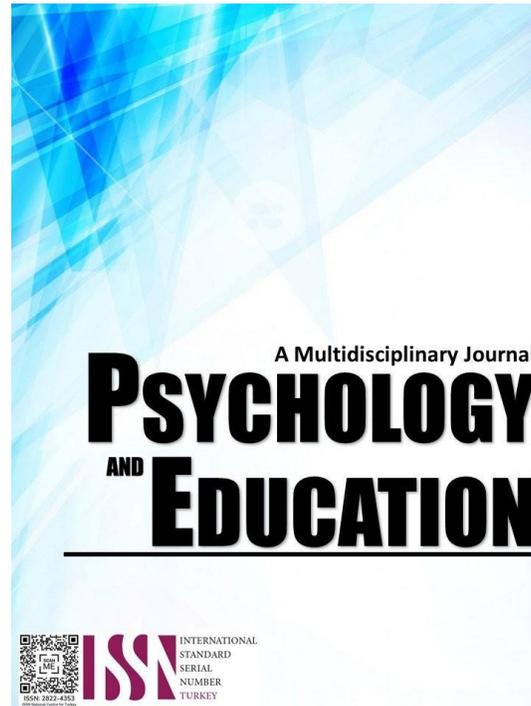


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Silent Struggles, Resilient Spirits: Exploring the Experiences of the Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school. The study examined the unique challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of young mothers balancing educational and maternal responsibilities. A qualitative approach was employed, specifically utilizing phenomenological methods to capture participants' lived experiences in natural settings. Purposive sampling was used, with five (5) adolescent student-mothers intentionally selected to participate in in-depth interviews (IDI). Data collection focused on personal narratives and experiences, enabling the researcher to identify emergent themes through analysis. Three overarching components, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights, were formulated to present the experiences of adolescent student-mothers comprehensively. In examining their challenges, six themes emerged: Time Management Difficulties, Academic and Cognitive Strain, Lack of Childcare Support, Financial Constraints, Social Judgment and Stigma, and Physical and Emotional Exhaustion. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated resilience through Faith and Spiritual Resilience, Family Support, Positive Mindset and Perseverance, Self-Discipline and Time Management, and Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose. Insights gained from their experiences revealed four themes: Maturity and Responsibility, Value of Education, Self-Empowerment and Resilience, and Valuing Patience and Thoughtful Decision-Making. The findings revealed the complexities of balancing education and motherhood, highlighting both the barriers and strengths of adolescent student-mothers. This study provides valuable implications for the Department of Education (DepEd), educators, school administrators, and policymakers in designing supportive interventions, programs, and policies that foster academic success, emotional well-being, and holistic development for adolescent student-mothers.

Keywords: *adolescent student-mothers, public secondary school, phenomenology, Glan 4 District, Philippines*

Introduction

"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated." -Maya Angelou.

The quote reflects the struggles of adolescent student-mothers balancing motherhood and school. It shows their determination to overcome exhaustion, financial problems, and little support. Despite discouragement and judgment, these young mothers remain resilient and committed to improving their future. They turn silent struggles into growth and perseverance.

Moreover, motherhood plays a central role in shaping a woman's identity, psychological well-being, and her child's development. Anchored in Identity Theory, becoming a mother involves acquiring caregiving competencies and constructing a maternal identity that supports the transition to adult roles and responsibilities. Maternal Mental Health Theory emphasizes that a mother's emotional well-being is critical to effective parenting, as conditions such as depression and psychological distress can negatively influence caregiving practices and child outcomes. Attachment Theory further explains that a secure and responsive mother-child relationship fosters children's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Interventions that strengthen maternal adjustment and mental health promote positive parenting experiences and improve children's developmental outcomes (Deneault et al., 2023; Gluck, 2022; Morris, 2024).

Further, Adolescent motherhood, defined as pregnancy and childbirth between the ages of 10 to 19, occurs during a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social change. Grounded in Developmental Theory, adolescence is a period of identity exploration and increasing autonomy, which can be disrupted by early parenthood. The dual demands of adolescence and motherhood often result in educational disruption, limited economic resources, social stigma, and heightened emotional strain. Public Health Theory frames adolescent motherhood as both an individual and societal concern due to its implications for health, education, and social equity. Comprehensive support systems are essential to promote the well-being, empowerment, and long-term opportunities of young mothers (Boutayeb, 2024; Donoga, 2025; UNESCO, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022).

