Silent Struggle: Exploring the Influence of Cultural Values and Expectations on Social Roles and Mental Health of Student Mothers

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of married student mothers, examining the interplay of cultural values, mental health, and the need for institutional support.

Methodology: This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach. 15 married student mothers at Quirino State University were purposely selected and interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Data analysis followed the guidelines of Creswell and Poth (2016).

Results: The findings revealed three major themes shaping the experiences of married student mothers. First, deeply ingrained cultural values—*hiya* (shame), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), and *matiisin* (endurance)—significantly influenced their decision-making, self-perception, and overall experiences. Second, the student mothers faced considerable mental health challenges, including feelings of pressure, invalidation, guilt, and self-doubt, largely stemming from societal expectations and the difficulties of balancing multiple roles. However, strong social support networks proved crucial in mitigating these challenges. Third, participants strongly advocated for increased institutional support, specifically requesting on-campus childcare, a dedicated student mother organization, and more flexible class scheduling.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, this study concluded that married student mothers face complex challenges stemming from cultural values, mental health pressures, and practical barriers. While strong social support fosters resilience, culturally sensitive mental health resources, on-campus childcare, peer support groups, and flexible scheduling are crucial for their well-being and academic success. Further mixed-methods research is recommended to deepen understanding and inform effective interventions.

Keywords: *Married Student Mothers, Cultural Values and Expectations, Role Conflict, Mental Health, Institutional Support*

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, many consider acquiring an educational degree as a crucial step towards personal growth and a prosperous future. With more individuals enrolling in higher learning institutions, it is evident that many aspire to enjoy the benefits of earning an education. However, within the massive population of those eager to earn a degree, there is an often overlooked population: student mothers.

Student mothers are those young mothers who enroll in college/university and pursue academic success while being mothers to young children. According to Kena et al. (2016), 70% of the 3.8 million undergraduates in the United States are mothers. The same trend has also been observed in the Philippines. According to survey of Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) International (2014), among young adult women aged 20-24, 43% are already mothers and 4 % are pregnant with their first child. This age group coincides with the typical age among Filipino college students.

Despite their persistence and aspirations, student mothers have several challenges that may not allow them to accomplish their academic goal. As shown by study of Snyder et al. (2015), the dropout rate of student parents within six years from their enrollment reached 52%. This shows that parenthood presents difficulties in maintaining their enrollment, thus delaying or even deterring one in degree completion.

In the Philippines, student mothers are likely to be in this situation-where they leave the school to focus on being mothers at home. This happens due to the cultural values towards Filipino women to commit more time and presence in carrying out their role as mothers.

In Filipino culture, Filipino women are often expected to excel as homemakers and supportive partners to their spouses. Maternal duties carry significant weight in the Philippines, shaping societal expectations and influencing the roles women assume. This enables student mothers to encounter constant demands from their various roles, specifically their roles as a mother and a student.

Student mothers operating simultaneously in various roles and tasks may suffer feelings of worry, guilt, helplessness, frustration, and inadequacy in both roles (Daminger, 2019). These experiences allow student mothers to suffer mental health issues. This makes this population of students particularly vulnerable to encounter mental health problems and challenges along their journey to earn a degree.

Furthermore, systemic problems in higher education rooted from the cultural values and expectations of its clientele, create another set of barriers to student-mothers. Educational institutions and academic curriculum and policies are often designed for childless students (Manze et al., 2021; Maisela & Ross, 2018). School works and activities were tailored for single students without dependents. This aggravates the overall well-being of student mothers. In this context, research suggests that educational policies should be reconsidered to provide student mothers with the required support and to eliminate the stereotype that motherhood and educational responsibilities are exclusive phenomena that oppose each function and purpose (Moghadam et al., 2017).

While recent studies about student mothers focus on understanding how their multiple roles and identities shape their experiences in higher education, there is a limited study focusing on the influence of Filipino cultural values on social roles and mental health of married student mothers who are enrolled in higher education institutions. This research then seeks to fill that gap by looking into the lived experiences of married student mothers in relation to the encountered Filipino cultural values and its influence into their roles as well as its effect on their mental health.

