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Title: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Unarine Maluleke (Student number: 3774452), the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is a true and accurate reflection of my own original work, except where the works of publication of others have been acknowledged by means of reference techniques. I have not copied anyone else's work or allowed anyone else to copy mine.

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ABSTRACT

Opportunities for women to study at institutions of higher learning have increased, when compared to past generations. Despite this, student mothers, specifically, are confronted with the extra burden of parenting, together with their academic work. Using an exploratory approach, within a qualitative research design, this study aimed to explore perceptions and experiences of student mothers enrolled at the University of the Western Cape. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, who had at least one child and were registered for a full-time undergraduate degree at the institution. Four semi-structured focus groups were held, with five to seven participants each, entailing a total of 25 female students. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time model was adopted, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of the student mother within various contexts. The study received ethics approval, adhered to good ethical principles and was conducted with permission from the university's registrar. Key themes related to the challenges experienced by student mothers were identified, including financial difficulties, and the stress of balancing their dual responsibilities of student and mother. Proximity to their children complicated their attempt to fulfil dual roles. Geographical distance from the child(ren) facilitated their performance as a student, but often at the expense of their role as mother, resulting in guilt. Close proximity to the child facilitated a closer bond with the child(ren), which impeded their academic performance. Familial support was noted as an important facilitator of performance. Family members often assisted with caregiving of the child, allowing the student mother to engage in her role as student. Some student mothers perceived a lack of support from the university, whilst others argued that it is their own responsibility to manage their commitments to study. Despite these difficulties, many student mothers found that motherhood was a motivation for them to study to secure a future for themselves and their child(ren).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The investment in education is one of the most important and influential investments a country can make to enhance intellectual and economic growth, wealth and prosperity. According to this perspective, "[education] is an essential human virtue, a necessity of society, basis of a good life and sign of freedom" (Bhardwaj, 2016, p. 24). Turkkahraman (2012) views education as a vital tool to success, and states that, when a community neglects education, this results in delayed progress on both economic and societal levels. It is a general expectation in most communities that young adults will utilise opportunities to study at an institution of higher learning in order to better their chances of success in a competitive world (Turkkahraman, 2012).

Opportunities for women to study at an institution of higher learning have increased, compared to the past (Lynch, 2008). Although this is the case, some women are still hindered from successful completion of their education due to various psychosocial challenges they may experience (Ngum, 2011). Some of the barriers (and consequences) experienced by women in institutions of higher education include those noted by Zulu (2017), such as female students taking longer periods to complete their undergraduate studies, as well as education inequalities that may hinder their promotion in the workplace. Chireshe et al. (2009) further noted that there is a greater likelihood that female students will drop out from institutions of higher learning, compared to male students. The study further indicates that the cause of this may be the reproductive nature of the female student, which is not always catered for in institutions of higher education (Chireshe et al., 2009).

Female students who are also mothers experience even more pressure, because it is not always obvious to know how to balance the roles of motherhood and being a student (Mayer, 2009). Chevalier and Viitanen (2001) demonstrate that early motherhood is detrimental to student mothers, and the roles of being both a student and a mother are demanding and stressful. These authors further state that there are various barriers and difficulties that student mothers experience, such as dropping out of training, poor parenting and negative encounters with parents, friends and family (Chevalier & Viitanen, 2001).

Among the challenges mentioned in research (for example, Sawhill, 2006), student mothers are deemed to be continually confronted with the extra burden of parenting, which leaves them having to manage their time between academic work and parenting. This highlights the burden of dual roles that eventually impacts negatively in their execution of both roles (Sawhill, 2006). Therefore, the challenges that continuously face the student mothers may seem to outweigh benefits such as expanding minds, building sound knowledge and gaining specialist knowledge and skills, which may be obtained in tertiary institutions (Drake, 2001; Macleod, 2007; Pillow, 2006; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1989).

Student mothers may lack adequate financial resources, suffer high stress, encounter family instability and have limited educational opportunities. These factors may contribute to inadequate parent-child interactions and reduced or diminished infant development (Letseka & Breier, 2008). However, social support can or may promote successful adaptation for emerging adult mothers and probably their children (Biersteker, 2012). From this brief synopsis, it is evident that student mothers are likely to experience various barriers that might impact their ability to benefit from tertiary education. The aim of the present study was to gain more clarity

about mothers' perceptions of motherhood and the facilitators or barriers that might impact on their dual roles as mother and student in a higher education environment.

1.2 Problem Statement

Nationally, concerns have been raised about high rates of university failure and dropout in South Africa, and these may be linked to some of the challenges young people face in higher education institutions (Letseka & Breier, 2008). A study conducted by Pillay (2007) showed that many challenges such as fear of failing, pressure of academic work, and financial and accommodation problems arise when young adults study at higher education institutions. These stressors may hinder students from having a successful academic performance and from reaching their full academic potential (Moreira et al., 2009).

In South Africa, studies on motherhood, such as those of Tladi et al. (2014), van Zyl et al. (2015) and Dlamini (2016), have primarily focused on teenage pregnancy among young female learners at primary- and high-school levels, while less attention has been paid to the unique population of young mothers in tertiary institutions. This focus is an important, but neglected, one, as tertiary education is the space where women advance their education to pursue career paths and thus improve their quality of life (Ebrahim, 2011). Kruger (2006) reported on various studies of motherhood that were mainly focused on subjective and diverse experiences of single mothers and not specifically on student mothers. Brown (1999) and Jeannes (2002) conducted studies on a similar population of single mothers, but these two studies only included white South African women as participants – this leaving unexplored the area of motherhood experiences from other cultural groups in South Africa. In addition to these studies, Moreira et al. (2009) highlighted some of the unique challenges faced by teenage mothers. For example, the

authors found that perceptions of motherhood were embedded in how these mothers experience themselves as mothers (self-focused identity exploration) and how they perceive, and cope with, the added responsibility of motherhood (the need for individual freedom).

Limited research has given attention to student mothers in the early adulthood or emerging adult phases. The Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) study in 2009 focused on experiences of parents in higher education institutions. Amongst the focus on parents, the HSRC study explored some of the challenges that student mothers encounter in higher education settings. The findings were similar to those discussed earlier, such as an inability to balance motherhood and student demands. Clearly, there is a gap in literature with regard to experiences of mothers at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

1.3 Rationale

According to Imbong (2009, p. 2), "education for women remains the most vital tool in the promotion of equality between men and women and in the empowerment of women to contribute fully to society". Young mothers who are trying to complete their studies seem to be particularly vulnerable (Ngum, 2011). Women continue to struggle with challenges such as socio-economic adversity, and a denial or ignorance about their psychological needs (Gerrard & Roberts, 2007; Ngum, 2011) if they wish to advance their academic life and successfully complete their studies. As gleaned from previous research, support provided to young mothers through education enables them to 'escape' the socio-economic shocks of poverty (Gerrard & Roberts, 2007; Mogotlane, 1993; Stephens, 1999). For this reason, challenges faced by young student mothers, and how they cope with and manage the challenges of dual roles, ought to be understood. It is crucial to understand what student mothers need and how they could be supported if they are expected to

successfully complete their studies. This study therefore sought to explore the experiences of motherhood in student mothers in a tertiary institution, with the specific focus on understanding their perceptions of motherhood and how this is impacted by being a student and vice versa.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the updated version of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory, which is the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model. This theory, first coined by Bronfenbrenner (2005), allowed a way of thinking that assesses the relationship between individuals and their environments and how this affects these individuals (Meyers, 2001). The PPCT model allowed for analysis based on how the individual interacts with the environment across various systems at multiple levels (Meyers, 2001).

The primary assumptions of Bronfenbrenner's theory are that systems are interrelated and that a change in one system affects all the other systems. It further postulates that, if the individual does not negotiate a fit with these systems, challenges might arise. It was an appropriate theory for this study because it gives clear definitions of the different structures of the interactions between systems and the influence on the student mother. The PPCT model is divided into four divisions, namely the process, person, context and time. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the *process* refers to "the interactions between an individual and her [immediate] environment". In terms of this study, the proximal process includes the parents, the family members, the father of the child, the peers and the community, as well as the institution.

The *person* is the student mother and all her biological and psychological characteristics (including age, gender, appearance, intelligence, skills and perseverance) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The person concept requires three kinds of characteristics from the student mother, namely demand, resource and force characteristics. The *demand* characteristics are biological, which in this study includes the age and gender of the student mother. The study included student mothers who are between the ages of 18 and 22. The *resource* characteristics refer, in this case, to the intelligence and emotional resources of the mother, and the presence or absence of financial security. The *force* characteristics comprise the student mothers' internal motivation to do and be better for their children and also to secure both their and their children's future. It also includes the parental influence, dedication to or passion for academic success and the importance of education in the life of a student mother.

The *context* is the next concept in the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The context is made up by five systems that constitute the frame for the mothers' lived experiences and perceptions. The systems are, firstly, the microsystem: "the complex of relations between the developing person and the environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (Santrock, 2009, p. 11). The second system, the mesosystem, "comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (Santrock, 2009, p. 18). The third system, the exosystem, is "an extension of the mesosystem embracing the developing person but [it does not] impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there" (Santrock, 2009, p. 26). For student mothers, deficiencies in the exosystem contribute to them experiencing difficulties in the institution of higher learning. The fourth system, the macrosystem, includes "[t]he overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations" (Santrock, 2009, p. 33). The macrosystem is influenced

by the broader policies. The fifth system is the chrono system that constitutes broader frameworks such as policies and political influences.

In this study, the context includes the student mother in the context of her family, and as a person registered at a diverse institution which accommodates students from different parts of South Africa and abroad (microsystem); the interaction or lack of interaction between the mother and her family, the student mother and the university (mesosystem) also needs to be explored. The student mother also lives in a specific community. The community constitutes the student community, as well as the community that she and her family live in (microsystem/mesosystem). The broader influences, such as the impact of culture, customs, policy and political influences pertaining to the area that she lives in, as well as the university at which she studies and the governing structures, also need consideration.

Time is the final concept in the PPCT Model. Time includes the chronosystem, which "consists of the dimension of time such as physiological changes that take place as the child ages" or the student becomes a mother (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). It also relates to their contemporary context, that is, the time in which they are living.

Bronfenbrenner's theory framed the understanding of a student mother, in the context of her family and the university, the interaction or lack of interaction between the microsystems, the impact of the community that she lives in and the broader influences such as culture, customs, policy and political influences on student motherhood. The proposed study sought to understand the interrelatedness of the systems and aspects of the four concepts that might have a potential impact on the student mothers' perceptions of motherhood.

1.5 Structure of the Mini-Thesis

The mini-thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction chapter, which includes the background of the study, problem statement, rationale and the theoretical framework in which the study is located. The second chapter, the Literature Review, provides a brief synopsis of relevant literature that pertains to motherhood, education and student mothers. The methodological choices that were made in the study are outlined in Chapter Three. This includes but is not limited to sections on the research design, data collection methods, choice of data collection, analysis and the ethical decisions that were made. The findings of the study, together with the integration of the discussion of these findings, are presented and discussed in Chapter Four, the Results and Discussion. Results are presented and described with supporting quotes from respondents and discussed with the literature that either supports or contradicts the findings it also draws on the findings and contextualises the findings within the PPCT model. The final chapter, Chapter Five, outlines the limitations of the study, the strengths of the study and concludes with recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Motherhood Contextualised

Motherhood is broadly defined as the state of being a mother (Woodward, 2003). Motherhood involves having a child or becoming a mother through adoption or through step-parenting a partner's children. Motherhood is an intrinsic part of the biology of women, and the drive to be a mother is innate to most women (Woodward, 2003). Being a woman is synonymous with the possibility of giving birth to offspring, thus meaning that women are inherently regarded as potential mothers and are destined to be mothers (Woodward, 2003). Therefore, one particular objective that some women might have is motherhood.

Motherhood is generally conceptualised as a positive and fulfilling experience (Choi et al., 2005). Choi et al. (2005) further report that the perception exists that women have the innate skills and knowledge to care for their children and are driven to find fulfillment from child-rearing and self-sacrifice. This, however, is deemed a stereotypical perception. Motherhood also brings added responsibilities. Such responsibilities include giving birth, ensuring the child's safety and health, and the fulfillment of the basic physical and social emotional needs of the child, amongst other factors that act as a blueprint for optimal development (Ngum, 2011). Being a mother is therefore also considered to be invariably challenging (Glenn, 1994; Miller, 2005; Nicolson, 1993; O'Reilly, 2004).

According to O'Reilly (2004), motherhood is often conceptualised around the notion of mothers being the primary caregivers; this author also views mothers as beings who are selfless in

nature, who may use up time and energy, as well as resources, to take care of their children's needs. O'Reilly (2004) further argues that there are some mothers who generally consider mothering as more important than obtaining financial security through employment (O'Reilly, 2004). O'Reilly's (2004) work resonated with the earlier work of Nicolson (1993), who emphasised that psychological theories such as Bowlby's attachment theory (Bretherton, 1992), and Winnicott's notion of "good enough mothering" (Newman, 2013, p. 63) place emphasis on the importance of a close and nurturing relationship between mother and child. These theories further argue that a lack of attachment might result in a child who experiences dire emotional and physical discomfort (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

These theories, however, have also been critiqued as being too general (universalising the women's experiences – and failing to consider the context in which motherhood takes place), and that their main thrust is stereotyping women as 'natural mothers' (Long, 2009). For instance, the emphasis on motherhood as a natural and intuitive modality creates unrealistic expectations for young mothers, especially those who find it difficult to adapt to motherhood (Kruger, 2006). Thus, societal opinions about mothers are generally underscored by psychological theories that a "good enough" mother is needed to provide the child with a chance to optimally develop to his/her full potential (Newman, 2013, p. 63). This perception automatically creates pressure for young mothers and makes it difficult for them to talk about or share their feelings and experiences of "not-so-good mothering" (Miller, 2005, p. 5).

Societal expectations and perceptions that a mother should be emotionally and physically present in their child's life also create added pressure (Ireland, 1993; Miller, 2005; Nicolson, 1993). Presence is generally used as a measure of "good mothering". There are perceptions attached to the "not-so-good" mothers and the consequences that arise from "not-so-good"

mothering (Ireland, 1993; Miller, 2005; Nicolson, 1993). Because these young mothers may find it difficult to express their feelings, they may want to uphold society's "good mother" notion at the expense of their own happiness (Miller, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, Kruger (2006) and Long (2009) argue that theories that emphasise the importance of 'good enough' mothering are not considering contextual factors that might impact mothering; these include culture, the impact of single parenting and socio-economic factors at play that affect the availability of the mother.

Motherhood needs to be seen in context, as a dynamic and sometimes challenging experience (Kruger, 2006; Long, 2009). Furthermore, motherhood is used as a construct across the globe, but might have different connotations for different woman across the world (Glenn 1994). Thus, a contextual and nuanced understanding of motherhood is needed, as the construct, motherhood, is shaped by time and immediate context, as well as the socio-political, economic, cultural contexts, racial groupings and class that the mother and child are part of and living in (Miller, 2005). These influences need to be kept in mind in this study when student mothers' perceptions of motherhood are explored. Motherhood is a concept that is innate for most women but needs to be viewed in different contexts for different women across the world. The meaning of motherhood is not universal and may differ from one woman to another.

