collected from the interviews were analyzed through the transcription of audio files, documentation of all observations made at the research site, and the simplification, summarization, and interpretation of the printed data. The researchers adhered to the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which served as a structured guide for conducting thematic analysis.

First, the researchers immersed themselves in the data to achieve a comprehensive understanding of its depth and context. Next, initial codes were developed to capture significant features relevant to the research questions. These codes were then reviewed and organized into potential themes that represented broader patterns within the data. The themes were subsequently evaluated for coherence and relevance, ensuring they accurately reflected the participants' responses. Following this, each theme was refined and clearly defined, with names that encapsulated



their essence. Finally, the themes were integrated into a cohesive narrative, supported by cross-referencing observation notes and memos. This process ensured the generation of comprehensive and well-substantiated findings, which formed the basis for an in-depth research discussion.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The study employed mean and standard deviation as the primary statistical methods for analyzing the data collected through Likert scale-type questions. This approach was deemed particularly appropriate given the study's focus on quantifying the subjective experiences and perceptions of single student-mothers. The use of the mean enabled a nuanced understanding of the respondents' attitudes by assigning appropriate emphasis to varying response categories, thereby reflecting the degrees of agreement or disagreement expressed by participants.

In addition, the standard deviation provided insights into the variability of responses, indicating the level of consistency in participants' perceptions regarding specific issues related to their experiences in higher education. The statistical analysis also included frequency counts to derive simple percentages, which facilitated a clear and accessible presentation of the data. This approach allowed for the straightforward interpretation of trends and patterns within the population.

By utilizing these statistical treatments, the study aimed to deliver a comprehensive and reliable analysis of the lived experiences of single student-mothers, thereby contributing meaningful insights to the existing body of knowledge on student-parent populations in higher education.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Through the collaboration of the participants, the researchers incorporated the knowledge

obtained from the narratives of single student-mothers into the creation of a novella that reflects their lived experiences. As a result, the researchers underscored that the findings were derived directly from the participants' responses, while diligently ensuring the absence of personal bias or subjective influence throughout the research process. This involved implementing systematic measures to minimize researcher bias and to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the narrative in alignment with the participants' realities.

Lincoln and Guba (1989) assert that the trustworthiness of a research study is fundamental to evaluating its quality and reliability. In this study, trustworthiness was established through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility ensured confidence in the truthfulness and accuracy of the findings, while transferability demonstrated the relevance and applicability of the results to other contexts beyond the study's scope. Dependability referred to the consistency and stability of the research process, indicating that similar results could be obtained under comparable conditions. Lastly, confirmability addressed the objectivity of the research, ensuring that the findings were shaped primarily by the voices and perspectives of the single student-mothers, rather than the researchers' personal assumptions.

These interconnected dimensions collectively contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study and strengthened the academic rigor and literary integrity of the resulting novella.

Audit Trail

In the research entitled *"Traversing Parenthood and Academia: The Resiliency of Student Mothers in Philippine Higher Education,"* the researchers maintained a detailed audit trail to ensure transparency and methodological rigor. As part of this effort, the rationale for employing a phenomenological approach, the selection of

thematic analysis as the analytical method, and the creation of a novella as the study's final output were clearly outlined and documented.

Ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed, encompassing all phases of the research process, including planning, initiation, data collection and analysis, reporting, archiving, and publication. The researchers provided a comprehensive breakdown of participant demographics, their origins, and the criteria used for their selection. Recruitment procedures, along with corresponding recruitment logs, were transparently recorded to demonstrate procedural integrity.

Furthermore, the process of creating and developing the novella was meticulously documented. The data analysis phase employed a transparent application of thematic analysis, and member-checking sessions were conducted to engage participants in the validation of the findings. The audit trail also included detailed documentation of the reporting process, including the challenges encountered, limitations observed, and critical decisions made throughout the study. This systematic approach ensured the trustworthiness of the research and supported the formal presentation of its findings.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell's ethical considerations framework emphasizes the importance of ethics throughout the research process, particularly in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. Below are the key components of this framework:



Figure 3: Creswell's Ethical Consideration Framework

Key Ethical Principles

- 1. Professional Integrity:** Researchers must maintain honesty and integrity in all aspects of their research, ensuring that their work is credible and trustworthy.
- 2. Informed Consent:** It is essential to obtain informed consent from participants before collecting data. This involves clearly communicating the purpose of the research and any potential risks involved.
- 3. Respect for Participants:** Researchers should respect the rights and dignity of participants, ensuring their autonomy and well-being throughout the study.
- 4. Anonymity and Confidentiality:** Maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities and data is crucial at every stage of the research process.
- 5. Transparency:** Researchers should be transparent about their methods, findings, and any conflicts of interest that may arise during the study.
- 6. Beneficence and Non-maleficence:** Researchers should aim to maximize benefits while minimizing harm to participants. This includes being mindful of any potential power imbalances in researcher-participant relationships.



7. Justice: Ethical research should ensure fairness in participant selection and treatment, avoiding exploitation of vulnerable populations.

Stages of Ethical Consideration

Creswell (2014) emphasized that ethical considerations should be integrated into every phase of the research process. In this study, the researchers applied his framework to ensure ethical integrity throughout. The first phase, planning, involved the early identification of potential ethical issues, including procedures for obtaining informed consent and strategies for managing data securely. The second phase, data collection, ensured that all methods were ethically sound and that participants were treated with dignity and respect throughout the process. The third phase, data analysis, required researchers to interpret findings with honesty and accuracy, ensuring that participants' experiences and perspectives were not misrepresented. Finally, during the dissemination phase, the researchers considered how the results would be communicated to avoid misinterpretation or potential harm to participants.

By integrating Creswell's ethical considerations framework, the researchers implemented a comprehensive and systematic approach to conducting ethical research across mixed methodologies. Adherence to these principles strengthened the study's integrity and helped ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being, thereby contributing to the ethical standards of scholarly research.

4. Definition of Terms

Dual role. Refers to the simultaneous responsibility of student-mothers in fulfilling their academic obligations as students while managing their caregiving duties as mothers.

Lived experiences. Refers to the personal and first-hand accounts of student-mothers as they navigate the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities and motherhood, highlighting their perceptions, emotions, and coping strategies within their everyday realities.

A **novelette** is a literary piece that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novella and novel. In the study, the novelette has three chapters, each with over 5,000 words.

Student-mother refers to a female student enrolled in higher education who simultaneously fulfills the role of a mother, balancing academic responsibilities with parenting duties.

Resiliency in this study, refers to the ability of student-mothers to adapt and continue their studies despite the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities with parenting. It involves how they manage stress, seek support, and stay motivated to succeed in higher education.

5. Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the student-mothers' demographic data and their level of needs satisfaction. Moreover, it also discusses their prevalent perceived challenges and their coping mechanisms. Lastly, this chapter reveals the diverse experiences of student-mothers and as an act of amplifying their unheard stories, these interpretations are creatively incorporated into the novelette "Dasig sa Kagabhion".



Phase 1 - Respondents Profile

Table 1. Age and Civil Status Profile of the Student-Mothers

Age (in years)		20-26		27-33		34-40		Mean Age
Civil Status	N	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Single	17	17	39.53	0	0	0	0	21.59
Partnered	19	17	39.53	1	2.33	1	2.33	23.61
Married	7	5	11.63	1	2.33	1	2.33	26
Total	43	39	90.70	2	4.65	2	4.65	23.12

The age distribution of student-mothers participating in the study reflects a predominant concentration in the early adulthood stage, suggesting developmental, financial, and emotional factors that may influence their academic needs and satisfaction. Based on the data gathered in Phase 1 of this study, a total of forty-three (43) student-mothers participated in the survey. Among them, thirty-nine (39), or 90.70%, were within the 20 to 26 years old age range. Only two (2) respondents, or 4.65%, were aged 27 to 33 years, and another two (2), or 4.65%, were between 34 and 40 years old. When categorized by civil status, the seventeen (17) single student-mothers recorded the lowest mean age at 21.59 years, followed by nineteen (19) partnered student-mothers with a mean age of 23.61 years, and seven (7) married student-mothers with the highest mean age of 26 years. The overall mean age of all respondents is 23.12 years.

This age distribution indicates that a significant proportion of student-mothers are in their early twenties, a critical life stage typically marked by emerging adulthood and ongoing identity formation. From a developmental standpoint, this period is often characterized by heightened vulnerability to challenges related to time management, emotional adjustment, financial independence, and the pursuit of higher education. The variation in mean ages across civil status groups may also suggest differing degrees of support systems or life stability; for instance, married student-mothers, being older on average, may possess more established familial structures or socioeconomic grounding. This information provides crucial context for analyzing how these variables may influence the participants' satisfaction of needs in academic and personal spheres.

Table 2. Financial Status and Living and Living Arrangement of the Student-Mother

Financial Status		Dependent		Independent	
Living Arrangement	N	f	%	f	%
Boarding	8	5	11.63	3	6.98
With Relative	32	28	65.12	4	9.30
Self-Sufficient	3	2	4.66	1	2.33
Total	43	35	81.40	8	18.60



Table 2 illustrates the predominant concentration of financially dependent student mothers living with their relatives (65.12%), suggesting that this demographic are not financially self-sufficient and still receive necessary resources to sustain both their education and caregiving responsibilities. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2017), living with relatives often provides a safety net for financially dependent student mothers, who may otherwise struggle to manage both educational expenses and childcare costs.

Based on the data gathered, out of the 43 participants, eight (8) are living in board housing, thirty-two (32) live with their relative/spouse, while three (3) live independently on their own houses. Moreover, among these forty-three (43) participants, when categorized by financial status, thirty-five (35) are dependent and eight (8) are independent.

This demographic profile sets a foundational context for the succeeding analyses of factors such as civil status, financial circumstances, and living arrangements, all of which are expected to impact the respondents' levels of needs satisfaction. Furthermore, to support the interpretation of the quantitative data, a five-point Likert scale was used to categorize mean scores into distinct satisfaction levels. This interpretive framework enhances the clarity and consistency of evaluating responses, ensuring a coherent analysis of the student-mothers' experiences and perceived support systems.

Using Cronbach's Coefficient to Assess Survey Consistency

The survey results were evaluated using Cronbach's coefficient, confirming their consistency and indicating a positive value regarding latent variability. With a total of

forty-three (43) respondents, the results revealed the following internal consistency reliability for each construct: Physiological (0.878), Safety-Security (0.935), Belongingness (0.950), Esteem (0.954), and Self-Actualization (0.956). All these values exceed the widely accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the items within each construct reliably measure the same underlying concept.

Values between 0.80 and 0.90, like the Physiological scale (0.878), indicate good to excellent reliability. In contrast, values above 0.90—observed in Safety-Security, Belongingness, Esteem, and Self-Actualization—demonstrate excellent internal consistency. However, it's essential to be aware that extremely high values, particularly those nearing 0.95 and above, may imply that some items are highly similar or possibly redundant. Additionally, while Cronbach's Alpha provides insight into reliability, it does not ensure validity.

Despite this, the findings indicate that the scales are highly reliable, with responses to items within each construct showing strong coherence. This reinforces that the scales measuring Physiological, Safety-Security, Belongingness, Esteem, and Self-Actualization exhibit excellent internal consistency reliability.

Phase 1- Level Needs Satisfaction

As a part of the first phase of the study, the forty-three (43) student mother participants answered a survey to gauge their needs satisfaction using a 5-Point Liker Scale. The table below shows the interpretation of the statistical results of the respondents needs satisfaction. This data was analyzed, summarized and organized using descriptive statistics (Mvududu, et al. 2023).

Table 3. Definition of Statistical Results

Mean Score Interpretation (5-Point Likert Scale)	General Summary of Interpretations		
4.20 – 5.00 = Very Satisfied	Higher means (closer to 5) indicate greater satisfaction with specific needs.	2.60 – 3.39 = Slightly Satisfied or Neutral	Low standard deviations ($SD \leq 0.50$) suggest consistent experiences within the group
3.40 – 4.19 = Moderately Satisfied	Lower means (closer to 3 or below) reflect lower satisfaction, suggesting unmet needs	1.80 – 2.59 = Dissatisfied 1.00 – 1.79 = Very Dissatisfied	High standard deviations ($SD \geq 0.70$) indicate diverse experiences, meaning participants in the same group may feel very differently about their ability to meet a given need

Table 4. Phase 1 Profile of Student-Mothers by Needs Satisfaction and Civil Status

	Single		Partnered		Married	
Needs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.57	0.48	4.67	0.58	3.92	0.43
Safety-Security	3.43	0.46	5.00	0.48	3.83	0.31
Belongingness	3.70	0.50	4.27	0.30	4.10	0.28
Esteem	3.70	0.37	3.93	0.49	3.96	0.38
Self-Actualization	3.44	0.43	2.92	0.42	3.99	0.25

Civil Status

The level of needs satisfaction among student-mothers varies significantly based on their civil status, with single student-mothers reporting the lowest levels of satisfaction in most need categories, suggesting that civil status plays a crucial role in shaping their overall well-being and academic experiences.

Among the forty-three (43) student-mothers who participated in the Phase 1 survey, the seventeen (17) single student-mothers consistently recorded the lowest mean scores across all categories of need satisfaction, excluding Self-Actualization. In contrast, the seven (7) married student-mothers reported a mean physiological needs satisfaction score of 3.92, indicating a moderate level of fulfillment, while the nineteen (19) partnered student-mothers had the highest physiological needs satisfaction with a mean of 4.67. Further breakdown of the partnered group's responses

showed relatively high satisfaction in safety (5.00), belongingness (4.27), and esteem (3.93). Regarding variability, the married group exhibited the lowest standard deviation (0.43) for physiological needs, followed by the single group (0.48), while the partnered group had the highest standard deviation (0.58), suggesting greater diversity in individual experiences within that subgroup.

These findings indicate that single student-mothers face more substantial challenges in meeting their basic and psychological needs, likely due to a lack of stable support systems. This is supported by Vyskocil (2018), who emphasizes that single student-mothers encounter severe time constraints, financial limitations, and psychological stress, often compounded by health issues. Johnson (2022) also found that the isolation experienced by single student-mothers is intensified by limited social interaction and a divergence from the

typical student lifestyle. In contrast, married student-mothers, while still reporting moderate satisfaction, appear to benefit from greater stability and emotional support, particularly from their spouses, as noted by Cantero et al. (2024), who described husbands as providing both emotional and logistical support. Interestingly, partnered student-mothers (unmarried but in relationships) report the highest levels of satisfaction in several key need areas. This may be attributed to fewer role strains and less identity conflict than in traditional marriages, a dynamic explored by Arden et al. (2022). Dankyi & Dankyi (2023) further elaborate that married partners, particularly husbands, may also experience emotional stress and role strain, which can negatively impact the overall family dynamic and reduce satisfaction for married student-mothers. The greater standard

deviation among partnered mothers suggests that while many benefit significantly from their partnerships, others still encounter barriers, leading to varied experiences within the group. These findings underscore the importance of considering civil status as a determining factor in student-mothers' ability to satisfy their physiological and psychological needs. According to Kim et al., 2020; Hope et al., 1999; Cairney et al., 2003, single mothers have been found to experience significantly lower quality of life, greater emotional distress, and reduced social support compared to their married or partnered counterparts. Recognizing these disparities according to Avison et al., 2007; Rahman et al., 2020 enables institutions to tailor support systems and interventions that address both structural needs and the nuanced emotional realities of each demographic.

Table 5. Summary of Interpretation of Table 3's Statistical Data (Civil Status)

Group	Mean (Physiological Needs)	SD	Interpretation
Single	3.57	0.48	Moderate satisfaction, with some variability, revealing that many still face unmet needs.
Married	3.92	0.43	Moderately high satisfaction, and consistent, suggesting some stability and or support.
Partnered	4.67	0.58	High satisfaction, but more variability, likely due to differing quality of partner support.

The statistical data in Table 3 demonstrates that civil status significantly influences student-mothers' levels of satisfaction in meeting their physiological needs, with partnered relationships yielding the highest average satisfaction levels.

Partnered student-mothers reported the highest mean satisfaction score for physiological needs among the three civil status groups. This suggests they experience a

relatively greater ability to meet basic needs such as food, rest, and personal well-being. However, their standard deviation (SD = 0.58) also reflects the widest range of experiences within this group, indicating that not all partnered student-mothers benefit from support equally. Married student-mothers followed with moderately high satisfaction, while single student-mothers, although still reporting moderate satisfaction, consistently had the lowest mean scores, suggesting greater



difficulty in meeting their physiological needs. The key differentiator across these groups appears to be the presence or absence of a supportive partner. Thompson, Brown, and Evans (2022) highlighted the critical importance of strong support systems—including familial, peer, and institutional resources—in fostering resilience among student-mothers. Emotional and physical support plays a critical role in reducing the stress associated with managing dual roles of parenting and academics. Sanborn et al. (2024) found that student-mothers with partners are more likely to receive caregiving and emotional assistance, which significantly reduces the strain of daily responsibilities. Conversely, single student-mothers, who often lack this layer of support, may face increased burdens in managing their time, finances, and responsibilities. While both partnered and married student-mothers benefit from the

presence of a partner, the partnered group may experience fewer structural expectations or identity conflicts compared to the married group, potentially explaining their higher satisfaction levels. The wider standard deviation within this group also suggests that while many partnered student-mothers thrive with adequate support, others still encounter significant gaps in assistance or stability.

These findings affirm that relationship status is a determining factor in physiological needs satisfaction among student-mothers. Understanding these distinctions allows institutions and policymakers to tailor support mechanisms—such as childcare services, financial aid, and counseling—to more effectively address the diverse experiences and challenges faced by student-mothers across civil statuses.

Table 6. Participants' Financial Status

	Independent		Dependent	
Needs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.50	0.61	3.80	0.53
Safety-Security	3.16	0.35	3.72	0.49
Belongingness	3.46	0.52	3.94	0.37
Esteem	3.28	0.53	3.77	0.41
Self-Actualization	3.41	0.52	3.47	0.40

The financial status of student-mothers plays a critical role in shaping their ability to satisfy basic and psychological needs, with financially dependent participants reporting generally higher and more consistent satisfaction levels across most categories of need.

Out of the forty-three (43) participants, thirty-five (35) were financially dependent while eight (8) were financially independent. Financially dependent student-mothers reported a higher mean score in Physiological Needs (3.80) than their independent counterparts (3.50), with a lower standard deviation ($SD = 0.53$) compared to 0.61 for the independent group, indicating

more consistent experiences. Similarly, for Safety-Security Needs, dependents again reported higher mean satisfaction (3.72) compared to independents (3.16). In the Belongingness and Esteem categories, dependent participants showed higher mean scores (3.94 and 3.77, respectively) than independent participants (3.46 and 3.28). While Self-Actualization Needs showed almost equal mean scores between the two groups (3.47 for dependents and 3.41 for independents), dependents still reported less variability ($SD = 0.40$) compared to independents ($SD = 0.52$), suggesting more stable experiences within this group.



These results suggest that financial dependency may offer a protective effect, allowing student-mothers to more easily satisfy their basic and psychosocial needs. This may be attributed to the presence of external financial support, typically from family or partners, which alleviates stress associated with daily necessities like food, shelter, and medical care (Chen & Assche et al., 2015). Financial independence, while commendable, often comes with heightened pressure to meet household expenses independently, potentially leading to greater psychological stress, reduced academic performance, and compromised well-being (Borjas et al., 2020; Ryu & Fan, 2022). The higher satisfaction scores in belongingness and esteem among dependents may reflect not only financial stability but also emotional and social support from support networks. Cranney (2025) emphasizes that financial dependency often fosters stronger social bonds, enhancing a sense of connection and reducing isolation, while Moneva et al. (2020) observed that such support networks also promote academic confidence and engagement. In contrast, financially independent student-mothers often face role strain and social isolation, especially in institutional environments that lack inclusive structures tailored to their unique needs.

The comparison between financially dependent and independent student-mothers highlights the complex interplay between financial stability and well-being. These findings suggest the need for universities and policymakers to recognize that financial support systems not only improve economic conditions but also enhance student-mothers' emotional, social,

and academic lives, particularly in relation to their ability to meet both basic and higher-level needs.

. Conclusion

The study evaluated the antiulcer efficacy of methanol stem bark extract and its fractions from *C. schweinfurthii*, revealing varied yields with the n-hexane fraction at 23% and the aqueous fraction at 0.36%. Phytochemical study revealed the presence of proteins, carbohydrates, phenols, flavonoids, and terpenoids, however tannins, steroids, and alkaloids were not detected. The crude extract and ethyl acetate fraction exhibited elevated amounts of these chemicals attributable to solvent polarity. Acute toxicity assessments demonstrated that the stem bark is safe for oral ingestion. The ethyl acetate and butanol fractions exhibited superior antioxidant capabilities. In the two ulcer investigation models used in the study, the aspirin-induced ulcer model of butanol fraction (400 mg/kg) consistently demonstrated comparable effects to omeprazole on gastric acid volume, total acidity, ulcer scores, and ulcer protection percentage. The ulcer protection percentages of omeprazole (85.7%) versus butanol fraction (74.1%) signal the protective ability of the plant's stem bark fraction. Our findings underscore the safety, abundant phytochemical composition, and ulcer-protective properties of the butanol (400 mg/kg) fraction of *C. schweinfurthii* stem bark, justifying its local use as an alternative in the management of acid-induced ulcerative conditions.



Table 7. Interpretation of the Table 5's Statistical Data (Financial Status)

Needs Category	Dependent Mean/SD	Independent Mean/SD	Definition
Physiological	3.80/0.53	3.50/0.61	Dependents show moderate satisfaction, with slightly more consistency than independents who show lower satisfaction and more variation
Safety & Security	3.72/0.49	3.16/0.35	Dependents feel more secure, though experiences vary slightly more; independents feel less secure but are more uniform in that experience.
Belongingness	3.94/0.37	3.46/0.52	Dependents feel a greater sense of connection, with more consistent responses. Independents feel less connected, and experiences are varied.
Esteem	3.77/0.41	3.28/0.53	Dependents experience higher esteem, more uniformly; independents show lower esteem, with wider variation.
Self-Actualization	3.47/0.40	3.41/0.52	Satisfaction is slightly higher for dependents, with more consistency. Independents are slightly lower and more varied.

The interpretation of Table 5 reveals a consistent trend in which financially dependent student-mothers experience higher and more uniform satisfaction across all categories of needs compared to their financially independent counterparts.

Across all five need categories—physiological, safety-security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization—financially dependent student-mothers reported higher mean satisfaction scores than independent participants. Furthermore, dependents exhibited lower standard deviations in each category, indicating a more consistent experience of need fulfillment. In contrast, financially independent student-mothers, though demonstrating greater autonomy, presented with lower average satisfaction and higher variability, pointing to a broader range of experiences and likely more personal challenges in meeting their needs.

These results suggest that financial dependence provides a more stable foundation for addressing both basic and emotional needs. The presence of consistent financial support likely mitigates the stressors associated with balancing academic responsibilities, parenting, and survival needs. As a result, dependents benefit not only from improved access to resources but also from a predictable and emotionally secure environment, contributing to higher satisfaction. On the other hand, while financial independence may foster a sense of self-reliance and agency, it often comes at the cost of heightened financial pressure and instability, potentially limiting the ability to meet personal and academic demands with the same consistency. The broader standard deviations among independents reflect a more diverse and unequal set of experiences, where some may thrive, but many may struggle with insufficient resources and support structures. This comparative analysis underscores the critical role of financial support in promoting student-mothers' well-being and academic



persistence. It suggests that institutions should not only acknowledge but proactively respond to the disparities between financially dependent and independent student-mothers by expanding support systems—such as

scholarships, childcare subsidies, and peer networks—that can help mitigate the burdens of financial independence and foster more equitable outcomes.

Table 8. Participants' Living Arrangement

	Boarding		With Relatives		Self-Sufficient	
Needs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.68	0.46	3.76	0.57	3.76	0.69
Safety-Security	3.47	0.33	3.65	0.48	3.65	0.67
Belongingness	3.85	0.47	3.83	0.39	3.83	0.33
Esteem	3.75	0.39	3.67	0.34	3.67	0.95
Self-Actualization	3.73	0.52	3.38	0.40	3.38	0.57

Participants' living arrangements have a notable influence on the satisfaction of various personal needs, with distinct patterns emerging across basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs depending on whether the student-mothers are boarding, living with relatives, or self-sufficient.