This study was conducted at Quirino State University (QSU), specifically in Cabarroguis campus. During the school year 2024-2025, the campus registrar reported that 146 out of the 3,879 students were student mothers. The number may be small in comparison to the whole population of the university, but it shows that a sizable percentage of mothers are taking on the journey of becoming a student as well.

This study aimed to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality. This study also aligned with the broader goals of sustainable development, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) 3, 4, and 5. UN SDG 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. UN SDG 4 advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. UN SDG 5 emphasizes the elimination of gender inequalities by empowering women to fully participate in and benefit from all aspects of society.

This research hoped to uncover the unique experiences of women who study while adhering to cultural traditions and responsibilities. This research aimed to give a voice to student mothers, advocating for a more supportive society and institutions.

Objectives

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of married student mothers in relation to the influence of Filipino cultural expectations and values.
Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:
1. What are the lived experiences of married student mothers in the performance of their social roles vis-a-vis Filipino cultural values and expectations?
2. How do married student mothers describe their mental health in relation to their adherence to these cultural cultural values and expectations?
3. What programs can be designed by educational institutions to help married student mothers cope with their roles as students and mothers while promoting mental health?

METHODS

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive phenomenological design to explore the experiences of student mothers at QSU Cabarroguis Campus. This approach was chosen to understand the complex interplay of cultural

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expectations, values, mental health, coping mechanisms, and desired institutional support within this specific population.

Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of married student mothers aged 18-30, enrolled at QSU Cabarroguis for the S.Y. 2024-2025, with custody of children aged 0-17, belonging to nuclear families, and willing to participate. Participants were excluded if they were single, lived with parents/in-laws, or had children 18 or older. Purposive sampling was used to select 15 participants who met these criteria, aiming for a sample representative of the target population.

Instruments

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by a three-part interview guide. The guide included an introduction, open-ended questions exploring cultural expectations, mental health, coping mechanisms, and desired institutional support, and a concluding section. The interview guide underwent content validation by three experts and pilot testing with a non-participant group to ensure clarity and effectiveness.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted from January to March 2025, each lasting 45-60 minutes. A campus guidance counselor accompanied the researchers. Following the interviews, a validation session was held with each participant to ensure the accuracy of the researchers' interpretation of their experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the steps outlined by Creswell and Poth (2016). Transcripts were created, coded to identify themes, and refined into meaningful categories using Microsoft Word tables. Themes were interpreted considering existing literature and participants' perspectives. Finally, findings were presented to participants for validation.

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the Isabela State University Research Ethics Board (IREB). Informed consent was obtained from participants and the institution. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymization of data, secure storage, and restriction of data use to research purposes only. Participants were debriefed after each interview. The researchers avoided including students they currently taught in the study.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the participants. The findings are organized into emergent themes, each accompanied by a corresponding interpretation and discussion of its implications. The thematic presentation follows the sequence outlined in the study's statement of the problem to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives.

1.   **Lived Experiences of Student Mothers**

Themes

"Nahihiya ako" (I am ashamed): Self-Limiting Beliefs of Student Mothers
"Kayat ko ti Makapagsubalit" (I want to give back): Dreams of Student Mothers
"Tiis tiis lang talaga" (Just bear with it): Student Mothers' Way of Surviving

1.1 "*Nahihiya ako*" (I am ashamed): Self-Limiting Beliefs of Student Mothers

Participants of the study consistently expressed feelings of shame ("*nahihiya ako*") regarding their circumstances as student mothers. This shame stemmed from a perceived limitation of their capabilities and a fear of negative social judgment. The following transcription excerpts illustrate this:

> **Participant 1: "Gusto ko sana sumali sa mga tagempiya, kaso parang di na pwede sa akin, tumaba na ako, tapos parang ako lang yung nanay doon, parang nakakahiya na sumali."**

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(I'd like to join the tagempiya (dance troupe), but I don't think I can anymore. I've gained weight, and I'll be the only mother there; it would be embarrassing.)