2.2 Education for Women

According to Imbong (2009, p. 2), "education for women remains the most vital tool in the promotion of equality between men and women and in the empowerment of women to contribute fully to society". However, young mothers who are trying to complete their studies seem to be particularly vulnerable (Ngum, 2011). Women continue to struggle with challenges such as socio-economic adversity and a denial or ignorance about their psychological and physical needs

(Gerrard & Roberts, 2007; Ngum, 2011), if they wish to advance their academic life and successfully complete their studies. Moghadam et al. (2017) suggest that policy-makers should implement strategies that will effect change to the traditional perspective that motherhood and educational responsibilities cannot be met at the same time by one person.

Barnes (2013) notes that some of the policies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) campus are not deemed inclusive of particular populations, for instance, student mothers. The author reported that policy is not in favour of pregnant students living in student residences on campus. This particular policy ignores the possibility of students falling pregnant at the university; it also makes the university unlikely to provide services for students with a child or children (Barnes, 2013). Barnes further argues that the university is reproducing the idea that a student is male and childless and is only concerned about acquiring education. It rejects the biological possibilities of women falling pregnant while studying at university.

These policies might indirectly affect student mothers' experiences of motherhood. They promote ideas such as that mothers belong at home and not in a university setting (Barnes, 2013). Students who are mothers during their course of studying face a number of challenges that ought to be attended to. It is recommended that policies such as these be revisited to consider the inclusion of student mothers in the university setting (Barnes, 2013). Education for women is of great importance. Women should be considered and catered for by policies in institutions of higher learning.

2.2.1 Student and Student-Parent Stressors at University

In South Africa, concerns have been raised about high rates of university failure and student dropout that may be linked to some of the challenges young people face in higher education institutions (Letseka & Breier, 2008; Simons et al., 2019). The transition from

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secondary education to higher education is usually seen as academically and personally stressful. Not only is campus a new environment for students to get used to, but campus life also introduces a new way of engaging with learning, bringing in new interpersonal social circles, and negotiating different roles at home, as well as added financial responsibilities. A study conducted by Pillay (2007) shows that many challenges arise when young adults study at higher education institutions; these include fear of failing, pressure of academic work, and financial and accommodation problems.

One of the additional stresses that students who have children might have to cope with is their responsibilities in terms of child-rearing. Students often need to negotiate who will look after their children. A recent study done by Matsolo et al. (2018) indicates that some of the reasons students who are parents drop out of university include battling with the competing demands of communal commitments and child-minding. The financial implication of finding someone to look after a child or children, or the responsibility of taking care of children while studying, is huge and creates a consistent tension between studying and child-minding. Parents who study are often faced with these dual role responsibilities. The dual roles are often seen as competing priorities between commitments to study at university, on the one hand, and the 'perpetually beckoning' parental responsibilities at home, on the other. These stressors, amongst others, may hinder student parents from attaining successful academic performance and from reaching their full academic potential (Moreira et al., 2009). There are many stressors that may hinder student mothers from successfully completing their studies, so student mothers need all the support they could possibly receive.

2.3 Contextualising Student Motherhood in South Africa and Globally.

In the past five years, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SSIRR) conducted research that revealed that 60 percent of children in South Africa have absent fathers; in addition, more than 40 percent of South African mothers are single mothers (Prinsloo, 2006). The above statistics amount to 25 percent when compared with the United States (US) and a developed world average of 15 percent (Prinsloo, 2006). In addition, divorce rates seem to be escalating; 25,326 divorce applications were granted in 2016 alone (Statistics South Africa, 2015). Post-divorce, women are often still taking responsibility for their children as primary caregivers. This is largely due to traditional gender role divisions whereby, in societies both locally and globally, women are considered to be primary caregivers (Hollway & Featherstone, 1997). Morrell and Richter (2006) conducted a study that revealed that, in the early 1990s, of the 22,000 children born in Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa, half of the mothers were not able to name, or call on the support of, their child's father. In another study, conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Lund and Ardington (2006) report that half of the fathers in the province did not have contact with their children. Young mothers were often left with the burden of parenting singlehandedly, and they struggled to earn a living or pursue their studies (Lund & Ardington, 2006). In South Africa particularly, there have been efforts to challenge gender inequalities, but still parenting remains highly gendered (Ngum, 2011). Additionally, it is important to note that institutional support is focused on parental responsibility that happens within marriage, because motherhood is assumed to occur after marriage; therefore, this approach ignores alternative pathways to motherhood (Ngum, 2011).

According to Hollway and Featherstone (1997), as well as Miller (2005), motherhood can be very stressful on its own, and unsupported mothers may even develop mental illness as a result. Miller (2005, p. 1) also expounds the experiences that come with motherhood, by arguing that "becoming a mother changes lives in all sorts of ways". Hoffnung (1998) argues that, in the past, motherhood was regarded as an imperative and enjoyable aspect of women's lives. However, for many women in the present day, it is no longer desirable as a full-time pursuit, and this is due to the economic imperatives in their socio-economic circumstances (Miller, 2005). These imperatives also contribute to the increasing number of female applicants and graduates, compared to the past years (Lynch, 2008).

Motherhood alone is quite challenging and takes up a significant amount of time, but so is being a student, which can be as challenging as motherhood (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Hollway and Featherstone (1997) argue that there is as much pressure on being a student as being a mother, and that being both at the same time is uncommon. Brown and Gilligan (1992) conclude that the dual role (motherhood and being a student) might predispose the mother to emotional and psychological risk.

Hallman and Grant (2004) conducted research that found that early child-bearing often means the end of the young mother's education. Kaufman et al. (2001) conclude in their study in South Africa that a mother's ability to manage her finances, academic life and her ability to mother, is a major determinant of her success in her studies. A study conducted by Pillow (2006) revealed that encouraging young mothers to pursue their studies assisted them in academic success, and in an improved ability to raise the child. In another South African study, Theron and Dunn (2006) observed that the demands of mothering and studying burden student mothers, as they are still developing psychologically. A British study supports this, as Chevalier and Viitanen

(2001) further sustain this idea by demonstrating that early motherhood may have dire consequences for young mothers, such as dropping out, poor parenting, and negative rapport with partners, friends and family, just to mention a few. In America, Sawhill (2006) found that young mothers tend to discontinue their studies to provide support for their children. This is especially observed when mothers do not receive financial support from the fathers of their children. These young mothers are also expected within their cultures to play a primary role in childcare. Subsequently, it may be difficult for student mothers, who apart from studying, have to carry the load of being a parent, which will then impact on both parenting and academic performance (Sawhill, 2006).

Research studies on the African continent found that student mothers experience a variety of challenges in tertiary educational settings (Ngum, 2011; Moghadam et al., 2017). Ngum (2011) and Moghadam et al. (2017) focused on challenges that student mothers experience to balance academic work and family life. Both studies identified and discuss barriers that students experience in meeting maternal and family obligations, against the backdrop of the challenges that arise with student life (Ngum, 2011; Moghadam et al., 2017). Moghadam et al. (2017) concluded that women feel that support must be provided for mothers in universities, as this would enable women to gain skills useful to fulfil their roles as mothers and students. These authors also state that policy-makers should implement strategies that would effect change to the traditional perspective that motherhood and educational responsibilities cannot be met at the same time by one person (Moghadam et al., 2017). Ngum's (2011) study similarly states that student mothers find it challenging to be both student and mother, and that mothers felt that there was a lack of understanding from universities on how difficult it is to be a student mother. Student motherhood

is not an easy path and requires a lot of effort from student mothers. Therefore, student mothers'

unique set of challenges should be understood, and support should be provided where possible.

2.4 The Aspirations and Challenges of Being a Student Mother

Studying and the qualification thereafter pose some benefits for student mothers, but for

the majority of mothers, the immediate challenges outweigh the longer-term benefits. According

to a study by Maisela and Ross (2018), student mothers study for a number of reasons, and these

may differ from one situation to another. The authors mention that student mothers study or

further their studies with the hope of securing a better and more stable financial future for their

children (Maisela & Ross, 2018). Student mothers also study to improve themselves and become

'better people' (Maisela & Ross, 2018). Some student mothers indicated that wanting to be

independent, especially financially so they can provide for their children with ease, is the

motivating drive for them to pursue studying. Thus, studying is perceived by student mothers to

have specific benefits (Maisela & Ross, 2018).

However, student mothers also mention various challenges in their pursuit of studying

(Maisela & Ross, 2018). Amongst others, student mothers have to find a balance between

motherhood and student life, and time-management is of essence in this regard. It is not always

possible for student mothers to manage their time between two demanding and competing roles.

Both roles are experienced as demanding, requiring time, patience and dedication (Maisela &

Ross, 2018). Student mothers also report that they have to spend numerous hours doing

assignments, attending class and preparing for tests and exams. The latter is a necessity for

completing their qualifications and to graduate (Lynch, 2008). Maisela and Ross (2018) argue that

the timelines stipulated in courses do not cater for a student mother, but rather for a student free of

any other responsibility other than the academic work. The authors claim that student mothers are learning under pressure with significant time constraints (Maisela & Ross, 2018).

One of the most pertinent challenges that student mothers face is the need for assistance in the day-to-day responsibilities concerning their children, especially when they have academic responsibilities to attend to (Maisela & Ross, 2018). This may mean that they need to obtain assistance from a family member or are in need of paid child-minding help. This may result in financial strain, as they are not yet financially stable. Additional pressures also include being the primary caregiver and provider for their children, as well as responsibilities such as settling their children's and their own tuition fees (Maisela & Ross, 2018). Student mothers thus need to deal with the dual roles of being a student and a mother to the best of their ability while studying. Despite the mentioned challenges and stressors, most student mothers seem determined to fulfil the dual role and obtain qualifications, to ensure a better future for themselves and their children.

2.5 Summary

This chapter presented a synopsis of local and international literature pertaining to student mothers. The literature started by contextualising motherhood and proceeded by discussing the important role of education, including the barriers and facilitators that student mothers experience. The chapter proceeded with a discussion of student mothers' experiences within the South African context, inclusive of the aspirations and challenges that they experience. The next chapter will present the information pertaining to the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aim of the Study

The study aimed to explore student mothers' perceptions of motherhood. Data were obtained from the student mothers recruited and interviewed (by means of four focus group interviews) from the University of the Western Cape. To achieve the above aim, the study had a certain set of objectives that are outlined below.

3.2 Research Objectives

- To explore student mothers' perceptions and personal experiences of motherhood.

- To explore student mothers' understandings of the importance of education.

- To explore student mothers' understanding of the dual role of being a student mother.

- To identify the barriers and facilitators in student mothers' study and home environments.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative research strategy, with a descriptive exploratory research design. Creswell (2009) and Langdridge (2007) suggest that the main objective of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a subject under

study by allowing participants to express themselves in their own terms (Creswell, 2009). The study did not aim to generalise the findings across the population under study and, therefore, a qualitative research strategy was appropriate to use (Creswell, 2009). The goal of this research was to describe and understand student mothers' perspectives rather than to explain causal relationships or to predict perceptions. The perspectives of student mothers have been under-researched and warranted an exploratory approach (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As such, using a descriptive exploratory qualitative research design was deemed appropriate for this study.

3.4 Research Setting

The study was conducted at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). UWC is a university established in 1960 by the apartheid government as an ethnic college, which then later became a full university in 1973 (Keats, 2009). Apart from being historically disadvantaged, UWC was also known as a historically 'Coloured' university (Keats, 2009). This meant that the university was established to cater for the educational needs of the Coloured community.

UWC has a history of creative struggle against oppression, discrimination and disadvantage (UWC, 2013). Among academic institutions, UWC now represents a racially diverse, and inclusive, institution of higher learning in the South African context (UWC, 2013). It now has roughly equal numbers of African and Coloured students of South African citizenry, and is also growing its footprint in terms of admission and registration of international students, particularly those from the African continent (UWC, 2013).

UWC is also known to have evolved from a teaching institution to an institution that has taken significant strides in developing into a research-intensive university (Keats, 2009). The institution is also known to have improved and expanded the types of research it conducts over

the years. With teaching still being at the heart of UWC, research is also increasingly taking centre stage, making UWC a research-intensive university (Keats, 2009).

UWC consists of seven faculties, namely Arts and Humanities, Community and Health Sciences, Dentistry, Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Law, and Natural Sciences. As far as this research study is concerned, undergraduate student mothers were selected from all seven UWC faculties. While it is not possible currently to obtain statistics on the number of UWC undergraduate students who are parents, there is evidence, such as the study by Theron and Dunn (2006) which was discussed earlier, indicating that being a parent is quite common among young university students.

UWC has established support for its students that can be accessed by all registered students. There is the Centre of Student Support Services (CSSS) on campus responsible for providing of the student's counselling needs. There is a long waiting time for accessing the services at the CSSS and is limited to individual counselling support.

3.5 Participants and Sampling Strategy

The selection criteria were that participants had to meet the following requirements. Firstly, they had to be a female student registered for a full-time undergraduate degree at the University of the Western Cape. Secondly, the student had to be between the ages of 18 and 22 years and, thirdly, the female student had to be a mother to a child or children.

In this research study, non-probability purposive sampling was adopted to recruit participants. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that selects participants based on their characteristics and the aim of the research study. It is a technique that is also known to be

subjective and selective (Tongco, 2007). The technique is often used for qualitative research and involves the researcher selecting respondents based on how they best represent the topic under study (De Vos, 2002). The very first student mother was purposively selected by the researcher, as she was known to the researcher as being a student mother. This initial student mother was approached and asked to identify other student mothers (snowball sampling), who were then invited to take part in one of the focus groups, if they met the selection criteria. Through snowball sampling, they were asked to also recommend someone whom they know would meet the inclusion criteria, and who would potentially be interested in participating in the study. The researcher also utilised the tutorial spaces to ask the female students who were present for tutorials if they would like to take part in the study or if they knew someone who met the criteria and might like to partake. When the researcher conducted the first focus group, there were participants who, as a means of assisting the snowballing of the research participation, asked if they could bring a friend (whom they knew would meet the inclusion criteria) to partake in the next focus group interview, thus making it possible for the researcher to have more student mothers participating.

3.5.1 Demographic Profile of the Participants

Four focus group interviews were held, with a total of 25 participants. All participants were female, full-time registered undergraduate students at University of Western Cape (UWC) and were all mothers, according to the selection criteria of the study. Of the 25 participants, five participants were in their first year, ten were in their second year, and six and four were registered for their third and fourth year, respectively. The range of ages of participants was between 18 and 22 years, and their children's age ranged between six months and seven years. Of the 25 participants, 22 were first-time mothers and the remaining three had more than one child.

The demographics of the participants were as follows: With regard to the home language, seven spoke isiXhosa, five spoke Afrikaans, four spoke Tshivenda, three spoke isiZulu, two spoke Sesotho, while the remaining four spoke English, Sepedi, Shona, and Tsonga, respectively. All participants from the study were black (from both African and Coloured backgrounds and communities). There were 19 'indigenous' African participants and six participants from the Coloured community and background. This composition of the sample was partly consistent with the percentages that were portrayed about the composition of students at UWC, as an institution that serves a predominantly black student population (from the African, Coloured and Indian communities combined).