Out of the forty-three (43) participants, eight (8) lived in boarding houses, thirty-two (32) lived with relatives, and three (3) were self-sufficient. For physiological needs, both participants living with relatives and those self-sufficient reported slightly higher mean scores (3.76) than those in boarding houses (3.68), although the latter had lower variability ($SD = 0.46$) compared to the self-sufficient group ($SD = 0.69$). In terms of safety-security needs, boarding participants again reported the lowest mean (3.47, $SD = 0.33$), while participants with relatives and those who are self-sufficient scored higher (3.65, $SD = 0.48$ and 0.67, respectively). However, for belongingness and esteem needs, boarding participants had the highest mean scores (3.85 and 3.83, respectively), followed closely by the other groups. In terms of self-actualization, boarding participants again reported the highest satisfaction (3.73, $SD = 0.52$), while those with relatives and self-sufficient reported lower means (3.38 each), though with varying degrees of consistency. Notably, the self-sufficient

group displayed the highest standard deviation in esteem ($SD = 0.95$), indicating greater variability in experiences.

These results suggest that living with relatives may offer more consistent and stable satisfaction of basic needs, such as safety and physiological requirements. June (2024) highlighted that family living arrangements often provide essential support—such as childcare, housing, and food security—which enhance the student-mothers' sense of stability. This finding is echoed by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2020), who emphasized the protective role of living environments in both maternal and child well-being. Conversely, boarding house residents may experience greater satisfaction in psychosocial and self-fulfillment domains, possibly due to increased independence and personal autonomy. Studies by Gomez & Sardida et al. (2025) and Malaga (2025) also affirm that boarding life cultivates key life skills—like budgeting, time management, and self-regulation—that may foster self-confidence and a sense of achievement. However, self-sufficient participants, despite showing strengths in certain areas, presented the most diverse experiences, particularly in esteem, as reflected by their high standard deviations. This variability may stem from differences in socioeconomic background, support systems, or readiness for independent living, which affect how these participants



manage both academic and parenting responsibilities.

These findings highlight the complex relationship between living arrangement and need satisfaction among student-mothers. Each living setup presents distinct advantages and challenges, underscoring the need for higher education institutions to consider housing

stability and support networks in their policy-making and intervention programs. Recognizing these diverse needs can inform more responsive services and improve student-mothers' academic success and overall well-being.

Phase 2 Participants – Level of Needs Satisfaction

Table 9. Demographic Information of Participants in Phase 2

Name	Age	Civil Status	Financial Status	Living Arrangement
Participant 1	23	Single	Dependent	Boarding
Participant 2	23	Partnered	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 3	22	Single	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 4	22	Married	Dependent	Boarding
Participant 5	23	Partnered	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 6	22	Partnered	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 7	29	Partnered	Dependent	Self-sufficient
Participant 8	21	Single	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 9	35	Partnered	Dependent	Self-sufficient
Participant 10	23	Partnered	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 11	22	Partnered	Dependent	Flexible Arr.
Participant 12	21	Partnered	Dependent	Boarding
Participant 13	27	Married	Independent	w/ relative
Participant 14	23	Single	Dependent	w/ relative
Participant 15	23	Partnered	Dependent	w/ partner

The demographic data of the fifteen (15) selected respondents in Phase 2 of the study reflects a concentration of participants in their early twenties, offering insight into the age-related dynamics of student-mother experiences.

Out of the total eighty-one (81) identified student-mothers, fifteen (15) were selected as participants for Phase 2, following the forty-three (43) who participated in Phase 1. According to the survey data, twelve (12) of these respondents fall within the early twenties age range, while two (2) are in their late twenties, and one (1) is in her early thirties. These participants also varied in civil status,

socioeconomic background, and living arrangements, reflecting a small yet diverse subset of the broader population.

The predominance of participants in their early twenties suggests that young adulthood is a critical phase for many student-mothers balancing education and parenting. This age distribution aligns with common academic timelines in the tertiary level, where women may concurrently navigate young motherhood and undergraduate studies. Younger student-mothers may face unique vulnerabilities—including limited financial independence, fewer support systems, and greater emotional strain—as highlighted in related literature. However, their youth may also reflect a high

level of adaptability and motivation to pursue academic goals despite personal responsibilities. The variation in civil status and living situations further illustrates that student-mother experiences are not monolithic and are shaped by intersecting demographic and socioeconomic factors.

Understanding the demographic composition of Phase 2 participants—particularly their age concentration—helps contextualize the findings of this study. It underscores the importance of age-sensitive and support-driven policies within academic institutions to better cater to the needs of young student-mothers and ensure their continued access to quality education and well-being.

Table 10. Phase 2 Participants' Civil status (Phase 2)

Civil Status	Single		Partnered		Married	
Needs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.64	0.38	3.67	0.66	4.00	0.00
Safety-Security	3.69	0.24	3.39	0.51	4.00	0.00
Belongingness	3.62	0.55	3.59	0.32	4.00	0.00
Esteem	3.42	0.21	3.44	0.57	4.00	0.00
Self-Actualization	3.33	0.04	3.31	0.35	4.00	0.00

Civil status plays a significant role in shaping the satisfaction of various needs among student-mothers in Phase 2, with married participants consistently reporting the highest and most uniform satisfaction across all five categories of needs.

Among the fifteen (15) student-mothers in Phase 2, married participants reported the highest mean scores across all needs categories—physiological, safety-security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization—with a perfect mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.00 in every category, indicating complete and consistent satisfaction. In contrast, partnered student-mothers showed slightly lower mean scores, such as 3.67 (SD = 0.66) for physiological needs and 3.44 (SD = 0.57) for esteem. Single student-mothers reported similar but slightly lower means compared to partnered participants—3.64 (SD = 0.38) for physiological and 3.42 (SD = 0.21) for esteem. Notably, partnered mothers reported the lowest satisfaction in safety-security (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.51) and self-actualization (mean = 3.31, SD = 0.35), placing them closer to the “Slightly Satisfied/Neutral” range. Meanwhile,

single student-mothers reported slightly higher safety-security satisfaction (mean = 3.69, SD = 0.24) than partnered peers.

The consistent high scores among married student-mothers suggest that marriage provides a unique layer of emotional, financial, and logistical support that directly contributes to the satisfaction of both basic and higher-order needs. The absence of variability (SD = 0.00) among this group further underscores the stability and uniformity of their lived experiences, pointing to a shared sense of security and self-fulfillment. On the other hand, the greater variation among partnered student-mothers implies a less predictable or reliable support system. Although these mothers have partners, the relationship dynamics may lack the formal or structural support typically associated with marriage, as shown by their lower means and higher standard deviations. Single student-mothers, while generally falling within the “Moderately Satisfied” range, face more subtle yet consistent challenges, likely due to the absence of a partner’s support. Nevertheless, their lower SDs suggest they experience these challenges in a relatively similar manner across individuals.

This analysis confirms that civil status significantly affects the well-being and needs satisfaction of student-mothers. Married student-mothers benefit from strong, stable support systems that promote well-being across all life domains, while partnered and

single mothers face more diverse and often unmet needs. These findings highlight the need for targeted institutional support, especially for non-married student-mothers, to ensure equity in educational success and personal development regardless of relationship status.

Table 11. Financial Status of Participants in Phase 2

	Independent		Dependent	
Needs Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.60	0.61	3.73	0.65
Safety-Security	3.70	0.45	3.51	0.51
Belongingness	3.50	0.80	3.68	0.39
Esteem	3.33	0.35	3.54	0.52
Self-Actualization	3.67	0.35	3.37	0.33

Financial Status

The financial status of student-mothers in Phase 2 plays a crucial role in shaping their needs satisfaction, with dependent participants generally reporting more stable fulfillment of basic and psychological needs, while independent participants experience greater satisfaction in self-fulfillment but with more variability.

Among the fifteen (15) participants, those identified as financially dependent reported higher mean satisfaction in Physiological Needs (mean = 3.73, SD = 0.65) and Belongingness Needs (mean = 3.68, SD = 0.39), compared to their financially independent peers (Physiological mean = 3.60, SD = 0.61; Belongingness mean = 3.50, SD = 0.80). Similarly, dependent student-mothers had a higher Esteem Needs mean (3.54, SD = 0.52) than independents (mean = 3.33, SD = 0.35). However, independent participants reported greater satisfaction in Safety-Security Needs (mean = 3.70, SD = 0.45) and Self-Actualization Needs (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.35), surpassing dependents (Safety mean = 3.51, SD = 0.51; Self-Actualization mean = 3.37, SD = 0.33). Notably, the standard deviation in belongingness for

independents (SD = 0.80) was higher than that of dependents (SD = 0.39), indicating more varied experiences within the independent group.

These findings suggest that financial dependence provides a more stable foundation for fulfilling fundamental and social needs. The external financial support likely reduces pressure on student-mothers to meet basic needs alone, resulting in greater consistency in their lived experiences. On the other hand, financial independence, while associated with slightly lower satisfaction in basic and social needs, appears to empower individuals in ways that enhance their sense of personal safety and self-actualization. Independent student-mothers may feel a stronger sense of control over their lives and futures, aligning with theories that link autonomy with internal motivation and self-growth. However, the greater variability among independent respondents, especially in belongingness, could reflect differences in support networks or the emotional costs of self-reliance.

Overall, financial status significantly influences how student-mothers experience and fulfill their needs. While dependents benefit from



consistency and support in foundational aspects of life, independents report enhanced feelings of security and self-fulfillment, albeit with more diverse experiences. These insights underscore the importance of tailored support

systems that can address both the stability needs of dependent student-mothers and the autonomy-related challenges faced by their independent counterparts.

Table 12. Phase 2 Participants' Living Arrangement

Needs Satisfaction	Boarding		With Relatives		Self - Sufficient	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Physiological	3.56	0.68	3.82	0.68	3.82	0.97
Safety-Security	3.53	0.48	3.57	0.48	3.57	0.95
Belongingness	3.58	0.42	3.66	0.42	3.66	0.45
Esteem	3.49	0.34	3.52	0.34	3.52	1.34
Self-Actualization	3.78	0.27	3.41	0.27	3.41	0.70

Living Arrangement

The living arrangement of Phase 2 student-mothers significantly affects their satisfaction of various needs, with those living with relatives or self-sufficient generally experiencing higher satisfaction in basic and social needs, while boarding participants tend to show greater fulfillment in self-actualization despite facing more challenges in meeting foundational needs.

Student-mothers living with relatives and those who are self-sufficient report the highest mean satisfaction scores for Physiological Needs (both mean = 3.82), compared to those living in boarding arrangements who have a lower mean (3.56, SD = 0.68). A similar pattern emerges for Safety-Security Needs, where living with relatives or self-sufficient (both mean = 3.57) surpasses boarding (mean = 3.53), though self-sufficient participants display the greatest variation (SD = 0.95). In terms of Belongingness Needs, those living with relatives (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.45) and self-sufficient individuals (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.45) report slightly higher satisfaction than boarding participants (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.42). For Esteem Needs, living with relatives shows the highest mean satisfaction (3.52) but with substantial variability (SD = 1.34), while boarding (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.34) and self-

sufficient (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.70) groups report slightly lower means. Conversely, Self-Actualization Needs are highest among boarding participants (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.27) compared to those living with relatives and self-sufficient individuals (both mean = 3.41), suggesting a unique benefit of boarding despite challenges in other areas.

These results indicate that living with relatives or being self-sufficient supports greater satisfaction of fundamental and social needs, likely due to the availability of familial support and resources that help meet physiological, safety, and social belonging needs. The higher variability among self-sufficient student-mothers reflects diverse personal circumstances and the potential challenges of independent living. Meanwhile, boarding participants, although reporting lower satisfaction in basic needs, demonstrate higher self-actualization, possibly because boarding life encourages independence, personal responsibility, and skill development, fostering autonomy and growth. However, the generally moderate satisfaction levels across all groups point to unmet needs and areas requiring targeted support.

In summary, living arrangement influences how student-mothers meet their needs, with



family-based or independent living providing stability in foundational needs, while boarding arrangements promote self-growth but pose challenges in basic need fulfillment. These insights emphasize the importance of tailoring support programs to the distinct needs arising from different living situations to enhance the overall well-being of student-mothers.

4. The Perceived Challenges in the Lives of Student-Mothers

Student motherhood presents numerous challenges that can significantly affect academic performance and overall well-being (Alhajjaj, 2016:1; Daniel & Madugu, 2023:21). Research has highlighted various difficulties faced by student mothers, including the struggle to balance academic responsibilities with childcare, maternal stress, anxiety, time management issues, and feelings of guilt (Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018:322; Hillier, 2020; Daniel & Madugu, 2023).

This section categorically delineates the multifaceted dimensions that make resilience a vital element in the lived experiences of student-mothers pursuing higher education. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, resilience is defined as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change.” Taormina (2005) expands this definition by presenting resilience as a construct composed of endurance, adaptability, recuperability, and determination—qualities that are essential for individuals who must persist despite persistent life challenges.

The participants in this study belong to a marginalized minority group in higher education: single student-mothers. They face an extraordinary set of responsibilities and constraints, balancing academic workloads with the demands of parenting, often with limited support systems. Thus, table 9 outlines the perceived challenges in the lives of student-

mothers. These factors include obstacles in balancing roles and emotional and mental fatigue. The categories associated with the participants’ responses facilitate each of these factors.

Table 13. Perceived Challenges in the Lives of Student-Mothers

Themes	Categories
Obstacles in Balancing Roles	- Limited income or sole provider pressure (struggles to provide for both child and education) - Time management - Academic struggles
Physical Care, Emotional, and Mental Fatigue	- Lack of sleep and personal time - Overwhelming pressure - Personal care

Obstacles in Balancing Roles

In the pursuit of higher education, student-mothers navigate a complex landscape marked by distinctive challenges (Bustillo, Bustillo, & Sayson, 2024). Student-mothers’ obstacles in balancing roles are one of the perceived challenges that captures their lived and multifaceted lives. The obstacles arise from economic pressures, time constraints, and competing demands that strain their ability to fulfill multiple roles effectively. Mitchell (2003) argues that unfortunately, as dedicated as student mothers are to both their children and their education, in the end, the time crunch can have devastating effects on the relationship with their children. According to Poindexter (2017), financial concerns are a major reason many student parents cannot complete college degrees. Many of our study participants named financial struggles one of their top challenges.



Limited Income or Sole Provider Pressure - Student-mothers who are the sole providers for their households experience intense financial pressure as they must generate sufficient income to meet all family needs. This pressure is heightened by limited opportunities, often due to conflicting schedules while juggling their responsibility as a mother and a student all at the same time. The burden of being the primary or only source of income creates stress and limits the ability to invest in other areas such as education or quality childcare. This circumstance compels them to continually struggle as they further rely on themselves for their family's survival.

Several interviewees, such as Participant 2 and Participant 7, explained that managing finances is a constant source of stress, especially when both the mother and child are students or when there is a lack of stable income. Some mothers rely on family support, while others juggle small businesses or part-time jobs to make ends meet, further complicating their schedules. As attested by the respondents:

So, kuan, sa financial support, umm, honestly kuan ra, sakong pag skuyla kay personal rajud na siya, kay akong kita sakong, like akong kita sakong pag paninda kay mao rajud na akong i bayad sakong mga Dept. fee, Org. fee then kanang kung sa allowance kay, ari rapud ko magkuha sakong kuan, then di man sad ko mag snacks kay di man jud ko kuan, tigpalit, kana rang magtukar akong utok, mopalit kog snack pero dili rajud ko kay kuan man gud, kanang, mama nata daghan kaytag, maglain tag kwarta para if naay mga in ana, tipid pud nya, kung, ay hinoon, akong pares kay, ang iyaha gud kay, para sa pagkaon siya ba, like panud-an. (Financially, I handle school costs from what I earn selling goods. My income covers my department and organization fees including my allowance. I rarely buy snacks unless I really crave something. As a mom, I have to be frugal. My partner helps with food and if

there's extra and alssamlo we use it for tricycle maintenance.) - **Participant 2**

Then, ang pinaka, pinaka, na-challenge lang gyud ko is financially kay student baya ko then student sad akong anak so mura'g, like-- like mura'g maglisod...di gani ko'g pangayo sa akong ate which is nag support nako. So, lisod kaayo siya i, kanang, i-manage gani imong kwarta nga di ka ganahan mangayo sa imong, for the expense sa imong school, school works. So, financially jud ko nag lisod. And actually, naglisod, ay, kanang, dili siya lisod, in terms of parenting gani, didto rajud ko maglisod sa financial support rajud ko niya ba. Dili ko maka-- naa siyay pangayuon nak, "Ma, mamalit ko ug lami ma beh". "Hala, wala man koy kwarta beh uy, adto ni lola nimo pangayo". So usahay, kuan, kay ma hurt sad ko usahay ba kay dili sad ko makahatag bisag palit lang ug kuan, ingon ana. (But the biggest challenge for me is financial—because I'm a student, and my daughter is a student too. It's hard to manage money, especially when I don't want to ask for help from my sister who supports me. So managing finances is really hard. Parenting-wise, it's not that hard because my mom helps me take care of her. I can focus during school hours, then we reconnect at night, after dinner. So that's manageable. But yeah, the financial part is the hardest. Like when she says, "Mama, can you buy me something yummy?" and I say, "Sorry, baby, I don't have money. Ask your grandma." It hurts when I can't give her something simple.) - Participant 7

Participant 2 and Participant 7 explained that managing finances is a constant source of stress, especially when both the mother and child are students or when there is a lack of stable income. Some mothers rely on family support, while others juggle small businesses or part-time jobs to make ends meet, further complicating their schedules.

Participants 2 and 7 further expressed their struggles and ways in coping and balancing



their finances considering the demands of raising children while pursuing education as a significant challenge. Participants with a shaky support system and limited support resources often face the dilemma of allocating scarce funds between essential child-related expenses (food, healthcare, childcare) and educational costs (tuition, books, fees). This notion underscores how the population in this minority go above and beyond to meet their needs and their family halfway. Additionally, the high cost of childcare and education, coupled with the need to provide basic necessities, creates a cycle where parents must choose between immediate survival and long-term educational goals which further strains resources. This struggle is intensified by systemic barriers such as informal school fees, lack of subsidies, and inadequate social safety nets.

Time Management: Student-mothers consistently reported that time management was their most significant obstacle, with nearly every participant citing the difficulty of fulfilling academic duties while meeting their children's needs. For instance, one of the respondents described dividing her evenings between childcare and studying, often sacrificing sleep. Meeting academic requirements while managing time and other equally important child-rearing responsibilities places considerable time and emotional strain on student parents. Deadlines for assignments, exams, and class attendance often conflict with caregiving duties such as attending to children's medical needs, school events, or emergencies. This dual responsibility can lead to fragmented attention and fatigue, negatively impacting academic performance and persistence. Studies highlight that student mothers face extraordinary difficulties balancing rigorous course demands with childcare, often without adequate institutional support (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Time management emerges as a central, all-encompassing challenge for student-mothers in higher education, profoundly shaping their academic, personal, and emotional experiences. The need to simultaneously fulfill academic requirements and child-rearing responsibilities creates persistent tension, often resulting in emotional strain, fragmented focus, and compromised well-being. Nearly every student-mother interviewed cited time management as their primary struggle. Balancing academic deadlines, classes, and study time with the constant needs of their children leaves little room for rest or personal care.

Participants' experiences reveal that the pressure to meet academic deadlines frequently conflicts with the unpredictable demands of motherhood. For example, **Participant 1** recounted, "*mag voice message ra mi sa akong bata. Ma, asa naman ka? Ma, ingon ka mo ari ka? Like, dili man everytime gud ko makaadto kay, kanang, kita wala man tay klase ang Friday pero naa man pud koy ginawork. So, mag-- libog gani ko asay unahon nako pero mas giuna nako mag work para naa pud koy ma provide niya--*". "I can't always visit [my daughter], even if we don't have Friday classes, because I have work. I often have to prioritize work so that I can provide for her." This highlights the constant negotiation between earning an income, academic obligations, and being present for their children—a juggling act that leaves little room for rest or self-care.

Participant 2 stated "*akoa man jud nang gahinan og panahon nga kanang kuan bitaw, di man ko ganahan gud nga ana pa mo lihok ig deadline na kay di ko ganahan nga ma pressure bitaw kay if ma pressure nako kay kanang, kita man siguro tanan kanang ma pressure ta murag di nata ka tarong og panghunahuna like kanang di nato mabuhat nga kani dapat atong buhaton ana, pero if kanang exams jud kay inig ka gabii jud ko mag kuan or kanang or mahurot na akong ice candy anha nako mag kuan*".



balik balikon jud nako ng kuan, balik balikon jud nako'g basa balik balikon nakog tuon para, para inig ka kuan exam na kay makuan na bitaw gani siya sakong utok ma tatak gyud siya ba kay if anha paka mag tuon like kanang kuan na kanang holy hour na bitaw siya kanang ma mental block paka, so, kuan ra jud kana ra akua nga ari ko ma apiki sa time if mabuntag ra, pero karon kay so far kay na kuan naman kanang ni hinayhinay na siyag ka usab ba kay syempre ako ng sayuan najud og mata para kuan, "I allocate time in advance. I don't like working at the last minute or under pressure—it affects my focus. I prefer studying at night, when I've finished selling ice candy, and I reread lessons multiple times, so it sticks in my mind. If I only study during "holy hour" (last-minute), I risk mental block. So, time really affects me, but I've adjusted by waking up earlier."

This strategy is particularly crucial for student mothers who juggle multiple roles and face fragmented time due to caregiving and work responsibilities. Her adaptation—waking earlier—demonstrates resilience and proactive problem-solving, aligning with research that highlights effective time management as a key factor in student mothers' academic success. Moreover, this approach reflects personal growth and self-awareness, traits identified as essential for overcoming the unique challenges faced by student mothers balancing education and family life.

Similarly, *Participant 4* described the emotional turmoil of leaving a sick child to attend mandatory school activities: *Kanang magsakit ang anak kay ug magsakit man gud ang bata kay di ka ganahan biyaan labina makakita ka niya nga magluya, kana ganing di ka ganahan moadto sa skuylahan kay para moskuyla, mas pilion, mas ganahan nako pilion ang kana kuyugan gani siya pero dili jud nako mahimo labina kanang naay mga importante nga activities sa skuylahan nga dili gyud kanang ma, di ka pwede maka skip ba. Kana nuong ma late, murag madugay jud ko kay labinag kana*

laging magsakit, kanang magduhaduha kog skuyla ba pero sa ako noong mga assignments ug projects di pud nuon ko ma late kana ra'g kanang ari sa skuylahan. "When my child gets sick... you don't want to go to school—you'd rather stay with them. But I can't really do that, especially when there are important activities in school that I can't skip... I usually get delayed especially when my child is sick. I sometimes hesitate to go to school." This scenario underscores how time management for student-mothers is not just about scheduling, but about making difficult, emotionally charged decisions that can lead to guilt, anxiety, and academic setbacks.

The struggle to allocate time effectively is echoed by *Participant 6*, who noted, *Ang pag manage ra sa time. Mas kuan siya if gikuan jud nimo imong oras gani kanang gi gahin.. unsa na ..kanang gi unsa na gi arra.. Basta in ana.. "It's really about managing time. It becomes manageable if you really allocate your time properly... if you arrange it well." However, as *Participant 8* pointed out that, *Ang pinaka kontra jud nako ani is time, kay ang time management lisod jud siya, i-balance jud kay knowing nga not just acads ra akong gi atubang, naa sad koy leadership nga, kanang mga, responsibilities then, murag, lisod jud siya i-balance. Lisod jud siya dayon ang ako nalang gi buhat is, kanang, those leisure time nako ako nalang jud i-bawi kay though matagaan man pud gyud nako ug time, like bahinon nako ang oras. even with careful planning, "Time management is really difficult because I'm not just dealing with academics—I also have leadership responsibilities. It's really hard to balance." These testimonies illustrate that the multiplicity of roles student-mothers occupy often leads to fragmented attention, persistent fatigue, and a sense of never fully meeting the demands of any single role.**

The emotional and psychological toll of these competing demands is further magnified during emergencies. **Participant 9** shared, *naglisod jud ko'g time management, and balancing*



between my responsibility as a mom and as a student kay there was a time man gud nga kanang, I was having my demo that time, and then, personal ni sha kay kanang nga kuan kanang, I was having my demo at that time and then my mom called me like, emergency, emergency gyud sha kay, kanang akoang daughter kay kanang low kay'g platelet and that time naglibog ko unsa ang akoang unahon, ang akua bang demo or moadto naba dayon ko sa hospital... niadto nako sa hospital and then makuan pud ko'g emotional nga nga kuan kay ganahan ko nga mag full time mom, pero kanang of course naa man koy responsibility as a student, so yeah that kanang feel nako mao na sha ang pinaka hard nga obstacle nga akoang na face. "I was having my demo at that time and then my mom called me like, emergency... my daughter's platelet count had dropped. I was torn between finishing my demo or going straight to the hospital. I felt emotional because I wanted to be a full-time mom. But of course, I also have a responsibility as a student." Such moments of crisis force student-mothers to choose between their academic progress and their child's immediate needs, often at great personal cost.