Participant 14: "Feeling ko po is namula ako nung ninominate ako... alam kong di ko kaya yun kaya di ko na pinaabot sa botohan, nakakahiya alam kong kakaunti boboto sa akin."
(I felt myself blush when I was nominated... I knew I couldn't handle it, so I withdrew my candidacy before the voting. I was embarrassed I knew that few would vote for me.)

Participant 4: "Mabainnakkun manginabaga kinda mama...madik kayaten nu mabalmabalin."
(I'm ashamed to ask for help from my mother… I don't want to if possible.)

Participant 7: "Nahihiya na ako kasi syempre may mga kapatid pa akong nagaaral, alangan namang ako pang may asawa ang unahin pa."
(I'm embarrassed because, of course, I still have siblings who are studying. It wouldn't be right to prioritize me, a married person.)

These examples demonstrate how the pervasive feeling of *hiya* (shame) influenced the participants' decisions and actions. The fear of social judgment, a core component of hiya (Martinez, 2019; Acharya, 2025), manifested in self-limiting behaviors. They avoided opportunities for personal or professional growth due to perceived inadequacies or the fear of negative social evaluation. This aligns with research showing how *hiya* can restrict individual autonomy and self-expression (Alampay, 2013), hindering the pursuit of educational and personal goals. The consistent expression of shame highlights the significant impact of cultural expectations on the self-perception and decision-making processes of student mothers.

1.2 "*Kayat ko ti Makapagsubalit*" (I want to give back): Dreams of Student Mothers
This theme highlights the strong desire of the participants to reciprocate their parents' support. This emerged as a key motivator for the student mothers to complete their studies which has significant influence in their life. This desire extended beyond their immediate needs and encompassed a commitment to supporting their families. The following participant quotes illustrate this:

Participant 3: "Ikinayod pa naman ako ng tatay at nanay ko, kaya ngayon at malapit na din ako makagraduate, hindi pa naman siguro huli ang lahat-na makatulong ako, makapagbigay kahit konti."
(My parents really supported me, so now that I am close to finishing my studies, maybe it's not too late to help them, to give back even a little.)

Participant 7:"Napigsa dan tu pay kuma tapnu makapagsubsubalit ak pay met...tapnu maenjoy da kuma."
(I wish they were still strong enough so I could repay them... so they could still enjoy.)

Participant 8: "Pangarap nila na makapagtapos kaming lahat kasi yun lang ang maipapamana nila."
(Their dream was for all of us to finish our studies, because that's the only legacy they could leave us.)

These quotes reveal a powerful sense of utang na loob (debt of gratitude) driving the participants' commitment to education. The desire to reciprocate their parents' support acts as a strong motivator (Medina & Medina, 2023). This reflects the strong emphasis on reciprocal relationships within Filipino culture (Alampay & Jocson, 2011; Reyes, 2015). The inability to directly repay this debt (Rungduin et al., 2016) likely intensifies the obligation, leading to increased commitment to educational attainment as a means of fulfilling this moral debt. The extension of this obligation to siblings highlights the collective nature of familial responsibility and the intergenerational transfer of utang na loob (Casiño et al., 2025).

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1.3 "*Tiis tiis lang talaga*" (Just bear with it): Student Mothers' Way of Surviving

The phrase "*Tiis tiis lang talaga*" (Just bear with it) captured the resilience and endurance strategies employed by the student mothers to navigate their overwhelming responsibilities. This approach, while reflecting the Filipino value of matiisin (patience and perseverance) (Embate et al., 2019), also revealed potential downsides. The following participant quotes illustrate this:

Participant 3: "*Ganun talaga, kung gustong mag aral, dapat magsakripisyo, tiis tiis lang talaga…kahit gutom, pagod, inaantok…tapos pag uwi bahay duties naman.*"
(That's just how it is; if you want to study, you have to make sacrifices, Just bear with it…even if you're hungry, tired, sleepy… then when you get home, it's household chores.)