There were 21 participants who were single, three were married and one was engaged. All the participants were full-time students and none of them was employed. Participants were from different parts of South Africa. Of the twenty-five, eight were from the Western Cape, while five were from the Eastern Cape, and another five from Limpopo. Three were from KwaZulu-Natal, two from the Free State, and one was from Mpumalanga. One participant was from Zimbabwe.

With regard to the qualifications of the participants, eight were studying Bachelor of Science, seven were studying Bachelor of Arts, three were studying Bachelor of Education, three were studying Bachelor of Commerce, two were studying LLB Law, and two were studying Social Work in the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences.

Participants aged 18-22 years best represented university students registered full-time for an undergraduate degree, and they also represented a population of young mothers who had recently finished high school and entered tertiary institutions. According to Erik Erikson's theory of identity development (Erikson, 1995), the ages from 18 to 22 years represent the human developmental stage of late adolescence during which identity formation is established (arising

out of the resolution of the psychosocial crisis of 'individual identity vs identity confusion')

(Louw & Louw, 2014). The tasks associated with this stage that need to be successfully

completed include, among others, autonomy from parents, and being realistic about their

capabilities and accomplishments to be able to make a suitable career choice (Erikson, 1995;

Louw & Louw, 2014). Therefore, it was crucial that the exploration of the perceptions of

motherhood was done with this age group for whom career pursuits are not only more salient, but

also represent competing priorities with motherhood (with the extra burden of parenting and its

challenges probably being more pronounced in the context of career pursuits). This therefore

made the 18-22-year age group an appropriate research group from whom to elicit the perceptions

and experiences of the challenges embedded in the duality of roles (of being a mother and a

student). The sample size was in accordance with the principles of qualitative research, as this

methodological approach holds that a relatively small sample size is satisfactory due to the in-

depth, rich data one gains from qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014.)

 3.6 Data Collection

The study used semi-structured, focus group interviews (see Appendix D) to collect data.

Semi-structured focus group interviews allowed for participants to elaborate and provided more

flexibility (Babbie & Mouton 2012). Four once-off focus group interviews were conducted. The

first focus group consisted of five participants, the second focus group had six participants, while

the third and fourth focus groups consisted of seven participants each. Babbie and Mouton (2012)

explain that a semi-structured interview is "essentially a conversation in which the interviewer

establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the

respondent" (p. 289). Semi-structured interviews conducted in a focus group setting serve as a rich source of data to explore the perceptions of the student mothers regarding motherhood.

Adhering to the nature of focus group interviews, they consisted of individuals with particular characteristics, such as being both a student and a mother, who focused the discussion on motherhood and their perceptions (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Furthermore, a focus group provided the participants with a more natural environment than that of an individual interview. While at times the sentiments shared represented the individuals' perceptions, experiences and perspectives, there were occasional moments in the context of the group discussion in which these resonated well with those of others, were influencing and being influenced by each other's, and echoed one another's – thus reflecting a more accurate real-life depiction of the theme of motherhood (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Focus group interviews also allowed for depth and saturation to be achieved. It provided the interviewer opportunities to probe and expand the interviewees' responses (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

The interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for the participants, and these took place on UWC campus, at the Psychology Department Staff Room between July and October 2019. The approximate duration of each focus group interview was 90 minutes.

While provision was made to make the information sheets (see Appendix A1 and A2), informed consent forms (see Appendix B1, B2 and B3), and interview guide in languages other than English (for example, in isiXhosa and Afrikaans), the focus group interviews were conducted in English on the basis of the participants' proficiency and expressed preference for the interviews. Interviews were conducted in a neutral and safe space, and were audio-recorded (with consent from participants) and then transcribed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.7 Data Analysis

The process of thematic analysis, as described by Clarke and Braun (2013), was used to analyse the data. Clarke and Braun (2013) describe six steps of data analysis that include getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes and writing up the findings. Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by transcribing the data collected and re-reading the collected and transcribed data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The second step was *initial coding and generating a code list* of themes identified in the transcribed data by the researcher. The researcher achieved these by organising the data in a meaningful and systematic way, which was guided by the research objectives (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The researcher coded the data by reducing large chunks of data into a meaningful and manageable set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thirdly, the researcher searched for themes or patterns that captured the significant set of data. The researcher achieved this by generating and examining the codes and outlining the preliminary themes according to the broader research objectives.

Fourthly, the researcher reviewed the data by noting any similarities and differences in the themes. The researcher achieved this by making sense of the data, assuring that the data supported the research objectives, avoiding fitting too much data into one theme and checking for how much themes were distinct from one another, and also if there were themes that were not included in the generated themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Finally, the data needed to be verified. The researcher achieved this step by defining the generated themes and explaining how the subthemes interacted and related with the themes. The researcher also checked if the information obtained was credible, and this was achieved by a

process called inter-rater triangulation. Inter-rater triangulation is a process where two researchers read and analyse the same data and then compare their notes. In line with King and Horrocks (2012), if the notes from the two researchers agreed, then the information was deemed credible. To achieve this, the data set was checked by the researcher, her research coach and her supervisors.

3.8 Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure that data collected is credible, reliable, and objective, it was important to assess the quality of the data collected. The study adhered to the five identified principles to ensure trustworthiness of data: dependability, transferability, authenticity, credibility, and confirmability as described by De Vos (2002). *Dependability* seeks to examine whether using the same procedures and processes would produce the same results in the same context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In this study, the researcher's supervisors examined the process and the final product (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Transferability* is the ability or potential for findings to be transferred to other contexts. The research findings in this study may not be transferable to other contexts due to the nature of qualitative study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Should other researchers be interested in repeating the same study, the researcher attempted to provide as much detail as possible about the study.

Authenticity refers to the degree to which the researcher has genuinely and fairly presented a variety of realities and not only those that support their own ideas, as described by Elo (2014). To meet the requirements for authenticity, the study was peer reviewed and was critically analysed by the supervisors. The researcher was also assisted by an experienced research coach

and editor, who are knowledgeable in qualitative research. The researcher implemented the changes suggested by both the research coach, editor and her supervisors.

In qualitative research, *credibility* is used in place of internal validity (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the researcher ensured credibility in three main ways. First, the researcher identified the participants by following the selection criteria as previously indicated. Second, the researcher used a theoretical framework linked with literature, to ensure that the study was conducted within the parameters (Harper & Cole, 2012). Finally, *confirmability* refers to whether or not the researcher had been completely objective in reporting of the findings; this is determined by a co-researcher being able to confirm the findings (De Vos, 2002). Confirmability was adhered to by the discussion of findings with the research coach and supervisors (De Vos, 2002).

Concerning the groups, the researcher was not always able to facilitate the group in such a way that all participants had the opportunity to engage equally in their group. Data checks, to substantiate if analysis was done rigorously, were difficult to arrange. None of the participants was available on enquiry to listen to the recordings and look at the analysis, to confirm if what they said was what they meant and whether what was extracted as themes was what was meant.

3.9 Reflexivity

As a researcher, there were – and are – certain personal aspects about myself that had the potential to influence the quality of the data that emerged, if unchecked during the phase of the execution of my fieldwork. It remains the responsibility of every researcher conducting research (especially qualitative research) to ensure acute awareness of these salient factors, and to be well aware of any potential biases and preconceived notions that one holds about the subjective experiences of participants. Without this, the presentation of the purported findings from the

research field could easily be influenced by the researcher's own construal, understanding and interpretation of the participants' realities, rather than the subjective experiences of the participants – as shared during the interviews. This reality renders the section on reflexivity an inescapable imperative when doing qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019); this allows for, and lets, the data emerging from the field (i.e. from the interviews with participants) 'speak for itself', rather than the researcher imposing themself through their interpretive lens. Therefore, in this section, I highlight a few salient factors that relate to my positionality as the researcher, and how this positionality was managed in such a way that it did not influence the quality of the data emerging from the field.

 As female of African descent, which was something shared with many of the participants, I could relate to some of the experiences that were shared by participants. All the participants were female students, and we could relate to one another. As we were all women, although I was not a mother myself, this assisted them to feel comfortable to talk about their experiences. The race demographics of the focus groups reflected the demographics of the institution, being primarily black (with participants being both from the 'indigenous' African and 'Coloured' backgrounds). We were from similar descent, and this therefore allowed me to connect with them on that level. There was a shared identity with some of the participants and some differences from some participants.

 During the data collection period, I was 25 years old and relatively older than the participants. My age did not hinder me from collecting data; rather, it had a positive impact because of the rapport that I was able to establish with the participants. I was still within the same broader age group, and we were in a same psychological developmental age, so I could relate to them as peers. However, it is important to note that I was a postgraduate student and the

participants were still undergraduate students. Although we were in a similar age bracket, we were in the different grouping at the university, because of the 'occupational' status we possessed.

Being a student at UWC was an aspect of the occupational status that was also shared with the participants, and there were some elements of common experience and common identity. As a university student myself, I could relate to some of the experiences that participants shared during the interviews which related to the academic demands and student life in general. One of challenges the student mothers mentioned was delays in accessing the counselling services on campus (CSSS). I have first-hand experience of this, waiting two months for a response. However, because I was a Master's student from the psychology department, I approached one of the lecturers to assist me, and they were able to fast-track the process. My experience at UWC only started from postgraduate level, so I did not have personal experience of being an undergraduate student at UWC. However, some of the experiences that participants shared related to meeting deadlines were similar to my experience during my undergraduate degree at a different institution, suggesting that there were some challenges that appeared to be common to undergraduate students across the South African context. Having a shared understanding of the higher education and institutional context, as a fellow student, made it easier to build rapport in the interviews.

However, I noticed that the participants viewed me as an expert in the field and felt intimidated by me, at first. They were all undergraduate students, and I was a Master's student, resulting in perceived power differences. I managed this by reassuring the participants, reframing my role and position as someone who was there to learn from them. I also aligned my identity as a student with theirs, this being a way of ensuring that the participants were able to share their subjective experiences and perceptions of motherhood, without the fear of their experiences being

invalidated by the 'senior' researcher some saw me as. By reframing the student mothers as the experts in the room, I shifted the perceived power dynamic; no one could ever tell their stories better than themselves. This appeared to put the student mothers at ease and assisted with the development of rapport.

I am a Tshivenda-speaking woman from Limpopo province in South Africa; at the time of the data collection, I was residing in the Western Cape, in Cape Town, where the predominant culture is different from where I came from. During the interview process, I became aware of the cultural differences between myself and the student mothers. For example, some of the student mothers mentioned the cultural custom of paying 'damages' (traditionally, this was paid in terms of cows but, in the modern day, may be a monetary compensation for the 'damage' caused to the woman and her family's reputation). These damages are due from the family of a male who impregnates a woman while unmarried, to be paid to the woman's family if the student mother and the father of the child were not married when they had the child. This was not a concept I was entirely familiar with. In order to ensure I understood the custom, I asked a colleague who has wider cultural experience and knowledge to help me gain better understanding of what paying 'damages' entailed and the implications thereof. This allowed me to better understand the other cultures of the student mothers, to facilitate accurate analysis and interpretation of the data.

However, despite my unfamiliarity with some of the cultural practices that pertained to being an unmarried student mother, this 'outsider' perspective still yielded rich, valuable data. Participants were still free and able to relate these cultural experiences without incurring the risk of a cultural 'stonewalling' from me as a researcher with a background somewhat dissimilar to theirs in this respect. However, even when some student mothers and I shared closer cultural similarities, it was important that I presented myself in a way that did not elicit 'socially desirable'

or 'expected' responses from any of the participants. In particular, I could relate to some of the family pressures and experiences shared by some of the student mothers whose families lived in provinces outside of the Western Cape. Even though we could connect participants were still able to articulate their own subjective experiences without being influenced by my positionality in terms of some degree of shared background with them.

I grew up in a religious family that lives by Christian principles. However, while I do not espouse the Christian-ingrained religious notion of the wrongness or inappropriateness of having a child before marriage, it was important to be aware of any implicit biases and preconceived notions in this regard. This was in order to not only manage any remnants of prejudice that might be lurking, but to also give participants time and space to speak freely about their experiences without being burdened with the fear of judgment. This made it easier to manage my personal beliefs during the data collection process, as I could engage with the participants without judgement and accept their experiences. Interestingly, religion did not come up during the focus group interviews, potentially due to the diverse religious groups represented, and so the moral or religious viewpoints around child-bearing and marital status were not discussed.

As already indicated, I do not have a child and am not a mother – in sharp contrast to the student mothers whose subjective experiences and perceptions formed the essence of the present study. My limited knowledge and experience of being a parent might have affected the way that I conducted the interviews. However, this may have made it easier for me to retain objectivity, as I could not lead the conversation in a certain direction based on my experiences. Again, not being a mother may have assisted me with remaining objective and letting the data speak for itself.

My mother had me when she was 18 years old, and her choice not to pursue her studies was one of the reasons for my interest in the topic of student motherhood. At the time, she felt

obligated to focus on her family, which meant not pursuing studies. Presently, I have a better understanding of her choices, and how life might have been had she pursued her studies. I was also aware that some of the experiences that participants shared, with regard to the impact that studying had on their relationships with significant others in their family, were something I could resonate with, to an extent, as I also experienced challenges with my relationship with my mother. While I did not seek to transpose my own parent-child relationship perspectives with my mother, and participants were able to articulate their own experiences in an unhindered manner, I hold valuable lessons from the perspectives that participants shared of their experiences of motherhood. These not only gave me insights into the experiences of my own mother, but most importantly broadened my understanding of motherhood at a young age (as the case was for the participants).

I grew up in a traditional family, where the father is the sole provider, and the mother is a stay-at-home mom who takes care of all household chores and child-rearing duties. My father was present in my life and played a huge role in shaping me into the woman I am today. His role in my life has impacted my understanding of the father's role, and I noted how different it was from what some of the student mothers communicated about the role that the child's father played in their children's lives. My guarded nature in some of the interviews may have stemmed from this difference in experience, which I was unable to relate to; I was therefore trying to stay as neutral as possible, to allow the student mothers to share their lived experiences. I was able to understand the concerns of student mothers around the lack of support from the fathers of their children. Despite the differences in our identities, I did not notice any judgements from the participants, and this did not appear to affect the rapport-building.

Although I clarified the purpose of the focus group at the beginning of each group, there was still an unspoken expectation that I was there to help participants and that I would intervene beyond the data collection stage. This left me feeling somewhat anxious and inadequate; I can look back to moments of fieldwork and conclude that participants may have expressed themselves in a manner that was adequately 'cathartic' (through these focus group narratives and shared experiences), especially given that none of them expressed the need for referral during or after the focus groups concluded. Retrospectively, this may reflect some of the unspoken needs of the mothers, as portrayed by their stories. This also alerted me to the huge need for interventions and support groups for student mothers. I tried to manage my own anxiety during the groups by giving mothers the opportunity to relate their experiences; I reminded myself that the purpose of the focus groups was to obtain mothers' perceptions of motherhood, and that dissemination of the information at a later stage might contribute to intervention strategies for student mothers in a similar position in future.