For some, the challenge is compounded by additional factors such as single parenthood or lack of familial support. **Participant 15** explained, *"pressure gyud siya, miss kay akoang bana nag trabaho man gud siya sa gawas then ako ra ang nag kuan sa akong anak. "It's really a lot of pressure because my husband works abroad, so I'm the only one physically taking care of my child." The absence of a co-parent further intensifies the burden of time management, leaving mothers to shoulder all responsibilities alone.*

According to Perna and Thomas (2008), student-mothers face extraordinary difficulties balancing rigorous course demands with childcare, often without adequate institutional support. Studies by Moreau and Kerner (2015) and Wladis, Conway, and Hachey (2018) further reveal that this dual responsibility can

lead to chronic stress, academic underperformance, and even attrition from higher education. The emotional labor involved in constantly negotiating priorities can undermine both academic persistence and personal well-being (Brooks, 2012).

Adaptive time management was essential for survival. Participants described planning tasks around their children's sleep schedules, prioritizing urgent academic work, and making use of any available free time, even at the cost of personal rest or leisure. **Participant 2** mentioned allocating time in advance to submit assignments on time, avoiding last-minute work that could affect her focus. Some used to-do lists or digital reminders to stay organized, and others compartmentalized their roles to focus on one responsibility at a time.

Lovell and Scott (2020) pointed out time management as an enormous challenge and branded conflicting roles as demanding responsibilities vying for attention. In addition, Brooke (2012) also pointed out that the unfortunate truth about time management is that students will often make up time by sleeping fewer hours, affecting their ability to function and be productive. In full essence, the challenge of time management for student-mothers is neither merely a logistical issue nor a matter of scheduling, but a daily negotiation of priorities that often involves emotional labor, sacrifice, and resilience reflecting the holistic struggle that shadows every aspect of their lives especially in the context of their need to make difficult choices, often sacrificing their own needs or aspirations for the sake of their children or their studies. Without adequate support systems, these challenges can have lasting effects on their academic trajectories and overall quality of life.

Academic Struggles - Student-mothers commonly face academic struggles and scheduling conflicts as they attempt to balance



their multiple roles. Previous research suggests that many student-mothers enter higher education less prepared for the academic rigor, which compounds the challenges they face (MPP, 2016). While they often express strong commitment to their school, program, and decision to pursue higher education, they also describe the difficulty of managing their academic responsibilities alongside caregiving duties. Yakaboski (2010) further highlights that rigid and conflicting college schedules pose a significant barrier to success for student-mothers, exacerbating the struggle to effectively balance academic and family obligations.

In discussing academic struggles, Participant 1 shared “Honestly, I usually cram in school. My only goal is to finish my degree.” She also added “My mind is really focused on working, not so much on school. I’d rather stop school and start working—but I’m holding on to my studies because it’s really for both of us.”

On the other hand, Participant 7 revealed that “My schoolwork ends up being rushed. Like, “Okay, this should be fine, it’s due tomorrow anyway.” So I just cram. Then when I get to class, I realize, “Oh, it needs to be colored?” or “Oh, it’s supposed to be something else?” That’s what happens—I don’t get enough time to make my output presentable.” She also stated that “For me, academics are my first priority—because I want to repay the people helping me by doing well.”

When asked about achieving balance in her dual role, Participant 8 asserted that although balance was achieved, however she also replied that “I feel like my performance dipped a little, not that I’m not doing my best. Still acceptable, though. It’s above the minimum required, but not the same as in high school when I was really an achiever. But it’s okay.” This magnified how she learned to lower her standards and adjusted it according to her current priorities as she stated that “Yes, I had high standards, but I

realized I can’t push myself too much anymore.” Participant 14 shared a similar experience as she postulated that “ Sometimes, miss, I really can’t get anything done. I have to do everything myself, and I end up cramming.” Other participants shared their explicit academic setbacks as well, for instance Participant 15 mentioned that “There was a time I failed one quiz because I wasn’t able to study—I was too emotional because I missed my daughter. I just cried it out, then I told myself to do better next time. I use my failures as lessons. I don’t dwell too long. I have to move forward.” When asked about the outcome of juggling her dual roles in her academic pursuits, Participant 3 expressed that “ It has a slight effect, but not much. For example, when I try to study or write, my child would just say that it’s time for us to sleep. That’s usually how it is.” Thus, implying that although her academics is one of her top priorities her role as a mother definitely plays a role in influencing her decisions. Participant 6 also bears similar experience about not having ample time to solely focus on her academic undertakings after class hours, when asked “Were you able to comply with assignments? Were you able to prepare for exams?” she posited “ I really didn’t, Miss. Because once I got home, I went straight to chores, then assisted my children. I would always fall behind — especially in terms of academics.” Meanwhile Participant 9 recounted that “It’s been hard, especially when we have early 7 AM classes. I have to prepare food, and sometimes my daughter wakes up early and wants attention. I get “mom guilt” — I feel like I don’t want to leave for class.” She further conveyed that “There were times I was 30 minutes late, but I still attended. For midterms, I tried to study late at night, but my daughter doesn’t sleep early. She prefers playing with me at night — maybe because she craves attention since she didn’t grow up directly with me but with our parents.” which resulted to a grade she least expected, “I once got a grade I didn’t



expect — even though I gave my best. I felt like I lacked something. That grade cost me my scholarship. It made me doubt myself. I thought, “If I weren’t a parent, maybe I wouldn’t be like this.” Sadly, I reached that kind of thinking.”

Although the majority reported that their academic performance plummeted and resulted in a downturn, Participant 10 stood out among all of them as she pointed out that “For me, I’m not really into studying after class. I really just focus during the class sessions — I try to absorb everything immediately. At home, I don’t study because I’d rather help my children with their assignments. Still, my academic performance is okay. I always rank first in class.” Moreover, Participant 11 also shared a mutual sentiment when asked as to how her dual role affected her academic performance, she replied “I haven’t had any major issues because, as I’ve said, time management really helps me balance everything.”

Meanwhile, Participant 12 showed how she handles her circumstance conducive as she explained the way she reaches out to her instructors “I really try hard to catch up on what I missed. Like, I go to my teachers and ask, Miss, can I still take this?” Or before I even get absent, I already inform them — Miss, what are we going to do tomorrow? Is it okay if I’m not around? And if there are any activities or assignments, I ask if I can just make up for it afterward.” Thus, shedding light on how she optimistically views her demanding role.

Student-mothers face a range of challenges that affect their academic pursuits, with experiences varying widely among individuals. Participant 9 described the emotional strain of balancing early morning classes and childcare, expressing feelings of “mom guilt” and the difficulty of finding study time due to her daughter’s needs. A certain participant also recounted how these

challenges led to an unexpected low grade that cost her scholarship, causing self-doubt and reflection on how parenting impacted her academic performance. This narrative highlights the emotional toll and practical obstacles that can undermine academic success for student-mothers.

Conversely, some participants demonstrated strategies and attitudes that help them maintain strong academic performance despite their dual roles. Participant 10, for example, focuses intensely during class rather than studying at home, prioritizing her children’s needs while still achieving top ranks. Participant 11 emphasized effective time management as key to balancing responsibilities without major academic issues. Participant 12 illustrated proactive communication with instructors to manage absences and make up missed work, reflecting an optimistic and strategic approach to overcoming scheduling conflicts.

These contrasting experiences underscore that while many student-mothers struggle with the competing demands of parenting and schooling—often leading to compromised academic outcomes—others successfully adapt through focused engagement, time management, and seeking institutional support. This diversity of coping mechanisms and outcomes points to the importance of flexible academic policies and supportive environments that recognize the unique challenges faced by student-mothers.

Physical Care, Emotional, and Mental Fatigue

The physical care observed by the student-mothers along with their emotional, and mental fatigue as experienced by them, according to the data gathered, is attributed to three interconnected factors: lack of sleep and personal time, overwhelming pressure from their responsibilities, and feelings of isolation and exhaustion. These factors combine to create



a significant burden that affects not only their psychological well-being and academic performance but also their physical health, manifesting as bodily exhaustion and physical strain. This section highlights the intense challenges faced by student-mothers as they juggle their dual roles of parenting and studying, often sacrificing personal rest and physical wellness.

For example, Participant 1 describes the pain of growing emotional distance and constant worry about not being present enough (*ang among connection nga duha. Kay murag naa nay gap, kay usahay gani- usahay gani kay matawag na ko niya nga ate-- ay, matawag mo ko niya nga Ma Angel, like ang katong Ma Angel nga katong mama niya didto sa-- katong ate nako sa syudad. Moa iyang matawag sa akoo, so murag naa nay gap, kanang, pero at the same time kay close man gihapon mi. "It feels like there's a gap between us. Sometimes, she even calls me "Ma Angel," which is the name of the woman she's staying with—my older sister in the city. So, there's already some distance between us emotionally, but we're still close."*), illustrating the emotional strain intertwined with the physical demands of caregiving and academic work.

In essence, this section illustrates the profound toll—physical, emotional, and mental—that balancing demanding roles exacts on student-mothers, emphasizing how these strains shape their lived experiences and necessitate significant sacrifices such as reduced time with their children and diminished personal rest. This clearly articulates how physical, emotional, and mental strain functions as a critical challenge that shapes the lived experience of student-mothers, supported by participants' testimonies and categorized causes.

Lack of Sleep and Personal Time - Bosch (2013) asserts that the student-mothers had to sacrifice severally if she aimed for success.

Sacrificing may take the form of sacrificing time spent socializing and sleeping. The Student mother must cut the number and amount of time spent with colleagues and friends if it is not purposely an academic requirement. This is because the student mother has other responsibilities to perform, that is either to put things in place for the next day, attending to the needs of the child or children or catch up with studies. The mother must miss certain social events organized by the faculty, department and university authorities for students so that she can properly manage herself, academic work and child rearing responsibilities (Ajandi, 2011). Most student-mothers may reduce the number of hours they spend sleeping, as facing conflicting, but equally urgent demands on a daily basis is the underlying dilemma student-mothers have to face. As a mother, a woman generally feels she should be available to her child when the child seeks contact. There are certain, often internalized societal expectations of a mother: she should be patient, read to her child, prepare whatever her child needs, keep the household tidy, and in general make her child's well-being the focus of her attention and her priority. Student-mothers often face a severe "time squeeze," wherein their responsibilities for caregiving, paid work, and schooling compete intensely for limited hours. This results in less time for sleep and leisure compared to other students or mothers not enrolled in school. The chronic lack of adequate rest negatively affects their health, emotions, memory, and academic potential, contributing directly to emotional fatigue (Hoffman, 2016; Stone & Hernandez, 2013). They frequently resort to studying during their child's sleep or rely on others for childcare, but disruptions such as child illness can derail these plans, further reducing personal time (Radcliffe & Lester, 2003).

Many participants report sleep deprivation and scarce personal time due to the demands of caregiving and academic responsibilities. For



instance, **Participant 2** shares the exhaustion of managing business, child care, and school: *“kanang morning jud mao jud nay pinaka busy jud nako kay magluto then magluto pako’g turon then kuan mag kuha sa ice candy ana then mag atiman sakong kato estudyante nako then kuan jud need jud siya ug kuan ba kanang need jud bitaw nga sayu ko momata tas para ma accommodate bitaw nako tanan bitaw like kanang momata ko kay mo atiman sa mga anak nya mgligo pako sakong katong 4yr old then kanang need pako mag hugas ug plato, maglung-ag, magluto sud-an, ana then mag luto pako sakong lutuonon then limpyo gamay then laba sa uniform ana kuan jud ang time jud ang pinaka kuan bitaw kanang dako nga challenge kay need man jud nimo siya ibalanse gyud nga wa kay mabiyaaan bitaw.”* (“Mornings are my busiest: I cook, prepare food like turon, collect ice candy, take care of my student-child... Time really is the biggest challenge...I need to balance everything so nothing is neglected.”)

She describes physical fatigue: *“kuan jud siya uyy kanang struggle jud siya pero, kana bitaw ig sulod nimos campus kay kani nalang ibabaw imong tarungon ba para ingnon naka panudlay ka bahalag ang ubos gubot kaayo ng ig abot sa skwelahan kutas pa kayka tas ig kuan nimo kay wana nagklase na, nag lisngag pana imong ilong kay 4th floor baya amoa, very kuan jud kaayo, kuan pa gyud laylay pajud, harwoy pajud akong bukton, in ana bitaw, ana lang gyud ang ka struggle kay tanan jud nga parte sa akong lawas kay naa juy dala ba, dire, ana siya”.* (“It’s really a struggle, you know? Like, it’s tough. But once you step inside the campus, you just fix the upper part of your appearance—like your hair—so it looks like you combed it, even if the rest of you is a total mess. Then when you get to school, you’re already out of breath, and when you finally arrive, class has already started. Your nose is flaring because our room is on the 4th floor. It’s really something, you know? And then your bag’s dragging, and my arm feels sore too. It’s like that. That’s just how much of a struggle it

is—every part of my body is feeling it. That’s how it is.”)

Meanwhile, **Participant 12** describes squeezing study and chores into her baby’s nap windows: *“i insert insert ra jud na nako akoang mga buhatunon sa balay kay kung matulog na siya kay diha raman gud nga time nga maka naa koy kuan ba nga matulog siya, while matulog siya kay naa koy buhatunon.”* (“I really just insert all my tasks into those nap windows. Because it’s only when she’s asleep that I actually have time to do things.”)

Moreover, **Participant 4** expresses the emotional toll in caregiving and the constant tug of war between prioritizing her academic undertaking or her child’s matters : *“kanang magsakit ang anak kay ug magsakit man gud ang bata kay di ka ganahan biyaan labina makakita ka niya nga magluya, kana ganing di ka ganahan moadto sa skuylahan kay para moskuyla”* (“When the child is sick, you really don’t feel like leaving them... I sometimes hesitate to go to school.”) This highlights how caregiving for a sick child imposes significant emotional and physical demands that disrupt the participant’s routines and reduce personal time. This caregiving responsibility often forces the participant to prioritize the child’s needs over academic and personal commitments, leading to compromised self-care. Although not explicitly stated, the situation implies sleep deprivation due to nighttime caregiving and emotional stress. Overall, these factors result in fatigue and a substantial lack of rest and personal time, justifying her circumstance under the category of lack of sleep and personal time.

On the other hand, **Participant 13** notes difficulty focusing due to constant worry about her child: *“Kanang dili kaayo maka focus gani, miss if kuan, if maka receive gani ko ug call nga kanang naay something about sa baby nako ba, unya kanang nag deal pud ko sa kanang sa murag exams or mga*



projects, miss nga mag struggle pud ko ana." ("It's the difficulty in focusing, especially when I receive a call that something happened with my baby.""). Participant 13's difficulty in focusing is directly linked to her constant worry about her child, which likely disrupts her ability to rest and have uninterrupted personal time. This persistent anxiety can interfere with sleep quality, reducing the mental and physical recovery needed for daily tasks such as exams and projects. Her circumstance reflects the impact of caregiving stress on rest and focus and further magnifies how caregiving responsibilities encroach on personal time, leading to emotional strain and cognitive challenges.

Participant 5 further exemplifies this category as she stated during our interview that, "*So ang biggest challenge Miss kana gyung magpurhisyo gani ang bata since my baby is coming 11 months naman so nag teething na siya kanang phase na kanang naay timeless nga mag activity ko ba then mag hilak-hilak siya then sleepless nights plus the academics then iyahang father is bag o pasad nahuman ug OJT dayun gi kuan man, gi absorb siya sa iyang gi OJThan ba busy pud sa work since busy pud sila, didto man siya nag OJT sa Maayo Hotel then busy mani siya karon nga month pud maong wala kaayo makakuan nako makabanos sa bata ba nya maikog pud ko sa akong mother-in-law since sa adlawan kay siya may mobantay mao anng ako nalang puy mobawi ug bantay igka gabie". (My biggest challenge, Miss, is really when the baby becomes fussy. Since my baby is already 11 months old, he's teething now. There are times when I need to do activities and he just cries, plus the sleepless nights—and that's on top of my academics. His father just finished his OJT and got absorbed by the company where he interned, so now he's busy with work. He had his OJT at Maayo Hotel, and he's really busy this month, so he can't help me much with the baby. I also feel shy to ask my mother-in-law to take care of the baby at night because she already takes care of him during the day, so I*

make up for it by taking care of the baby at night.)

Participant 5's experience highlights the emotional and mental fatigue caused by chronic sleep deprivation and limited personal time due to caring for a fussy, teething baby while managing academic demands. The lack of sufficient support from her partner and reluctance to burden her mother-in-law forces her to sacrifice rest, undermining her physical and psychological well-being. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this situation reflects unmet physiological and safety needs, which in turn affect her sense of belonging and self-esteem as she struggles to balance motherhood and education. These unmet foundational needs hinder her progress toward self-actualization and academic success. Addressing these layered needs through increased support and rest is crucial for her holistic well-being and ability to thrive in both roles.

Participant 7 vividly illustrates the toll of sleep deprivation and lack of personal time on student-mothers' well-being. She candidly shares how her personal care comes last due to exhaustion, stating: "*last na jud akong self as priority nako, mao na nga, kanang, na ingon ani na ko. Wala na koy care sa akong self ba. Kana nga, less na akong tulog, ingon ana then maka-affect baya pud siya sa akong, kanang, makatulog na ko diri, sige nalang ko ug tulog diri sa skuylahan. "Nganong sige mana siya'g katulog?" Ingon ana. "Bahala na mo uy, basta matulog ko", ingon ana. Moa to siya.*" (My personal well-being comes last. That's why I'm like this now. I lack sleep, and it affects me—I even fall asleep during class. But I don't care what people say, I sleep when I need to.) When asked about stress-relief activities, she explains: "*kung naa koy vacant nga time, kung naa koy free time kay matulog ra gyud ko. Yeah, if kanang, naa mi maestro nga dili mo sulod, matulog ra gyud ko kanang, whole hour ana kay matulog ra gyud ko. Kay, as in, hangul gyud kaayo ko ug katulog, like, mas ma-prefer*



pa ko matulog kaysa mag laag gani ko kay, feel nako mao ang need sa-- mao ang need sa akong lawas ba." (Honestly, if I have free time, I sleep. Like if a teacher doesn't show up, I'll sleep for the whole hour. I'd rather sleep than go out. That's what my body needs—rest, not leisure. I'll go out when I'm well-rested.)

The pervasive lack of sleep and personal time among student-mothers emerges as a critical factor contributing to their emotional and mental fatigue. Participants vividly recount the relentless "time squeeze" caused by caregiving, academic demands, and household chores, which leaves little room for rest or self-care, as exemplified by Participant 2's description of her exhausting mornings filled with multitasking and physical strain. The emotional toll intensifies when caregiving responsibilities, such as tending to a sick or fussy child, disrupt study routines and sleep, as shared by Participants 4, 13, and 15, highlighting how these interruptions exacerbate stress and cognitive challenges. Participant 15's narrative, in particular, underscores how chronic sleep deprivation and limited support undermine foundational physiological and safety needs, which Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs identifies as essential for psychological stability and growth. Participant 12 describes the necessity of squeezing study and chores into her baby's nap windows "I really just insert all my tasks into those nap windows. Because it's only when she's asleep that I actually have time to do things." Directly illustrating this struggle, Participant 7 candidly reveals prioritizing sleep over all other activities, even academic commitments, stating that her personal well-being has become a last priority, often resulting in her falling asleep during class and emphasizing that she would rather sleep than have time for leisure. Addressing these layered challenges through enhanced support systems and opportunities for rest is imperative to alleviate fatigue and enable student-mothers to

pursue academic success while maintaining their well-being.

Overwhelming Pressure - This section underscores the reason behind the student-mothers' overwhelming pressure. The pressure on student-mothers arises from juggling multiple demanding roles simultaneously. They experience stress, anxiety, and feelings of being overwhelmed by their academic and parental obligations. This pressure is compounded by the need to maintain academic performance while ensuring proper care for their children, often leading to feelings of anger, restlessness, and a pervasive sense of insufficient time (Radcliffe & Lester, 2003; Stone & Hernandez, 2013; Wolfinger, 2008). The constant need to perform well in both domains without adequate support creates emotional strain and mental exhaustion (Hoffman, 2016). Thirteen out of fifteen student-mother participants expressed experiencing overwhelming pressure while pursuing higher education. The researchers categorize this pressure as a manifestation of unmet or strained basic and psychological needs, as outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs—specifically in the areas of physiological, safety and security, belongingness, and esteem.

This finding indicates that for many student-mothers, education is not pursued under optimal conditions, but rather amid compounded challenges from their dual roles as learners and caregivers. For instance, **Participant 1** revealed the difficulty of maintaining physical, emotional, and financial stability, stating: "*Physically, dili ka okay; emotionally dili ka okay; then financially, dili pa jud ka okay*" (*Physically, you're not okay; emotionally, you're not okay; and financially, you're really not okay*). These compound stressors reflect threats to her safety and security needs, particularly the lack of consistent income and emotional resilience.

Similarly, **Participant 2** shared how she wakes at 5 A.M. to manage household chores,



vending, and caregiving before walking to school and climbing to the 4th floor of their classroom: *"Tanan jud nga parte sakong lawas kay naa juy dala ba"*. This reflects the exhaustion related to unmet physiological needs, such as rest and nourishment.

While **Participant 3** experiences profound emotional exhaustion and burnout due to the demands of long daily travel, solo child care, and academic responsibilities. She shared *"I feel hopeless, helpless... Sometimes I consider giving up, but then I think, 'What would happen to me if I quit? I cry at night... I reflect on my actions... then I find motivation again."* Her feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are punctuated by moments of reflection and renewed motivation, illustrating a cycle of emotional struggle and resilience. These challenges undermine her emotional security and self-esteem, reflecting unmet safety and esteem needs in Maslow's Hierarchy. Her experience highlights the urgent need for emotional and practical support to help student-mothers sustain their well-being and academic persistence.

Moreover, **Participant 4** exemplified that *"it's really about my child's needs—and also the constant pressure to excel academically... Sometimes, I really can't get anything done. I have to do everything myself, and I end up cramming."* She revealed that although financially stable (her husband supports her from abroad), she bears full responsibility for their child and struggles academically under pressure to perform well. This reveals pressure at the esteem and time-management levels of Maslow's Hierarchy.

Subsequently, **Participant 5** experiences intense emotional conflict as she tries to balance her academic focus with feelings of guilt over caregiving interruptions. She expresses a deep bond and responsibility toward her child, stating, *"My child is my top priority... all my efforts are for him,"* yet struggles emotionally when parenting duties disrupt her studies. This tension creates significant stress and guilt,

reflecting her struggle to fulfill both roles effectively. Her experience magnifies the interplay between belongingness and esteem needs in Maslow's hierarchy, where the desire to care for her child coexists with the challenge of maintaining academic performance.

On the other hand, **Participant 6** experiences significant academic setbacks due to a lack of personal time for rest and study, leading her to frequently fall behind in her coursework. She shared *"I really didn't [have time for myself]... I would always fall behind — especially in terms of academics. I stress eat... just full-on stress."* This chronic stress manifests physically, as she copes through stress eating and internal reflection to manage her overwhelming demands. The absence of adequate self-care undermines both her physiological well-being and academic confidence, linking to Maslow's needs for health and esteem. In essence, her struggle highlights how insufficient personal time can negatively impact both physical health and academic performance for student-mothers.

Meanwhile, **Participant 7** voiced concerns regarding esteem and self-worth, noting the pressure to perform well in school while also parenting full-time. She shared that: *"I feel so insecure right now. I don't like going out with friends because I feel like I don't care for myself that much like how my friends used to. But in the future, I'll make up for it."* She also reiterated *"I don't usually show emotions. Maybe because of everything I've been through—I learned to manage them. When I cry, I do it alone, in secret. I cry for a bit, then sleep. I tell myself, 'I'll be okay tomorrow.'" Participant 7's pressure is rooted in emotional insecurity and diminished self-worth, despite having financial support. Her experience aligns with Maslow's esteem and belongingness levels, highlighting how internalized social comparison and emotional suppression create profound stress for student-mothers, even when basic needs like food or shelter are not in immediate jeopardy.*



Participant 8 faces overwhelming pressure from juggling multiple demanding roles as a mother, student, and leader, leading to significant time deprivation and sleep loss. She explains, *"I divide my time carefully... From 10 p.m. to morning, that's when I focus on academics,"* illustrating how she sacrifices late-night hours to keep up with her studies. This intense schedule often comes at the cost of emotional presence with her child, who sometimes asks why she's always away, she certainly shared, *"Sometimes he gets upset and asks why I'm always away. Eventually, he understood"* highlighting the personal toll of her commitments. This role overload compromises her basic physiological needs and affects her sense of belonging and self-esteem, demonstrating how overcommitment can strain essential needs and underscore the challenges student-mothers face in balancing personal well-being with academic and caregiving responsibilities.

Participant 9 experienced intense pressure when her academic responsibilities collided with a medical emergency involving her child. She recounts, *"I was having my demo... and then my mom called—emergency—my daughter's platelet count dropped... I felt emotional,"* illustrating the immediate and distressing conflict between her role as a student and as a mother. This situation forced her to confront the painful choice between academic duty and maternal instinct, as she admits, *"I wanted to be a full-time mom."* The crisis triggered profound emotional distress and guilt, reflecting Maslow's needs for safety and belongingness, as the wellbeing of her child became paramount amid competing demands.