Furthermore, adolescent student-mothers face unique challenges that affect their education and development. In the Philippines, people juggle schoolwork and childcare, which causes stress and academic difficulties. In Ghana, student-mothers often encounter stigma and lack support. In Indonesia, living with an extended family can help, but also complicate schooling. In particular, little is known about how adolescent student-mothers in public secondary schools manage academic demands, caregiving roles, social expectations, and institutional responses on a day-to-day basis. This absence of localized, experience-centered evidence limits the development of responsive, culturally grounded, and school-level interventions that address the actual needs of adolescent student-mothers, thereby

underscoring a critical research gap that the present study seeks to address (Buku et al., 2021; Gatbonton, 2021; Reisenhofer et al., 2021).

As a senior high school student without a child, the researcher sees classmates who are mothers still attending school. They go to class, do schoolwork, and care for their children. Their struggle and determination inspire me and highlight the challenges of balancing home and school. Early parenthood affects education, goals, and emotions.

The researcher wants to study adolescent student-mothers because of what the researcher have noticed. The researcher aim to learn about their challenges, motivations, coping strategies, and insights as they continue their studies. Understanding their experiences can build empathy and awareness in school. Their stories also encourage other youth to value education and make wise choices.

Indeed, this study focuses on the unique challenges and realities of adolescent student-mothers. It examines their emotional, social, and academic struggles, such as limited support, financial difficulties, and stigma. By reviewing experiences in a public secondary school, the study identifies barriers, coping strategies, and helpful resources. The research aims to guide policy and program development for a more supportive school environment for adolescent student-mothers.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of the adolescent student-mothers enrolled in a public secondary school. Specially, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do the participants describe their experiences as adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school:
 - 1.1 How do the participants view their challenges as adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school?
 - 1.2 How do participants cope with the challenges of being adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school?
 - 1.3 What are the insights or lessons learned by the adolescent student-mothers of a public secondary school?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing phenomenological methods. Qualitative research seeks to understand social or human experiences by using descriptive data to construct a detailed, holistic perspective. It involves capturing participants' viewpoints, emphasizing their lived experiences, and conducting the study in natural settings. Rather than relying on numerical data, qualitative study focuses on interpreting and deriving meaning from non-numerical information (Creswell, 2014; Dongque & Espinosa, 2025; Luthfiandana et al., 2024; Urcia, 2021; Williams, 2021).

The qualitative approach is effective in exploring and interpreting how individuals or groups make sense of a social phenomenon or human issue. This study method involves well-defined questions and procedures, with data typically gathered in participants' natural settings. Data analysis follows an inductive process, moving from specific observations to broader themes. The researcher interprets the collected data to uncover its significance. Qualitative researchers emphasize an inductive approach, prioritizing personal meaning and highlighting the complexity of a given situation or problem (Busetto et al., 2020; Tisdell et al., 2025; Pyo et al., 2023).

Phenomenology was used to explore how individuals experience and respond to various phenomena. This approach acknowledges the subjective nature of reality and prioritizes participants' perspectives. It aims to identify common themes while honoring each participant's unique viewpoint, ultimately offering deep insights into the phenomena under investigation (Engelland, 2020; Guenther, 2020; Käufer & Chemero, 2021).

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a strategy that intentionally identifies individuals most capable of providing rich, detailed insights into the phenomenon of interest (Denieffe, 2020). The inclusion criteria required participants to be adolescent mothers aged 10–19, currently enrolled in a public secondary school in Glan 4 District, and actively managing both student and mother roles. They needed to be willing to share personal experiences on academic, social, and personal challenges.

The final sample included five (5) participants, chosen from different grade levels to capture a diversity of experiences. The sample size was aligned with the standard phenomenological range of 5 to 25 participants, as noted by Ahmed (2025). This was justified based on qualitative research standards and the principle of data saturation, which was reached when successive interviews no longer yielded new themes or insights, thereby ensuring the depth and richness of the data. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect comprehensive narratives.

Procedure

Before collecting data for the study in a public secondary school, the researcher sought permission from the school head via a formal letter outlining the study objectives and methodologies. Upon receiving approval, coordinated with the relevant school authorities and potential participants. Selected participants were then invited to a brief orientation, where I explained the study's purpose and provided them with an official cover letter. They were made aware that taking part was purely voluntary, with no consequences for those who

chose not to participate. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings (Dougherty, 2021; Facca et al., 2020; Saavedra-Rubio et al., 2022).

Logistical preparations were made, including arranging a suitable interview venue and ensuring an audio recorder was available. Participants were notified beforehand that their answers would be documented, and note-taking would also be done. Individual interviews were conducted, beginning with a thorough review of the informed consent form to confirm participants' willingness to participate. After obtaining their consent, the researcher explained the interview procedures in detail and addressed any concerns they had. They were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out at any time without repercussions.