I collected the data by means of focus group interviews, based on my prior knowledge of focus groups. In retrospect, my knowledge and experience of focus groups were limited. In preparation, before the first focus group, I did a mock focus group interview with my supervisors, where I had the opportunity to ask questions and they were able to guide me in some of the techniques that are important in the facilitation of focus groups. Before every focus group discussion, I also had a practice session with my flat mates, to improve my skills and to build confidence in my ability to facilitate the groups more effectively. During the interviews, there were moments where I still felt uncomfortable. This was mainly when I had to ask quieter participants to share their thoughts, while guiding the more active participants to remain quiet to give others a chance to participate. To manage this, I kept track of who was speaking and

responding to what question. If I noticed someone was being quieter, I would direct a question to them and allow them to speak. When someone was a little 'too active' in the group, I would summarise and acknowledge their contribution, and then open it back up to the group for contributions from others.

Finally, I also have to acknowledge that I had limited knowledge with regard to qualitative data analysis, and I was aware of my limitation when it came to analysing and interpreting the data in a deeper and more meaningful way. To manage this, discussion with my supervisors regarding the data collected influenced how I came to understand the data, and I was able to think through and interpret it in a more nuanced way. I was also introduced to a mentor who guided me throughout the whole process of analysing and interpreting the data. The interpretation and writing up of results are still not something that comes naturally to me, but I have learned a lot and will continue to engage and learn if I choose to pursue a career in research.

3.10 Ethics Considerations

The study followed the strict ethics considerations set out by the University of the Western Cape. Before the data collection commenced, ethical clearance (HS19/5/15) (see Appendix G) was obtained from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). Permission for access to undergraduate students was also obtained from the registrar's office [UWCRP240819UN] (see Appendix D). In general, the study adhered to the ethics guidelines that were identified by Basit (2010).

Information: Participants were clearly informed about all aspects pertaining to the research study. An information sheet (see Appendix A1 and A2), provided participants with a brief background; an outline of the aims of the study; a summary of their rights; and an

explanation of the lines of communication to provide feedback or raise concerns about the research.

Voluntary participation: Participants were also informed that participation was completely voluntarily and that they could withdraw from the study at any given time with no negative consequences (Marshall et al., 2006).

Anonymity and confidentiality: Participants' identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms during data analysis to replace their identity. Although participants had a choice of using either their original names or pseudonyms, which they were informed about, they preferred to use their original names during the course of the focus group interviews. It was also agreed that the information they shared would be used anonymously (Babbie & Mouton , 2001).

Right to privacy: Participants were also informed on their rights in the study, such as the right to privacy or the extent to which they could share information (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

Informed consent: Participants' informed consent was obtained by means of signing a consent form (see Appendix B1, B2 and B3), where they also had an option to consent to be voice-recorded during the focus group interviews. The researcher made every effort to avoid exposing participants to sensitive questions which might have resulted in psychological discomfort.

Referrals: Participants were also briefed that they had the option to be referred to the Centre for Student Support (CSSS) on campus if they experienced any psychological discomfort after the focus groups. They were able to contact the researcher for referral to CSSS at any stage after the focus group discussions. No one made use of the referral option.

Dissemination of data: Data collected is kept secure in a password-protected computer for a period of five years starting from its collection date and will be destroyed thereafter. It will be disseminated by means of manuscript publication. Consent for the dissemination has also been obtained from the participants.

3.11 Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology of the research, including the design, method, sampling, data collection, data collection tool, data collection procedure, data analysis, as well as the trustworthiness and the ethics considerations which guided the research study throughout. The next chapter focuses on the presentation of results and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The overall aim of this chapter is to report on the findings of the exploratory investigation into university student mothers' experiences and perceptions of motherhood. The chapter is presented as an integrated results and discussion chapter. For a better integration of the findings with the theory and literature, it was thought better to present these two within one chapter. The findings of each of the thematic categories identified by means of thematic analysis will be illustrated and discussed in turn. Table 4.1 presents a synopsis of the identified themes and follows a short description of the themes. The overall findings are formulated theoretically through the lens of the PPCT model. The theoretical formulation gives an understanding of the student mother in light of the findings and how they could be understood in different contexts.

Illustrative quotes from student mothers are provided per theme. The letters and numbers after each quote indicate the focus group and the participant in the specific focus group, where 'FG represents the focus group and "P" represents the participant. For example, 'FG2 translates to focus group two or the second focus group, and 'P1' translates to the first participant in a focus group; 'FG2: P2' indicates that the quote portrays the response of the second participant in the second focus group. A short summary of the main findings per category will conclude the discussion of the category. Thereafter, the findings of each category are discussed in the context of available research.

Three categories were identified from the thematic analyses, namely the student mothers' perceptions of motherhood, the challenges experienced by mothers, and the role that social support systems play in student motherhood. The three categories were also divided into themes.

For example, the themes under category one are 'motherhood as a motivation' and 'motherhood as a burden'. Table 1 provides a summary of the three categories and the thematic content (themes) within each category.

Table 1

Summary of Categories and Themes Identified in the Analysis of the Data

Categories	Themes
1. Perceptions of motherhood	Motherhood as a motivation Motherhood as a burden
2. Challenges identified by student mothers	Finances Dual and multiple responsibilities Sentiments regarding physical distance from the child(ren) Educational context Community safety
3. Social support systems	Father of child and his family Family support Friends and community

4.1 Thematic Category One: Perceptions of Motherhood

Student mothers acknowledged that motherhood had its positive and negative effects on them. Their perceptions of motherhood are described in two main themes, namely, 'motherhood as a motivation' and 'motherhood as a burden'. The two themes are presented and discussed below.

4.1.1 Motherhood as a Motivation

A predominant theme during the focus group interviews with student mothers pertained to motherhood being seen as a motivator for these participants to complete their studies. Tied to this motivation was the notion that getting education ensures a brighter future for both themselves as mothers and their child(ren). The following excerpts are a case in point:

"I would basically say it motivated me in a way, not saying that it's ok to have a child at a young age but I feel like now, whatever decision, that I am making, I am not making for me only." (FG1: P2)

"...but sometimes being a student mother is, it could be a motivation in some ways, like you have to strive to be a better person so that you can be a parent to your child." (FG2: P1)

Furthermore, and taking the issue of motivation further, it was worth noting that, for some participants, the experience of motherhood was not only something seen in negative light, but also there were instances in which it was described as something positive to draw from, out of which different and new perspectives in life were reported as having been gained.

"Yes, I think for me it was also a motivation 'cause, before I got pregnant, I would maybe say I was a little bit lazy. I was not sure what I wanted to do in life, like I think I was just all over the place and then when I had my baby that was when I felt like the need to put my life in order so that I could actually like support my baby." (FG2: P2)

Relating to the above, some student mothers reported experiencing motherhood as a specifically life-changing experience. They believed that they had to focus on their children and had to study to ensure a better future for their children.

"...when you are a mother, it changes your entire life and how you see life and also how you do things, because you always have to consider the fact that you have a child." (FG3: P3)

"I would also say having a child actually put me in the right direction." (FG1: P5)

Student mothers felt that motherhood could be seen as a motivator to work hard and persevere in their studies to ensure a better life for themselves and their children. Specifically, the student mothers drew strength from their experiences of motherhood, although they did not condone early pregnancy (out of awareness of the set of challenges that this presented for them). The participants reported the need to prioritise their studies to secure their future and that of their children. Motherhood in itself was viewed by participants as a motivation and also as a need for self-assurance that what they were prioritising was for the better in the long run. In empirical support for the above, Ngum (2011) found motherhood to be a motivator to mothers – in other words, it provided a motivation to do better for themselves and their children.

4.1.2 Motherhood as a Burden

In contrast to the experience of motherhood as a motivating factor (as illustrated above), for some participants, motherhood was reported as a burden that often imposed the conditions under which they had to prioritise their child/ren's needs before their own. In this regard, there was a consensus around motherhood being a demanding endeavour, often leading to a forced change in priorities.

"I think motherhood on its own is burden and having to be a student as well is and added burden. I have to study and be a mother and also be a good student at school and submit my assignments in time and write all my tests and pass and make it out of here alive." (FG4: P6)

"It's demanding… being a mother is not nice. It's so sad, it's not easy, even being a young mother is no easy and at school it's not easy because you have so many years that you have to study. You are not working, you don't know if you gonna find work, you don't know if you gonna have a stable salary." (FG3: P3)

"Jah [Yes] *at a time it's like… ohh my my baby is asthmatic… so it's hard, 'cause sometimes you have to be at the hospital, and if he starts you know, boys, he doesn't like wearing shoes, he has to wear shoes all the time; he mustn't play in the grass, he plays in the grass all the time."* (FG3: P2)

"Sometimes I don't feel that I am living for me alone but for the child too. So, I must forget about my needs and think for the baby. That's why I am also studying because I have to better my life and my baby's life. So, it's challenging to be a mother." (FG4: P3)

"Like I had to change my lifestyle, because I can't afford a good life for two people now. It's now always about the baby and less about me." (FG3: P7)

From the above excerpts, there was a prevailing sense of motherhood as a responsibility that needed to be prioritised, a factor that (for the participants) brought added pressures to student motherhood. From the participants' accounts, it seemed especially difficult to juggle between different responsibilities, which all required careful attention and time, something that was experienced as putting further constraints on their studies. This is discussed in more detail under the thematic content relating to dual responsibilities as one of the 'challenges identified by student mothers. For some students, there seemed to be a constantly lingering examination of whether all the studying that they had to do was worth it, considering the overwhelming sense of uncertainty about what the future held for them. These experiences of student motherhood as a phenomenon that is characterised by navigating through the 'maze' of conflicting roles and responsibilities ties up with the literature. This literature highlights these responsibilities as inherently tied to

motherhood, which is described by some (for example, Ngum, 2011) as a self-sacrificing concept, owing to the uniqueness in how these demands, roles and responsibilities affect mothers.

From the above excerpts (regarding their perceptions of motherhood), student mothers perceived motherhood as a life-changing experience and some found it difficult to adapt to the new way of living, while some experienced it as a motivating factor for them to pursue their higher education studies (given the anticipated set of longer-term benefits from completing a higher education degree). The student mothers prioritised the pursuit of their studies as a means to support the child or children, sometimes at the cost of their personal needs. There was also an apparent tension between adapting to new ways of living and being a responsible parent. Societal expectations imposed on mothers also made it difficult for the young mothers to adapt to student motherhood, as these have influenced the student mothers' perceptions of motherhood. Society informs us what it means to be a mother, how a woman should mother, and what behaviours are appropriate (Ngum, 2001).

The dominant ideology put forward in Western culture accepts a universal truth about a natural, forever self-sacrificing, good, sensitive, caring and nurturing mother (Hattery, 2001). This might come across as a 'double-edged sword' for the participants in the present study. Motherhood, for student mothers, was experienced more as a condition imposed on them by a range of contextual and societally defined factors. These include being a mother in the context of adverse socio-economic conditions (see theme on community safety as one of the 'challenges identified by student mothers') – over and above the absence of socially and materially supportive networks (see the thematic content under the 'social support systems' category). Given this background, the notion of motherhood as 'natural', 'good', 'caring', 'sensitive' and 'nurturant' in this context might render itself open to rigorous scrutiny and criticism, as these conditions, from

the participants' accounts, seemed far removed from their own lived experiences as student mothers. In recognition of this limited view of motherhood, Hattery (2001) notes that some mothers *are* often being self-sacrificing, at times neglecting their personal needs to persevere with their studies to enable a better future for their children, and that performing the combined roles of being a mother and a student often comes with a wide range of challenges. In relation to these challenges, Hattery (2001) proposes ways in which these competing responsibilities (of being a student and a mother) could be managed.

4.2 Thematic Category Two: Challenges Identified by Student Mothers

The numerous challenges that student mothers reported to be experiencing while in the course of their studies included challenges with finances, their dual responsibilities of being both a student and a mother, how far or near (geographically) they were to their children, challenges with regard to community safety and educational context. These challenges did not occur in isolation; they were interlinked, and, in some cases, they also influenced one another.

4.2.1 Finances

A predominant topic in the focus group discussions with the student mothers was a repeated reference to their overall sense of a lack of financial means to sustain livelihoods at university, against the competing priority of motherhood, with their resultant limited abilities to provide nurturance to their offspring. To this end, the majority of participants gave accounts of experiencing financial constraints. They reported feeling that their financial status negatively influenced the ability to take care of their children, as their focus on their studies meant that they were not able to earn money to support their children. The following excerpts illustrate their

expressed frustration, consternation and overall sense of despondency around the financial battles experienced while studying at university:

> *"The fact that financially I am not stable and the father of the baby is not supporting the baby, and the fact that, like, I have to depend on other people to support me and the baby as well."* (FG2: P2)

> *"For me to study in South Africa* [as a foreign student], *unlike you guys* [South African students] *... you can pay your fees in monthly instalments. We can't do that. In January, I make sure that R40, 000, including my medical aid, has been paid up for me to register to study."* (FG3: P2)

> *"I also struggle with my school work and I can't find anyone to help me for extra cash because I also don't have much money ... My parents are not always supporting me, but they just want me to pass and pass, because they are tired of taking care of my baby."* (FG4: P3)

Salient in the above excerpts seemed to be the notion that the aggravating factors to the financial struggles included singlehandedly overseeing the upkeep of children, without the financial or material support of the children's fathers. Of interest to note in this regard were the parallels between these students' experiences and the experiences of financial struggles of single mothers in communities, who often eke out a living (and support their children) without much support from the fathers (Widan & Greeff, 2019). Indeed, these parallels also lend credence to the idea that university life, in some respects, is a microcosm of society (Kubeka, 2016).

Also noteworthy in the above excerpts was the notion of added pressure and extra financial burdens, mainly and uniquely attributed to the national identity of being a foreign student – an experience that was subjectively judged as not comparable to that of South African students. The findings of the study by Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing (2015), on the experiences

of students embarking on studies outside their home countries, highlight that a wide range of challenges these students encounter include difficulties in functioning on an equal footing with the local students, especially around the financial means of sustaining university life in a 'foreign' country. Some student mothers had the additional burden of not residing in the country and this meant that they had to pay registration, class and residential fees upfront, which left them with little financial means to support their children.

Regarding the experience of university life being fraught with financial battles, there is cumulative empirical evidence pointing to these realities for students. For example, research on students (Maisela & Ross, 2018), and specifically on student mothers (Ngum, 2011), shows that students often find themselves rendered powerless by financial instability and chronic shortages of material means to sustain their life during their studies, especially in a context of no available avenues for providing the needed financial support.

Some participants were sufficiently financially stable that this did not present a barrier. These may be characterised as 'voices of protest' or 'dissenting voices' to the predominant themes around student life being generally fraught with financial difficulties. These were best articulated in the following excerpts:

> *"... like, I don't experience any financial problems or anything like that, 'cause my 'baby daddy' does everything for the child. So, he is very supportive."* (FG3: P3)
>
> *"I have NSFAS that pays for me, and my boyfriend or the father of my child helps with my child and buy groceries for us at home, and then we use my parent's and my child's grant money."* (FG4: P6)
>
> *"My father pays for my fees and now I also waiting for my bursary to pay. So, this is my final year and I applied for a few jobs."* (FG2: P6)

"… 'cause sometimes, if even if you have money but if you don't know how to take care of your child, it's not good." (FG2: P4)

What the above excerpts illustrate is the contestation of the generally held perspective of student life as one of financial crisis, and that single motherhood is equally financially strained. The references to multiple sources of support (in the form of student funding, social relief grants, parental support) serve to highlight the evidence for this. In the case of a specific participant above (FG2: P4), they had good financial support, but noted that they struggled to bond with their child. This links with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Crandall et al., 2020), in that her basic needs were provided for, and so she was able to grapple with the higher order need of bonding with her child**.** The available literature suggests that when students' financial and material needs are taken care of, that frees them up from financial stress. Stress about finances may take up a large amount of cognitive space, and once that is alleviated, student mothers are better able to invest more energy in their studies and parenting responsibilities (Robotham, 2008).