Participant 7: "*Ayaw kong sumagot ng pabalang, hinahayaan ko nalang kasi syempre wala akong mapagiwanan din talaga sa anak ko pa… tsaka ganun din naman na sya noon, parang sanay na ba?*"
(I don't want to answer rudely, I just let it go because, of course, I have nowhere else to leave my child…besides, she was like that before, maybe I'm used to it?)

The participants' enduring patience highlights their resilience, reflecting the Filipino value of *matiisin*. While this can be a strength, enabling individuals to overcome obstacles (Rilveria, 2018), in this context, it also suggests a potential normalization of hardship, particularly for Filipina women (Embate et al., 2019). The "just bear with it" approach, while demonstrating remarkable strength, also raises concerns about the potential for overlooking the need for support and systemic changes to address the overwhelming burdens faced by student mothers.

2. Student mothers' mental health

Themes
Pressured and Invalidated
Guilt and Self-Doubt
Overwhelmed yet Secured and Supported

2.1 Pressured and Invalidated

Student mothers consistently reported feeling pressured and invalidated, stemming from both societal expectations of motherhood and academic demands. This pressure manifested in two key areas: the expectation of innate maternal competence and the conflicting demands of academic priorities.

2.1.1 The "*Nanay Ka Na, Dapat*" (You're a Mother, You Should) Pressure: The pervasive expectation that mothers possess inherent maternal knowledge led to feelings of anxiety, stress, and self-doubt. Criticism from family members amplified these feelings.

Participant 3: "*Palagi nya ako sinasabihan ng bakit ko daw ginawa ng ganun…parang mali yung karamihan sa ginagawa ko kaya, nafifeel ko is yung sa decision making ng pang nanay wala ako, kaya nacoconscious ako everytime.*"
(She always tells me why did I do it like that…it's like most of what I do is wrong, so I feel like I lack maternal decision-making, so I'm conscious every time.)

Participant 5: "*…nakakawala po sya ng confidence sa akin, parang palaging may duda ba kung tama ba yung ginagawa ko o hindi.*"
(…it takes away my confidence, it's like there's always doubt whether what I'm doing is right or not.)

Participant 11: "*Nararamdaman ko parang di pa ako ready, kasi palagi kong naririnig kay mama, bakit daw ganito, bakit daw ganyan, nanay ka na dapat…*"
(I feel like I'm not ready yet, because I always hear my mother asking why this, why that. You're a mother, you should…)

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2.1.2 The "Know Your Priorities" Dilemma: The frequent admonition from instructors to "know their priorities" further invalidated the student mothers' experiences. This implied a lack of commitment to their studies, exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and stress, particularly when balancing academic and familial responsibilities resulted in compromises in one area or the other.

> **Participant 1: "Palagi po akong kinakabahan everytime na nalelate po ako. Nasabihan po ako ng instructor ng medyo nakakasakit sa damdamin. Bakit pa daw ako mag eenrol kung di ko din naman pala pangangatawan ng pagiging studyante."**
> (I'm always nervous every time I'm late. The instructor told me something hurtful. Why did I even enroll if I couldn't fulfill my role as a student?)

> **Participant 6: "...parang ayaw ko nalang po kung minsan pumasok kasi parang di ako bagay maging student na kasi di ko kayang gawin lahat. Feeling ko di ako welcome kasi nanay ako, pangbahay nalang."**
> (...sometimes I don't want to go to class anymore because it feels like I'm not fit to be a student since I can't do everything. I feel like I'm not welcome because I'm a mother, just for the house.)