During the interviews, the researcher read the questions twice to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings. The questions were presented clearly and audibly, allowing participants ample time to formulate their responses. To uphold confidentiality, participants were referred to using assigned codenames, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on (Heaton, 2022; Itzik & Walsh, 2023; Lahman et al., 2023).

The whole interview session was captured on a smartphone to ensure accuracy. After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and provided each participant with their transcript for verification. They had the opportunity to review, modify, or remove any part of their responses. The Colaizzi Method was employed to analyze the data and identify emerging themes, ensuring that the transcriptions accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was then conducted to address the study's key research questions and derive meaningful insights from the collected data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study involved gathering, summarizing, and presenting the most essential insights. A semi-structured interview approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. A structured interview guide was prepared to ensure consistent information collection from each participant. Following this, face-to-face interviews were conducted, allowing participants to share their stories openly. Before proceeding, the researcher obtained participants' consent to record the interviews, thereby ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data collection process (Mölder et al., 2021; Peck et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

The Colaizzi Method was employed for phenomenological data analysis to examine, describe, and interpret participants' experiences, coping mechanisms, and lessons learned. This process followed several key steps. First, each transcript was read and reread to develop a comprehensive understanding of its content. The second step involved identifying significant statements relevant to the research topic, with each statement recorded alongside its corresponding page and line numbers in a separate document. Next is the third step, meanings were formulated from these significant statements, forming the third phase of the analysis.

In the fourth step, the derived meanings were categorized into themes, theme clusters, and broader categories. The fifth phase involved integrating the findings through a detailed explanation of the phenomenon, presented as a narrative account. To ensure a structured analysis, emerging themes, clusters, and meanings were synthesized into the description, preserving key elements of participants' experiences. The sixth step focused on determining the phenomenon's fundamental structure. Finally, the findings were validated by presenting the researcher's results to participants, allowing them to compare these interpretations with their own experiences and insights (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021; Upendra, 2021; Vignato et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were rigorously observed to safeguard participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent was obtained from participants and, when necessary, from their guardians, with clear explanations provided about the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty or impact on their academic standing. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymization of all responses and secure handling of data. These measures enhanced the trustworthiness, credibility, and ethical integrity of the study, ensuring that findings accurately reflected participants' lived experiences while adhering to established research standards.

Results and Discussion

The study answered three questions. First, six themes emerged regarding the challenges faced by adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school: Time Management Difficulties, Academic and Cognitive Strain, Lack of Childcare Support, Financial Constraints, Social Judgment and Stigma, and Physical and Emotional Exhaustion. For the second, five themes described how participants coped: Faith and Spiritual Resilience, Family Support, Positive Mindset and Perseverance, Self-Discipline and Time Management, and Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose. For the third, four themes showed the lessons learned: Maturity and Responsibility, Value of Education, Self-Empowerment and Resilience, and Valuing Patience and Thoughtful Decision-Making.

Challenges of Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School

Table 1 presents the challenges faced by adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school and refers to the selection criteria as identified. This study discussed six emergent themes. The table summarizes the key themes identified regarding the challenges faced by adolescent student-mothers. Moreover, the themes were clustered based on participants' responses.



Table 1. Challenges of the Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Difficulty balancing responsibilities as a student and a mother Inability to attend school when childcare is unavailable Challenges in managing time between childcare and studies Prioritizing child’s needs over academic tasks Struggle to complete schoolwork while caring for a child Difficulty understanding and following lessons	Time Management Difficulties
Inability to concentrate due to worry or distraction from child Missed school days because of lack of childcare support Financial constraints affecting ability to continue schooling Experiencing social pressure and stigma as a student-mother Missed school days due to absence of childcare Reliance on parents or relatives for child supervision Constant worry about child’s care while attending school Bringing the child to school when no one is available to watch them Inability to earn extra income due to study and childcare responsibilities Dependence on parents for financial support Difficulty affording school expenses and child’s needs Need to work or pause studies due to financial hardship Stress and fatigue caused by financial pressures	Academic and Cognitive Strain
Experiencing negative comments and criticism from others Judgment and gossip from relatives and peers Feeling looked down upon for continuing education as a mother Motivation to persevere despite social disapproval Waking up early to fulfill household and childcare responsibilities Fatigue from managing all tasks independently	Lack of Childcare Support
Distraction and strain caused by child’s needs while studying Continuous burden of daily household chores Studying late at night after completing other responsibilities	Financial Constraints
	Social Judgment and Stigma
	Physical and Emotional Exhaustion