Participant 11 experiences significant emotional suppression and guilt as she struggles to balance her academic responsibilities with motherhood. She admits, *"It's only a mother's guilt... I prioritize school over*

my baby sometimes... I really miss having my child in my arms," revealing the painful emotional trade-offs she endures. Despite managing to cope academically, she reflects, *"I feel like I'm doing something wrong,"* indicating ongoing internal conflict and self-doubt. This tension threatens her sense of belongingness and esteem, as the temporary separation from her child challenges her feelings of connectedness and adequacy.

Participant 13 experiences pressure related to balancing her roles but manages it without signs of emotional breakdown or severe struggle. She reflects on her challenges and copes through prayer, as she shares, *"When I feel stressed, I take time to pray and think things through."* This internal reflection helps her maintain emotional balance and resilience despite ongoing demands. Her experience aligns with Maslow's esteem needs, showing that while pressure exists, her coping strategies support her psychological stability and prevent burnout.

Participant 14 faces significant pressure from managing solo caregiving alongside academic demands, as her husband works abroad and she is solely responsible for their child. She shares, *"I'm pressured to excel in school... My husband works abroad, so I'm the only one who takes care of our child,"* highlighting the mental and physical load she carries alone. This overwhelming responsibility often leaves her with little time for assignments, admitting, *"Sometimes I don't even have time for assignments."* Despite having no financial problems, the combination of self-doubt, exhaustion, and time stress undermines her confidence and academic focus, reflecting Maslow's esteem and safety needs.

In the context of belongingness, multiple participants reported separation anxiety and emotional detachment from their children due to academic obligations. For example,



Participant 15 admitted: *"I lose focus sometimes. There are nights I can't sleep because I'm thinking about her. Like, 'Is she eating well?' 'Is she okay?' Especially when I hear that she's sick—it affects my ability to concentrate. I cry sometimes, and I get really anxious".* While Participant 15 recalled moments of guilt during sleepless nights attending to her child while still trying to meet academic expectations. She stated that: *" There was a time I was cramming because we had to pass our research proposal manuscript. But my baby kept crying after getting vaccinated. I didn't know what to do anymore because my partner was on duty. Luckily, his father volunteered to take care of the baby, so I was able to overcome that situation."*

When asked about her feelings she responded: *"I really felt like crying. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to focus on my studies, but I also felt sorry for my baby who was crying and needed his mother. At 11 months old, they already recognize and look for their mother."* These statements highlight the psychological toll of balancing maternal bonds with educational demands.

The following findings above reinforces the observation of Maslow's theory that individuals cannot effectively pursue higher-level goals like self-actualization (e.g., achieving educational success) without a stable foundation of basic needs. According to Raghupathi et al. (2020), the development of self-awareness, emotional well-being, and safety is necessary before individuals can focus on improving their capabilities and long-term goals. Furthermore, Prasetyo et al. (2021) explains that education serves as a tool for enhancing quality of life—but only if learners are equipped to engage with it fully. For these 13 participants, educational engagement coexists with a constant negotiation of unmet needs, transforming education not just into a developmental opportunity, but also a daily battle for survival, dignity, and hope.

The overwhelming pressures experienced by student-mothers are deeply validated and justified by the inherent demands of simultaneously fulfilling two highly challenging roles. As Dalian (1998) highlights, being a mother and a university student, each require significant time, energy, and commitment, and attempting to manage both often results in urgent, competing demands that strain a woman's resources. The strong identification with motherhood as a primary caregiving role intensifies feelings of guilt and inadequacy when limited time, money, or energy prevent them from meeting their own expectations. This internal conflict is further compounded by the perception that pursuing education may detract from their effectiveness as mothers, leading to feelings of selfishness and questioning of priorities, thereby underscoring the legitimacy of the emotional and practical pressures student-mothers face in their journey to balance academic success and parenting.

Personal Care: This category was centered on each participant's descriptions of their personal care during this time of being a student-mother attending college. Discussions from this category found several areas where student-mothers view personal care as something they either can not or do not include in the list of their priorities. Student-mothers frequently report feelings of isolation, shame, and guilt, especially when they perceive themselves as failing to meet the expectations of either role. This isolation is intensified by a lack of validation for their struggles, which can lead to withdrawal and difficulty communicating their emotions to others, including their children (Wolfinger, 2008; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003) which often prompts these individuals to reject the idea of selfcare. The emotional burden includes a loss of control and the sense that they are "not superheroes," underscoring their need for recognition and support to mitigate burnout (Wolfinger, 2008). Such isolation exacerbates



exhaustion and can negatively affect their well-being and parenting quality (Hoffman, 2016). Lovel and Scott (2020) also reported social isolation and no time for themselves as a challenge for single parents.

Participant 2 shared candidly about the limited time she has for personal care, stating, “When it comes to personal care, I really only get very limited time for myself. It’s only when I happen to have free time that I can truly take care of myself.” She described how people around her often remind her to look after herself, with comments like, “Te, take care of yourself too,” or “Look after yourself.” For her, even small routines like combing her hair are significant daily acts of self-care. She noted the contrast between herself and others who have more time to focus on style and appearance: “Sometimes, when it comes to how I dress... well, you know how others these days are very conscious of style and matching clothes. But for us mothers, it’s different. I still know how to carry myself, of course, but there are just times when I’m rushing. Unlike them, they don’t have much else to worry about, so they still have time to care for their appearance. As for me, I just wear whatever is available and convenient.” She also revealed the emotional toll of her responsibilities: “There are days I cry from exhaustion—between school, selling, taking care of kids.” Her priorities remain firmly with her motherly roles, explaining, “I don’t really hang out a lot after school—I go straight to selling, then home.”

Participant 4 echoed the deprioritization of self-care, stating, “For self-care, I don’t really prioritize it anymore, especially when family problems and other issues pile up. I just cry it out and tell myself that everything happens for a reason, that there’s a purpose why I’m in this situation.” Similarly, **Participant 7** admitted, “My personal well-being comes last. That’s why I’m like this now. I lack sleep, and it affects me—I even fall asleep during class. But I don’t

care what people say, I sleep when I need to.” **Participant 8** shared a mutual sentiment, acknowledging the struggle to maintain true self-care: “Honestly, that part often gets neglected. Physically—I still try to look good, even without enough sleep. But in terms of true self-care, it’s really a struggle. Eating is also affected—sometimes I forget to eat. That’s where I tend to break down a bit.” She also described isolating herself when overwhelmed and resisting reaching out due to fear of burdening others with her vulnerability.

Among the 15 participants, only **Participant 14** and **Participant 15** reported actively engaging in self-care as a coping strategy. **Participant 14** stated, “I unwind, miss,” and added, “I go to the salon, miss—to pamper myself.” **Participant 15** expressed optimism in her approach to self-care: “I sleep. If I don’t have classes, I rest. Sometimes, I eat my favorite food or watch a movie. That’s how I recharge. And if I can afford it, I go to the salon to pamper myself a little. It helps.”

The remaining participants shared a common view of self-care as a privilege rather than a necessity, often deprioritizing it based on their self-assessment and the pressing demands of motherhood and academics. This collection of experiences highlights the significant challenges student-mothers face in maintaining personal care, with many sacrificing their well-being due to overwhelming responsibilities and emotional strain.

The data reveals that student-mothers consistently deprioritize personal care due to overwhelming responsibilities, leading to neglect of basic physiological and emotional needs. This neglect contributes to exhaustion, emotional strain, and feelings of isolation, which negatively impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Their experiences reflect a struggle to fulfill foundational needs such as sleep, nutrition,

and emotional support, which are critical according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Only a few participants actively engaged in self-care, highlighting the challenge of balancing motherhood and education without adequate support. In essence, the findings emphasize the urgent need for institutional interventions that address these fundamental needs to help student-mothers thrive both personally and academically.

Analyzing the lived experiences of student-mothers in higher education reveals the weight of the everyday challenges they endure while fulfilling dual roles. These women, often young and navigating their academic journey with limited support, are faced with a varied reality defined by social, emotional, and economic pressure. As the data suggest, their struggles are not merely incidental but systemic—deeply rooted in the simultaneous demands of motherhood and academia.

This notion then frames the first prevailing challenge, the obstacles in balancing roles. Many of the student-mothers serve as sole providers for their families, burdened by financial instability while trying to secure both their child's future and their own academic success. Their schedules are tightly packed with responsibilities, yet often insufficient to meet them all, forcing them to compromise between caregiving and coursework. Time management becomes a battle they fight daily, where academic performance suffers not from lack of will, but from the overwhelming necessity to prioritize survival. As a result, academic setbacks are not uncommon, accompanied by persistent feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

Amid this, the second theme, physical care, emotional, and mental fatigue emerges. Student-mothers report consistent sleep deprivation, minimal personal time, and a neglect of self-care. These deprivations

manifest not only in physical exhaustion but also in emotional distress, with many describing themselves as overwhelmed, pressured, and silently struggling. Yet, their persistence continues—not because the burden has eased, but because of an unrelenting drive to secure a better life for their children.

These reflections ultimately portray a portrait of resilience shaped by hardship. The challenges student-mothers face—economic, academic, physical, and emotional—compound to create an environment that often feels unsustainable. However, even amid this strain, they find ways to move forward. Like seeds pushing through the cracks in concrete, they continue, albeit with scars and weariness, to chase their aspirations. Their narrative is not solely one of struggle, but of perseverance—a quiet, enduring strength that speaks to the transformative power of maternal determination.

6. The Resiliency and Coping Mechanism of Student-Mothers

Table 14. Themes for Support System and Motivation

Themes	Categories
Support system	- Familial Support - Social Support - Institutional Support
Motivation to Persevere as an act of Resilience	- Intrinsic Motivation - Children and Personal Goals - Extrinsic Motivation - Family and Partners

Support system

On a positive note, the participants highlighted the crucial role of support systems in helping



them navigate the challenges of balancing motherhood and academic responsibilities. Many student-mothers expressed that encouragement and understanding from family, friends, and instructors provided emotional strength and practical assistance, enabling them to persist in their studies despite overwhelming pressures (Nnadi & Özada Nazım, 2024). This support fostered a sense of belonging and reduced feelings of isolation, which are essential for their psychological well-being and academic motivation (Cabaguig, 2020). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, such social support fulfills the belongingness and esteem needs, which are critical for student-mothers to maintain resilience and pursue self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Thus, the presence of a supportive network not only alleviates stress but also contributes significantly to the overall well-being and academic success of student-mothers.

Familial Support: The proponents of this study explored the participants' experiences of familial support and its impact on their academic and personal lives. Many student-mothers elucidated that despite the numerous challenges they face, the encouragement and practical assistance from family members provide them with emotional strength and motivation to continue their education. For instance, **Participant 1** shared that "It's hard being a single mom. I need someone to lean on. My mom helps, but even she gets tired." She also added that "I didn't plan to go back to school, but my mom cried and begged me to continue. So I did it for her. It's a tough story, but it's real. Transitioning from work back to school was very hard." Her experience highlights the critical role of familial support in her journey as a single student-mother, with her mother providing both emotional encouragement and practical help despite her own exhaustion. Her decision to return to school was deeply influenced by her mother's

heartfelt plea, demonstrating how family can motivate persistence amid difficult transitions. This support, while invaluable, also underscores the shared challenges and fatigue experienced within family networks supporting student-mothers.

On the other hand, **Participant 2** shared that emotionally, her parents and partner provide significant support "Emotionally, my parents and my partner really help. In my first year, the only thing I asked from my mom was payment for a departmental shirt. My parents are emotionally supportive—they encourage me." Her parents are encouraging, and her partner especially helps her when she feels overwhelmed, "My partner also supports me emotionally, especially when I'm overwhelmed." often telling her, "You can do it." Whenever she feels the need for support, she turns to her partner as the person she opens up to. Additionally, she shared, "So every time I feel like I need support, I go to my partner—that's the person I open up to."

Moreover, **Participant 3's** familial support primarily comes from her live-in partner, who has been a consistent presence since her early teenage years and has taken on both emotional and financial responsibilities, including the role of a father to her child. She emphasized that without his support, continuing her studies would have been extremely difficult, especially given her large family background—being one of eleven siblings—and her father's limited capacity to provide for all of them, particularly during times when the family's vegetable harvest was insufficient. The participant's reflection underscores how critical her partner's support is in enabling her to balance the demands of motherhood and education, compensating for the absence of her mother and the financial constraints faced by her family. Thus, highlighting the importance of a dependable and multifaceted support system in the academic persistence of student-mothers.



Participant 4 receives significant financial support for her studies and child from her uncle who works abroad, which alleviates her financial struggles. She shared, “My uncle who works abroad supports me with my studies,” and confirmed, “Yes, he supports me financially, including my child, so I don’t really struggle with expenses.” Regarding childcare, she explained that her child’s father, although unemployed, takes care of their child when she attends school: “The child’s father... stays with our child.” However, they do not have other family members to rely on for childcare and feel uncomfortable leaving their child with either side of the family, stating, “If ever there’s no class, we don’t really have anyone else to leave the child with. We feel shy to leave them with either side of the family. It’s really different when it’s us who are taking care of the child.” This illustrates a support system where financial assistance is present, but childcare support from extended family is limited due to personal reservations.

On a similar note, **Participants 5 through 15** consistently emphasized the vital role of familial and partner support in enabling them to balance the demanding dual roles of motherhood and education. Many participants highlighted financial assistance as a crucial form of support, with family members such as uncles, fathers, and partners providing necessary resources to cover school and household expenses. Emotional support was equally significant, with partners, siblings, and friends offering encouragement, motivation, and understanding during stressful times. Practical help with childcare was frequently mentioned, as family members and partners often took responsibility for looking after the children, allowing the student-mothers to focus on their studies. This multifaceted support network—comprising financial aid, emotional encouragement, and childcare assistance—was essential in sustaining their academic

persistence and well-being despite the numerous challenges they faced.

As attested by the participants:

Participant 5: “My partner... still helps me take care of the baby... my friends... volunteer to take care of my baby.”

Participant 6: “At home... my only support is really my husband. He’s the one who encourages me to keep going.”

Participant 7: “My eldest sister is working abroad, and she never hesitates to support me.”

Participant 8: “The financial support is expected... But the emotional support... really help... they offer to take care of my child so I can rest.”

Participant 9: “My family has been very supportive... He even gave up school to work instead so I could continue.”

Participant 10: “My husband supports me financially... My children also help me with household chores.”

Participant 11: “Since then, my husband has been the one supporting me.”

Participant 12: “If I have something to do, I’ll ask, ‘Ma, can you take care of the baby?’... My partner... even offers to watch over the baby.”

Participant 13: “They help financially... Yes,” regarding childcare help.

Participant 14: “He encouraged me to continue. He’s my biggest support.”

Participant 15: “Financially, it’s my father. Emotionally, it’s my partner... Also, my classmates... help me get through things.”

This collective testimony aligns with research indicating that moral, financial, and childcare support from family and partners is crucial for student-mothers to cope with their dual responsibilities (Manalang, 2015; Andres, 2021; Smith, 2019). Such support networks not only provide practical assistance but also foster emotional resilience, enabling student-mothers to persist in their educational goals despite significant challenges (Cox & Ebbers, 2010; Kruvelis et al., 2017). The presence of these



supports is often a determining factor in their ability to manage time effectively and maintain well-being while juggling motherhood and academic demands.

By examining this aspect, the researchers successfully highlighted the vital role of family as a source of stability and resilience, contributing significantly to the participants' overall well-being. This approach unveiled how familial support not only alleviates stress but also fosters a sense of belonging and security, which are essential for student-mothers juggling multiple roles. According to Maslow (1943), such social support fulfills fundamental belongingness needs, enabling student-mothers to better manage their responsibilities and maintain their pursuit of academic and personal growth.

Furthermore, the participants revealed that while managing motherhood and schooling is demanding, the presence of supportive family networks helps sustain their psychological well-being and academic persistence. However, even with familial support, student-mothers continue to face significant struggles in balancing their dual roles. This underscores the complexity of their experiences and the need for comprehensive support systems that extend beyond the family to include educational institutions and communities.

Familial support plays a crucial role in the academic persistence and emotional well-being of student-mothers, as it provides both practical assistance and socio-emotional encouragement necessary to navigate the challenges of balancing motherhood and education. Research indicates that positive family relationships, including emotional ties and tangible help such as childcare and financial aid, enhance students' academic self-perception and motivation to succeed (Padua, 2019; López-Angulo et al., 2020). Families often make significant sacrifices, including adjusting household roles and incurring additional

expenses, to create an environment conducive to the student-mother's educational pursuits, which helps reduce stress and fosters academic focus (Csók & Pusztai, 2023). However, familial support can be complex, as some student-mothers may experience unsupportive or even harmful family dynamics, underscoring the importance of alternative support networks like peers and institutional resources (Cox & Ebbers, 2010; McMillen, 2022).

Social/Peer Support: The proponents of this study examined the participants' experiences of social support from friends and classmates and its influence on their ability to manage the dual demands of motherhood and education. Many student-mothers revealed that despite the challenges they face, encouragement, emotional support, and practical assistance from peers provide essential motivation and help them cope with academic and personal pressures. This social/peer support complements familial and partner support, playing a meaningful role in sustaining their well-being and academic persistence. Peer support, whether from classmates, friends, or fellow student-mothers, provides a sense of solidarity and shared understanding. These relationships offer practical help (such as sharing notes or reminders about assignments) and emotional comfort during setbacks.

Participants 2 through **15** described varying degrees of social support from friends and classmates, which complemented their familial and partner support in managing the challenges of student-motherhood. **Participant 2** noted having a close friend she treats like a younger sibling and the ability to socialize with classmates despite age differences, though she does not often hang out after school. **Participant 3** mentioned receiving only moral support from classmates. **Participant 4** expressed emotional support from classmates, family, and her partner's family. **Participant 5**



shared that her friends help by taking care of her baby during group research sessions.

Participant 6 said her friends provide advice. **Participant 7** admitted feeling insecure about socializing but hopes to reconnect with friends in the future. **Participant 8** appreciated friends who motivate her and do not see her as competition. **Participant 10** described classmates helping her with technology skills essential for schoolwork. **Participant 11** acknowledged receiving moral support from friends. **Participant 12** valued friends who assist with academic tasks and help her adjust during transition. **Participant 13** had few friends but noted classmates who inquire about her baby's well-being. **Participant 14** mentioned going out and eating with friends to unwind. **Participant 15** valued classmates who notice when she is struggling and offer help. Meanwhile, **Participants 1** and **9** did not mention friends or acquaintances as part of their support networks.

As attested by the participants:

Participant 2: "I have one friend I treat like a younger sibling... I don't really hang out a lot after school."

Participant 3: "Only moral support from my classmates."

Participant 4: "I have people I can talk to—my classmates, my older sister, my partner's family, my mom, and my partner—they all support me emotionally."

Participant 5: "While I focus on our research, they volunteer to take care of my baby."

Participant 6: "They give me advice."

Participant 7: "I don't like going out with friends... but in the future, I'll make up for it."

Participant 8: "Friends... like Roque... He really motivates me."

Participant 10: "I'm thankful to my classmates — they teach me... they call me on video and walk me through the steps."

Participant 11: "Support in the form of a literal support system... moral support."

Participant 12: "I also have friends I can ask... They're willing to assist me."

Participant 13: "Some classmates offer support, like asking how the baby is."

Participant 14: "Sometimes we go out to unwind—and we eat together."

Participant 15: "My classmates... notice, and they ask me if I'm okay. They help me get through things."

These accounts illustrate that while familial and partner support remain primary, peer support—ranging from emotional encouragement, practical help, to academic assistance—plays a meaningful role in the student-mothers' coping strategies and social well-being.

Social support from peers and student-mother groups within educational institutions significantly contributes to student-mothers' sense of belonging, emotional resilience, and academic persistence. Studies show that peer networks provide vital encouragement, practical advice, and shared understanding of the unique challenges student-mothers face, helping to alleviate feelings of isolation and invisibility often experienced on campus (Cox & Ebberts, 2010; Katz, 2013). These informal and formal peer supports facilitate information exchange, emotional validation, and survival strategies inside and outside academic settings, which are critical for sustaining motivation and engagement (Demetriou et al., 2017; Hallett et al., 2020). The presence of supportive peers thus complements familial and institutional resources, collectively enhancing student-mothers' ability to persist and succeed in higher education (Romero et al., 2020; education student parent, 2025)

Institutional Support: When these student-mothers described their needs, they touched on several topics for how the college could improve their experience. College professors were discussed often, and the participants



believed these professors could improve by being more approachable, more helpful, and better communicators. According to Carpenter et al. (2018), building relationships with faculty and staff builds support networks and connections and creates a sense of belonging that motivates and pushes students toward success. Additionally, participants explicitly mentioned how considerate certain instructors are in their college that went above and beyond to help them meet their loads halfway.

Support from academic institutions and understanding instructors can also be significant, though experiences vary. Some mothers report that teachers allow make-up work or are flexible during emergencies, which alleviates stress and helps them stay on track. However, others encounter stigma or lack of accommodation, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation or discouragement.

Participants 3 through **14** shared varied experiences regarding institutional support, particularly from instructors, which influenced their ability to manage academic responsibilities alongside motherhood. **Participant 3** appreciated instructors' understanding when she missed class due to her child's needs, noting, "Just last week, I was absent because I had to bring my child to a check-up, and they were okay with it." **Participant 4** explained that while some instructors might forget her situation, she manages absences by writing letters explaining childcare challenges. **Participant 5** recounted a negative experience where a teacher did not accommodate her pregnancy-related absence, resulting in an incomplete grade that affected her academic standing. **Participant 6** shared that instructors allowed her to make up missed activities at her convenience. **Participant 7** expressed gratitude for an understanding advisor who acknowledges the challenges faced by student-mothers. **Participant 8** described a situation where instructors and the

dean showed understanding when she left class due to her child's medical emergency. **Participant 9** recounted a painful experience with an unsupportive professor who discouraged her from continuing her studies due to her parenting responsibilities. **Participant 10** felt supported by teachers who allowed her to make up for absences, recognizing her caregiving role. **Participant 11**, however, had not yet experienced understanding from instructors during emergencies. **Participant 12** praised teachers for being very considerate of her dual responsibilities. **Participant 13** shared that the school allowed her to be absent for her baby's first birthday, showing consideration. **Participant 14** mentioned that instructors usually allow make-up work but also recalled being denied an exam due to a child's medical appointment, which negatively impacted her performance. Among all the participants, only **Participants 1, 2, and 15** did not mention any institutional support.

As attested by the participants:

Participant 3: "Just last week, I was absent because I had to bring my child to a check-up, and they were okay with it."

Participant 4: "If I'm absent... I just write a letter explaining I couldn't attend because no one could watch over my child."

Participant 5: "One teacher... didn't let me take the final exam... He gave me an INC (Incomplete), and that affected my grade."

Participant 6: "If I miss activities, they let me take them later — whenever I'm available."

Participant 7: "Our advisor understands... she'll say, 'Do you have a child?'"

Participant 8: "The teacher was upset at first, but once I explained, they understood. Thankfully, our dean was also very understanding."

Participant 9: "She (the teacher) said... 'Just drop out, Rhona.' That hurt me deeply."



Participant 10: "My teachers also understand me... They're very considerate because they know I'm the only one caring for my kids."

Participant 11: "I haven't really experienced that yet... the last time I had a medical check-up for my baby, it wasn't considered."

Participant 12: "My teachers are really very understanding... They're very considerate if I miss something or need anything."

Participant 13: "When it was my baby's first birthday, I asked if I could be absent... they allowed it."

Participant 14: "If I need to be absent, I just talk to the teacher. They usually allow me to make up... I wasn't allowed to take the exam... That was really discouraging."

These narratives reveal that while many student-mothers experience empathy and flexibility from instructors, there are also instances of rigidity and lack of understanding, which can significantly affect their academic progress and emotional well-being.

The experiences of student-mothers in this study reveal that institutional support—particularly from instructors and advisors—plays a pivotal role in shaping their academic success and persistence. Many participants reported that understanding and flexibility from faculty, such as allowing make-up work or excused absences for childcare emergencies, significantly eased the burden of balancing motherhood and education. However, others encounter a lack of empathy or institutional support as some also encountered unsupportive attitudes or rigid policies that exacerbated their stress and threatened their continuation in school. These findings align with research emphasizing that even a single supportive institutional agent can positively influence student-mothers' trajectories, while a lack of tailored institutional policies and empathetic faculty can contribute to feelings of invisibility and increase dropout risks (McMillen, 2022; ACE, 2024; Medved & Heisler, 2002).