> **Participant 10: "Aware po ako na dapat alam kong timbangin yung mga bagay, kaso ang hirap po yung sitwasyon ko, siguro kasi wala sila sa sitwasyon ko kaya madali para sakanila, kaya kung minsan na aasar na po ako hindi kasi nila ako magets."**
> (I'm aware that I should know how to balance things, but my situation is difficult, maybe because they're not in my situation, it's easy for them, so sometimes I get annoyed because they don't understand me.)

The combined pressures of societal expectations and academic demands created a significant source of stress and invalidation for the student mothers. This aligns with research on role conflict, where individuals struggle to balance competing demands, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and fatigue (Munyua et al., 2022). The pressure to embody the "ideal mother," coupled with the expectation of innate maternal competence, negatively impacted the participants' self-efficacy and increased anxiety, mirroring societal trends that negatively affect maternal well-being (Henderson et al., 2016; Silverio et al., 2021; Ding, 2024). Furthermore, the invalidation experienced from academic settings, where the admonition to "know their priorities" implied a lack of commitment, exacerbated the stress and hindered academic performance, a challenge already common among student mothers due to time management and childcare difficulties (James, 2010; Paredes, 2022). The participants' experiences underscore the need for more understanding and support systems within both family and academic environments to address the unique challenges faced by student mothers (Townsend, 2024).

2.2 Guilt and Self-Doubt

The student mothers frequently expressed feelings of guilt and self-doubt stemming from their inability to fully dedicate themselves to both their children and their studies. This resulted in feelings of inadequacy as mothers and students, impacting their well-being and raising questions about the long-term value of their sacrifices. The following participant quotes illustrate these experiences:

> **Participant 9: "Ang sama sama ng tingin ko sa sarili ko minsan, lalo na pag iiwanan kong may umiiyak sa kanila, o kaya pag may sinat, nakaka konsensyang umalis."**
> (I really look down on myself sometimes, especially when I leave them crying, or when they have a fever, it's really conscience-pricking to leave.)

> **Participant 4: "Nakakahiya sa asawa at sa anak ko kasi kahit weekends... meron yung times na di ko sila makabonding ng maayos, meron yung natataasan ko sila ng boses kasi may tinatapos akong activity."**
> (I feel ashamed towards my husband and child because even on weekends...there are times I can't bond with them properly, there are times I raise my voice at them because I'm finishing an activity.)

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Participant 1: *"Yung pinaggugulan ko ngayon ng oras, pagod, at pera, at the expense ng hindi ko pagiging mabuting asawa at nanay may papupuntahan kayang maganda?"*
(The time, effort, and money I'm investing now, at the expense of not being a good wife and mother, will it lead to something good?)

Participant 12: *"Naiisip ko kung minsan kaya ko pa kaya ng ilan pang taon, baka mamaya titigil din ako, edi sayang yung mga times na dapat sana nandun kasama ko anak ko."*
(Sometimes I think if I can still handle a few more years, maybe later I'll stop, then the times I should have been with my child will be wasted.)

This study reveals significant guilt and self-doubt among participants struggling to balance childcare and academic pursuits. The pressure to be a "good mother" intensified feelings of guilt (Van der Riet, 2018), while the constant juggling of roles led to feelings of inadequacy (Oyoo, 2024). Compromised academic performance due to family responsibilities further fostered self-doubt (Osafo, 2016). These findings highlight the emotional toll of attempting to meet the often-conflicting demands of motherhood and higher education.

2.3 Overwhelmed yet Secured and Supported
Despite experiencing significant negative emotions, the student mothers consistently emphasized the crucial role of social support in mitigating these feelings and fostering resilience. This support came from various sources, significantly impacting their ability to persevere. The following participant quotes illustrate this:

Spousal Support:
Participant 1: *"Pinapatibay talaga niya yung loob ko."*
(He really strengthens my spirit.)

Participant 11: *"Very thankful naman ako sa asawa ko, kasi kahit andaming challenges namin sa ibang tao...nandyan sya para sabihin na, kaya natin to, may future din tayo ganun."*
(I'm very thankful to my husband, because even with all the challenges we face from other people...he's there to say, we can do this, we have a future, things like that.)