Time Management Difficulties. This theme is the central challenge faced by adolescent student-mothers as they balance academic responsibilities with childcare and household duties. Participants consistently described how overlapping roles consume their limited time, often compelling them to prioritize their child’s needs over schoolwork. This constant division of attention results in accumulated academic tasks, fatigue, and emotional strain, making it difficult to establish a stable daily routine. These findings align with previous studies reporting that adolescent student-mothers experience persistent struggles with time management due to competing maternal and academic demands, leading to stress, exhaustion, and missed academic obligations (Espiritu et al., 2023; Nnadi & Nazim, 2024; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Moreover, the results highlight how the lack of time for rest and self-care intensifies the adverse effects of time management difficulties. Participants emphasized that their days are primarily devoted to childcare and household responsibilities, leaving little opportunity to recover physically or mentally, which negatively affects class attendance and academic focus. This finding is supported by related studies indicating that insufficient time for self-care contributes to heightened stress, burnout, and weakened academic performance among adolescent student-mothers (Amolo et al., 2024; Baluyos & Alvarico, 2024; Timothy & Juhudi, 2023).

Academic and Cognitive Strain. This theme highlights the mental and emotional difficulties experienced by adolescent student-mothers as they attempt to meet academic demands while fulfilling parental responsibilities. Participants described persistent distractions and cognitive fatigue stemming from the need to divide their attention between schoolwork and childcare, making it difficult to concentrate during lessons, complete assignments, and sustain academic performance. The pressure of managing these dual roles often diminishes motivation and confidence in their academic abilities, as they struggle to process information and remain engaged in school activities. These findings are consistent with earlier studies showing that adolescent student-mothers experience significant academic and cognitive strain due to divided focus, frequent absences, and anxiety about their children’s well-being, which disrupt learning and contribute to delayed academic progress (Adangabe et al., 2021; Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Moreover, the findings indicate that social and economic pressures, such as financial constraints, discouragement from others, and inconsistent childcare support, further intensify academic and cognitive strain. Participants noted that these external stressors compound their mental exhaustion and emotional distress, leading to uncertainty about their ability to continue schooling. Irregular attendance, difficulty concentrating, and limited study time further weaken academic engagement and self-efficacy. Supporting literature similarly emphasizes that external pressures interact with maternal responsibilities to heighten stress and cognitive burden, ultimately hindering educational attainment among adolescent student-mothers (Akomaning & Osafo, 2021; Espiritu et al., 2023; N-yelbi, 2024).

Lack of Childcare Support. This theme underscores the significant challenges adolescent student-mothers face in accessing reliable childcare while pursuing their education. Participants reported that the absence of consistent caregivers often forces them to miss

classes, arrive late, or attend school while preoccupied with concerns about their children. Many depend on relatives, particularly parents, to supervise their children; however, this support is frequently irregular and uncertain. As a result, their learning routines are disrupted, and their ability to focus on academic tasks is compromised. These findings align with existing studies indicating that limited or inconsistent childcare support restricts school attendance and academic engagement among adolescent student-mothers, particularly in the absence of affordable daycare and structured support programs (Adangabe et al., 2021; Cranney, 2025; Espiritu et al., 2023).

Moreover, the findings reveal that the lack of dependable childcare extends beyond academic disruption and significantly affects the emotional well-being of adolescent student-mothers. Participants expressed persistent feelings of guilt, worry, and anxiety when leaving their children at home or bringing them to school due to unreliable supervision. The instability of family-based support systems intensifies emotional strain, as concerns about their children's safety persist throughout the school day. This outcome is supported by prior research emphasizing that unreliable childcare heightens emotional distress and undermines both academic performance and psychological stability among student-mothers (Richardson, 2022; Richardson & Harrington, 2022; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Financial Constraints. This theme highlights how limited financial resources substantially shape the educational experiences of adolescent student-mothers. Participants described persistent difficulty in meeting school-related expenses while simultaneously providing for their children's basic needs, resulting in heightened stress and emotional exhaustion. The pressure to secure funds for tuition, school supplies, and childcare necessities often compels them to juggle studying with income-generating activities, and in some cases, to postpone or temporarily discontinue schooling. Dependence on parents or relatives for financial assistance further reflects their economic vulnerability and limited autonomy.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that financial instability forces adolescent student-mothers to make difficult choices between education and survival needs, negatively affecting focus, productivity, and overall academic progress (Adangabe et al., 2021; Espiritu et al., 2023; Kanana et al., 2021; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Moreover, the results indicate that financial hardship extends beyond material limitations and profoundly affects the emotional well-being and decision-making of adolescent student-mothers. Participants reported increased stress, anxiety, and fatigue due to the need to work while studying and, in some cases, contribute to household income. These economic pressures diminish motivation and confidence, influencing critical decisions such as delaying education, dropping subjects, or assuming additional responsibilities to support their families. Supporting literature similarly emphasizes that financial constraints undermine mental resilience and consistent academic engagement, affecting not only access to education but also time management, social functioning, and sustained participation in school activities (Cranney, 2025; Govender et al., 2020; Kanana et al., 2021; Nnadi & Nazim, 2024).