Institutional support is thus not only about formal policies but also about the attitudes and responsiveness of faculty and staff, which can either validate or hinder student-mothers' identities and needs. Research suggests that institutions should develop family-friendly policies, provide flexible academic accommodations, and foster faculty awareness to better support student-parents (Robertson & Weiner, 2013; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Without such support, student-mothers may feel isolated and overwhelmed, negatively impacting their academic persistence and well-being (Kruvelis et al., 2017; McMillen, 2022). Therefore, institutional commitment to recognizing and addressing the unique challenges of student-mothers is essential for promoting equity and success in higher education.

Motivation to Persevere as an Act of Resilience

Research consistently shows that student-mothers face numerous challenges, including time management, financial constraints, and childcare responsibilities, yet their intrinsic motivation—often supported by family encouragement and personal goals—drives their perseverance in higher education (Exploring Motivation and Life Course Transformations in Student Mothers, 2025). Many student-mothers are motivated by the desire to improve their careers and provide a better future for their children, viewing education as a pathway to stability and success (Challenges and Strategies of Student Mothers in Higher Education, 2025). Studies also highlight that children serve as powerful sources of inspiration and strength, reinforcing mothers' commitment to continue their studies despite competing demands (Manalang, 2015; Andres, 2021).

Furthermore, student-mothers employ coping strategies such as religiosity and problem-



solving to overcome obstacles, which contributes to satisfactory academic performance (Balancing Act: Motivation, Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Academic Performance of College Student-Mothers, 2022). Collectively, these proven notions underscore that motivation and perseverance among student-mothers are sustained by a combination of internal drive, familial support, and future aspirations, enabling them to successfully balance motherhood and education.

Kruvelis et al. (2017) also believed that there were great rewards in earning a higher education credential, as student-mothers identified these credentials as a stepping stone toward higher earnings, better opportunities, better health, a pathway out of poverty, and a more significant opportunity for improved educational outcomes for children of single parents and holistically student-mothers. The participants' motivations to persevere as student-mothers can be categorized into intrinsic, extrinsic, or a combination of both types of motivation, each playing a significant role in sustaining their educational journeys.

Intrinsic Motivation: Maslow (1954) theorized that growth came from an internal desire to add value to someone's life. The discussions on this category showed that these study participants also wanted to add value. These participants were goal-setters seeking satisfaction, assurance, security, and achievement. Whether it was a personal aspiration, a desire to prove their ability, or a longing to create a better life for their family, the participants desired growth. This internal desire was a major motivational factor pushing them to succeed.

Under this category, the proponents of this study examined how student-mothers' internal motivation—the personal drive rooted in their own goals, values, and aspirations—enables them to overcome challenges and persist in balancing the demands of motherhood and education. This intrinsic determination is often

strengthened by encouragement and practical support from friends and classmates, which plays a crucial role in sustaining their focus, resilience, and ability to manage academic and personal pressures. Peer-driven motivation, together with familial and partner support, reinforces their commitment and well-being, helping them maintain academic progress despite obstacles. Ultimately, internal motivation, bolstered by social connections, serves as a powerful force that propels student-mothers forward even when external support is limited.

Maslow's self-actualization theory evaluates human needs and motivational factors. This approach highlights growth and self-actualization and points out an individual's ability to be effective, add value to their life, and reach their fullest potential (Maslow, 1954). Maslow (1954) discussed the need for growth and suggested that growth did not come from seeking out something one did not have but rather from an internal desire to grow as a person. Growth and adding value are also evidenced in previous literature as researchers documented single parents who reported their need to seek higher levels of accomplishment, set goals, attain better opportunities, discover personal fulfillment, and achieve life-long goals (Wahl, 2018).

Previous research has pointed out that student-mothers are goal-setters seeking achievement and better opportunities. Lindsay and Gillum (2018) reported that student-mothers believe their hard work will provide a better future. Majority of the participants echoed this sentiment as they identified their desire to create a better life for themselves and their children as an essential motivator.

Intrinsic motivation is evident in participants who draw strength from personal goals, self-reflection, and internal drive. For example, **Participant 2** said, "I tell myself, 'I can do this,'"



and focuses on improving her skills by challenging herself against her classmates. **Participant 3** described coping with burnout by reflecting alone and pushing herself with thoughts like, "What would happen to me if I quit?" **Participant 7** motivates herself by imagining future rewards, saying, "I motivate myself by imagining what I'll do once I graduate and have a job." The most powerful internal motivator for student-mothers is their children. The desire to provide a better future, serve as a role model, and make their children proud is a recurring theme. Many mothers explicitly state that their child is their primary source of strength and the main reason they persist despite difficulties. **Participant 8**, for instance, finds motivation in her child, telling herself, "If I don't do this, what kind of future will she have? Who else will she depend on?". **Participant 10** posited that her aspirations are not just for herself but also for her family "For myself, it's because no one in our family has graduated yet...I have to do this for myself too." "I told myself that I'd train myself — that I'd really learn... What's important to me is that I'm able to achieve something — so I can say I'm not worthless."

Participant 12 expressed a personal goal "to achieve my goals in life — to be able to provide for myself, so I won't have to depend on others anymore." **Participant 13's** internal drive is to "buy everything I want and not have to worry about money after I graduate." **Participant 10** also shared a mix of internal motivation, stating, "For myself, it's because no one in our family has graduated yet...I have to do this for myself too."

As exclaimed by the participants:

Participant 2: "I tell myself, 'I can do this'... I want to be good in my own way." "I tell myself I had to do better... I just reminded myself, 'It's okay. I was weak in that area. But that doesn't mean I can't make it.'" "Sometimes we think we've reached our limit,

but we don't realize we still have potential — we still have strength inside us."

Participant 3: "I think about my motivations... I push myself to be motivated again." "Sometimes I consider giving up, but then I think, 'What would happen to me if I quit?'"

Participant 7: "I motivate myself by imagining what I'll do once I graduate and have a job." "I always tell my friends, 'Once I start working, I'll buy all the skincare I want!' or 'Don't get married yet—I need time to glow up first!'"

Participant 10: "For myself, it's because no one in our family has graduated yet...I have to do this for myself too." "I told myself that I'd train myself — that I'd really learn... What's important to me is that I'm able to achieve something — so I can say I'm not worthless."

Participant 12: "To achieve my goals in life — to be able to provide for myself, so I won't have to depend on others anymore." "My motivation is my own self-stability — so that in the future I'll already be stable."

Participant 13: "Maybe it's that I want to be able to buy everything I want and not have to worry about money after I graduate and find a job."

Personal growth and the pursuit of long-term goals also drive student-mothers to persist. Some are motivated by the prospect of earning a college degree, achieving financial independence, or proving to themselves and others that motherhood is not a hindrance to success. This motivation is often rooted in a desire for self-fulfillment and to break cycles of hardship or limited opportunity. Resilience is further bolstered by personal philosophies that frame current hardships as temporary sacrifices for future rewards. As **Participant 15** put it, "This is temporary. The hardships now will pass. Every sacrifice I'm making now will be worth it someday. I just need to be patient and consistent".

These participants demonstrate motivation that originates from within themselves, including



personal goals, self-improvement, future aspirations, and the desire for independence and self-worth. The intrinsic motivation demonstrated by the student-mothers serves as a powerful internal force that drives their perseverance despite the multifaceted challenges they face. Rooted in personal goals such as self-improvement, independence, and future stability, this internal drive compels them to push beyond feelings of exhaustion, self-doubt, and burnout. For example, participants who reflect on their own potential and set clear aspirations—like achieving academic success to prove their worth or to provide for themselves—are able to maintain focus and resilience amid competing demands of motherhood and education. This self-generated motivation fosters a mindset of growth and determination, enabling them to reframe setbacks as opportunities for learning and to sustain their commitment to their educational journey even when external support is limited or inconsistent. In consummation, intrinsic motivation equips student-mothers with the psychological resources necessary to navigate their dual roles and persist toward their goals with steadfast resolve.

Extrinsic Motivation: The extrinsic motivation experienced by the student-mothers plays a crucial role in sustaining their perseverance by providing external sources of encouragement, responsibility, and validation. Motivated by the needs and expectations of their children, partners, family members, and faith, these women find purpose and strength in fulfilling their roles beyond themselves. For instance, many participants emphasized that their children's futures and well-being are primary motivators, prompting them to endure hardships and prioritize education as a means to secure a better life for their families.

Additionally, support and encouragement from partners and family members—such as a

mother's plea to graduate or a husband's assistance with childcare and schoolwork—offer tangible and emotional reinforcement that alleviates stress and fosters resilience. This external motivation not only validates their efforts but also creates a sense of accountability and connection, which helps student-mothers maintain their commitment to education despite the numerous challenges they encounter.

Extrinsic motivation comes from external sources such as family, children, partners, and peers, which provide encouragement and practical support. *Participant 1's* motivation stems from her mother's encouragement: "She wants me to graduate because I'm the youngest in our family... my diploma would be like her trophy as a mother." *Participant 4* said, "I just look at him [my child]... I want my child to see that I worked hard for him." *Participant 5's* main motivation is her child: "All my efforts are for him." *Participant 9* relies heavily on faith and family: "I know God is with me... I go to church and cry it out there." *Participant 11* mentioned her husband's support: "When I get home, he takes care of the baby and even helps with my schoolwork." *Participant 15's* motivation is both her daughter and proving to herself that she can succeed despite early motherhood.

When asked about what keeps them motivated to persevere, the participants stated:

Participant 1: "My belief is that... my mom told me... She wants me to graduate because I'm the youngest in our family. She said my diploma would be like her trophy as a mother."

Participant 4: "I just look at him [my child]. When I look at him, I feel I need to keep going... I want my child to see that I worked hard for him so he can say, 'This child didn't rely on my uncle financially.'"

Participant 5: "My child. I tell myself that I shouldn't give up because I'm doing all of this



for him. All my efforts are for him."
"My child is my top priority."

Participant 6: "It's my husband who helps me deal with the stress."

Participant 7: "Whenever I feel exhausted or hopeless, I think of my sisters. They're really my weakness. My eldest sister is working abroad, and she never hesitates to support me."

Participant 8: "When I get frustrated with academics... I just look at my child. That's enough motivation for me."
"I just pray... every time I ask God, He grants my prayers."

Participant 9: "I know God is with me... Every time I break down, I feel better afterward."
"I go to church and cry it out there."

Participant 10: "It was really my husband who insisted that I go to school."
"I'm being fully supported by my children... They say things like, 'Wow, Mom, it's so nice that you're studying again.'"
"My family also motivates me. I want my children to be proud of me."

Participant 11: "From my husband too. When I get home, he takes care of the baby and even helps with my schoolwork."

Participant 12: "It's Inday (Zakiyah), my family... They are really my motivation — to finish school."

Participant 13: "It's for our future, Miss—especially for my baby."

Participant 14: "She's my motivation [referring to her child]. I want to be able to help her in the future."

Participant 15: "My daughter. Always. I want her to be proud of me. I want to give her a better future."

These lines illustrate how external factors—family encouragement, children's needs, partner support, and faith—serve as powerful motivators for student-mothers to persevere in their academic and personal lives.

External support systems play a critical role in helping student-mothers cope with setbacks and persist. Family members, especially

parents and partners, provide emotional encouragement, financial assistance, and practical help with childcare. For many, words of encouragement and belief from loved ones are essential for maintaining motivation during difficult times.

Conclusively, many participants exhibit both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, where personal goals reticulate with external encouragement to fuel perseverance. For instance, *Participant 2* combines self-challenge with peer comparison, while *Participant 10* balances family expectations with personal pride. *Participant 7* balances familial sacrifice with personal aspirations. This dual motivation helps them sustain resilience amid academic and maternal demands.

The data revealed that student-mothers' perseverance is driven by a dynamic reciprocation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Internal motivation, rooted in personal goals, self-reflection, and future aspirations, empowers them to maintain focus and resilience despite setbacks. External motivation from family, children, partners, and faith provides emotional support and practical encouragement, reinforcing their commitment. Together, these motivational forces create a robust foundation that enables student-mothers to navigate the complexities of motherhood and education, sustaining their determination to succeed.

The analysis of the lived experiences of student-mothers reveals that their ability to cope with adversity is shaped by the interplay of external support systems and internal motivational drivers. These coping mechanisms serve as crucial foundations for navigating the intersecting demands of academic obligations and maternal responsibilities. Two central themes emerged from the data: Support Systems and Motivation to Persevere as an Expression of Resilience.



These themes encapsulate the multifaceted strategies student-mothers employ to sustain their pursuit of higher education amid structural, emotional, and practical challenges. The theme of Support Systems highlights the indispensable role of interpersonal and institutional networks in buffering the effects of stress and role overload. The first category, Familial Support, underscores the significance of immediate and extended family members in offering instrumental and emotional assistance. Participants frequently cited the involvement of parents, siblings, and other relatives in providing childcare, household help, and occasional financial aid—resources that are vital for sustaining their dual roles.

Secondly, Social Support—primarily from peers, classmates, and fellow student-mothers—serves as a critical avenue for emotional validation, academic collaboration, and mutual understanding. This form of support fosters a shared sense of solidarity and normalizes the struggles they encounter, contributing to their psychological well-being. Thirdly, Institutional Support refers to the structural accommodations and resources provided by the academic institution. These include flexible academic policies, access to scholarships or financial aid, student services, and understanding faculty members who recognize the unique constraints faced by student-mothers. Such institutional responsiveness, though inconsistent across participants, is often cited as a pivotal factor that enables academic continuity.

Complementing these external mechanisms is the theme Motivation to Persevere as an Expression of Resilience, which focuses on the intrapersonal forces that empower student-mothers to persist. The first category, Intrinsic Motivation—Children and Personal Aspirations, captures the deeply rooted determination of participants to improve their circumstances for the benefit of their children.

Their offspring serve not only as dependents but as primary sources of meaning and inspiration. Additionally, their commitment to achieving personal goals—such as degree completion, career advancement, and self-empowerment—further anchors their academic persistence.

The second category, Extrinsic Motivation—Family and Partner Support, pertains to the affirming influence of external encouragement from significant others. Partners, parents, and extended kin offer both emotional reinforcement and practical support, which, although variable in availability, serve to reframe difficulties as surmountable. These external sources of motivation function as stabilizing agents that sustain their morale and sense of purpose.

The study also assessed the resilience of the fifteen student-mothers across various domains namely: Determination, Endurance, Adaptability, and Recuperability, with respect to their living arrangement, civil status, and financial independence. Since the thematic foundations of this study have already been established in previous discussions, this section now presents the analytical results to further understand the unique challenges and strengths of student-mothers. The results indicate that overall, student-mothers show moderate to very high satisfaction in most areas of personal resilience.

Resilience, as a critical factor in navigating academic and personal responsibilities, can offer insights into how student-mothers adapt, persist, and recover in their educational journey. The following analysis is designed to further comprehend where these insights have led the researchers, focusing on patterns across demographic dimensions and key areas of resilience.



Following *Table 2's Definition of Statistical Results*, this section presents an analytical summary of the fifteen student-mothers' responses to the adapted *Taormina's Four-Part Measure of Personal Resilience and Taormina and Gao's Five Need Satisfaction Measures* administered during the *Phase 2* of the study's data collection. Data was analyzed across different demographic categories: living arrangement, civil status, and financial status. The aim was to interpret their levels of satisfaction and resilience based on four key domains: Determination, Endurance, Adaptability, and Recuperability.

By Living Arrangement, Student-mothers living with relatives reported the highest and most consistent levels of satisfaction across all resilience domains, all with a standard deviation of 0.00, indicating a stable support system. Self-sufficient mothers exhibited the highest satisfaction in recuperability (Mean = 4.50), yet showed diverse responses in other areas, indicating varying levels of independence and support. Boarding students reported moderate satisfaction in determination, endurance, and adaptability, but had the lowest score in recuperability (Mean = 3.33), suggesting challenges in recovery from stress.

By Civil Status, Married student-mothers displayed the highest satisfaction in determination and endurance (Means = 4.50 and 4.20), likely due to spousal support. However, their adaptability and recuperability were only slightly satisfactory, reflecting potential challenges despite marital stability. Single and partnered mothers generally showed moderate satisfaction, with partnered individuals reporting slightly higher adaptability (Mean = 3.78). Most responses in this group were consistent (SD < 0.50).

By Financial Status, Financially independent and dependent student-mothers both exhibited very high satisfaction in determination (Means

= 4.50 and 4.33) and high consistency (SD = 0.00), indicating strong internal motivation. Financially dependent mothers reported very high endurance (Mean = 4.40), suggesting a perception of external financial support. Recuperability remained moderate in both groups, with slightly higher scores among dependent students.

A consistent finding across all demographic categories is the relatively lower score in recuperability, indicating a common challenge in recovering from stress and fatigue. The prevalence of low standard deviations throughout the dataset shows uniformity in student-mothers' experiences, underscoring the reliability of the responses. While high levels of determination and endurance are prevalent, the slightly lower scores in adaptability and especially recuperability highlight areas where institutional or social support may be beneficial.

Table 15. Key Implications of Taormina and Gao's adapted Survey

Recuperability is consistently the lowest domain across all groups	Indicates a challenge for the student-mothers to recover from stress or fatigue
Financial status plays a strong role in Determination and Endurance	Independent and dependent student-mothers both feel resilient, though by different means
Married student-mothers show split satisfaction	Support from marriage may aid Determination, but adaptability/recuperability still suffer
Partnered and single mothers show consistent experiences	Suggests more homogeneous environments and stress patterns



Very low SDs across groups	Most groups show uniform response patterns, indicating reliability of results.
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The study demonstrates that student-mothers possess commendable levels of resilience, particularly in their determination and endurance. However, attention should be directed toward enhancing their ability to recover from stress, possibly through targeted mental health services, support programs, or workload accommodations. In essence, the narratives of student-mothers reveal that coping is not solely a matter of individual strength but is cultivated through a dynamic interplay between relational support and motivational resilience. Their ability to manage and endure adversity is grounded in the collective strength of social connections and personal conviction. Despite the considerable constraints they face, ranging from financial insecurity and time scarcity to emotional exhaustion, student-mothers demonstrate a profound capacity for perseverance. Their journeys are emblematic of resilience, driven by both the desire to secure a better future for their children and the affirmation received from their families, communities, and institutions. Tailored interventions based on living conditions, civil, and financial status may further strengthen these outcomes.

5. Summary Of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of findings based on the study's analyzed data, provides the conclusion, and offers recommendations based on the study's results.

Summary

This research is conducted to investigate the narratives of the student-mothers enrolled at Cebu Technological University - Argao

Campus (CTU-AC) using a mixed-methods approach, specifically an Explanatory Sequential Design. The total population of 81 student-mothers was identified through a formal request submitted to all program mayors across all year levels.

In Phase I, an adapted survey was administered to 43 student-mothers to gather data on their demographic profiles and level of satisfaction. Most participants were aged 21-23, partnered, financially dependent, and living with relatives. Needs satisfaction was measured across five categories: physiological, safety and security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Partnered, married, and financially dependent respondents showed higher and more consistent levels of satisfaction, while single, financially dependent, or self-sufficient participants reported more variability. In Phase II, 15 student-mothers were purposely selected for in-depth interviews. Two key themes emerged regarding perceived challenges: (1) obstacles in balancing roles with three identified categories: (1) financial pressure (2) time management (3) academic struggles, and (2) physical, emotional, and mental fatigue with three identified categories: (1) lack of sleep and personal time (2) overwhelming pressure (3) personal care. To cope with these challenges, participants relied on three main support systems: (1) external support, such as help from family, peers, and academic institutions and (2) motivation to persevere, rooted in their children, personal goals, and encouragement from significant others. Findings from both phases were synthesized into a creative literary output entitled "Dasig sa Kagabhion," developed using Flower and Haye's Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.

Summary of Findings

The analysis rendered the following findings in careful reference to the sub- problems introduced: The study employed a purposive



sampling to select fifteen student-mothers. A significant majority (86.67%) were aged 21-23. Most participants were in partnered relationships (66.67%), financially dependent (93.33%), and resided with relatives (53.33%). Only one participant was financially independent. Therefore, the typical respondent was a young, partnered, financially dependent student-mother living with extended family.

Needs satisfaction was assessed across five domains: physiological, safety and security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Partnered and financially dependent student-mothers reported higher satisfaction levels in physiological needs, though with greater variation in responses. Married participants demonstrated consistently high satisfaction across all needs domains. Conversely, single and financially independent participants exhibited lower and more varied satisfaction levels. Living arrangements also played a role; those living with relatives reported more consistent satisfaction of basic and emotional needs, while boarding students showed higher self-actualization scores.

Student mothers faced challenges primarily in two areas: (1) obstacle in balancing roles which magnified three major categories: (1) limited income or sole provider pressure (struggles to provide for both child and education) (2) time management (3) academic struggles; and (2) Physical Care, Emotional, and Mental Fatigue manifested as (1) lack of sleep and personal time (2) overwhelming pressure (3) personal care.

Two major themes emerged in how student-mothers cope: (1) support systems, comprising familial, social, and institutional support; and (2) motivation to persevere, drawn from both intrinsic sources, such as their children and personal goals, and extrinsic sources, including emotional and practical support from partners and extended family.

These findings reflect the multidimensional pressures faced by student-mothers and the mechanisms that enable their persistence in higher education. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), the satisfaction of foundational needs—such as physiological stability (adequate rest, nutrition), safety and security (financial stability, housing), and belongingness (supportive relationships)—is essential before individuals can attain higher-order needs like esteem and self-actualization. The study revealed that unmet basic and psychological needs often compromised student-mothers' well-being, yet those with adequate support in these areas reported greater resilience and academic persistence.

Further reinforcing this, Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Theory (2005) defines resilience as a set of four interrelated components: determination, endurance, adaptability, and recuperability. These were evidenced in how student-mothers managed academic obligations, restructured routines, adapted to challenges, and drew on internal and external motivations. Those who accessed familial, social, and institutional support systems, and who were driven by both intrinsic goals and extrinsic reinforcement, exhibited higher levels of these resilience dimensions—enabling them to withstand role strain and persist in their educational journey.

Conjointly, these theoretical frameworks validate how both need satisfaction and personal resilience serve as foundational mechanisms for student-mothers' continued engagement in higher education despite compounding stressors.

Conclusion

Based on the data presented, this study concludes that student-mothers at Cebu Technological University, Argao Campus, navigate a complex reality shaped by their demographic profiles, most of whom are in their early twenties, financial circumstances,



with the majority being financially dependent, and living arrangements, where most reside with extended family members. Their capacity to balance academic responsibilities and motherhood is significantly influenced by the extent to which their needs, from basic physiological requirements to higher psychological needs, are fulfilled, as framed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Taormina's Adult Personal Resilience Theory. Despite ongoing challenges such as role strain and emotional stress, these student-mothers exhibit resilience through a combination of intrinsic motivation and external support from family, partners, and peers. The mixed-methods approach of the study enabled a comprehensive exploration of their experiences, culminating in the creative work, *Nightscares*, which artistically honors and amplifies their voices. Ultimately, the findings highlight the critical need for targeted academic and social support systems that address the unique challenges faced by student-mothers, fostering their academic success and personal well-being while advancing broader goals of educational equity and social development.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are proposed to support the academic success, well-being, and recognition of student-mothers in higher education:

1. Literary works that reflect the lived experiences, struggles, and resilience of student-mothers should be integrated into the curriculum of relevant academic programs such as Education, Literature, Social Sciences, and Gender Studies. Incorporating these narratives will foster empathy, critical awareness, and a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by women who balance academic responsibilities with motherhood.
2. The creative literary output of this study, "Nightscares," which reimagines and narrates the real-life accounts of student-mothers, should be considered for both digital and print publication. Translating the novelette into Cebuano is recommended to promote linguistic accessibility and cultural relevance for Visayan-speaking communities.
3. For research integration, "Nightscares," may also be utilized as a supplementary material in academic discussions or literary analysis, particularly in classes exploring gender, resilience, and narrative representation. Its real-life grounding makes it a valuable tool for reflective learning and cross-disciplinary dialogue.
4. Universities should strengthen their support systems for student-parents by implementing more flexible academic policies, providing accessible and affordable childcare services, expanding mental health resources, and offering targeted financial assistance. These measures can significantly reduce dropout rates and enhance educational retention among student-mothers.
5. Student affairs offices and guidance centers should conduct regular well-being check-ins and offer structured programs such as time management workshops, peer-led support groups, and specialized counseling services tailored to the needs of student-mothers. These initiatives can improve coping skills and emotional resilience.
6. Further studies should be conducted to examine the broader experiences of parenting students, including fathers, guardians, and non-traditional caregivers. Employing diverse methodologies such as longitudinal, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches will provide richer insights. Research on the long-term academic, professional, and



psychosocial outcomes of student-mothers post-graduation is also recommended to inform inclusive policy-making in the education sector.