The findings above on finances as both a barrier and facilitator provide a clear picture of some student mothers who had financial support whilst financial support was absent for other student mothers. Student mothers also indicated how the lack of finances is a barrier to them and their children and how it also affected their studies.

4.2.2 Dual and Multiple Responsibilities

Another recurring theme pertaining to the range of challenges expressed by participants related to the duality of roles that, for them, characterised student motherhood. This pertained to expressions of having difficulties in finding a balance between the different, mutually competing, roles that they had to fulfil: one being that of a student, and another being a mother. There seemed

to be a general consensus about the experienced difficulties in having to fulfil both roles, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> *"I think, for me, my challenge is juggling to be a good mother and be a good student at the same time … like doing my school work without thinking about my child."* (FG3: P7)

> *"I feel that I have the challenges of mother and the student, so I have two challenges at the same time."* (FG4: P3)

The above excerpts serve to highlight the notion of the two roles (of simultaneously being a student and a mother) as generally incompatible, yet inherently linked. To this effect, finding a balance between the two is expressed as laden with difficulty, tension, and stress, which all stem from the realisation that it proves nearly impossible to determine which of the two roles should be a priority. One of the participants' expressions above serves to highlight the difficult negotiations between the notion of the 'good enough mother' and the 'good enough student'.

Relating to this, evidence from literature (e.g. Kubeka, 2016) exists to confirm that student mothers tend to find it hard to balance and fulfil the roles of being a mother and a student simultaneously. This author further states that societal expectations around motherhood (needing to be performed without attention being given to other aspects of life) and student life (also requiring undivided attention) may put student mothers under undue, additional pressure (Kubeka, 2016), as the two roles – for many student mothers – cannot be separated.

As also evident in participants' excerpts was the notion that there are difficulties finding a balance between the two roles (student and mother). To financially sustain livelihoods meant having to adopt an additional layer of responsibility (which entailed having to be a worker or an employee), in order to generate resources deemed critical for their own, the child's, or others'

financial upkeep and well-being. To this end, these roles extended to more than their being just dual, but rather multiple, and made navigating between these roles even more complicated for the student mothers. Quotes below provide illustrative expressions of the multiple roles that these student mothers found themselves having to fulfil.

"I am a mother and a student, but I still work, when I am off [my studies]*, I work, I work. So it's seven days since I started* [working]*, jah".* (FG3: P5)

"So, I do some business too, so I can have money for bus ticket and also to buy things for my child. I do things like beauty. Like uhr … the nails, I plait the hair. I also shape the eyebrows, so also the styling and it makes me some money … it's not easy because I have to study too and it's a lot of work and the money is good. Sometimes they call and say my baby is sick and they don't have the money for the hospital." (FG4: P1)

"… like you are just employed person who is actually [not] *getting paid, but at the same studying."* (FG1: P5)

From the above quotations, it is clear that being a mother in itself may be difficult and becomes even harder when you have to provide financially for yourself and your child while studying. Ngum (2011) identifies the conflicting demands that the different roles impose on student mothers, with societal expectations of being a student mother cited as a factor that brings with it an implied understanding of conflicting roles in being a mother, a student and possibly an employee or businesswomen, all at the same time.

The findings above on the dual, and sometimes multiple, roles that student mothers face were an indication that it is difficult to fulfil more than one role successfully as a student mother. This might point out that student mothers strive to be good in both these roles, itself a task that, for many, proves more than challenging.

4.2.3 Sentiments Regarding Physical Distance from the Child(ren)

The impact of the physical (and psychological) distance from the child while committing to studies at university was dominant in the focus group interviews. Notably, this distance meant missing out on key developmental milestones, which, in their collective view, also adversely affected their bonding with the child. The following participants' expressions highlight the case in point:

> *"but then when you add it with being a student, I feel like it changes the whole game, 'cause we are always like, you always have to study and like at the same time I can't study and worry about my kids at the same time. 'Cause they are at home and I am this side, I feel like I am missing out …. on their like stages as they are growing up, 'cause I am always this side ... so I think ... at the same time it's fun, but then for me, I also feel like it's sad 'cause I feel like I am missing out on a lot on their part."* (FG3: P4)

> *"but when I was at home, he didn't remember me and he will say 'my mum' to my mum ... and I am like 'This is your granny' and my mom is like, 'Suka! [Nonsense!] ... leave the child alone' ... so it's something like that, it's annoying."* (FG3: P3)

> *"I think I agree …, 'cause, like, when I gave birth, I had to come back to* [varsity]*, my baby I think was … three weeks old. … And then* [by] *the time I went back home …, so much had already passed, … my baby was … five months old and for me – on my part – I felt like I had missed* [out] *so much … as a mother."* (FG 1: P4)

Most mothers spoke about the hardships of being away from their children during their studies. They commented on time and distance away from their children and how this influenced their ability to bond with their children. They also reflected on how being away from their children impacts the children's perceptions of them as parents. A particularly salient point that is common in the above excerpts speaks to the idea of a 'diluted' sense of identity as a mother, as well as the overall role confusion pertaining to how they should relate to the child. This is set

against the reality of being geographically distanced from the child and family and how impactful this is on their psychological well-being. Kubeka (2016) echoes these tensions in her study, noting that time and distance apart often result in mothers being sad, and feeling guilty and despondent about parenting. The author further highlights that student mothers are often unable to bond with their children and do not know where to seek support that can assist them to improve their attachment to their children (Kubeka, 2016).

Even when the times or opportunities were available for visiting home (whether it was during weekends, weekdays or holidays) for family commitments or to be with their child(ren), for most student mothers these moments appeared, from the focus group discussions, to not necessarily have been problem free. To this effect, most difficulties pertained to dealing with balancing children's needs and study needs, and that these needs are sometimes in direct conflict with one another. This serves to highlight that the experiences of the competing priorities and demands between a student life and being a mother become even more pronounced with the proximity to the child and family. To this end, most mothers felt that taking care of the needs of their children felt like an 'unwelcome' distraction from their commitment to the studies. Quotes below provide illustrative expressions from student mothers about their difficulties in balancing their responsibilities in terms of their studies and child-rearing, within the home environment.

> *"That's another problem, 'cause for the past two weeks I was at home, because I had to attend my cousin's funeral. Whatever, so I went back to the Eastern Cape, so I had my psychology assignment due which I started while I was at school, right, but then I was like, okay. I will just finish it at home. right … And, tjo, the one time my mom had to leave me with my son, I literally couldn't do anything, I couldn't do the assignment 'cause he keeps like, he is eight months, so he keeps crawling and he keeps on doing. He wants to touch the papers, he wants to do just everything … he is brushing the laptop, everything is*

just a mess and I am like, I can't even breathe because he is just, I can't focus on my school [work] *while he is around."* (FG3: P3)

"I also agree your studies really suffer because you can't just do one thing at a time. Even during tests and exams, you still need to think for your child, and it's always so difficult to focus." (FG4: P2)

The quotes above reflect how student mothers struggle to balance and give attention to their children *and* their studies. Regardless of the fact that their studies are important for a successful future, the participants tended to prioritise motherhood responsibilities over their student responsibilities. Some participants acknowledged that they felt emotional about this tension and that they felt defeated and upset. A study by Hattery (2001) indicated that mothers find it difficult to attend to academic tasks when children need attention. Mothers also have to deal with emotions such anxiety, agitation and guilt that might arise when there are competing demands (Ngum, 2011).

Taking the subject of the competing priorities in the home context further, there appeared to be moments in which participants expressed frustration regarding having to accept the reality that being a mother far outweighs their commitment to the studies, as when emergency cases arose regarding the health and well-being of their child. Not only did some participants have difficulty balancing day-to-day parental responsibilities and the demands of university, they also reported finding it very difficult if their children needed extra attention, such as if the child was ill and needed medical attention. Excerpts below provide illustrative reference to student mothers' difficulties balancing their responsibilities towards their studies and child-rearing.

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"My child is asthmatic, but the other one is fine, the other one just doesn't want to eat, so you have to spend like two hours telling him eat, eat, eat, eat, eat and you have assignments… eat, eat, eat, eat." (FG3: P2)

"So like uhm … this one time, neh, uhm … my daughter was sick and I had to take her to the hospital because my aunt works, I also had to write a test that day. I could not write the test as I was at hospital the whole day." (FG4: P5)

Most student mothers indicated that they struggled to have sufficient time to focus on their studies. The participants gave a clear picture that caring for their children takes precedence over study commitments. The research by Kubeka (2016) similarly found that parental responsibilities, such as attending to children's physical health, generally take precedence over attending to academic demands. The author further states that these roles are often experienced as conflicting (Kubeka, 2016).

Guilt seemed to be one of the feelings that surfaced often when student mothers were sharing their experiences about the demands of studying and parenting. Most participants felt very guilty that they were parenting from a distance and were not actively involved in their children's nurturance and overall upbringing, contrary to what is expected to meet societal expectations of the mother as the primary caregiver. The quotes below illustrate some of the guilt feelings that mothers expressed.

"… also, being a student, you don't, so for me, for instance, I can't do much. But the child is also my responsibility and also even when we are at school; when you think you always have to consider your child." (FG3: P3)

"I don't have, I don't feel like I am ready, actually I don't like my baby." (FG2: P4)

"I can't, because …, I don't want my son, how do I put this … to be a burden [to my family]*."* (FG1:P1)

The student mothers above described how their experiences and guilt seemed to have surfaced more if they had to parent from a distance. These comments showed the deeper emotional burden that comes with being a student mother. They wanted to be good mothers to their children; however, it may have been difficult for them to meet societal expectations. They were faced with frustration, guilt and emotional regrets. Miller (2005) mentions that society defines motherhood in terms of roles and responsibilities; this definition usually influences how student mothers view themselves, and this itself evokes guilt when participants feel that they are not living up to the societally defined notions of motherhood. This not only impacts on their view of self as student mothers, but also their self-esteem and their perceived role in society. Miller (2005) further explains that guilt is closely linked to a sense of ambivalence in student mothers.

The themes discussed above show that the student mother's distance from her child was often experienced as a barrier and complicated her engagement with her studies and fulfilling her role as a mother. Most mothers felt that they did not have a close bond with their children. They also felt guilty that they are not able to conform to societal views of the mother as the primary caregiver. Student mothers have also shared their difficulties in caring for a child when the child is sick. These experiences have contributed to student mothers' feelings of frustration, ambivalence and guilt.

4.2.4 Educational Context

The challenges experienced within the educational context also dominated the focus group discussions, in which participants expressed frustrations regarding what they perceived or deemed as inadequate support on campus, to assist with their academic and personal difficulties. The

quotes below describe some of the student mothers' perceptions around the lack of support that they experienced in the educational context.

> *"No, we don't receive any support from anyone. Every man* (sic) *for themselves here on campus. Even if you book for counselling, you wait for about three months to finally get a consultation. So, nothing at all."* (FG2: P6)

> *"I think they must also increase the counsellor people at the student support because sometimes you go there and it's full, and you have to wait for months before you get help."* (FG4: P7)

The above illustrations highlighted student mothers' struggle to obtain support within the university setting when they felt that it was needed. The counselling services on campus seem to have been under pressure to serve the broader student population, as indicated by the long waiting periods to receive support. The perceived lack of support or inability to access student services available on campus may have contributed to some student mothers' feelings of loneliness and isolation when on campus. Student mothers could not seek professional help outside of campus because they often did not have the financial means to seek help and support from the private sector.

Hallman and Grant (2006) state that counselling services in primary health care, and more specifically on campus, should cater for all students. However, the large numbers of students who need psychological support place the support services under pressure. A study by Pillow (2004), conducted in South Africa, indicated that there are no institutions of higher learning that provide facilities exclusively for students who are also mothers. Pillow (2004) further explains that special accommodations for mothers do exist in some universities in the United States, where student mothers have access to counselling services, can stay in residences with their children and have

access to support groups that focus on student mothers' challenges. These facilities assist mothers to overcome barriers that might affect their studies.

The student mothers participating in the present study further expressed concern about their inability to attend lectures and tutorials, especially when the need arose to prioritise their child or children's needs. The biggest challenge pertained to the difficulties surrounding negotiating 'tight' academic deadlines, and the inflexibility of class attendance and the general academic timetable, to accommodate special situations such as travelling home to spend time with the child. This in turn adversely affected the student mothers' view of the support available to them on campus. A compounding factor in this was the student mothers' sense that, if they travelled home, they would miss out on academic work. They felt that they would not have been able to catch up with the work they had missed – especially given the focus on getting the work done (with the overall sense that the lecturers, in their execution of duties, often did not fully understand the pressures imposed by student motherhood). The participants expressed these concerns below.

> *"I went to one of the lecturers and he was, like, no you have to suck it up and just move … and I am like I am asking for help, and he is like, 'I know but suck it up and because you are here and you are asking for help, I understand that, but you need to put in the work. I will just tell you that I need you to build me a double storey; it's up to you what types of bricks, what type of design. All I want to see is the final product'. So it was hard but now I am adjusted; we have a certain way of doing things".* (FG3: P2)

> *"I think the pressure is also a lot coming from home and also from the school work. I mean the lecturers do not even care if you have a child or not. I mean that is none of their business, and you cannot expect a special favour from them. But they must understand that you have a lot of responsibilities, like being a mother and being a student."* (FG4: P3)

"I touched on it because I feel like we receive no, no, no support. It's just that also, if your lecturers don't like you as well, then you're in deep trouble." (FG2: P5)

Participants, in the above excerpts, expressed how they felt that the systems and personnel are not always supportive, especially where their unique set of challenges is concerned. Lecturers were reported as not being able to identify or even understand the challenges that faced the unique population of student mothers, who felt unsupported in their academic struggles. Student mothers perceived lecturers as unempathic and inattentive to other factors that affect students. These perceptions were linked to the frustration student mothers experienced in the university setting, due to the demands of both their motherhood and studies' roles. It seemed lecturers focus on the context of policy, procedures and learning and teaching, as prescribed by the university. This seemed to be a broader policy issue and needed attention from university policy-makers. According to Ngum (2011), little has been done to communicate with the university's policy-makers about the challenges that student mothers experience. Ngum (2011) further argues that student mothers are affected by these policies and that these policies might have a direct impact on the attitudes of lecturers towards student mothers. Hallman and Grant (2004) confirm these findings by indicating that the biggest hindrance of student mothers' academic success is student motherhood.

Not only were participants worried about the lack of support from their lecturers, but they also expressed the need to be able to attend to their children's needs on campus. They wanted to explore the possibility of child-minding on campus through the use of existing structures to accommodate the child or children on campus. Student mothers were aware of the existence of a crèche on campus and wanted to explore the possibility of accommodating their child or children

on campus while they attend to their academic responsibilities. Most participants expressed the need to have such services accessible to them that catered for their children's needs. The quotes below expressed some of the participants' concerns.