Social Judgment and Stigma. This theme captures the emotional burden experienced by adolescent student-mothers due to persistent negative perceptions from their social environment. Participants reported being subjected to criticism, gossip, and discriminatory attitudes from peers, relatives, educators, and community members, often being labeled as irresponsible or morally at fault for early motherhood. Such judgments foster feelings of shame, embarrassment, and emotional distress, undermining self-confidence and intensifying the challenges of continuing their education. These findings are consistent with prior studies indicating that social stigma surrounding adolescent motherhood contributes to psychological strain and creates additional barriers to school participation and academic engagement (Adangabe et al., 2021; Espiritu et al., 2023; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Despite the emotional toll of stigma, the findings also reveal that many adolescent student-mothers develop resilience and determination in response to social judgment. Participants described how negative perceptions motivated them to persist in their studies and prove their competence in both academic and maternal roles. This adaptive response aligns with the existing literature, which suggests that stigma, while a source of distress, can also foster self-empowerment and perseverance among adolescent student-mothers who are determined to challenge societal bias and redefine their identities (Mogamedi & Mudau, 2023; Nichols et al., 2021; Ruzibiza, 2021).

Physical and Emotional Exhaustion. This theme captures the profound fatigue experienced by adolescent student-mothers as they navigate the simultaneous demands of childcare, household responsibilities, and academic work. Participants described daily routines dominated by continuous tasks that leave little opportunity for rest or personal care, resulting in persistent physical tiredness and emotional strain. Sleep deprivation, heightened stress, and anxiety were commonly reported, making it difficult to maintain concentration and sustain consistent academic performance. These findings are aligned with previous studies indicating that the burden of fulfilling multiple roles exposes adolescent student-mothers to intense physical and psychological exhaustion, which negatively affects their well-being and school functioning (Adangabe et al., 2021; Bustillo et al., 2024; Nnadi & Nazim, 2024). Additionally, the findings reveal that emotional burnout compounds physical fatigue, as the responsibility of caring for a child while meeting academic expectations can lead to feelings of overwhelm and psychological pressure. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated perseverance and determination to continue both motherhood and education, reflecting resilience amid sustained exhaustion. This pattern is supported by related literature suggesting that although adolescent student-mothers often experience chronic fatigue and emotional distress, many persist through strong internal motivation and coping strategies, even as ongoing exhaustion affects their daily functioning and overall mental health (Espiritu et al., 2023; Kisanga & Matiba, 2023; Villones & Motus, 2023).

Coping Mechanisms of Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School

Table 2 presents the coping mechanisms of adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school, along with the selection criteria



identified. This study discussed five emergent themes. The table describes the essential themes gathered regarding how adolescent student-mothers cope with the challenges of balancing their academic and maternal responsibilities. Moreover, clustered themes are presented based on participants' responses.

Table 2. *Coping Mechanisms of the Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Reliance on prayer to seek guidance and blessings Continuous faith in God to overcome challenges Gratitude for answered prayers and support received Belief in personal strength supported by spiritual faith	Faith and Spiritual Resilience
Dependence on parental care for child Emotional comfort from family Encouragement from relatives and spouse Assistance in daily routines Moral and financial support from home Maintaining optimism despite adversity	Family Support
Ignoring negative opinions Belief in self-worth and capability Resilience to challenges Self-motivation and goal focus	Positive Mindset and Perseverance
Waking early to prepare for responsibilities Organized daily routine Balancing school and home duties Prioritization of urgent tasks Adaptability to changing schedules	Self-Discipline and Time Management
Child as source of inspiration Desire to provide a better life Focusing on goals and dreams Inner strength to continue schooling Viewing hardships as motivation	Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose

Faith and Spiritual Resilience. This theme highlights the vital role of faith and spirituality in helping adolescent student-mothers navigate the complex demands of motherhood and education. Participants described spirituality, particularly prayer and trust in divine guidance, as a primary source of strength, comfort, and motivation amid academic pressures and childcare responsibilities. Through faith-based practices, they maintain hope, emotional stability, and a sense of inner peace, enabling them to cope more effectively with stress and uncertainty. These findings are aligned with existing studies that emphasize spirituality as a meaningful coping mechanism that fosters resilience, psychological adjustment, and perseverance among adolescent student-mothers facing multiple life challenges (Haiping & Namakula, 2025; Pandya, 2023; Wasike et al., 2024b).