These recommendations seek to foster a more inclusive, compassionate, and supportive academic environment—one that recognizes student-mothers not as exceptions, but as integral members of the academic community whose resilience deserves both recognition and structural support.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The proponents of the study declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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6. The Planning, Translating, and Reviewing of the Novelette

This chapter details the creative process involved in developing the mimetic composition of the novelette, closely aligned with the study's findings. The researchers adhere to a structured framework that systematically and creatively directs the entire process of crafting the novelette from start to finish. To achieve this, they employ the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, developed by scholars Linda S. Flower and John R. Hayes. This theory identifies three essential stages that every writer should follow: (1) planning, (2) translating, and (3) reviewing.

Procedure 1. Planning

The planning procedure, sometimes called “pre-writing,” is the first significant step the researchers have to accomplish to construct the “skeleton” or foundation of the write-up (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). According to Aripin et al. (2021), planning is the most significant part of the writing process because it is where writers should dedicate seventy percent of their time. In this initial phase, writers delve into the necessary arrangements and preparations before writing. The planning phase includes writing strategies like generating ideas through internal representation, organizing, and goal-setting.

Generating ideas through internal representation

During the planning phase of writing, authors construct internal representations—a creative technique where ideas and meanings are connected through the illustration of objects. For example, a single word or brief phrase can trigger an entire web of related concepts. It's important to understand that internal representations are not limited to language or physical objects; writers might also draw on visual patterns, such as a fleeting image, which they later elaborate on or describe with words. One of the most prevalent forms of internal representation in literature and language is the use of signs. In the field of semiotics, signs can take many shapes, including codes, gestures, sounds, and symbols, and these often differ across cultures. A sign is made up of two parts: the signifier, which is the physical form that carries meaning, and the signified, which is the idea or concept that the form represents (Dewitri, 2023).

The Internal Representation of the Novelette

The researchers utilized an internal representation strategy using signs to replicate the study's findings in the form of a novelette. This novelette consists of key elements including the title, chapters, and book cover, each paired with their respective signifiers and



signified concepts. Table 14 illustrates the signifiers and signified components of the novelette as derived from the study's results.

Table 16. The Signifiers and the Signified of the Novelette

Parts of the Novelette	Signifier	Signified
Title	<i>Dasig sa Kagabhion</i>	"Dasig sa Kagabhion" is a research-based novelette celebrating student-mothers and their resilience. "Dasig" represents their inner drive to balance academics and personal life, while "Kagabhion" highlights the hidden challenges of exhaustion and sacrifice.
Chapter 1 – "I'm a Survivor"	Linda	Challenges of a single and financially independent single mother
	Althea	A child's innocence and a constants reminder of the responsibilities
	Nanay at Tatay	Familial support
	Debit Card	The anxiety of financial instability
	Cooking Dinner	An act of love and a routine.
	Rosary Beads	A symbol of spiritual resilience
	Planners	Time management and time segmentation
	Watermelon	Both nurturing and symbolic of wordless comfort.
Chapter 2 - "Jetlag"	Tessa	Adaptability in the face big life changing decisions
	Andrew	Romantic love and parental support
	Andrea	Social Support
	Meme	Humor and online culture become tools for surviving mental strain.
	Lagro Park	Outdoor bonding representing essential emotional outlets
	Acceptance Letter	Sacrifice for Security and the possible trade off
Chapter 3 – "Wondering"	Dolores	The complex balance of being a wife, mother, and student



	Mr. Lazo	Unsympathetic rigidity of the academic system.
	Library	Academic self-care and devotion to her goals despite fatigue.
	Dolores and Christian's tense interactions	Deeper struggles in the relationship between ambition, roles, and expectations.
Epilogue – “End of Beginning”	Graduation Ceremony	Culmination of years of sacrifice
	Bracelet	Gesture of friendship and recognition of shared struggles
	Dolores and Andrews Interaction	Letting go of past pain and forgiveness
	Internship, LET	Clear aspirations to provide better futures for their children.

Table 16. The Translation Process of the Novelette

Signifier	Signified	Passage of Translation
Linda	Challenges of a single and financially independent single mother	She watched the city blur past, lights twinkling like stars against the encroaching night. Her thoughts drifted from one problem to another, contemplating the small ways she could make life a little easier, a little brighter for her family.
Althea	A child's innocence and a constants reminder of the responsibilities	Halfway through the meal, Althea's storytelling dam burst. "Mama, my classmate brought glow-in-the-dark crayons, and I forgot my colored papers today because you were gone last night and I couldn't find them and Teacher said it's okay but tomorrow I need to bring—"
Nanay at Tatay	Familial support	"You're doing more than trying, 'nak. You're doing your best, and that's enough." Her words were a balm, soothing the invisible bruises of a day spent juggling too much.
Debit Card	The anxiety of financial instability	Finally, as the cashier scanned the last packet of instant noodles—beep—a bright number flashed on the screen like a rude alarm clock. She winced internally, her mind automatically calculating half the month's budget and how it was about to be shredded like confetti.
Cooking Dinner	An act of love and a routine.	"Working on it, Ma," Linda grinned, heading to the kitchen. In minutes, garlic and onions sizzled. She stir-fried whatever veggies hadn't turned tragic in the crisper and stretched half a pound of pork with cabbages and carrots. Dinner was



		humble but hearty — the culinary equivalent of a comforting pat on the back.
Rosary Beads	A symbol of spiritual resilience	Nanay sat on the threadbare sofa, head bowed, rosary sliding bead to bead like an abacus of grace. Nanay’s whispered <i>Amen</i> dissolved into the fan noise. She opened her eyes, found Linda’s, and simply waited. Her silence permeated the room, encouraging but never urgent.
Planners	Time management and time segmentation	Once again, she looked at the clock and exhaled. Out came the budget notebook: a beat-up planner whose original inspirational quote cover (<i>DREAM BIG, SPEND WISELY</i>) had faded into irony. At the bottom of the page, she scribbled, <i>Colored papers + pencils, don’t forget (again)</i>.
Watermelon	Both nurturing and symbolic of wordless comfort.	Mama’s answer was wordless: she stood, retrieved a plate of chilled watermelon, and set it beside Linda’s laptop. Linda forked a triangle of watermelon — cold, sweet, strangely energizing. Her mother was never one for words, but like every mother who stood up for her daughter, her actions spoke instead of words.
Tessa	Adaptability in the face big life changing decisions	Regrets hovered but never landed. She touched Andrew’s calloused knuckles — proof of every cheap socket he’d repaired so that neighbors’ fans could keep babies cool. She touched Eli’s tiny toes — proof that love sometimes arrives disguised as chaos. Looking out the window, the garden was silvered by moonlight. Tessa found comfort in the small certainties that anchored her: the rhythm of Andrew’s breathing, the soft rise and fall of Eli’s little chest, and the quiet strength of a family bound by love, no matter the distance.
Andrew	Romantic love and parental support	What would two years feel like? She scrolled through memory: high-school field trip where she first bumped Andrew’s arm; the afternoon Andrew fixed their house’s sagging power line for free and came home smelling of burnt rubber and pride; and the pregnancy test line that rewired every timeline. His constant presence during her pregnancy and the tearful laugh hearing their son’s first cry.
Meme	Humor and online culture become	She scrolled through her photo gallery — selfies with her son and parents at last month’s fun-run; screenshots of



	tools for surviving mental strain.	scholarship deadlines; a meme proclaiming, "Coffee: because adulting is unpaid overtime."
Andrea	Social Support	Tessa smiled to herself, thinking about how Andrea was always there for her, even when things got a little complicated. She couldn't help but appreciate how Andrea had stepped in to help with Eli, despite the chaos of their schedules. Tessa knew that not everyone would have volunteered to pick up extra community service hours, especially when they had their own commitments.
Lagro Park	Outdoor bonding representing essential emotional outlets	The park was filled with families and teenagers milling around the seesaws and monkey bars. Late-afternoon sun slipped through acacia leaves, freckling the paving stones. Laughter and chatter floated through the balmy air, mingling with the sweet scent of cotton candy and the distant melody of a street performer strumming a guitar. Children dashed about, their delighted shrieks punctuating the gentle hum of conversation.
Acceptance Letter	Sacrifice for Security and the possible trade off	He handed her the letter—official stationery from the job agency. Her stomach cartwheeled. They had filled out the application almost as a dare twelve months back: <i>Andrew Borja, electrician, willing to work abroad.</i> It wasn't the same; it could never be the same. Those calls wouldn't be clear enough, words wouldn't be warm enough, and distance—the distance would never be close enough.
Dolores	The complex balance of being a wife, mother, and student	"I'm studying to give us a better life... I love our daughter, but I'm also a person with dreams."
Mr. Lazo	Unsympathetic rigidity of the academic system.	"Ms. Fernandez, nice of you to join us," he said. The tone was neutral enough to disguise a warning siren.
Library	Academic self-care and devotion to her goals despite fatigue.	Hours slipped by as she alternated between jotting down notes and highlighting key concepts. Despite the fatigue tugging at her eyelids, a spark of understanding ignited—a small triumph that made the morning's chaos feel worthwhile. Time passed unnoticed. She was pulled from her trance only when a janitor tapped her shoulder. "Miss, the library is closing."



Dolores and Christian's tense interactions	Deeper struggles in the relationship between ambition, roles, and expectations.	Christian wiped his hands on his jeans, the tension evident in the furrow of his brow. Frustration etched on his face, he took a deep breath. "I work too, Dolores. I come home tired, but I still play with Dalia, help with the laundry, clean the house." He gestured around the room, emphasizing his point. "I'm not saying give it all up—I'm saying <i>balance</i> . One of us has to."
Graduation Ceremony	Culmination of years of sacrifice	"Look at us," she began, eyes shining. "We have overcome so much, we have lost and gained along the way. We have balanced children, partners, parents, jobs, and thesis deadlines like circus jugglers who can't afford to drop a single pin. But life does not end here, rather this is just the beginning of a new journey."
Bracelet	Gesture of friendship and recognition of shared struggles	Tessa reached into her purse, produced two bracelets braided from leftover yarn Eli's teacher had donated. "Made these during exam week to stay sane. One for you, one for Dolores. Colors are ... random optimism." Linda accepted hers, looping it around her wrist like armor. "Random optimism suits me."
Dolores and Andrews Interaction	Letting go of past pain and forgiveness	Dolores wasn't lying, she truly was happy for them. Years have passed, and though the pain could not be undone, the wound was no longer festering. She saw how happy Tessa was, her contentment and maybe even regret but Dolores was at peace with the choices she'd made. Each path had its own story, its own lessons, and she had learned to cherish hers.
Internship, LET	Clear aspirations to provide better futures for their children.	"Tomorrow," Dolores said, "lesson planning, tuition budgeting, deployment packing." Her voice carried the weight of responsibility, yet there was no hesitation. "Tomorrow," Linda echoed, glancing at a nearby bookstore where a cat lounged lazily in the window, "but not tonight."

In this context, translating serves as a bridge between the conceptualization of ideas during the planning stage and the evaluation and refinement of the written work during the reviewing stage, effectively linking these two key writing processes. As Yifeng Sun (2022) explains from a communicative standpoint, translation seeks to develop nuanced expressions that convey complex ideas and emotions with clarity and depth. Translation

goes beyond a simple, literal word-for-word conversion from the source language to the target language; it penetrates beneath the surface of the language. It captures a profound understanding of the original text's underlying messages and themes, bridging cultural contexts and offering readers a richer, more comprehensive perspective. Within the framework of the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, translating functions to convert



cognitive concepts into linguistic form, enabling effective communication and allowing writers to clearly and persuasively convey their intended messages to their audience.

Procedure 3 .Reviewing

In this study, the reviewing phase involves proofreading and revising the novelette. Writers must pay close attention to this stage, as it provides an opportunity to improve the overall structure of their work. Hardwood (2022) emphasizes that student writers may benefit from seeking professional assistance during assessment and review to receive valuable corrections and feedback that enhance the final output. Importantly, the review process for the novelette goes beyond just checking grammar and syntax; it also requires careful evaluation and refinement of the essence, arguments, and use of literary devices within the content. To uphold ethical standards and maintain rigor in developing the novelette, the researchers submitted their manuscripts to experts for further enhancement and revision.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Linda Flower and John R. Hayes's Cognitive Process Theory of Writing is highly effective in guiding a coherent, hierarchical, and procedural approach to crafting creative works, particularly novelettes. The theory enabled the researchers to follow a systematic, methodical, and smooth creative writing process, thereby reducing stress and improving productivity.

6. The Novelette “Dasig Sa Kagabhion”

Rationale

Mimesis, the imitation or representation of reality, originated in ancient Greek philosophy and was debated by Plato and Aristotle, who further explored the concept in his "Poetics" (Wesoly, 2022). Aristotle believed that mimetic art, when done correctly, leads to understanding, discussing different forms of

mimetic poetry and their cognitive effects (Bebenek, 2020). Mimesis, therefore, goes beyond mere imitation to generate understanding, yielding knowledge (Pitari, 2021). Modern philosophers like Jean-Luc Nancy and Martin Heidegger view mimesis as a creative principle that uncovers existential insights (Ekweariri, 2022).

Literature, traditionally defined as creative poems and prose with artistic merit (Rexroth, 2024), broadens our perspective and knowledge, allowing us to learn from history (Writers International Edition, 2022). Stemming from the Latin word for "writing," literature expands beyond personal experiences, letting us perceive the world through others' eyes (De Beauvoir & Fleming, 2020).

The output of this study is in the form of a novelette, capturing the resilience of the student mother as they juggle roles as a student and as a mother all at the same time. Literary works, such as novelettes, provide a broader perspective as they convey human experiences and actions through the characters to transmit information to educate readers, discover, express, and share awareness. Furthermore, according to Alfarhan (2024), literature with high artistic value reflects the realities of human life and society. It conveys crucial messages and insights that can influence and shape societal development.

Recognizing the profound influence of literary creation, this study's output takes the form of a novelette, creatively giving voice to the student mother as they juggle dual roles and shows their resilience. This literary work offers a deep and nuanced understanding of how catastrophic events affect vulnerable communities. Supporting this perspective, Valvi (2023) highlights that literary works continuously shape and influence society through diverse streams of thought. Through this novelette, our literary output aims to



cultivate a spirit of solidarity within the community by encouraging mutual support and fostering collective resilience in the face of adversity.

Engaging with literary works is crucial because it helps us grasp the author's ideas and broadens our worldview. Simanjuntak (2020) explains that literature is commonly understood as an effort to portray real-life events. Often, literary pieces are seen as reflections of the actual circumstances during the period in which they were written. This view is reinforced by Wibowo (2013), who argues that literary works, as tangible expressions of human experience, can represent cultural values and communities. Such works reveal the nuanced realities of authentic and informed social connections. These perspectives highlight that realistic portrayals are fundamental to literature; without them, readers would struggle to connect with or believe the narrative.

Objectives

these are the main objectives that form the essence of the novelette:

1. On a local scale, the “Nightscapes” novelette seeks to illuminate the quiet heroism and daily resilience of Filipino women like Linda and Tessa within their immediate communities. By focusing on the intimate details of their routines—navigating grocery aisles on a tight budget, juggling work, childcare, and studies, and relying on the steadfast support of family—this narrative aims to foster empathy and recognition among neighbors, local leaders, and grassroots organizations. The objective is to encourage the development of stronger community support systems, such as accessible childcare, after-school programs, and local food assistance, while validating the lived experiences of working mothers and students. Through storytelling, the hope is to inspire local action and solidarity, making visible the invisible labor that sustains families and communities.
2. On a national scale, the “Nightscapes” novelette aspires to raise broader awareness about the systemic challenges faced by Filipino families, particularly women who shoulder the dual burdens of economic insecurity and caregiving. By portraying the struggles with budgeting, the pressure of educational expenses, and the emotional toll of balancing multiple roles, the narrative advocates for policy changes at the national level. These include pushing for improved labor protections, gender-sensitive workplace policies, expanded access to affordable education, and social safety nets. The story aims to contribute to national conversations around gender equality, poverty alleviation, and the need for comprehensive support for working parents and students, ultimately influencing public opinion and legislative priorities.
3. On an international scale, the “Nightscapes” novelette aims to connect the experiences of Filipino women to the global narrative of women's resilience and the universal struggle for work-life balance. By sharing Linda and Tessa's journeys, the objective is to foster cross-cultural understanding and solidarity, highlighting both the unique and shared challenges faced by women worldwide. The story also seeks to draw attention to the experiences of migrant families and the Filipino diaspora, advocating for international recognition of their contributions and the need for global labor protections.

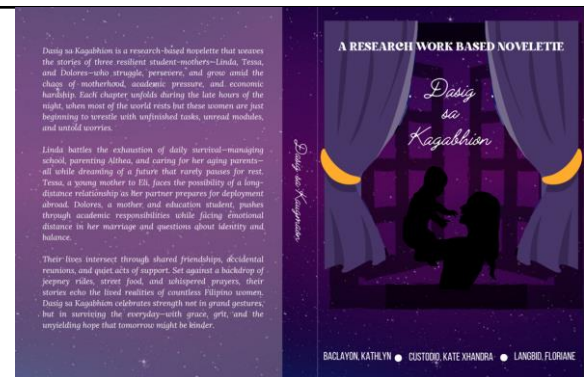


Ultimately, the narrative supports global initiatives for gender equality, decent work, and inclusive social policies, aligning with international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Scheme of Implementation

The creation of the novelette was guided by a carefully structured methodological process that the researchers thoughtfully designed. Following the successful defense and approval of their research proposal, the researchers commenced data collection, ensuring that every step strictly complied with established ethical standards. Once the data was gathered, the team employed thematic analysis to distill and encapsulate the core meanings and recurring themes found within the participants' stories. This analytical phase was complemented by extensive discussions and interpretations, during which the researchers drew upon their direct observations made throughout the in-depth interviews with the carefully chosen participants.

Building upon these insights, the researchers began crafting the novelette, which ultimately took shape across three distinct chapters. The writing process is envisioned as iterative and ongoing, with the team committed to continuously revising and enhancing the manuscript. These refinements are undertaken in close collaboration with their adviser, whose feedback is instrumental in preparing the work for eventual self-publication. The researchers' ultimate goal is to obtain a printed version of the novelette, which will not only serve to foster a readership within their campus community but also provide them with a sense of personal achievement and fulfillment.



Chapter 1 – “I’m a Survivor”

Linda could feel the supermarket’s fluorescent glare peeling away what little energy she had after a day that had started long before sunrise. She reached for a shopping cart, its metal frame cold and unwelcoming against her palm. As she pushed it forward, the wheels squeaked in protest, echoing through the nearly empty aisles. Linda maneuvered past towering displays of cereal boxes and shelves stocked with canned goods, her mind on autopilot. Her eyes scanned the shelves with determination, seeking the items on her hastily scribbled list. As she turned the corner, the cart bumped into a stack of precariously balanced soup cans, sending them clattering to the floor. The sudden noise startled Linda, and she quickly bent down to gather the rolling tins. A store employee rushed over to assist, but Linda waved them off with a weary smile, determined to handle the small mess herself. Once the cans were back in place, she straightened up, brushing off her jeans with a resigned sigh before continuing her search.

As she shuffled into the checkout line, her mind replayed the endless list of tasks waiting at home. Nearby, a toddler’s tantrum echoed through the aisles, mingling with the sounds of carts skidding, shoppers talking, and music playing in the background—sounds that would have been easy to tune out if her overstimulated mind had the decency to cooperate. Unfortunately, today was not one of those days.



Finally, as the cashier scanned the last packet of instant noodles—*beep*—a bright number flashed on the screen like a rude alarm clock. She winced internally, her mind automatically calculating half the month's budget and how it was about to be shredded like confetti.

That's... a new personal best, she thought, mentally rifling through the crumpled bills in her wallet. Coins? Forget it—Althea had siphoned those off for the class “coin bank” project. *Should I check if I have enough?* Her cheeks warmed. Pulling out her debit card, she aimed for casual confidence.

“Cash or card, ma’am?” the cashier chirped. “Um, card,” Linda echoed, as if she'd planned it all along. The machine blinked *PROCESSING* while she silently calculated how much would still be in her savings after this unplanned swipe. *I'll replace it on payday*, she vowed—a promise she'd been making and breaking more often than her New Year's resolution to sleep before midnight.

The cashier's cheerful “Have a nice day!” felt almost mocking, but Linda mustered a polite smile, gathering her bags with an efficiency born from countless similar trips. The automatic doors whooshed open, and the humid air hit her like a wall, immediately sticking to her skin. Bag handles dug into her fingers as she stepped out into the humid 6 P.M. air. Jeepneys honked, vendors hawked boiled peanuts and fried kamote. Somewhere, an OPM ballad crackled through a tiny speaker, a classic remembrance of every middle-class commuter. Linda inhaled the city's exhaust-flavored evening and set off toward home, rehearsing tonight's to-do list: cook dinner, quiz Althea on spelling, finish two assignments, maybe have a long shower if the universe felt generous.

The bus arrived with a huff and a squeal, and Linda climbed aboard, settling into a window

seat. She watched the city blur past, lights twinkling like stars against the encroaching night. Her thoughts drifted from one problem to another, contemplating the small ways she could make life a little easier, a little brighter for her family.

A sagging wooden gate announced her arrival with a groan that echoed down a narrow alley lined with potted malunggay and plastic chairs. Inside, fluorescent bulbs buzzed; the ceiling fan wobbled heroically.

“*Mano po, Ma, Pa!*” She pressed her forehead to her parents' offered knuckles. Her mother's rosary beads clacked a soft reply. Her signature roses and coconut oil enveloped her ever-comforting presence, a scent Linda had always associated with *home*. Papa, half-asleep in front of the news, grunted a welcome without looking up from the screen. Althea, five years old and powered by equal parts curiosity and sugar, barreled in for a hug. “Mama! What's in the bag? Is it a surprise?” Her eyes were saucers fixed on the groceries.

Linda slipped out a tiny probiotic bottle. “Yakult—you better put that in the ref first; you can drink it after dinner.” Althea squealed like she'd won the lottery.

While her daughter's victory dance proceeded in the living room, Linda paused for a moment, listening to the rhythmic thumping of her daughter's feet against the wooden floor. The sound was infectious, bringing a smile to her face as she pulled a carton of milk from the bag. The kitchen was awash with golden afternoon light, and as Linda reached for a loaf of bread, she could hear her daughter's joyous laughter echoing through the house.

With a quick glance at the clock, she realized it was nearing dinner time. She picked up the pace, her hands moving swiftly as she organized the fresh produce in the refrigerator. The carrots and peppers joined the rest of the



vegetables, neatly stacked in the crisper. Meanwhile, the scent of ripe apples filled the air as Linda set them in a bowl on the counter. Nanay raised an eyebrow, "Have you eaten, 'nak? I gave Althea a snack 2 hours ago."

"Working on it, Ma," Linda grinned, heading to the kitchen. She removed her worn-out jacket, leaving it on their sticker-covered *lantay*, not even bothering to change out of her work clothes—a futile decision, knowing full well that she was going to sweat as she cooked their dinner. In minutes, garlic and onions sizzled. She stir-fried whatever veggies hadn't turned tragic in the crisper and stretched half a pound of pork with cabbages and carrots. Dinner was humble but hearty—the culinary equivalent of a comforting pat on the back. Halfway through the meal, Althea's storytelling dam burst. "Mama, my classmate brought glow-in-the-dark crayons, and I forgot my colored papers today because you were gone last night and I couldn't find them and Teacher said it's okay but tomorrow I need to bring—"

"Thea, what did I say about talking with your mouth full?" Linda said, though her heart pinched. She made a mental sticky note: buy a fresh pad of colored paper. Somewhere between rent and tuition, she'd squeeze it in.

"...not to talk," Althea replied. Undeterred, she continued her rambling. "Mama, can I buy a new coloring book with colored pencils? Mine are all so short." Her voice carried no blame—just an earnest report, like weather.

"Sure thing, *nak*. Now, finish your food before it gets cold."

Althea finally down for the night, Linda eased her daughter's bedroom door shut. Nanay sat on the threadbare sofa, head bowed, rosary sliding bead to bead like an abacus of grace. The only sound was the ceiling fan's steady *whap-whap*, like a giant metronome measuring

exhaustion. The dim light cast a shadow on her deep cheeks, creating a silvery shimmer on her thinning hair. Linda silently slid onto the other end of the couch, pulling out her laptop and a stack of handouts. Blue light spilled over highlighted paragraphs on entrepreneurial ethics, the irony not lost on a woman who had just blown a week's budget on probiotic drinks and a pack of sausages, different from the usually inexpensive ones she always bought. Nanay's whispered *Amen* dissolved into the fan noise. She opened her eyes, found Linda's, and simply waited. Her silence permeated the room, encouraging but never urgent. Linda began to fidget—biting and picking on her nails—an incessant habit she had since childhood.

"She forgot her art materials," Linda blurted. It came out half confession, half lament. "I wasn't home to pack her bag." Linda took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the day settle into the cushions beside her. Waking up was never as hard as facing the harrowing emotions that crashed at night, when the world was finally quiet and all that was left was the oppressive weight of the day.