Support from Mothers and Mothers-in-Law:
Participant 3: *"Kayam ata, sumrek ka latta."*
(You can do it, keep going.)

Peer Support from Classmates:
Participant 13: *"Dumadali para sakin yung activities na mahirap, mahirap pa rin naman pero nakakagaan ng loob kasi may kadamay ako."*
(Difficult activities become easier for me, they're still difficult but it's comforting because I have someone to share the burden.)

Participant 15: *"Pag nahihirapan ako, nagsasabi sila na kaya ko pa daw, na konti na lang tapusin ko na, na sayang naman daw kung ngayon pa ako mag iistop 3rd year na ako."*
(When I'm struggling, they're the ones who say I can do it, that I'm almost finished, that it would be a waste if I stopped now, being in my 3rd year.)

The consistent emphasis on social support highlights its crucial role in mitigating negative emotions and fostering resilience among the student mothers. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of emotional and practical support in improving well-being (Sicam et al., 2021; Montaño & Francisco, 2024), the vital role of strong social networks, particularly for women (Sallee & Yates, 2023), and the significance of community cooperation

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("*bayanihan*") in navigating challenges (Bistis-Nadala, 2024). The presence of these supportive relationships was essential for the participants' perseverance.

3. Institutional Programs for Student Mothers

Themes
Childcare Facility on Campus
School Organization for Student Mothers
Tailored Class Schedules

3.1 Childcare Facility on Campus

The student mothers' strong desire for on-campus daycare centers reflects a need to alleviate childcare burdens and foster greater independence. While motivations varied, the overarching goal was to create a less stressful environment for both themselves and their families.

> **Participant 6: "Malaking tulong sya kung merong nursery dito sa school, mas komportable po kaming lahat, lalo na si nanay kasi matanda na siya, gusto ko sana, kung meron mang chance maginhawaan din sya."**
> (It would be a big help if there was a nursery here at school, we would all be more comfortable, especially my mother because she's old, I wish that, if there's a chance, she could also be relieved.)

> **Participant 1: "Marami po talagang advantage yung naiiwan ko kay nanay yung anak ko, kaso kung minsan dahilan din ng tampo at madalas away, kaya sana may mapag iwanan ako sa loob ng school habang nagklaklase ako."**
> (There are many advantages to leaving my child with my mother, but sometimes it causes resentment and frequent arguments. I wish there was a place to leave my child inside the school while I'm in class.)

> **Participant 7: "Maiiwasan siguro yung sumbatan namin ng kapatid ko kung hindi na si nanay yung mag aalaga. Kaya sana merong daycare dito sa school."**
> (We could probably avoid arguments with my sibling if my mother wasn't the one taking care of the child. So I wish there was a daycare here at school.)

The desire for on-campus daycare reflects the significant burden of balancing childcare and academics. Current reliance on family members, while offering support, often creates stress and conflict, impacting family dynamics and academic performance (Maluleka et al., 2023; Salindo & Salindo, 2024; Taukeni, 2014). Lack of accessible childcare forces difficult choices, directly affecting academic success (Opit et al., 2020). On-campus daycare offers a safe, convenient alternative, allowing focus on studies without childcare worries (Salindo & Salindo, 2024; Samiullah, 2024), mitigating the negative impact of childcare responsibilities on academic focus (Maluleka et al., 2023). Universities need to invest in well-equipped daycare centers with professional staff (Andres, 2021; Samiullah, 2024), coupled with supportive policies including flexible learning options and mental health services (Salindo & Salindo, 2024), to ensure equity and success for student mothers.

3.2 School Organization for Student Mothers
The student mothers expressed desire for a dedicated on-campus organization highlights their feelings of isolation and the need for peer support and community. This desire reflects a recognition that their experiences are unique and require a specific support structure.