Moreover, the findings suggest that faith not only provides emotional reassurance but also nurtures gratitude, optimism, and a sense of purpose that sustain long-term endurance. Participants noted that spiritual reliance helps reduce stress and strengthen their resolve to persist in both education and motherhood despite ongoing obstacles. This pattern is supported by the related literature, which indicates that spirituality promotes emotional regulation, hope, and positive meaning-making, serving as a protective factor against adversity and reinforcing personal growth and academic engagement (Elzamzamy et al., 2024; Rojas-Flores et al., 2025; Tsomokos, 2024).

Family Support. This theme underscores the crucial role of family members in enabling adolescent student-mothers to manage the competing demands of education and motherhood. Participants emphasized that support from parents, siblings, spouses, and extended relatives provides essential practical assistance, particularly with childcare and household tasks, enabling them to attend classes and complete academic requirements. Beyond instrumental support, emotional encouragement from family members fosters motivation and confidence, reducing stress and reinforcing their commitment to continuing their schooling. These findings are aligned with prior studies indicating that consistent family support promotes resilience and helps adolescent student-mothers balance academic responsibilities and parenting duties more effectively (Abalos et al., 2022; Hope and Homes for (Children, 2025; Padawan & Gupit, 2025; Wang & Chen, 2025).

Furthermore, the findings highlight that family support extends beyond immediate task-sharing and plays a vital role in sustaining emotional stability and self-efficacy. Participants noted that moral encouragement, financial assistance, and a sense of security provided by relatives strengthened their capacity to cope with academic pressure and maternal responsibilities. This comprehensive support system enables adolescent student-mothers to persist in their education while fulfilling their parental roles. Supporting literature similarly emphasizes that integrating emotional, practical, and financial support within the family serves as a foundation for personal growth, resilience, and academic success among young mothers (McGregor & Arditti, 2023; Stephen et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2022).

Positive Mindset and Perseverance. This theme highlights the determination of adolescent student-mothers to remain optimistic and resilient despite the numerous challenges associated with early motherhood and education. Participants reported encountering societal judgment, skepticism, and discouraging remarks regarding their ability to continue schooling. Nevertheless, they maintain a forward-

looking attitude, focusing on their personal and academic goals while embracing self-belief and inner strength. These findings are consistent with prior studies showing that optimism, determination, and resilience are crucial for adolescent mothers to overcome adversity and sustain engagement in both educational and maternal responsibilities (Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Benneker et al., 2023; Yousefi et al., 2025).

Moreover, the findings emphasize that perseverance and a positive mindset serve not only as emotional coping mechanisms but also as drivers for personal growth and goal attainment. Participants described transforming challenges into opportunities for development, maintaining focus on long-term objectives, and reinforcing their sense of capability. This proactive approach enables them to persist in education while managing motherhood, demonstrating strong self-motivation and commitment. Supporting literature similarly notes that maintaining optimism and determination empowers adolescent student-mothers to navigate external pressures, enhance resilience, and sustain both academic and personal development (Haiping & Namakula, 2025; Rahim et al., 2024; Walter & Hazan-Liran, 2025).

Self-Discipline and Time Management. This theme highlights the strategic efforts of adolescent student-mothers to organize and manage their daily responsibilities effectively. Participants reported carefully allocating time to childcare, household tasks, and academic activities, ensuring that neither their studies nor their family obligations were neglected. Through structured planning, task prioritization, and consistent scheduling, they maintain balance and prevent critical responsibilities from being compromised. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing that disciplined time management enhances productivity, reduces stress, and is essential for sustaining the dual roles of student and mother (Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Bustillo et al., 2024; Prasad, 2023). Moreover, the findings indicate that adaptability and proactive scheduling enable adolescent student-mothers to navigate unforeseen challenges while maintaining consistent participation in school and family life. Participants described strategies such as waking early, organizing tasks, and prioritizing urgent activities to maximize productivity and minimize conflict between academic and maternal duties. This structured approach not only supports their educational progress but also promotes their well-being and that of their children. Supporting literature similarly suggests that self-discipline and effective time management function as critical tools for young mothers, facilitating resilience, academic achievement, and the successful fulfillment of household responsibilities (Alcalde et al., 2023; Padawan & Gupit, 2025; Tao & Jing, 2023).

Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose. This theme highlights the inner drive that enables adolescent student-mothers to persist in their education despite numerous personal and social challenges. Participants emphasized that their commitment to schooling is deeply influenced by a sense of responsibility toward their children and the desire to secure a better future for their families. This intrinsic motivation allows them to focus on long-term goals, maintain resilience, and persevere through financial, emotional, and social difficulties. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that personal purpose and responsibility toward dependents are key factors in sustaining educational determination among adolescent student-mothers (Bustillo et al., 2024; Çelik, 2024; Torres et al., 2025).

Moreover, the results indicate that intrinsic motivation fosters a sense of inner strength and perseverance, enabling participants to navigate hardships without succumbing to discouragement. Adolescent student-mothers described obstacles as opportunities for growth, reinforcing their commitment to balancing motherhood with academic responsibilities. This dedication, rooted in the desire to provide a better life for their children, illustrates how a clear sense of purpose functions as a critical driving force in overcoming adversity. Supporting literature similarly emphasizes that goal-oriented perseverance and self-driven motivation enhance resilience and focus, allowing adolescent student-mothers to sustain their academic journey while managing the demands of early parenthood (Panelo et al., 2021; Pacardo, 2022; Stephen et al., 2025; Wang, 2025).

Insights of Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School

Table 3 presents insights from adolescent student-mothers at a public secondary school and depicts the selection criteria identified. This study discussed four emergent themes. The table summarizes the essential themes identified in reflections, realizations, and personal growth among adolescent student-mothers. Moreover, clustered themes are presented based on participants' responses.

Maturity and Responsibility. This theme highlights the significant personal growth and development experienced by adolescent student-mothers as they navigate the dual responsibilities of motherhood and education. Participants reported that managing childcare alongside academic tasks cultivated emotional maturity, independence, and a strong sense of accountability. These experiences required thoughtful decision-making and resilience, enabling them to balance competing demands and approach challenges with determination. These findings are consistent with prior studies that emphasize how early motherhood accelerates social and emotional development, fostering responsibility and self-reliance in young mothers (Kelly et al., 2025; Nnadi & Özada Nazım, 2024; Rzechowska, 2025).

Moreover, the results indicate that adolescent student-mothers develop a heightened awareness of the consequences of their early-life choices, recognizing that their success largely depends on personal effort and perseverance. Participants described learning to manage both academic and parenting responsibilities independently, often without external support. This cultivation of self-reliance, emotional maturity, and resilience provides a strong foundation for coping with the multifaceted challenges of education and motherhood. Supporting literature similarly notes that these experiences strengthen self-awareness and determination, equipping adolescent student-mothers with the skills necessary to sustain both their educational and maternal roles effectively (Dizon et al., 2023; Gatbonton, 2021; Haiping & Namakula, 2025).



Table 3. *Insights of the Adolescent Student-Mothers in a Public Secondary School*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Awareness of personal growth	
Realization of early motherhood challenges	
Acceptance of accountability	Maturity and Responsibility
Understanding consequences of early decisions	
Emotional maturity through experience	
Viewing education as a priority for future success	
Persevering in studies despite challenges and hardships	Value of Education
Continuing education regardless of having a child	
Ignoring negative opinions and focusing on personal growth through learning	
Persevering in studies despite trials and challenges	
Ignoring negative opinions and maintaining self-confidence	Self-Empowerment and Resilience
Determination to succeed and prove personal capability	
Continuing efforts despite difficulties for long-term benefit	
Prioritizing education before making major life decisions	
Avoiding early marriage and hasty commitments	Valuing Patience and Thoughtful Decision-Making
Making careful decisions and not rushing into unwise choices	
Heeding parents' advice for better outcomes	