"I'm trying, Ma," she finally said, her voice barely above a whisper. It was a confession wrapped in resolve, the kind that only a mother could understand. "It's been so long, and I still keep trying my best..." But what if my best isn't enough? she worried silently. What if, in all my trying, I'm missing out on her life, on those little moments that matter? The thought gnawed at her, a persistent fear that she couldn't shake, a fear that she was letting time slip through her fingers, missing the chance to be truly present for her daughter.

Nanay nodded, her expression a mix of sympathy and pride. It was such a heavy emotion that only a mother would understand, a mother beckoning the comfort from her mother. She gently placed her hand on her



daughter's shoulder, offering silent reassurance.

Mama's answer was wordless: she stood, retrieved a plate of chilled watermelon, and set it beside Linda's laptop. She sat back on the indented warm spot on the couch, a trademark at this point, and just sat there reading her bible; silent as the May moon's warm embrace and still as the monotone murmur of the leaves. As the clock struck 10, Nanay stood up and gave Linda a pat on the cheek, a tight little smile, and she retreated to her bedroom. Parental wisdom delivered in sugar and vitamins.

"You're doing more than trying, 'nak. You're doing your best, and that's enough." Her words were a balm, soothing the invisible bruises of a day spent juggling too much. Linda forked a triangle of watermelon—cold, sweet, strangely energizing. Her mother was never one for words, but like every mother who stood up for her daughter, her actions spoke instead of words.

A soft smile crept onto Linda's face, looking at her mother's retreating figure. *Thanks, Ma*, she thought, grateful for the unconditional support that never wavered, even when she stumbled. Hours passed. Noticing the time—1:06 A.M.—her spine crackled as she stretched. Her phone buzzed: Andrea.

|| *Girl, have you covered Unit 3 in Strategic Management? I'm drowning.*

Linda thumb-typed back, *Yep, got notes*. She snapped photos of her spiral notebook—flipping pages so fast paper cuts became occupational hazards—then fired them off. Five seconds later, Andrea's sticker of a dancing leprechaun popped up.

|| *You're a saint. Coffee tomorrow?*

Can saints afford coffee? Linda almost joked, but typed *Later*.

|| *Deadlines first. Miss u!*

The clock blinked 12:19 A.M.—the time of night when semicolon placement felt like rocket science.

Linda stretched, her spine cracking like old lumber. Outside, somewhere down the street, a stray dog debated the moon. Midnight owl traffic faded to occasional motorbike roars. She returned to her essay, hammering clauses until the word counter hit the professor's arbitrary line in the sand. One last reread: decent.

Save. Submit. Exhale.

Once again, she looked at the clock and exhaled. Out came the budget notebook: a beat-up planner whose original inspirational quote cover (*DREAM BIG, SPEND WISELY*) had faded into irony. After listing all her expenses, she flipped to the page bookmarked 'DEADLINES' and logged two more due dates, then sketched dinner ideas for the week: *Monday – tinola; Tuesday – adobong sitaw; Wednesday – whatever's left, rebrand as frittata*. Marketing magic.

At the bottom of the page, she scribbled, *Colored papers + pencils, don't forget (again)*.

The planner closed with a soft thud. Linda glanced at the digital clock: 2:03 A.M.

Phone battery red-lined at 5%. Linda closed everything, laid her head on folded arms, and allowed the fan's hypnotic rhythm to blur thought into dreams: Althea waving art projects, Nay's rosary beads morphing into coins that filled tuition jars, Tay humming karaoke victory anthems after each bill was paid.



In the quiet moments before sleep claimed her, Linda felt the familiar presence of love wrapping around her like a warm blanket. The world outside might be relentless, but within these walls, she found her peace.

Chapter 2 - "Jetlag"

Tessa always said that she did her best thinking between 12:01 and 2:00 A.M., the witching window when the city's traffic hushed to a purr and every responsible adult was already dreaming of paydays. Tonight, however, even the cicadas sounded caffeinated.

She sat at her desk, the glow from her laptop barely illuminating the room. Her fingers danced across the keyboard, pausing only to scribble notes on a pad beside her. The ideas flowed like a swift river, but tonight, they seemed more like rapids, each thought jostling for attention.

A sudden gust of wind rattled the window panes, and she glanced up, momentarily distracted by the rustling leaves outside. Her living-room desk—really a recycled plywood door balanced on cinder blocks—was buried under neon flashcards, half-empty mugs, and the outsized hopes of a twentysomething who still believed good grades could out-shout the economy. The glow of her laptop painted her face a faint alien blue while her cursor blinked at the final line of a reflection paper on *Corporate Social Responsibility*. A vibration skittered across the wood. Andrea, classmate-slash-co-conspirator, had slid into Messenger:

|| *Sis, awake? Strat-Man reviewer is roasting my brain.* Help.

|| *Notes from a friend of mine, Page 83 diagrams, page 94 summary. I color-coded the Porter models. Purple = threat, obviously.*

Tessa laughed—quietly, because her boyfriend slept in the next room—and attached photos of her prettily amplified notes. Andrea's typing

bubbles danced for a moment, then froze, replaced by three crying-from-laughter emojis.

|| *BTW, our community-service make-up forms? Where do we find those?*
|| *In the student portal, but we also have to go to the Prefect of Discipline in person. I still can't believe you have to comm serve because of me.*

|| *It's no big deal. Babysitting baby Eli was no big deal, and way better than sitting down for 3 hours on those monoblock chairs.*

Tessa smiled to herself, thinking about how Andrea was always there for her, even when things got a little complicated. She couldn't help but appreciate how Andrea had stepped in to help with Eli, despite the chaos of their schedules. Tessa knew that not everyone would have volunteered to pick up extra community service hours, especially when they had their own commitments.

The conversation see-sawed from quizzes to daycare woes. They talked about the newest K-Pop news and Tessa's toddler, Eli, who had apparently decided that vegetables were the enemy unless carved into dinosaur silhouettes, and the household blender had tragically died in battle. Andrea offered a half-serious tutorial on stealth-mode spinach purees, and Tessa shared some insights on bringing 1kg power banks during concerts, when she noticed the time. 1:49 A.M.

"Sleep," she muttered as she said her goodbyes and clicked *Submit* on her essay, slammed her laptop shut, and flopped onto the bed. Sleep, of course, played coy. She scrolled through her photo gallery—selfies with her son and parents at last month's fun-run; screenshots of scholarship deadlines; a meme proclaiming, "Coffee: because adulting is unpaid overtime." Sometime past 2:30, exhaustion finally wrestled the phone from her grasp.



Humidity greeted Tessa like an overly friendly Labrador as she hustled across campus, forehead dripping with sweat. Fortunately, her tardiness in waking early that morning made her dodge a blotchy makeup catastrophe. She slipped into her seat seconds before Mr. Toledo arrived. The economics teacher possessed the energy of three espresso shots and a disposition that suggested none of them contained sugar. Without preamble, he chalked “ELASTICITY & CONSUMER SURPLUS” onto the board, letters as rigid as his posture.

Tessa tried to focus, but her mind kept performing domestic arithmetic: Eli’s doctor visit next week (P850 for lab tests), Andrew’s overdue sneakers (duct tape currently reinforcing the soles), and her own tuition, which felt like a ticking parking meter she glanced at every hour. She copied formulas mechanically, but the symbols might as well have been hieroglyphs. Her late night and incomplete circadian cycle probably also played a part in her absent-mindedness, but after a week’s worth of juggling responsibilities, it seemed like the whispers of early morning were the only time she could have for herself.

She wiped her hands on a napkin and glanced at her friends. “I need to take this,” she said, standing up quickly. The cafeteria buzzed with lunchtime chatter, but Tessa maneuvered through the noise, weaving between groups of students. She pushed open the heavy doors that led to the courtyard and found a quieter spot under a sprawling oak tree.

Taking a deep breath, she hit the button to accept the call. The screen flickered before Andrew’s familiar face emerged, his hair standing at odd angles, slightly pixelated yet unmistakably him. Perched on his lap, Eli brandished a wooden spoon like a scepter. “Mama!” his voice boomed through the tiny

speakers, a surprisingly mighty sound for such a small child.

“Hi, baby! Have you eaten already?” Tessa asked, her voice warm and inviting. Andrew swiveled the camera to reveal Eli’s plate: noodles lay conquered, carrots abandoned, and a single green bean sat forlorn on the edge. “Veggie Armageddon,” Andrew commented with a chuckle.

Tessa launched into a lively recount of campus gossip for her two favorite boys, detailing Mr. Gonzales’s rumored pop quiz and the upcoming charity fun-run, which promised free ice cream to finishers.

“Finish ice cream?” Eli echoed, eyes wide with hope.

“You’ll have to outrun Mama for that,” Andrew teased, a playful challenge in his voice.

“If you want to run faster than me, you need to eat your veggies,” Tessa mouthed, her tone both encouraging and teasing.

Obnoxious or not, the afterglow carried Tessa through Mr. Gonzales’s dreaded announcement ten minutes later: “Clear your desks. Surprise quiz.” The collective groan from the class didn’t faze him; he simply adjusted his glasses and began distributing the papers with a hint of a smile. Mr. Gonzales had a reputation for his unpredictable quizzes, and his students often speculated that he took a certain delight in keeping them on their toes. Tessa’s heartbeat drummed a double-tempo. She closed her eyes, summoned last night’s conversation with Andrea. *Elasticity: percentage change in quantity divided by percentage change in price.*

Pencil scratched. Ten questions later, she exhaled, unsure whether she’d aced or merely survived.



Outside the classroom, her friends gathered in a conspiratorial huddle, already dissecting the quiz like detectives at a crime scene. Kay grinned, “Did you see that trick question on consumer surplus? I swear, Mr. Gonzales has been watching too many mystery shows.”

Tessa laughed, feeling the tension dissolve like sugar in tea. “I just hope my guesses were educated enough.”

They walked across campus, the sun dipping low and casting long shadows that stretched ahead like paths yet to be traveled. It was moments like these—amidst laughter and camaraderie—when Tessa felt a reassuring sense of belonging. Kay clapped her on the shoulder. “Let’s hang out at Lagro Park. We require fish balls and questionable ice flavored as ‘ube.’ You in?”

“But Eli—” Tessa began.

“Bring him!” Myrene said. “We’ll teach him the sacred art of popping fish-ball blisters without burning tongues.” Group laughter sealed the plan.

The park was filled with families and teenagers milling around the seesaws and monkey bars. Late-afternoon sun slipped through acacia leaves, freckling the paving stones. Laughter and chatter floated through the balmy air, mingling with the sweet scent of cotton candy and the distant melody of a street performer strumming a guitar. Children dashed about, their delighted shrieks punctuating the gentle hum of conversation.

Nearby, a group of teenagers lounged on the grass, earbuds visible under their tousled hair, a soundtrack of youthful rebellion and camaraderie. They traded jokes and secrets, the kind that felt monumental in the moment,

destined to be remembered with fond nostalgia.

As the sun dipped lower, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, the park took on a golden glow. It was a moment to breathe, to pause, and to appreciate the small, beautiful details woven into the fabric of everyday life. Tessa spread a fading cartoon picnic mat while Eli used her shoe like a steering wheel, vroom-vrooming in circles.

Vendors rattled their carts: “Fish-ball! Kikiam! Ice scramble!” Kay purchased a mountain of skewers that steamed like edible bonfires. Myrene performed a dramatic reenactment of Question 6 from the quiz, her arms mimicking supply curves while Kay, playing “price,” swiveled left and right. Eli applauded every exaggerated flop while Tessa snapped photos. It was around 8:00 in the evening when Tessa and Eli returned home, and around 9:00 when they finally settled Eli down for the night. Tessa gently tucked a wayward curl behind his ear before quietly slipping through the sliding door to their pocket garden.

Battery-powered fairy lights, leftover from last Christmas, were draped between two valiantly potted calamansi trees. Under their faint halos, Andrew waited, fiddling with a folded letter. The smell of wet earth and basil lingered after a late drizzle. The garden was the handiwork of Andrew’s mother and Tessa’s, proof of the green thumb Andrew and Eli did not seem to inherit from their mothers.

“You look tired,” Tessa whispered, settling onto the bench. The old bamboo *lantay* creaked under the weight.

“Look who’s talking,” Andrew paused, his words hanging in the air as uncertainty crept into his voice. The hesitation was palpable, as if he was weighing every possible consequence before continuing.



He handed her the letter—official stationery from the job agency. Her stomach cartwheeled. They had filled out the application almost as a dare twelve months back: *Andrew Borja, electrician, willing to work abroad*. It had become background noise, like an unpaid bill pinned to a fridge until the numbers faded. Now, the possibility loomed large and daunting, no longer just a distant notion. Tessa traced the embossed letterhead with her thumb, feeling the weight of the paper as if it carried the weight of their future.

“Remember when we thought this was just a long shot?” she said, her voice a blend of disbelief and nostalgia. Tessa remembered the day they filed this application; it was just one of the five agencies they applied to. Andrew, with the lopsided grin of his, said, “What’s the worst that could happen?”

Andrew chuckled softly, a sound that warmed the cool night air. “Yeah, it was like buying a lotto ticket. Except now it feels like we might’ve actually hit the jackpot—or, you know, at least a consolation prize.”

They shared a smile; each lost in their own thoughts about what this opportunity could mean. Tessa’s mind raced through a carousel of images: Eli’s laughter, the creaky floorboards of their little home, and dreams of a more secure future.

“Deployment earliest in three months,” Andrew said, voice low. “Contract is two years in Jeddah. Salary...” He named a figure that turned Tessa’s knees fizzy.

She pictured lines of digits morphing into concrete things: daycare fees, doctor visits, maybe a modest wedding she’d postponed twice because a reception cost more than optimism. But she also pictured blank spots—the corner of Eli’s drawings labeled *For Daddy* instead of *With Daddy*; the silence at bedtime

when Andrew’s off-key lullabies were replaced by patchy video calls.

It wasn’t the same; it could never be the same. Those calls wouldn’t be clear enough, words wouldn’t be warm enough, and distance—the distance would never be close enough.

“Do you want it?” she asked, the grown-up question.

“I want to give you both more,” he said. “But I don’t want to miss Eli mistaking the coffee table for Mount Mayon.”

A wind rustled calamansi leaves, releasing a citrus whisper. Tessa traced the bench’s splintered edges, thinking of elasticity in an entirely different sense: how far could two people stretch before something snapped?

“If you go,” she said finally, “we draw a map. Schedules, savings targets, countdown calendars, reunion tickets.”

“But you know,” Andrew added thoughtfully, “whether it’s Jeddah or here, it’s just geography. What matters is making sure we’re all okay.”

As Tessa turned off the bedside lamp, darkness settled around them, bringing a stillness that only night could provide. She lay back against the pillow, staring at the ceiling, where shadows danced from the dim light sneaking through the curtains. Her mind, however, was anything but still.

What if I regret this? The thought lingered like a persistent echo in her mind. She knew the decision was monumental, a crossroads that could change everything. Yet, Andrew’s promise, his willingness to wait, wrapped around her like a comforting blanket. He always knew how to reassure her, even in the midst of uncertainty.



Andrew lay beside her, staring into the same darkness. The words of the letter seemed to float in the air around him. His thoughts twisted and turned, each one trying to find its place in the puzzle of their future. Could they really make this work? Could love to conquer the practicalities of life that seemed so daunting?

He turned slightly, feeling Tessa's presence beside him. They had faced challenges before, but this felt different. This choice was about roots and wings, about staying or flying. His heart ached with the enormity of it all, yet he knew that whatever decision they made, it had to be together.

We've always been stronger together, he reminded himself, hoping that this truth would guide them through the uncertainty. He reached for Tessa's hand under the covers, squeezing it gently, finding solace in the simple connection.

Tessa felt the warmth of his hand and squeezed back, grateful for the silent acknowledgment of their shared burden. Together, they closed their eyes, allowing sleep to slowly creep in, knowing that tomorrow would bring a new dawn and, hopefully, the clarity they both desperately sought.

They linked pinkies—an old ritual from prenuptial days—before heading back inside. The blanket fort glowed faintly, a small galaxy held up by clothespins.

In their bedroom, Eli nested at the bed's center like a starfish dictator. Andrew slept on one side, hand resting protectively on the toddler's belly. Tessa lay on the other, staring at the ceiling where dime-store glow-in-the-dark stars attempted constellations.

What would two years feel like? She scrolled through memory: high-school field trip where she first bumped Andrew's arm; the afternoon Andrew fixed their house's sagging power line for free and came home smelling of burnt rubber and pride; and the pregnancy test line that rewired every timeline. His constant presence during her pregnancy and the tearful laugh hearing their son's first cry.

Regrets hovered but never landed. She touched Andrew's calloused knuckles—proof of every cheap socket he'd repaired so that neighbors' fans could keep babies cool. She touched Eli's tiny toes—proof that love sometimes arrives disguised as chaos.

Looking out the window, the garden was silvered by moonlight.

Tessa found comfort in the small certainties that anchored her: the rhythm of Andrew's breathing, the soft rise and fall of Eli's little chest, and the quiet strength of a family bound by love, no matter the distance.

Chapter 3 – “Wondering”

Dolores had woken before her phone's rooster-crow ringtone, a tiny mercy that spared her husband Christian from greeting the day with a mini-heart attack. Outside, the city's dawn still smelled of damp concrete and fried garlic rice; inside, the kitchen bulb hummed like an anxious bee while Dolores assembled three breakfasts at once—hers, Christian's, and the pint-sized princess currently drooling on a plush unicorn in the next room.

With rice in the cooker and eggs hissing in the pan, Dolores flicked open her class group chat. Forty-three new messages had appeared overnight: reminders about micro-teaching demos, memes of teachers turning into zombies, and three polite pings asking if she had printed today's handouts in advance because she'd “promised to, ate.” She thumb-



typed a quick “Will do after going to RHU, promise,” sprinkled chopped tomatoes over the eggs, and inhaled. Vaccine day first, lesson plans later. After all, she had already informed her instructors three days in advance that she wouldn’t be in class.

The morning sun gently filtered through the curtains of the small home, casting golden hues on the kitchen floor. The clinking of utensils and the sizzle of garlic in hot oil filled the kitchen as Christian trudged in, eyes half-mast, hair a dark forest of morning static. He planted a kiss on his wife’s forehead and fumbled for coffee. “Did you turn off my alarm?” he mumbled.

“Alarm was blaring but you were snoring,” Dolores answered, plating sunny-side-ups with surgeon precision. “Consider it a public-health intervention.”

“Good morning,” she said softly, handing him a steaming cup of coffee.

“Morning,” Christian replied, sipping the brew. “Smells good. You made longganisa?”

“Your favorite,” she smiled. “You have a long day ahead, right?”

“Yeah. Tile installation inspection at the warehouse. I’ll be home before dinner.”

They shared a look—brief, yet comforting. There were days when silence between them was heavy, but this morning it felt like a pause in a song—meaningful and warm.

Christian wolfed down two spoonfuls of rice, checked the ancient wall clock, and winced. “If I don’t leave now, the MRT queue will make me late.” He crouched to Dalia’s height. “Papa needs to go to work, ‘nak. Mama’s taking you to the clinic. No tears, okay?”

Dalia made the solemn face of someone signing a peace treaty. “Okay, pa. But can I bring Sparkles?” She hoisted the unicorn. Its horn was peeling glitter like dandruff.

“Sparkles is brave, so yes,” Dolores decreed. She kissed Christian goodbye—quick, warm, a promise in miniature—then pivoted to wrangle socks onto Dalia’s reluctant feet.

By 7:45 a.m., mother and daughter, armed with umbrella, snack pack, and a folder of yellow vaccine cards, marched out. The sky swelled gray, as if contemplating rain but too lazy to commit. Dolores calculated: twenty-minute jeep ride, fifteen in line, jabs by nine. Plenty of margin before her 1:30 education theory class. *Famous last thoughts*, she would later tell herself. The Rural Health Unit was performing its best impression of a sardine can. A security guard waved Dolores toward a queue that snaked past posters of smiling infants and “Know Your Dengue Symptoms” infographics. Fluorescent bulbs flickered overhead, lighting a hundred restless toddlers and their caffeine-deprived minders. Mothers with babies in slings, toddlers gripping their guardians’ hands, and healthcare workers calling names filled the waiting room with a cacophony of life.

Dalia clutched Sparkles like a talisman, eyes darting between crying babies and the nurse’s silver needles. Dolores located the end of the line—and froze. Was that Tessa? Same heart-shaped face, same ponytail currently escaping its tie. Tessa looked up, recognition igniting.

“Dolores?”

“Tessa.”

The two women stared at each other for a moment too long, looking at each other’s faces in contemplation and surprise—bad or good surprise?



Dolores was the first to smile, albeit cautiously. "It's been a while." *Definitely a long while*, Dolores thought. They were still in high school then, but it seemed like years had passed since senior year prom; when having the best dress and makeup was the most pivotal decision a girl like her would have to make.

Tessa nodded. "Yeah. I didn't know you lived in this area."

"I moved back after... well, after everything," Dolores replied, glancing briefly at Dalia. Dolores was *not* uncomfortable, she was just surprised; Tessa looked so different from what she remembered.

Tessa followed her gaze. "She's beautiful."

"Thank you," Dolores said, then looked at the toddler by Tessa's side. "And so is he."

The air shifted between them—not tense, but uncertain. She was so different, gone was the girl who threw a mischievous smirk at anyone who cared, the girl who would take one look at a book and judge it with brash sneers. There stood a stranger—similar features, yes—but that girl was not the Tessa Dolores had known from all those years ago.

"I didn't know you had a child too," Dolores said, her voice soft. A statement rather than the questions that fought to leave her mouth, '*What changed?*' Dolores thought.

"Yeah. Three years now. It's been a ride," Tessa chuckled. "And you? How's school?"

"Still pushing through," Dolores smiled.

"Juggling motherhood and a degree isn't easy."

Tessa nodded slowly. "Tell me about it."

They didn't talk about the past. They didn't need to. The shared struggle of young motherhood stitched them together in quiet solidarity. As the line crept forward, they shared stories of sleepless nights, first steps, and the endless balancing act of assignments and diaper changes. The conversation flowed naturally, like a leaf winding through a familiar riverbank.

"Sometimes it feels like I'm running on fumes," Dolores admitted, adjusting her grip on Dalia's hand, her fingers intertwining in a reassuring squeeze.

"Same here," Tessa nodded, her eyes reflecting a shared exhaustion. "But then Eli will do something to make me smile, and I remember why it's all worth it." She glanced at Dolores, a soft smile playing on her lips.

Dolores laughed, the sound light and unburdened, as if a weight had been lifted. She felt a warmth spread through her chest, realizing that Tessa must have truly found fulfillment. It was a comforting thought; the idea that amidst the chaos, there were still moments of genuine joy.

As they neared the front of the line, a comfortable silence settled over them. There was no rush to fill it with words; the presence of mutual understanding was enough. A few years had passed, and their lives, once kindred by one man, had long since absconded.

"Maybe we could meet up some time," Tessa suggested, before they parted ways as they neared the nurse's station. "Let the kids play. Share some stories."

Dolores nodded, her heart lightened by the offer. "I'd like that. Maybe we can even trade some tips on juggling it all."



Their numbers were finally called. Dalia clutched Sparkles as she bravely received her vaccine. Dolores whispered praises while Tessa cheered in her own son.

By the time Dolores returned home, it was nearly noon. She rushed to prepare lunch, packed Dalia's bag for afternoon class, then waved goodbye as Christian left to drive their daughter to school.

Exhausted but determined, Dolores took a quick shower and threw on a clean blouse. She was already running late. Dolores checked the time: 1:02. Class at 1:30. She could make it if—traffic gods willing.

Dolores grabbed her keys and dashed out the door, her feet barely touching the ground as she hurried down the front steps. Her trusty motorcycle waited in the driveway like a loyal steed, and she slid into the seat, starting the engine with a flick of her wrist. The vehicle roared to life, and she backed out onto the street with practiced precision.

As she maneuvered through the familiar neighborhood roads, Dolores kept one eye on her watch and the other on the traffic ahead. Each red light felt like an eternity, but she willed herself to stay calm. Her fingers tapped anxiously on the handlebar as she edged closer to the main road.

The traffic gods seemed to be smiling upon her today—most of the lights turned green just as she approached. Dolores zipped through the bustling streets, weaving expertly between cars. With every turn, she inched closer to her destination.

Finally, the college campus loomed into view, and Dolores breathed a sigh of relief. She found a parking spot, grabbed her bag, and sprinted across the courtyard.

She did not make it. Bursting into the room eight minutes late, Dolores felt forty pairs of eyes perform synchronized eyebrow lifts. Sir Lazo paused mid-PowerPoint.

"Ms. Fernandez, nice of you to join us," he said. The tone was neutral enough to disguise a warning siren.