"I also feel that the crèche that is on campus is expensive and I want my child to be close to me when I am attending my lectures ...." (FG2: P2)

"... you know, I was speaking to this other girl a few days ago because she was asking me, is there a crèche on campus, and I said I think there is around the nursing. Somewhere there, there is a crèche." (FG3: P2)

"So, she goes to crèche in the morning and aftercare in the afternoon. So, when I come back from campus, I get her at the aftercare, then my granny helps me with the child." (FG 4: P2)

Student mothers expressed the need to have services available to ensure access to their children while they attend lectures on campus. They also expressed concerns about the financial implications if their child(ren) are able to attend the on-campus crèche. The crèche on campus was more expensive than the normal township rates, which could have been affordable to student mothers. It seemed important to student mothers to have their child or children near them, as this would enable them to fulfil their dual roles with more ease; they would be able to attend to their child(ren)s needs and fulfil their study commitments.

In addition to the need expressed to have their children nearby, participants also expressed the need for support for themselves to alleviate some of the challenges that they are facing as student mothers. They suggested that, to overcome these barriers, support such as support groups for student mothers, workshops on motherhood with a focus on psycho-education, and financial assistance are needed. They stated that support groups would help them to establish the necessary

coping mechanisms to alleviate some of their challenges and help them solve some of the problems they encounter. The participants below articulated some of the mentioned barriers and how they perceived to have overcome them.

> *"I feel like* [there is a need for] *emotional support for me and other student mothers. So, I would say also education for student mothers of how to mother and be a student. To have people like motivational speakers and previous student mothers of how to do it or how they did it."* (FG2: P6)

> *"… as for me I feel like, uh, the support that I want is knowing how other student mothers are coping."* (FG2: P4)

> *"So, I feel like, when it comes to student mothers' support programme, or student mothers' support programmes, they should actually include employment, because a lot of us use NSFAS and NSFAS is not enough. You find that, at the same time, the* [child support] *grant is [R]450".* (FG1: P5)

From the above, participants noted that support on campus would assist them with the necessary coping strategies to enable a better focus on their academic and motherhood needs. They suggested that support in the form of informal gatherings with other student mothers would have been useful for some to learn that their difficulties are shared difficulties. Formal models of support would also have made a huge difference; these could include support in the form of psycho-education, or more formal support groups facilitated by professionals who would be able to understand their difficulties and help them to arrive at working solutions to alleviate some of their difficulties. Additional help in the form of employment opportunities for student mothers could have been of assistance with the generation of funding for them to support themselves and their children. There is also an expressed need for emotional support to assist in balancing the dual roles, as most of the participants are likely to have felt emotionally drained. Workshops

would assist student mothers to gain knowledge and practical skills, and would give the opportunity to listen and learn from others in the same situation.

Overall, mothers felt that they would have valued support from their education context in the form of psychological support, support groups and even child-minding support. The availability of child-minding on campus would have added to their children being safe and close by, and would most probably have given the opportunity to foster closer relationships with their children. This supports the findings by Kushner (2005), who suggested that any form of support for student mothers in the educational context is of value.

4.2.5 Community Safety

A prominent theme, which was probably related to both physical and psychological safety, emerged from the student mothers' concern with the welfare and safety of their children, whom they left in the care of others. In this regard, participants expressed concern for the safety of their children in communities that are characterised by violence. Illustrative quotes below provide examples that highlight student mothers' concerns around their child/ren's safety in the community where they reside.

> *"I also think that being a mother is challenging because I also come from an area where crime is everyday food. I come from [community name removed] and there it's very difficult to even improve yourself. And there's a lot of violence too because people are always fighting. It's also not good for the child to be seeing that every day and as a mother who is also a student, you don't know how to protect your child. She is exposed to a lot of things, like begging on the roads for money, drugs, alcohol and all sorts of things."* (FG4: P6)

> *"I want my child to be close to me when I am attending my lectures because my area is not safe."* (FG2: P5)

"... yes, because there is constant shooting every day and two weeks back, they shot a six-year-old in the head and she died, so every day there is shooting. There doesn't go a day past where there is no shooting; everyday there is shooting and if it's not shooting, it's stabbing or robbery." (FG3: P3)

The above expressions of concern from the student mothers reflected the primacy of their consideration for the safety of their children, where the major concern expressed is that children's exposure on a daily basis to violence and crime from a very young age may be incorporated to influence their norms and values. Of particular note in participants' accounts was their implied helplessness, given the physical distance from their children while being away on campus, over feeling unable to do much in the face of the risks they mention. Participants would rather have had the child or children on campus than in the community where they reside, in order to protect them from the violent neighborhoods. The psychological impact of violence on their children, with the resulting vulnerability of their child(ren) being exposed to everyday criminal activities, was a stark reality, as shared by participants. Miller (2005) substantiates these concerns by suggesting that children are shaped by what they experience. Continuous exposure of children to crime and violence may have dire consequences for them, their aspirations and the communities that they reside in.

4.3 Category Three: Social Support Systems

The third category covers student mothers' understandings of the support systems that were reported as available to alleviate some of the difficulties that they experienced in their quest to fulfil the dual responsibilities of being both a mother and a student. Three themes were identified, which all pertained to the participants' appraisals about material, social and emotional

support received from the father of the child or his family, their immediate as well as extended family, and friends and the community where they reside.

4.3.1 Father of the Child and his Family

Some of the student mothers who took part in the study indicated having received some form of support from their child's father or from his family. In this regard, there seemed to be a collective 'semblance of reprieve' or relief over the fact that parenting was experienced as shared, with the end result being that the participants were better able to manage their multiple roles. The excerpts below provide illustrative accounts of the student mothers' perceptions about the above-mentioned support.

> *"… my son is living with his father's family … so I really can't say it's, I am stranded, or I cannot study. I see him during the weekends."* (FG1: P1)

> *"I had a child with my boyfriend and then he was hit by a car and passed away. So, my child stays at her father's place full time. I, uhm … only go to see her when I go home during holidays and I stay there for a few days … My girl is about to go start crèche and his family promised to take care of her until she is able to stand on her own. I know they love her so much."* (FG4: P4)

> *"Sometimes, his father come and take him to his place for a week or so and bring him back."* (FG4: P6)

Some student mothers expressed that the father of the child or children and their families offered differential support in the absence of the student mothers. The support received from the fathers was reported as having eased the burden of dual roles on the student mothers; this was of great value and made a huge difference. According to Ngum (2011), the primary responsibility for care for the child, especially in cases of fathers being absent in a child's life, has traditionally been

considered the domain of the mother. Contrary to this traditional viewpoint, some student mothers reported differential support from the fathers of their children, and in some instances, this support was received from the immediate family. The fact that some fathers were active parents may have been a facilitator of the student mothers managing their multiple roles.

Despite the above, there were some participants who reported feeling that they did not receive the required or expected support from the fathers of their children; this was identified as a barrier against student mothers functioning optimally in these dual roles and responsibilities. They had to deal with both the physical and financial burden of parenting with no assistance from the fathers of their children, and these circumstances impacted negatively on their ability to balance these roles in the context of their studies. The student mothers' reflections on absent fathers are quoted below.

> *"I just feel like for some not that, like, I never wanted my baby daddy* [father of the child]*, like I never wanted us to be in a relationship but for us to co-parent … So, I feel like he still has grudges over me leaving him, and yet he is putting the hatred to the child; he can't do anything for the child."* (FG1: P5)

> *"I think I last saw him when I gave birth; he only saw the baby once and he never saw him again … And even since then, he never even attempted to make contact to find out how is the baby doing."* (FG1: P2)

For the participant below, it seemed to have been a personal choice for her to exclude the father of the child from the child's life. Thus, the father appears to have been deliberately excluded, which explains why there is a lack of support, particularly from the father described. She did not receive required or expected support from the father of her child, which represented,

and was identified as, a barrier for the student mother to optimally function in these dual roles and responsibilities.

> *"I broke up with her father so he has never seen her, ever in his life, 'cause I never told him I was pregnant. So, uhm … he has no say in my angel's life. So, we have no support from him at all."* (FG4: P5)

In some other cases, there were contextual factors that may explain the absence of fathers in the child's life (for example, community violence resulting in the death of the father), which meant that the support needed would not have been forthcoming.

> *"The father of my child was shot* [and killed] *by one of his girlfriends before the baby was born, so I can't say he even knows he had a child."* (FG4: P6)

While mothers are circumstantially obliged to engage in singlehanded mothering, many fathers are distant from fatherhood roles and responsibility. Mothering necessitates both a physical and emotional obligation, sometimes to the detriment of women's needs (Ngum 2011). Moreover, against the background of societally imposed expectations about gender roles, there is a feeling among women who aspire to the ideals of 'good enough' motherhood that they need to fulfil these obligations well (Pillow 2004), despite the impact the pursuit of these ideals has on their psychological well-being. Many women share a common experience in terms of their respective partners' lack of support for their young children, although in some cases they received financial support (Pillow 2004).

4.3.2 Family Support

Participants emphasised the importance of the role played by immediate and extended family in their children's lives, especially in their absence. In some instances, immediate and extended families appeared to be sources of support for the student mothers in their pursuit of education and to assist with child-minding business.

> *"I have my aunt who looks after the child and send*[s] *me the money for the school."* (FG2: P2)

> *"My family was supportive during these changes, but it's not like I can go back to my old* [pre-motherhood] *life."* (FG3: P7)

> *"They* [family] *are always willing to provide for me whenever they can; so I can say when it comes to my extended families, they are quite supportive."* (FG1: P2)

Participants received support from the family and extended family in different forms, including financial support. It was clear that participants understood the importance of the support from their families and how it may have facilitated their time and dedication to their studies. It may have also assisted them to direct most of their attention to their studies, as they had little to worry about where their child-minding was concerned.

Sharply contrasted to the above was the experience shared by some participants that support was sometimes absent from family and extended family members. Participants related experiences where they fell pregnant at a young age and that family members and extended family members found it difficult to offer support. Some of the experiences of participants on the perceived lack of support are conveyed below.

> *"Even though my parents think I have disappointed them so badly that they cannot accept my child, I feel that I need to prove that having a child is not the end of the road ...*

[They said] *'you have disappointed the whole family and mostly us as your parents'."* (FG4: P4)

"I think it's much better for them if you [have support]*, because my mother is not supporting me."* (FG2: P3)

"My parents … feel I have disappointed them so much. They don't send me the money for school. They say they only take care of the child because it is my child." (FG4: P1)

Although some student mothers received support from their family and extended family, there were student mothers who reported that the lack of support has left them stranded and struggling in the execution of their dual roles. From some participants' accounts, parents were reluctant to support the participants because of the disappointment they felt, and they may have been withholding support as a form of punishment to student mothers because they did not meet societal expectations of only falling pregnant when they were able to attend to the child's needs. The families' reluctance to provide support made it difficult for the student mothers to cope with the challenges of their situation. At times, the student mothers felt that the shift of attention from supporting them to rather supporting their children left *them* feeling unsupported. There appears to be a gap in the literature with regard to research being done in terms of support for student mothers from family and extended family.

4.3.3 Friends and Community

Support from friends and the community seemed to play a vital role in helping student mothers to fulfil their dual roles. The participants indicated that they did receive support from their friends and community members, as denoted by the saying: "It takes a village to raise a child". Peer and community support was reported as having assisted the mothers to relate and talk about the challenges that they experienced with regard to their studies, but more importantly about

their parenting. It helped them normalise some of the challenges that they experienced. Peer and community support assisted them to speak and even relate to others' similar experiences. This support was usually available without a fear of judgment or rejection. The student mothers' reflections on the value of friendships are seen below.

> *"She* [a friend] *is just always there, whenever I wanna like talk about my situation or about my child or whatsoever, she is just always there, giving advice and everything."* (FG1: P1)

> *"In my area, there are many of us who have babies and the people that are the same age as me, uhm uhm."* (FG2: P5)

Some participants expressed valuing friendships and community members who were not judgmental and who gave advice when necessary. The support from friends and community made the student mothers feel they were valued and gave them a sense of belonging. It seemed that some of the participants came from communities where it is unusual to have a baby at a young age. The acceptance that they experienced from friends and peers fostered a sense of belonging to the community.

In contrast, some participants highlighted having friends and community members who were experienced as unsupportive. In this regard, there is the implied notion that the journey from pregnancy, childbirth and through to motherhood was subjectively experienced as a socially isolating one, especially given the disruptions and loss of key interpersonal and peer relationships in contexts where this journey is traversed alone. Some participants reported that they lost friends when they fell pregnant and were not able to count on their friends for needed support during their studies, highlighting the psychological distance that they reported having experienced between

themselves and their friends and community members. The student mothers' reflections on the loss of friendships are reflected below.

> *"Ah, I lost my friend, when I was pregnant. When I gave birth* [in] *2017 December, so after that I didn't have friends ever since then. Yep, I really need friends ... they* [friends] *didn't want to go out with me anymore, 'cause I had, you know* [a child]*."* (FG1: P1)
>
> *"My friends started spreading rumours about me, saying all sorts of negative things ... I also had a baby in high school ... and all of them ... when I became pregnant, ... just became so distant."* (FG1: P2)

The dynamic of friendships was also witnessed by student mothers, who, at some point, needed a friend to talk to but only found friends who were judgmental and friends who seemed to lack an understanding of the complexity that student motherhood brings. Lack of peer support could have left participants with feelings of being judged and a loss of their sense of self. Participants reported feeling despondent about friends who appeared to be judgmental, perceiving that these friendships may not have been genuine.

In addition to the lack of support in the form of absent fathers, family, friends and community, student mothers also reported that they had to deal with the stigma attached to being a young mother. Most student mothers who had an unexpected pregnancy felt that they did not meet societal expectations. They felt that they were judged at home, within their social groups and their communities because they fell pregnant and had to contend with being a mother at a young age. Some of the perceptions of the student mothers regarding the stigma attached to young mothers are stated below.

> *"... 'cause their* [friends'] *parents were like, 'Don't go out with that child' 'cause she is gonna teach you this and that so."* (FG1: P2)

"I still remember I went to [my friend's] *house and her father is like, 'Leave my house; you will influence my child to get pregnant'."* (FG1: P5)

"From my father's side, they always tell my cousins, 'No, you can't stay with [P1] *cause she will influence you to have a baby' and stuff."* (FG1: P1)

The quotes above related to student mothers' reflections on the tension that existed between them falling pregnant and the societal expectations that motherhood needs to be linked to commitment or marriage. In this regard, Ngum (2011) highlights that student mothers are held captive by societal and cultural expectations that one has to be in a committed relationship to be a good parent. It was evident that, within the community, there were parents who were worried about the influence the student mothers may have on their children. This may have stemmed from the stigma attached to early pregnancy and how societal expectations are imposed on young student mothers. Interestingly, the student mothers seemed to have been challenging this stigma by reconstructing societal expectations to conform to their own expectations. In advocating for the self-empowerment of mothers and women in general, Kushner (2005) suggests that, given that it is society that sets out expectations for mothers, it is therefore mothers who should set out their own expectations.