Value of Education. This theme emphasizes the firm belief of adolescent student-mothers in education as a vital instrument for personal growth and family advancement. Participants reported that despite the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities with childcare, they remain committed to learning, recognizing its role in achieving success, independence, and stability. Their dedication reflects perseverance, goal orientation, and resilience, illustrating how they view education as essential for overcoming obstacles and securing a better future for themselves and their children. These findings are consistent with prior studies highlighting that adolescent mothers perceive education as a transformative resource, motivating them to persist in the face of adversity (Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Espiritu et al., 2023; Gatbonton, 2021; Morris, 2023; Nikiforidou & Holmes, 2023). Additionally, the results reveal that the value placed on education serves as both a strategic and motivational force. Participants described prioritizing studies despite societal discouragement and the pressures of motherhood, recognizing that the knowledge and skills they acquire will yield long-term benefits. This perspective demonstrates their resilience, responsibility, and commitment to achieving their goals. Supporting literature similarly notes that adolescent student-mothers leverage education as a means to improve life opportunities, fulfill family aspirations, and cultivate stability, highlighting how an evident appreciation for the transformative power of learning sustains their perseverance and educational engagement (Fatima et al., 2025; Mwakililo, 2025; Torres et al., 2025).

Self-Empowerment and Resilience. This theme highlights how adolescent student-mothers cultivate inner strength to navigate the dual demands of early motherhood and education. Participants consistently described persisting in their academic journey despite societal judgment, criticism, and personal challenges, demonstrating determination, confidence, and self-reliance. By balancing school responsibilities with childcare, they maintain focus on long-term goals and embrace personal growth, illustrating how resilience becomes a critical coping mechanism in managing competing demands. These findings align with previous studies showing that adolescent student-mothers develop self-empowerment and perseverance to overcome societal stigma and the pressures associated with early motherhood while sustaining their educational engagement (Adangabe et al., 2021; Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Sabidalas et al., 2023; Tugiramasiko et al., 2025).

Further, the results emphasize that resilience enables participants to transform challenges into opportunities for growth. Their persistence amid discouraging remarks and societal expectations fosters confidence, self-discipline, and a strong sense of agency, allowing them to assert their capabilities and continue their education. This inner strength not only supports academic achievement but also enhances personal development, highlighting the interconnection between self-empowerment and goal attainment. Supporting literature similarly underscores that adolescent student-mothers leverage determination and resilience to maintain focus, adapt to adversity, and successfully fulfill both maternal and academic roles, reinforcing the significance of personal fortitude in achieving long-term success (Bacang et al., 2025; Donoga, 2025; Haiping & Namakula, 2025; Morgan et al., 2025).

Valuing Patience and Thoughtful Decision-Making. This theme underscores how adolescent student-mothers cultivate patience and discernment as they manage the dual demands of education and early motherhood. Participants reported developing the ability to make deliberate choices, prioritize their studies, and consider the long-term impact of personal decisions, such as delaying marriage or avoiding premature commitments. These experiences foster self-reflection, responsibility, and emotional awareness, highlighting how early motherhood can accelerate maturity and encourage strategic planning for both personal and familial well-being. Such findings align with existing studies showing that adolescent student-mothers learn to navigate complex life situations with foresight, emphasizing thoughtful decision-making and patience as critical skills for achieving stability and long-term success (Baluyos & Alvarico, 2025; Gatbonton, 2021; Torres et al., 2025).

Moreover, participants' growth in self-regulation and mindfulness enables them to resist impulsive actions and negative influences, further reinforcing their ability to achieve long-term goals. By carefully evaluating consequences and prioritizing their child's welfare

alongside academic obligations, adolescent student-mothers demonstrate accountability, resilience, and a forward-looking perspective. This deliberate approach to life enhances both personal and educational development, illustrating that cultivating patience and thoughtful decision-making is essential not only for immediate problem-solving but also for sustaining long-term growth, stability, and success (Ravindranath et al., 2024; Rzechowska, 2025; Sahr, 2025).

Conclusions

The results of this study provide significant insight into the lived experiences of adolescent student-mothers in a public secondary school in Glan 4 District. By exploring their challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights, this study illuminated the complex interplay between educational aspirations and maternal responsibilities. The findings revealed the resilience, determination, and growth that these young mothers exhibit despite facing time management difficulties, financial constraints, social stigma, and physical and emotional exhaustion. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on adolescent parenthood but also highlights the critical importance of providing supportive educational and community structures that empower young mothers to continue their learning journey while nurturing their children.

This study deepened our respect for the courage and perseverance of adolescent student-mothers, whose quiet strength enables them to balance demanding roles with purpose and hope. Their experiences reveal the transformative power of education, self-motivation, and family and community support in building resilience and personal growth. Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, the study shows that inclusive and supportive learning environments allow young mothers to continue their education despite challenges. When given access, guidance, and understanding, they are empowered to develop life skills, pursue their potential, and inspire others. Ultimately, the study affirms that with determination and support, adversity can become a powerful source of growth, maturity, and inspiration for both individuals and the wider community.

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