"Apologies, sir. RHU delays, but I've read today's chapter," she blurted, sliding into the only empty chair. Her seatmate—Samantha, and Kim, at the back—sent subtle thumbs-up signals.

Lazo resumed explaining theories relating to the cycle of customer demand. Dolores opened her notes, mind sprinting to catch up. She copied diagrams while replaying the morning like a documentary titled "Optimism vs. Bureaucracy."

After class, Andrea swiftly caught up with Dolores at the doorway. "Girl, you missed three theories. I took photos," she announced, thrusting her phone forward. Gratitude surged through Dolores as Andrea quickly sent over the files with a few taps.

While some classmates ambled toward the cafeteria for gossip and ice scramble, Dolores forged a determined path to the library. She commandeered a corner desk, her textbooks and laptop spread out like a tactical map. However, as she tried to focus on the notes, the library's hushed ambience failed to soothe her racing thoughts, leaving her mind in a relentless whirl.

Taking a deep breath, she refocused on the task at hand. She spread out her notes, determined to decipher the theories she had missed. The gentle hush of pages turning around her created a comforting backdrop as she immersed herself in the world of academic theories and equations.



Hours slipped by as she alternated between jotting down notes and highlighting key concepts. Despite the fatigue tugging at her eyelids, a spark of understanding ignited—a small triumph that made the morning's chaos feel worthwhile.

Time passed unnoticed. She was pulled from her trance only when a janitor tapped her shoulder.

"Miss, the library is closing."

Dolores blinked at the wall clock. It was almost 9:30 p.m.

Dolores quickly gathered her scattered papers, stuffing them into her worn backpack. Her fingers brushed against the smooth surface of her notebook, and she paused for a moment, savoring the thrill of newfound clarity. She slung the bag over her shoulder with a determined nod, mentally promising herself to revisit her notes as soon as she got home.

As she made her way through the dimly lit aisles, the librarian gave her a sympathetic smile, acknowledging the late-night dedication. Dolores returned the gesture, feeling a sense of camaraderie in their shared commitment to knowledge.

By the time Dolores emerged from the library, the sun had hidden its bright head, and the moon had donned its pearly helm. The campus was bathed in the soft glow of streetlights, casting gentle shadows on the pathways. Dolores clutched her books to her chest, feeling the weight of the day dissipate into the evening breeze. The air was cooler now, refreshing against her skin, and she took a moment to savor the tranquility that enveloped the campus at night. The campus gradually gave way to the familiar rhythm of the city. Jeepneys rumbled past, their colorful exteriors like

moving canvases in the bustling urban gallery. Even more during the peak of the night, the vendors called out, offering snacks and drinks to weary passersby.

The commute home felt exhausting and prolonged. As Dolores disembarked from the bus and onto the rough, uneven path, her strides grew wider and brisker. After walking for over a minute, she spotted the soft, inviting glow of the front porch light. Inside, the house was quiet, with the kitchen lights still aglow. Christian was at the sink, washing the dishes, but he didn't lift his gaze.

"Hi," Dolores said gently, setting down her bag and brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Hi." His voice was flat as he continued to rinse a plate, the water splashing lightly.

She approached him, cautious, her footsteps barely making a sound on the kitchen tiles. "You didn't have to wait up."

"I wasn't," he replied, turning his back as he scrubbed the plate more vigorously. "I was just cleaning."

Dolores leaned on the counter, her fingers tapping lightly on the surface, sensing the tension that lingered in the air.

"Is something wrong?" she asked, tilting her head slightly. Even a clueless bystander would scoff at the question—*of course, something's wrong*. Christian finally faced her, his brow furrowed and eyes shadowed with frustration. "You're asking me that?"

"What do you mean?" Dolores retorted, crossing her arms defensively, her eyes searching his for answers.

"You come home late almost every day now. Even if you're here, you're buried in books. Sometimes, Dalia talks to me about things she



did and says, 'Don't tell Mama, she's busy.' Do you know how that feels?" Christian never yells when we fight—no, he's too much of a pacifist for that—Christian speaks with such monotone calmness that it infuriates anyone taking the brunt of his words.

Dolores stiffened, her fingers clenching around the edge of the kitchen counter. "I'm doing my best. Didn't you tell me—encourage me, even—to always try my best when I enrolled for college?" Her eyes met Christian's, searching for the support he once promised. "That you would be here, beside me, helping me out? What happened to always being my biggest supporter?" She took a deep breath, her voice steadying. "I'm studying to give us a better life."

Christian ran a hand through his hair, his voice rising slightly in frustration. "At what cost?" He gestured towards the empty dining table, his eyes narrowing. "You forget her homework, you miss dinner, and when you're home, your mind's somewhere else. What's left for us?"

Dolores crossed her arms defiantly, her voice sharp. "So what, I'm supposed to drop everything and just be a housewife?" Her eyes softened as she glanced towards the hallway where their daughter's laughter echoed faintly. "I love our daughter, but I'm also a person with dreams." Her voice quivered, the frustration and vulnerability seeping through. "Am I not allowed that?"

"That's not what I'm saying." Christian, calm as ever, stood his ground, his hands resting firmly on his hips.

"No? Because it sounds like you want me to shrink myself into a mother and nothing more!" Dolores threw her hands in the air, her voice rising with each word.

Christian wiped his hands on his jeans, the tension evident in the furrow of his brow. Frustration etched on his face, he took a deep breath. "I work too, Dolores. I come home tired, but I still play with Dalia, help with the laundry, clean the house." He gestured around the room, emphasizing his point. "I'm not saying give it all up—I'm saying *balance*. One of us has to."

They stood in silence, the air between them charged with unspoken words, each one heavier than the last. Dolores crossed her arms, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, her gaze fixed on the floor.

Neither backed down. Neither apologized. Dolores turned away first, tears stinging her eyes as she moved toward the hallway. "I'm going to bed," she said over her shoulder, her voice barely above a whisper.

The next morning, the house smelled of garlic and eggs. Dolores was cooking fried rice while Christian quietly washed dishes. They moved around each other with a practiced efficiency, but without words.

Then, the sound of light footsteps broke the silence.

"Good morning!" Dalia beamed, rubbing her eyes while stretching her arms over her head. Both parents turned, smiles forced but gentle.

"Good morning, D," Dolores said, ruffling her hair.

Christian handed her a glass of milk. "Morning, anak."

The morning passed like usual, the husband and wife exchanged a few glances but kept their words measured, careful not to let their earlier tensions spill into the day. As they moved through the familiar morning routine,



the house slowly filled with the comforting sounds of normalcy—the clinking of breakfast plates, the hum of the coffee machine, and Dalia's cheerful chatter.

Dalia, her face still puffy with sleep, seemed blissfully unaware of the undercurrents between her parents as they sat together at the breakfast table. She giggled at her own jokes and asked a million questions about the day ahead—what games they'd play at school, whether she could bring extra cookies to share with friends. Her excitement was contagious, yet it barely masked the tension simmering beneath the surface.

The couple exchanged awkward smiles over their coffee cups. Neither acknowledged the weight of the moment, a reminder of one of the many instances that still colored their lives. It was just another Monday, but the unspoken words hung heavily between them.

"It's Monday," Dolores said, breaking the silence. "Your turn to bring her to school."

Christian nodded, attempting a reassuring smile. "I'll be back before dinner," he replied, knowing they both understood the significance of that promise. As he helped Dalia gather her things, he wondered how long they could continue to navigate this delicate balance.

In class, Dolores was scribbling answers in her workbook when her phone vibrated silently in her lap.

|| Can we talk later? I hated how we ended things last night. I'm sorry. I just miss us. My mom will pick up Dalia after school. Can we meet at Don Julio's? You know, where we had our first date?

She stared at the message, then reread it. Her lips curved into a small, reluctant smile.

As she considered the text, the classroom around her buzzed with the usual chatter and the teacher's voice droned on about quadratic

equations. Dolores glanced at the clock, noting how slowly the seconds seemed to tick by. She tapped her pen against the workbook, her mind racing through the possibilities of the upcoming conversation.

She thought to herself,
'Maybe we can still figure this out.'

When the final bell rang, Dolores packed her things with a newfound lightness in her step. She waved goodbye to her classmates, promising to catch up over coffee soon, and headed out into the warm afternoon sun.

Epilogue – "End of Beginning"

'What if the person most deserving of this medal... never got one? What if the real valedictorians aren't the ones standing on this stage—but are quietly seated among you right now?'

'To those who showed up with tired eyes, but hearts that refused to quit. To the one who studied through tears, who cried in silence, but still made it to class with a smile.'

– Tricia Ann Anda, DLSU Class of 2025 Valedictorian

The sun began its ascent, painting the horizon with strokes of amber and gold, a celestial artist crafting the first masterpiece of the day. As light spilled across rooftops and treetops, it nudged the world awake with a gentle but undeniable insistence. Leaves rustled under the touch of a gentle breeze, and the city's heartbeat quickened with the soft hum of life returning to its daily rhythm.

Linda, stirring alongside it, awoke to a sound she would one day miss: Althea practicing her graduation march in the hallway—*left, right, spin for flair!*—while Nanay ironed Linda's borrowed toga with the reverence usually reserved for Holy Week vestments. Tatay guarded the breakfast table, keeping the bacon



supply intact (a luxury her father insisted in) by distracting his granddaughter with knock-knock jokes.

The morning radio station swathe their humble abode in nostalgic humor, paired with the gentle swing of Tatay's *kolumpyo*, and the swash of Nanay's dress. On the calendar above the fridge, today's square was triple-circled in red: GRADUATION! Linda traced it with a fingertip, half-sure she'd dreamt the whole ordeal. Four years of dusk-till-dawn shifts, jeepney rides scented like exhaustion and prayer, assignments typed at 1 A.M. beside plates of watermelon—clumped now into a single morning.

"Ma, time!" Tatay called, tapping his wrist where a watch ought to be.

Linda snapped back. She wolfed the last spoon of garlic rice, kissed Nanay's cheek, and let Tatay tuck a candy into her tote—tradition. At the door Althea lifted her chin for lipstick, solemn as a maid of honor. "Promise you'll wave if you see me, okay?" Linda said.

"I'll yell," Althea corrected, then sprinted outside to scout for a tricycle.

The sun rose like a stage light as Linda and her entourage squeezed into a tricycle already festooned with crepe-paper streamers—its driver moonlighting as someone's proud uncle. Nanay pointed out landmarks the way saints point out miracles: "*That sari-sari you bought your yellow pad after bring the wrong paper... That bridge heard your sobbing after the exam...*" Linda laughed until her eyes watered. The driver, catching the spirit, chimed in with his own tales of the neighborhood's quirks and characters. The tricycle came to a halt at the college gates, and the world seemed to pause with it. Linda took a deep breath, feeling the weight of expectation and excitement mingling in the air.

Andrea Santos—toga slightly askew, toddler niece balanced on her hip—fought a bobby pin and lost. She spotted Linda across the lobby and waved, nearly decapitating an inflatable congratulations balloon. Their hug compressed a thousand study-group secrets.

"You look like a cum laude," Andrea teased.

"More like *kumain-laude*," Linda shot back.

"Three rice refills at breakfast."

Andrea snorted. Then she glanced toward the entrance. "Oh, hey, there's someone I want you to meet," she gestured with her chin.

Tessa Borja advanced, Eli straddling her arms like a pirate captain. The introduction was overdue; until now, Linda knew Tessa through Andrea's chat screenshots of study notes and was better known as 'the connection from the different section'. In seconds they were shaking hands, toddlers already circling each other like astronauts. Eli brandished a toy car and Althea held her trusty unicorn, Sparkles.

Together they hunted reserved seating for children and unofficial titas. Nanay and Tatay claimed a spot near Christian Fernandez—Dolores's husband, still in office slacks but radiant with a camera hung in his neck—and a seat left empty for Andrew, currently riding a bus straight from the airport for a six-day vacation timed to this graduation.

As the trio of women—Linda, Tessa, and Andrea—made their way through the bustling crowd, Christian spotted them and stood, offering a courteous nod to let them pass. He gestured towards the seats he had saved, a warm smile on his face as he greeted them. "Glad you all made it in time with all that traffic," he said, his voice carrying a hint of relief.



The friends exchanged pleasantries, a familiar camaraderie settling among them like a well-worn quilt. Laughter echoed as they shared tales of late-night study sessions and the myriad challenges that had accompanied their journeys.

Soon after, Andrew arrived, his presence marked by the distinct shuffle of suitcase wheels and a travel-weary yet exuberant grin. He strode towards the group, his hand reaching out in anticipation. He was immediately introduced to Christian, who shook his hand firmly, his grip conveying warmth and sincerity. "Nice to finally meet you," Christian said, his tone friendly and genuine, as he gestured for Andrew to take a seat.

Just as they began to settle into the comfort of conversation, Dolores arrived, her heels clicking softly against the floor. Her entrance was marked by a brief but noticeable pause in the group's chatter as she adjusted her sash and surveyed the room. Andrew's eyes widened slightly as he recognized her, an old familiarity tugging at the corners of his mind. It was his high school ex-girlfriend, a chapter from his past that he hadn't anticipated revisiting. He hesitated for a moment before offering a tentative nod, his thoughts racing with memories.

Dolores's gaze flickered over to Andrew, and for a moment, the air felt charged with unspoken history. The group exchanged glances, the silence stretching like a taut string until Andrea, ever the diplomat, broke it with a gentle nudge. "Hey, kids, go bless your Uncle Andrew," she suggested with a playful grin. The children, oblivious to the undercurrents, eagerly obliged.

"Mano, po," said Althea then Dalia, each taking turns to press their foreheads gently to the elders' hands.

After a few moments of light-hearted chatter, Andrew excused himself and approached Dolores, drawing her aside from the group. The two stood at the edge of the gathering, a pocket of privacy amidst the chaos.

"Dolores," Andrew began, his voice quiet but earnest as he approached her beneath the fluttering banners of their college graduation ceremony. The scent of fresh-cut grass mingled with the excitement of students and families. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Dolores managed a small smile, her eyes meeting his with a blend of nostalgia and acceptance. The gathering crowd of graduates and their families created a heartwarming scene of laughter and celebration. "Life's full of surprises, isn't it?" she replied, her tone light yet tinged with the weight of the past.

Andrew nodded, the years since their high school days folding neatly between them like a well-read book. Memories of their courting days, when he serenaded her under the decades old mango tree and school dances flashed briefly in their minds. "I just wanted to say... I'm sorry for how things ended back then. I never meant to hurt you."

Dolores's gaze softened, and she nodded. "We were young. We all made choices that changed us," she said, recalling how they had gone from inseparable friends to distant strangers by senior year. "I'm happy for you and Tessa, really. I've also found my place, my family, and it would not have been possible if things didn't unfold the way it did."

Dolores wasn't lying, she truly was happy for them. Years have passed, and though the pain could not be undone, the wound was no longer festering. She saw how happy Tessa was, her contentment and maybe even regret but Dolores was at peace with the choices she'd



made. Each path had its own story, its own lessons, and she had learned to cherish hers. He smiled, a genuine warmth in his eyes, as he reached out to shake hands with an old friend. "Thank you," he replied, glancing over to where Tessa, now his fiancée, was chatting animatedly with their friends, her laughter ringing through the room. "You look great, by the way," he added, straightening his tie with a quick, confident gesture. "Ready for whatever comes next?"

Dolores chuckled softly, adjusting her cap with a playful tilt. "I think so," she said, her eyes twinkling as she tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "It's kind of exciting, isn't it? Not knowing what's around the corner." She leaned back, crossing her arms comfortably as she watched the lively scene unfold around them.

The words lingered between them, a gentle acknowledgment of the paths they had chosen. As they rejoined the group, the air felt lighter, the past now a thread woven seamlessly into the present stories of their lives.

The first notes of *March No. 1* rose from a volunteer brass quintet, echoing off the bleachers as the players swayed slightly to the rhythm, their cheeks puffing with effort. Robed students filed in with determined strides, color blocked by college: education, accountancy, engineering, psychology, and literature, their tassels swaying with each step.

The ceremony started in a blur; the valedictorian stood confidently at the podium, quoting Marie Curie and Moira dela Torre in the same breath while gesturing passionately. The audience clapped along, their timing slightly off, creating a ripple of laughter among the attendees. Children squirmed restlessly in their seats, nudging each other and whispering, while parents dabbed at their eyes to spare their makeup, sharing proud smiles and nods.

As the roll-call reached the B's, the dean intoned, "Borja, Maria Theresa." Tessa took a deep breath and stepped onto the ramp, her tassel trembling with each step. From row C, Eli jumped up, waving his arms and bellowing, "Mama, run faster than ice cream!" His enthusiasm sent waves of laughter through the crowd; Tessa's grin was so bright it could have powered the sound system.

"Fernandez, Dolores Maria," the dean called out next. Dolores felt as if she might levitate with excitement. She walked purposefully to the stage, raised her diploma high like a lantern guiding her way, her heart pounding with pride and joy.

"Santos, Andrea." With a confident stride, Andrea strutted onto the stage, her niece playfully tugging at her gown like a superhero cape. Andrea paused, flashing a victory sign to a cluster of classmates who were draped in leis made from fragrant sampaguita flowers and quirky USB cables, their laughter and cheers echoing across the hall.

"Rivera, Linda." As Linda's name was announced, her knees wobbled with a mix of excitement and nerves. She scanned the crowd, her eyes searching until they found Nanay's clasped hands and Tatay's trembling lower lip. Her heart swelled as she saw Althea perched on her Uncle Andrew's shoulders, waving enthusiastically. With a deep breath, Linda accepted her parchment.

As the graduates tossed their caps into the air, a cheer erupted from the crowd. Mobile-phone and cameras quickly followed the action, capturing the moment as confetti sparkled under the fluorescent lights, which suddenly seemed almost sacred in their glow.

The auditorium buzzed with excitement as photos were snapped from every angle, the



collective flash bright enough to lift spirits and banish any trace of gloom. Families came together in joyous celebration, forming a colorful mosaic of connections. Tatay, with an arm around Andrea's mom, grinned for the camera held by Christian. Linda snapped a candid shot of Tessa and Dolores, who laughed as they juggled their diplomas amidst the chaos of wriggling children and scattered snacks. The air was filled with laughter, congratulatory hugs, and the sweet sound of new beginnings.

Because fancy buffets cost half a semester's tuition, the graduation banquet convened at Linda's relatives' carinderia, still festooned with last December's parol. Long tables fraught with aluminum trays: pancit bihon, lumpiang shanghai, and Christian's contribution—his mother's legendary leche flan. Plastic pitchers of lemon juice clinked with ice while toddlers hijacked the condiment caddies as building blocks.

Conversation criss-crossed like jeepney routes as the friends sat around the small table. Dolores leaned forward, animatedly gesturing with her hands, as she narrated how her teaching demo earned top marks. "I used place-value hopscotch!" she exclaimed, tapping the table with excitement. Andrea nodded enthusiastically, leaning back in her chair before revealing her own news. "I've landed an internship at an NGO offering stipends," she announced with a grin, raising her glass in a mock toast. "Actual money, not just exposure!" Linda, who had been quietly sipping her soft drink leaned in closer and whispered her news. Her eyes darted around the room to ensure no one else was listening. "My cousin promised weekday shifts only, so I can take the licensure review classes," she confided with a hopeful smile.

"You better top that board," Andrea warned, playfully brandishing her fork like a scepter.

"Top ten, maybe," Linda hedged, shrugging with a modest grin as she twirled her spoon between her fingers.

Tessa clinked a spoon against her glass. "Ladies and gents, may I please have your attention?" She stood, the communal roar dimming.

"Look at us," she began, eyes shining. "We have overcome so much, we have lost and gained along the way. We have balanced children, partners, parents, jobs, and thesis deadlines like circus jugglers who can't afford to drop a single pin. But life does not end here, rather this is just the beginning of a new journey."

She cast a quick look at Andrew, then at Eli, who was smearing ketchup on Sparkles. "Next week, this guy is off again for two years. I feel both terrified and proud. However, today serves as a reminder that I'm not facing this journey alone. We are each other's lifelines." She raised her glass. "To late-night note-sharing, to kids who think Band-Aids cure everything, and to diplomas that prove hustle can outrun circumstance."

Glasses clinked. Cameras flashed again.

As plates dwindled, subgroups formed. Nanay and Tatay swapped parenting hacks with Dolores's in-laws; Christian and Andrew compared power-tool injuries; Linda and Andrea planned a joint yard-sale to fund licensure-exam books.

Near the doorway, Tessa found a moment alone with Linda. Their kids sat cross-legged nearby, coloring graduation programs. The women watched the crayon strokes spread over institutional cardstock.

Linda spoke first. "Remember when we both thought we were failing? Me with grocery budgets, you with surprise quizzes?"



"Still half-failing daily," Tessa said, smiling.

"But in the right direction." Linda's gaze softened. "Seeing them"—she nodded at the children—"makes the spreadsheets worth it."

Tessa reached into her purse, produced two bracelets braided from leftover yarn Eli's teacher had donated. "Made these during exam week to stay sane. One for you, one for Dolores. Colors are ... random optimism."

Linda accepted hers, looping it around her wrist like armor. "Random optimism suits me." Across the room, Dolores snapped a candid photo of the exchange. She lowered her camera, swiping at an unexpected tear.

Sky shifted to tangerine. Families filtered out, arms laden with leftover trays. Andrew hauled Eli onto his shoulders; Tessa carried a bouquet of flowers and doodles. Andrea promised to send everyone a shared folder of photos—"as soon as I sort the 947 blurry ones." Christian loaded Dalia, half-asleep, into the sidecar along with Nanay's potted malunggay parting gift.

On the sidewalk, the three women—Linda, Tessa, Dolores—stood in a loose triangle, their gowns swapped for formal dresses, but tassels still dangled from the rearview mirrors like proud medals on an athlete's wall. They watched as a street vendor expertly flipped sizzling skewers of meat on a nearby grill, the aroma mingling with the city air.

Silence fell, warm and companionable. City sounds—honking horns, the clatter of dishes from a nearby café, a distant karaoke rendition of "Buwan"—floated around them like wails of benign ghosts.

Linda pointed to a group of children playing tag under the streetlights, their laughter brightening the evening. The women shared a

knowing smile, recalling their own carefree days.

They broke into quiet giggles—tired, profound, unstoppable. Then, one by one, they hugged, not the polite kind but the bone-deep kind that transfers strength like jumper cables. A passing cyclist nodded at them in understanding, as if recognizing the bond that needed no words.

"Tomorrow," Dolores said, "lesson planning, tuition budgeting, deployment packing." Her voice carried the weight of responsibility, yet there was no hesitation.

"Tomorrow," Linda echoed, glancing at a nearby bookstore where a cat lounged lazily in the window, "but not tonight."

"Tonight," Tessa concluded with a gentle yet resolute nod, "we rest." Her finger traced the sky, where the first star had ignited, insignificant yet dazzling, a tiny beacon against the encroaching night. "And maybe wish," she added, her voice as light as the breeze that swept through, rustling the leaves with a soft, feathery whisper and carrying the sweet scent of jasmine on its wings.

Together, they turned in unison, their footsteps a rhythmic harmony on the sidewalk, a gentle patter echoing their readiness to embrace whatever adventures awaited yet savoring this serene moment of stillness and dreams.

Their eyes followed her upward gesture. The light flickered defiantly against the darkening canvas of the sky—a tiny, stubborn spark, refusing to be unseen. As the women turned towards their waiting tricycles and jeepneys, that speck of brightness hung overhead, weaving their paths into a single, ethereal constellation.

And if anyone had listened closely as engines sputtered to life and families began their journey home, they might have heard it: three women, in three different corners of the street,



whispering the same benediction into the gentle embrace of the coming night.

. Conclusion

The study evaluated the antiulcer efficacy of methanol stem bark extract and its fractions from *C. schweinfurthii*, revealing varied yields with the n-hexane fraction at 23% and the aqueous fraction at 0.36%. Phytochemical study revealed the presence of proteins, carbohydrates, phenols, flavonoids, and terpenoids, however tannins, steroids, and alkaloids were not detected. The crude extract and ethyl acetate fraction exhibited elevated amounts of these chemicals attributable to solvent polarity. Acute toxicity assessments demonstrated that the stem bark is safe for oral ingestion. The ethyl acetate and butanol fractions exhibited superior antioxidant capabilities. In the two ulcer investigation models used in the study, the aspirin-induced ulcer model of butanol fraction (400 mg/kg) consistently demonstrated comparable effects to omeprazole on gastric acid volume, total acidity, ulcer scores, and ulcer protection percentage. The ulcer protection percentages of omeprazole (85.7%) versus butanol fraction (74.1%) signal the protective ability of the plant's stem bark fraction. Our findings underscore the safety, abundant phytochemical composition, and ulcer-protective properties of the butanol (400 mg/kg) fraction of *C. schweinfurthii* stem bark, justifying its local use as an alternative in the management of acid-induced ulcerative conditions.

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