Student mothers seemed to be a vulnerable group who required support from the baby's father, family members, friends, university and the broader community to assist with child-rearing practices, as well as financial and emotional support to enable them to persevere with their studies. A lack of support from these groups was perceived as a barrier to being successful in both roles as a student and as a mother.

4.4 Theoretical Formulation

The theoretical framework utilised by the study was the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), an update to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory. The findings of the study are interpreted and discussed within the framework of the PPCT model as follows.

4.4.1 Process

The proximal systems for this study that were closely related to the student mother were her child/ren, the father of the child/ren, her parents, family members, peers, the community that she stays in, as well as the institution of study. Student mothers expressed the need to interact with and receive support from all of the identified systems. If the father was absent or deceased, student mothers were more dependent on other systems, such as their family or extended family, to provide support.

The findings have indicated that it is important to the student mothers to bond with their children. For some, due to the geographical distance between them and their children, it was difficult to achieve this. For those who did have time to bond with their children, it was not always easy to form that bond because of the time they had spent apart from their children. This impacted on how student mothers perceived themselves as mothers. Some student mothers indicated that their children viewed them more as their siblings than as mothers, and that this was upsetting and frustrating for them. It is clear that, when mothers did not have regular contact with their children, the familial roles and the relationship between the mother and her child became blurred, even shifting to a sibling relationship. This might even have contributed to a sense of loss of identity in terms of motherhood for the student mothers.

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The interactions of student mothers with the fathers of their children were also deemed important. Although some of the fathers of the children were present and played an active role in their children's lives, most of the fathers of the children were absent or deceased, and this contributed to student mothers' isolation and heightened their sense of responsibility towards their children. Generally, student mothers found it difficult to balance their dual roles, as their children's needs were seen as primary whilst the studies had to take a secondary place. This contributed to mothers feeling frustrated, sad and despondent about their dual responsibilities.

In addition to the limited support that student mothers received from the fathers of their children, support from family members was also lacking, or conditional, in many instances. Parents were struggling to come to terms with their daughters having children at a fairly young age. Some of the parents were also unable to distance themselves from societal and cultural beliefs about marriage, motherhood and the role that education might play in their children and grandchildren's futures. In many instances, the student mothers expressed guilt and concern about their parents' reactions and were disappointed about the perceived lack of support from their parents. However, a few student mothers did receive support from parents and family members and, generally, this support contributed to their ability to care for their children and to cope with the demands of their studies.

In addition to their interaction with family members, some student mothers also reported that peers and friends impacted negatively on their experiences of student motherhood. Student mothers reported that friends or peers, contrary to the expectation that they would be supportive, added to their experience of stigma by being judgemental about them becoming mothers at a relatively young age. Some student mothers found it difficult to

share some of their challenges with friends and peers, most probably because these peers and friends could not relate to student mothers and the difficulties that they experience in the multiple roles that they have to fulfil.

The findings also emphasised that student mothers faced various contextual barriers such as residing in low socio-economic communities where crime is a prominent factor. Their child's and the family's safety and the financial difficulties that they have to endure were engrained in the reflections that they made about their experiences. The environment where they were raised, and where their children and families still reside, created anxiety and worry for the student mothers.

Student mothers also gave feedback about their interaction with the institutions and the lecturers where they received training. Most of student mothers indicated that they had had interactions with their lecturers that negatively impacted on their studies. Some of them expressed that support was lacking and that lecturers were unable to acknowledge or understand the unique situation that they faced as student mothers. They expressed a need for better communication and support from their lecturers and ultimately also from the training institution.

From the above, it is evident that interactions between the various systems are important to student mothers to enable them to balance personal, familial and training needs. In many instances, a lack of interaction (or poor-quality interactions) brought disequilibrium and challenges for student mothers in their attempts to fulfil the multiple roles that they have to perform as student mothers.

4.4.2 Person

According to Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, the person is the student mother with all her biological and psychological characteristics (including age, gender, appearance, intelligence, skills and perseverance) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The *demand characteristics* are biological, which in this study included the age and gender of the student mother. The study included student mothers who were between the ages of 18 and 22. The student mothers were in the early adulthood developmental phase, where it was deemed crucial for them to have established a sense of identity. Important to note is that this developmental phase of identity formation is usually more centred on individual growth focused on becoming independent and responsible, and procuring a better future for oneself by means of studying or working. It does not usually include being a mother and taking care of a child or children (Jacobs & Collair, 2017). The *resource characteristics*, in this case, could arguably be deemed as constituting the student mothers' intellectual capacity and overall functioning, given their collective occupational status of being enrolled at university. The fact that they were registered for a degree at a university suggests they have the capacity to engage in tasks requiring a wide range of the cognitive, emotional, and problem-solving skills required to function optimally and sustain their lives at university. From the results of the study, it was clear that, although the student mothers' academic ability was generally seen as a facilitator to enable coping, in many instances, her ability was impacted by external and contextual factors. Factors such as a lack of finances, lack of support from significant others including the father, parents and friends, as well as lack of support from the institution of study, added pressure and impacted negatively on the student mother's ability to engage with learning demands utilising her perceived skills in the cognitive domain.

While some mothers had some form of financial presence or assistance, others were faced with financial constraints. The student mothers' lack of finances not only impacted negatively on their studies but also on their children's lives, because in some instances, student mothers had to start small businesses to provide for their children, indicating a split in time and focus. Based on these findings, the lack of finances had a negative impact on student mothers and how they parent their children, as well as how they engaged with their studies.

The *force characteristics* comprise the student mothers' internal motivation to use their pursuit of studying to ensure a better future for themselves and their children. Most student mothers indicated that they were motivated to be 'good enough' mothers to their children and to pursue their studies to ensure financial stability to better their own and their children's circumstances. It also included her sense of dedication or passion towards being a mother but also her view of academic success and the perceived importance of education in her life. In general, the student mothers displayed resilience, but most mothers also expressed feelings of sadness, frustration and uncertainty about their ability to cope with the demands of the dual roles that they had to fulfil.

4.4.3 Context

In this study, the context included the home, the community where the mother resides and the context of their university of study. These contexts constituted the different contexts in which 'the person' or the student mother functioned. The home context included the presence or absence of significant others to assist the mother to fulfil her duties as a mother. This home context has been explored and reported upon in detail in the summary section above.

The community context included the broader contextual factors that might have impacted the student mothers' ability to fulfil the dual roles of student mother. These included the area where student mothers and their children were residing. Student mothers gave various accounts of how violence in their community contributed to a lack of safety, how restrictive access to health care affected their ability to keep their children healthy, and how a lack of finances impacted on their ability to take care of their children, to name a few. Another important aspect that affected support available for the student mothers was the specific beliefs, norms and stereotypes within the community. It was apparent that student mothers had to cope with societal norms such as to "not to have children at a young age" and/or "not to have children while you are single". They also had to deal with the pressures to conform to gender roles and the changes in gender roles, for example, that women are still expected to be mothers, but must assume financial responsibilities as well.

These ways of thinking were identified as potential barriers, as many of the mothers were often not able to seek support from friends and sometimes even family members because they held some of these beliefs or were influenced by others who held these beliefs. From the brief discussion on community as a context, it can be seen that various community factors also impacted students' perceptions of student motherhood and the support that they offered.

On a broader level, 'context' also speaks about the context of the university, where the mothers were registered as undergraduate students at the University of the Western Cape. The University of the Western Cape is a historically disadvantaged university which accommodates students from different parts of South Africa and abroad. The student mothers were a heterogeneous group of mothers from different cultural and societal backgrounds.

Their religious beliefs and cultural practices influenced their ways of relating to the fathers of their children, and their relationships with their children and their parents. It also affected their sense of responsibility and drive to complete their studies. For example, some mothers spoke about the payment, by the father, of 'damages' to the family of the student mother to acknowledge that he had made their daughter pregnant. Customs were ingrained into the responses of the student mothers.

Many student mothers experienced challenges in the higher education context. They found it difficult to cope with the demands of the courses that they were registered for and generally expressed a need for support to deal with the challenges that simultaneous motherhood and studying brought. For some of the mothers, the difficulties were very personal and impacted their perception of themselves of not being able to 'be a mother' at all. The challenges left them frustrated and hopeless. On an organisational level, the lack of clear policy, strategies and guidelines to inform support for student mothers was also seen as a possible barrier that student mothers had to contend with.

4.4.4 Time

The data was collected during a time when there were protests on campus with regard to off-campus student accommodation. The university released a statement that they would be unable to accommodate UWC students on certain off-campus residences the following year because these residences had been privatised by Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), an institution nearby UWC. Although classes still took place, the protests had a significant effect on student attendance, as most students were concerned for their personal safety should classes be disrupted. The focus groups were held during this time, and student mothers seemed anxious about the possible disruption of the groups.

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Although some of the student mothers had studied and experienced similar protests such as the 'Fees Must Fall' campaign on campus, the protests were generally seen as disruptive, and student mothers expressed concern about their safety.

It is important to acknowledge that the data was collected from a group of young mothers who were facing challenges on various levels, including their developmental life stage. Young adulthood is generally seen as a stage where one needs to move towards being independent and that one needs to assume responsibility for oneself. Most of the student mothers were finding it challenging to function independently, as they were not able to work to earn a living to support themselves and their offspring. They had the responsibilities of studying and providing for their children, making it difficult for them to navigate their way through young adulthood.

The focus group interviews took place on weekdays and during official scheduled lecture hours, and student mothers would schedule an hour and a half to attend the focus group interview before rushing off to attend their lectures. This might have contributed to a lack of concentration and focus on the topic at hand, and might have provoked some anxiety and stress. Factors already mentioned such as the protests further exacerbated their perceived stress.

The above discussion emphasised how process, person, context and time interacted to contextualise student mothers' experiences of motherhood and of being a student. It highlighted the many challenges that they face. With these challenges in mind, the focus now shifts to a brief summary of the possible support structures across contexts that need to be considered as support to student mothers.

An engagement between the place of study and student mothers to better understand their unique challenges and needs in the academic context may provide relevant role players with additional information to review and revise policies. These policies and strategies can assist relevant role-players to establish support structures for student mothers to enable them to engage more optimally within the learning environment. For example, the policy that pregnant women cannot stay in campus residences could be reviewed to accommodate women with children. In addition, the provision of family responsibility leave or accommodations for assignment deadlines or special tests might also be a consideration to assist student mothers when the need arises.

The student mothers did mention that institutional support was available in the form of individual counselling, support groups, bursaries and opportunities to exercise as ways to alleviate stress. However, there were long waiting periods for accessing counselling, in particular. Some student mothers expressed the need to have a better understanding of available assistance that their place of study can provide in terms of funding opportunities.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the themes revealed the tensions and challenges experienced by student mothers, as they strived to meet their motherhood and student responsibilities and, for some, work responsibilities. In their struggles to meet societal expectations, they placed themselves under extreme physical and emotional stress. For some, by voicing their experiences, they were trying to make sense of motherhood and all the challenges that come with it. It became evident when the transcripts were analysed that there were some commonalities in the challenges experienced by the student mothers who participated in this study. It was also evident that the concept of dual

roles is complex and cannot only be advocated for by just one study, as this study in particular could not reach the whole student mother population.

The theme of perceptions of motherhood gives us a clear indication that motherhood is expected to be innate but this was not always the case for some of the student mothers. The theme demonstrated the huge effort student mothers make to fulfil both roles as mothers as well as students. As mothers, they often give up their own needs and sacrifice their wants to fulfil the needs of their children first. This conflict of needs usually makes life even more difficult for student mothers. Student mothers generally pursue their studies under huge financial and emotional strain.

As evident in the findings, most student mothers strive to be good enough mothers to their children and simultaneously try to be diligent in their studies. Being a mother and a student proves to be demanding and exhausting, bringing unique sets of challenges to the fore. These challenges pertain to motherhood, family, friends, community and university. The findings also showed that some student mothers receive support from family members, friends and the university, whilst other student mothers still struggle to find adequate support. The need for ongoing support from family members, friends, community and the university were evident in student mothers' responses. On a broader front, expected compliance with societal expectations, such as marriage before pregnancy, or studies before motherhood, needs to be challenged continuously.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction to the chapter

This section provides an executive summary of the findings of the study. The overall aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of student mothers, with the research objectives being focused on the exploration of student mothers' perceptions of motherhood, their challenges with regard to motherhood, their educational context and their support system, and their understandings of the importance of education. The objectives and findings served as the overarching framework for the delineation of the executive summary.

5.1.1 Student Mothers' Perceptions of Motherhood

Student mothers' perceptions of motherhood were closely linked to the dual roles that they had to cope with. Many of the student mothers perceived motherhood as providing a motivation to fulfil their aspirations and to complete their studies. The findings emphasised that some student mothers showed resilience in this regard. The common denominator that motivated them to persevere was that they want to ensure better lives for their children and themselves. They viewed challenges as growth opportunities, to be embraced to become better versions of themselves. Overall, the student mothers seemed motivated to pursue their studies, to ensure a better future for themselves and their children, even if they had to persevere through challenges and hardships.

However, some student mothers experienced motherhood as an added burden, adversely affecting their pursuit to obtain a tertiary education. They experienced motherhood as time-consuming and demanding. Student mothers were aware of the impact that their pregnancy and

motherhood had on their family, with some noting the perceived disappointment experienced (and sometimes, expressed) by their parents. Most student mothers perceived motherhood as stressful, as it added to their sense of responsibility; they had to balance studies, self-care and motherhood. Motherhood, and especially student motherhood, was found to have left most student mothers feeling ambivalent, frustrated and guilty about the dual roles that they had to fulfil. They wanted to pursue their studies to guarantee a better life for themselves and their children, but were faced with numerous challenges and limitations due to the duality of roles and responsibility that being a mother and student brought.

5.1.2 Student Mothers' Challenges Concerning Motherhood, Their Studies and Their Support Systems

Student mothers identified challenges in three distinct areas, namely challenges that pertain to *motherhood*, challenges that pertain to their *studies* and challenges that pertain to their *support systems*.

Challenges experienced in the domain of motherhood

Student mothers identified finances as a prominent barrier. Most student mothers were unable to generate an income during their studies. For those who were able to assume the burden of multiple roles such as to work and study, working added to their perceived stress and interfered with their studies by demanding additional time or attention, causing more stress. This impacted significantly on their ability to take care of, and to provide for, their children.

Most of the mothers in the study were single parents, as some of the fathers of the children were unable to provide or either (or both) physical and financial support to them. Contextual factors, such as the death of some of the fathers, also contributed to the mothers' struggles. This meant that mothers had to deal with the pressures of mothering, studying and provision of finance,

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security and other needs, without the assistance of significant others such as the child's father. This placed a significant burden on mothers, especially if support from other sources was also lacking.

Mothers also felt that they were unprepared for the changes and challenges that motherhood brought and that their studies affected their ability to bond with their children. The student mothers indicated that they were challenged by not being prepared to manage and navigate between the roles of being a student and a mother. They indicated that student motherhood is demanding and challenging, and requires a lot of time and attention. They expressed that student motherhood raised expectations in both the domain of motherhood and of being a student. One of the perceived challenges that was expressed was the struggle to bond with their child(ren). Bonding was generally perceived as difficult due to the physical distance that existed between the mother and the child. This physical distance also contributed to emotional distance, and feelings of guilt, on the part of the student mother.