> **Participant 9: "Sana merong maorganize ay na group ng kagaya kong nanay, para makapag sharan, makapag kwentuhan, makapag palakasan ng loob, kasi syempre iba kasi kung singles yung nakakasama, hindi kasi nila alam yung sitwasyon unlike kung kapareha, mas alam nila yung sitwasyon."**

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(I wish there was an organized group of mothers like me, so we could share, talk, encourage each other, because of course it's different when you're with singles, they don't know the situation unlike those who are the same, they know the situation better.)

Participant 11: "Masaya din kung may group for student mothers, to be recognized too as a group sa campus, tsaka para platform na rin para makapagtulungan kami, tsaka mag kwentuhan ng experiences para maka de stress."
(it would be nice if there was also a group of student mothers, to be recognized as a group on campus, and also as a platform for us to help each other, and to share experiences to de-stress.)

The need for a dedicated organization aligns with research showing that shared experiences are crucial coping mechanisms for stress reduction and fostering a sense of belonging (Oyoo, 2024). Structured support programs significantly enhance community and reduce feelings of isolation (Hoiland et al., 2024). Such an organization would provide a platform for sharing experiences, reducing stigma (Lipman et al., 2010), and improving self-esteem and parenting skills through mutual support (Lipman et al., 2010). Regular meetings could address educational and developmental issues (Baillie, 2022), and a recommendation system could further enhance belonging by facilitating the sharing of challenges and solutions (Benedict et al., 2023). Combined with tailored support services (Vaithianathan et al., 2021), such an organization could equip student mothers with strategies for time management and financial planning, ultimately supporting their academic success.

3.3 Tailored Class Schedules
The student mothers' strong advocacy for tailored class schedules underscores the significant challenge of balancing their academic pursuits with their demanding family lives. The inflexible nature of current schedules creates considerable difficulties.

Participant 4: "Kung pwede, sana I ayos po nila yung schedule namin. Sayang yung pagitan, sana pwede namang I half day ganun. Para makauwi, makagawa naman sa bahay."
(I hope they could arrange our schedule. The gaps are wasted. It would be better if it could be half-day. So, I could go home and do things at home.)

Participant 8: "...yung schedule po sana ay maging swak para saaming mga student mothers."
(...I hope the schedule could be suitable for us student mothers.)

Inflexible schedules lead to wasted time, increased costs, feelings of guilt, and increased stress, negatively impacting academic performance. This aligns with research highlighting significant time constraints faced by mothers during the academic year (Cowan et al., 2024). Personalized adaptive scheduling systems (PASS), such as the iSchedule (Kannan et al., 2012), offer a potential solution by creating more efficient and flexible schedules that cater to individual needs (Xiong et al., 2015), potentially improving well-being and retention. However, implementing flexible schedules requires careful consideration of the potential impact on family dynamics and children's well-being (Leibbrand, 2018). A holistic approach is essential to ensure that flexible scheduling positively impacts both the academic success of student mothers and their families' overall well-being.

Conclusions
This study revealed the complex challenges faced by Filipino student mothers, shaped by cultural values, mental health pressures, and practical barriers. Filipino cultural concepts of (*hiya*) shame, (*utang na loob*) gratitude, and (*matiisin*) endurance significantly influenced their experiences and decision-making processes. The dual roles of motherhood and academics created considerable stress, but strong social support networks proved crucial for resilience. Student mothers strongly advocated for institutional support, including childcare, peer support groups, and flexible scheduling. These findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive support systems within both family and academic contexts to improve the well-being and academic success of student mothers.

Recommendations
To support Filipino student mothers, culturally sensitive mental health resources and family-school partnerships are crucial. Readily available on-campus childcare and dedicated support groups are also vital for

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addressing practical and emotional challenges. Faculty training should foster understanding and empathy for the unique needs of student mothers. These recommendations aim to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for Filipino student mothers, enabling them to successfully navigate the challenges of balancing their roles and achieving their educational goals. Further research may employ mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences.

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