Some of the mothers also expressed difficulties in assuming the role of mother, because they were unprepared to assume this role at such a young age. In most cases, being unprepared, experiencing challenges, and being affected by emotions such as guilt, sadness and a sense of regret, made it difficult for mothers to focus on their studies. These feelings were exacerbated when support from the father, family, friends, community and the institution where they studied were perceived as lacking.

Challenges experienced in the domain of their studies

Student mothers generally expressed that they experienced challenges with regard to support structures at university. Student mothers felt that institutional support was lacking and that the challenges they face as student mothers were not always seen or understood by the

training institution. They also felt that their studies were demanding, making it difficult to attend to their children's needs. Most student mothers expressed that they did not feel that enough physical and emotional support was made available by the training institution. They felt worried, and expressed the view that the dual roles of being a mother and a student were difficult to balance and that an understanding of these roles was not always apparent from those involved in their training.

Challenges experienced within their support systems

Some student mothers had the support from their family, fathers of their child/ren, and community and/or the institution where they were studying. However, there were those who received little to no support from the mentioned support systems. As already stated, the dual roles were perceived as challenging, and support lacking, and despite dedication and resilience, student mothers expressed difficulties coping. As already alluded to, support, especially from the fathers of the children, was indicated to be of importance to student mothers. Additionally, the support from immediate or extended family was perceived as essential to alleviate stress, especially in the absence of the father.

Although most student mothers were determined to be good mothers to their children, they felt that they were unable to attend to work and child-minding demands if they received little to no support from their family members. However, some student mothers highlighted that they did receive support from their families and that it made a significant difference, affording them more time to spend on their studies. There were also student mothers who reported conditional support, which depended on whether they contributed financially to the household where the child resided. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that student mothers experienced a number of

personal and familial challenges as student mothers in the attempts to balance personal, familial and educational needs.

5.1.3 Student Mothers' Understanding of the Importance of Education

Almost all of the student mothers agreed on the importance of education and qualifications as a means to ensure a better future for themselves and their children. Student mothers were generally concerned that their responsibilities towards their children sometimes distracted them from their responsibilities concerning their studies. They mentioned that they sometimes missed classes, were unable to meet assignment deadlines, and thus risked failing modules, when children's needs needed to take precedence. In these difficult times, the perception was often that the university, departments and lecturers were not understanding or even aware of the challenges that they experience, with little regard for the personal context of the student. Furthermore, policies around allowance for recourse and flexibility if they experience barriers were often lacking, departmentally and institutionally. The lack of policies to guide lecturers and administrators might have been experienced as a barrier, as lecturers could not be guided on how to accommodate student mothers, for example, by providing an extension if a child has been sick.

The barriers at home and at university left most student mothers in situations where they felt helpless and hopeless in both contexts. They felt that they were unable to negotiate the dual roles that they found themselves in. Student mothers agreed that it was difficult to balance the demands of mothering with the demands of studying. Thus, although education was seen as a means to a better future, the reality of their focus on their studies, and how this distracted them from being present in their children's lives, was a difficulty that they were not able to negotiate successfully.

5.3 Strengths of the Study

It could be argued that conducting a study on a largely under-researched terrain (such as the student mothers' perceptions on motherhood) presents its challenges as such research builds on a limited set of benchmark studies. Despite the challenges of venturing into an unfamiliar research area, the present study had some strengths that were worth highlighting. Not only will these strengths assist in bridging the knowledge gap that currently exists, but will also allow for future research studies to explore the topic further, and for identification of an appropriate theoretical framework to be used.

Firstly, the present study addressed the noted gap in literature pertaining to student mothers' experiences at university level, in contrast to previous studies that have largely focussed on teenage motherhood. Therefore, the study has contributed to the South African and international literature concerning student mothers' perceptions and lived experiences of student motherhood in the higher education context. Within this field, the study contributed to the knowledge of the importance (and difficulties) of balancing the dual roles of mother and student, as well as employee at times. It has highlighted the importance of finding pathways for harmonising these roles to maximise a better functioning of student mothers within the context of higher education.

Secondly, the use of focus group interviews allowed the study to achieve its exploratory goal, by yielding insights into the student mothers' lived experiences, especially from the vantage point of enabling an atmosphere for shared student experiences pertaining to student motherhood (and for connecting with fellow student mothers on common matters). The focus group interviews allowed for the study to access more participants than individual interviews would have allowed,

thus providing a collaborative, supportive, and mutually validating space that they may not have experienced by means of a one-to-one interview format.

Thirdly and finally, on the theoretical level, the study has made a contribution by identifying a relevant theoretical framework that may be utilised to formulate objectives for future studies. The study has identified the PPCT model as an appropriate theory to understand the developmental outcomes of student mothers through four components: 1) process; 2) person; 3) context; and 4) time, and through where this model positions student mothers in each of the systems. It is hoped that this study will assist other researchers to continue to focus their research on student mothers.

5.3 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the strengths of the study, there were certain limitations that were worth highlighting in the context of research. A few salient limitations are discussed here, in conjunction with the recommendations upon which future research could be conceptualised.

Firstly, focus group interviews may have limited the exploration of the topic by engaging around shared perceptions and experiences, and this may have limited individual expression or perceptions. Some participants might have adjusted their contributions to be more agreeable to the group, and thus, expression of individual opinions may have been limited. The individual views may have been more clearly elicited in one-on-one interviews. As such, it is recommended that future research on the topic could utilise a triangulated research method that includes both focus group and individual interviews, to ensure the diversity of views is more accurately captured.

Secondly, the study was limited to undergraduate students and excluded postgraduate students; thus, it is impossible to ascertain if the data obtained reflected the undergraduate student

mothers' experiences only, or whether these were also shared by student mothers in general (regardless of the undergraduate-postgraduate divide). To determine if there may be some transferability of the undergraduate student mothers' experiences to those of the postgraduate cohort, future research could be made more inclusive by focussing on the experiences of both undergraduate and postgraduate student mothers.

Thirdly, this study focused on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood and, by virtue of this, it excluded the father's perceptions and the perceptions of other people centrally involved in the upbringing and nurturance of the children around whom the experiences and perceptions of motherhood in the present study were solicited. Therefore, future research could include the perceptions of fathers, as well as other stakeholders in the student mothers' life, including parents and/or the primary caregivers of the child, friends, members of the community, or lecturers, to get a more holistic picture of the unique experiences of student mothers.

Fourthly and finally, by the very nature of this having been a qualitative research study, which explored experiences of student motherhood, it was not possible to quantify the nature of any statistical relationships between variables identified. Future research could adopt quantitative research methods to investigate the nature of the relationships between the variables that have been identified (such as stress, self-esteem and anxiety). This would require a larger sample size, in order to be able to generalise the findings. Moreover, to overcome the potential limitations of either method, mixed-methods studies could be used, employing both qualitative and quantitative research procedures. This would enable the exploration of subjective experiences, while also quantifying the nature of the relationships between the identified variables of interest.

5.4 Implications for Intervention

In a concluding note, it is important for psychological research (i.e. a study dealing with, and focusing on, such psychological issues as perceptions and experiences of student motherhood for those enrolled at institutions of higher learning in South Africa) to highlight the practical implications for interventions based on the main findings from the present study. These interventions are aimed at augmenting the functioning of the student mothers while studying.

Firstly, initiating interventions for student mothers is a noted area of need. These could entail, for instance, specific support groups for student mothers, with pre- and post-study research to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The student mothers found it beneficial to able to share their experiences, and even their engagement within the focus group as a form of support group speaks to the need for support groups specifically catering to student mothers. This intervention was also recommended in a similar study at a different institution (Kubeka, 2016).

Secondly, it is suggested that parenting workshops would be of assistance to enhance the student mothers' knowledge about children and their development. Most student mothers highlighted the challenges embedded in parenting while also studying, this alone being a possible consequence of not having been ready or prepared for parenthood. Such workshops could enhance their understanding of motherhood and help them to set realistic expectations with regard to their role as mothers and their performance as students. In addition, they would help student mothers find a balance in the execution of the two roles, and better understand their child's developmental milestones and needs.

Thirdly, interventions could prioritise the creating of mother-child bonding environments within the available platforms for student mothers, in order to narrow the geographical and temporal gap characteristically defines the mostly detached relationship with their offspring

(owing to the academic demands of being a student). Possibilities pertaining to the development of child-friendly spaces within the educational institutions (as part of the Student Wellness Programmes) could be explored. For example, while not always practically possible due to the perpetually constrained university fiscus to augment infrastructural development, temporary child-care centres (crèches or child-visitation spaces) on campus could accommodate student mothers' needs for connecting with their children during planned and regulated visits. This would allow their children a safe space and the necessary stimulation to develop optimally. This may give the student mothers peace of mind concerning their children's safety, allowing them to focus better on their studies. However, this would need to be affordable for student mothers and feasible for the academic programming of the educational institutions in which they are enrolled.

Fourth and finally, student-specific, targeted workshops covering study skills, and financial and time management would be beneficial to them in managing their multiple responsibilities of being both a student and a mother. The workshops could assist them beyond their time at university, and the knowledge and skills developed thereby could be transferred from one generation to another.

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Appendix A1
Information Sheet

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Project Title: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

What is this study about?

The study aims to explore student mothers' perceptions of motherhood. The topic on student mothers' and how they perceive motherhood has been under researched. Therefore, an exploratory study on how they perceive motherhood and how they could be supported to successfully manage and balance the dual roles is of importance.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to partake in a semi-structured focus group at a time most convenience for you that will take up to an hour at most. The interview questions are aimed at gaining knowledge on the student mothers' perceptions of motherhood.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher aims to ensure your confidentiality in this study, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym on the collected data. The use of pseudonym will assist the researcher to link the collected data to the participant involved. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the identification key.

The researcher aims to ensure confidentiality as well. The audio-recording and notes will be kept in a safe place where only the researcher and supervisor will have access. All transcribed scripts will be kept in the password-protected computer. Data collected will be made available to the public by means of thesis publication.

What are the risks of this research?

All research relating to human interactions carries a form of risk with it. As a researcher, the aim is to reduce any possible risks and aim to assist in any regard should the participant feel uncomfortable in any manner during the process of participation. Where necessary, referrals will

be made to appropriate professionals for further assistance. For example, should you feel acute emotional discomfort (by extreme sadness, guilt or dejection), we will set up an appointment for you to see a psychologist at the University's Centre for Student Counselling Services (CSSS).

It is important to note that this research is merely for research purposes only.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the outcomes will help to generate knowledge surrounding the perceptions of student mothers on motherhood.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

All participation in the research is voluntary. You do have the right to deny the request for participant. Should you decide to partake in the research, you may stop participating at any time with no consequences of your withdrawal from the study.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Unarine Nembanzheni at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Unarine Nembanzheni at 3774452@myuwc.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. (REFERENCE NUMBER: HS19/5/15*)*

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INLIGTINGS DOKUMENT

Titel van die projek: Moeders se persepsies oor moederskap: 'n Verkennende studie.

Fokus van die studie:

The studie poog om moeders se perspepsies oor moederskap te ondersoek. Die tema oor moeders se persepsies het min aandag ontvang in navorsing tot op hede. Daarom word hierdie verkennende studie gedoen ten einde inligting in te win oor moeders se persepsies met die einddoel om hulle te ondersteun om die balans tussen studie en moederskap meer effektief te hanteer.

Wat word van my verwag as ek instem om deel te neem:

Jy sal gevra word om deel te neem aan 'n semi-gestruktureerde fokusgroep. Die groep sal plaasvind in 'n tydsgleuf wat geskik is vir jou. Die fokusgroep sal omtrent 'n uur duur. Die fokus vrae sal gerig wees daarop om student se kennis en persepsies oor moederskap te ondersoek.

Sal my deelname aan die groep vertroulik wees?

Die navorser se doelwit is om vertroulikheid te verseker. Jou naam sal verwang word met 'n pseudo-naam. Die gebruik van die pseudo-naam sal die navorser instaat stel om die data aan jou response te koppel. Slegs die navorser en haar supervisors sal toegang het tot die identifikasie sleutel.

Die navorser sal onder all omstandighede poog om vertroulikheid te verseker. Die audio-opnames en notas sal in 'n veilige plek gestoor word. Dit sal net toegangklik wees vir die navorser en haar supervisors. Alle transkripsies sal met 'n wagwoord beskerm word op die rekenaar. Die data sal deur middel van publikasies aan die publiek bekend gestel word.

Is daar enige risikos betrokke in the navorsing?

Alle navorsing wat van menslike interaksies gebruik maak dra 'n sekere vormvan risiko. Die navorser sal probeer om die risiko so lag as moontlik te prober hou en daardeur te poog om jou

so gemaklik as moontlik te laat voel en te laat deelneem aan die navorsing. Waar nodig, sal daar verwysings gemaak word na geskikte proffesionele persone om hulp te verleen indien nodig. Die Sentrum vir Student Ondersteuning by die Universteit Wes Kaap is een moontlike verwysingsbron wat gebruik kan word indien verwysing nodig mag wees.

Dit is belangrik om te weet dat hierdie navorsing net gemik is op navorsing aleenllik.

Wat is die voordele van hierdie navorsing?

Die navorsing is nie bedoel om jou persoonlik te help nie, maar die uitkomste mag hou help om nuwe insigte te vorm oor persepsies van studente aangaande moederskap.

Word ek gedwing om aan die navorsing deel te neem? Kan ek ter enige tyd onttrek indien ek wil?

Deelname aan die navorsing is vrywillig. Jy het die reg om ter enige tyd te onttrek indien jy wil sonder enige negatiewe gevolge. Jy het ook die reg om te weier om aan die navorsing deel te neem.

Wat moet ek doen as ek vrae het?

Die navorsing word gedoen deur Unarine Nembanzheni van die Universiteit van die Wes Kaap. Indien jy enige vrae kan jy haar kontak by 3774452@myuwc.ac.za.

Indien jy enige vrae het oor die studie en jou regte as 'n deelnemer of as jy enige probleme ervaar en dit wil raporteer, kontak asb my supervisors by die Sielkunde Department:

>Dr. Erica Munnik
>University of the Western Cape
>Private Bag X17
>Bellville 7535
>emunnik@uwc.ac.za
>
>Prof Nceba Z. Somhlaba
>University of the Western Cape
>Private Bag X17
>Bellville 7535
>nsomhlaba@uwc.ac.za
>
>Hoof van die Departement
>Dr. Maria Florence
>mflorence@uwc.ac.za
>Tel: 0219592453
>Fax: 0219593515

Dekaan: **Prof. A. Rhoda**
Dekaan van die Fakulteit van Gemeenskaps en Gesondheids Wetenskappe
Universiteit van die Wes Kaap
Privaatsak X17
Bellville 7535
chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Contact Details:
University of the Western Cape
Robert Sobukwe Road
Top Floor – C Block, Room 28
BELLVILLE
Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa
7535
Tel: 0219592948/49/88/ or 0219592709

Hierdie navorsing is goedgekeur deur die Universiteit van die Wes Kaap se Menslikheids en Sociale Wetenskappe Navorsings Etiese Kommittee. (VERWYSINGSNOMMER: HS19/5/15*)*

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3774452@myuwc.ac.za

CONSENT FORM

Project title: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to other participants. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits. I understand that data collected will be made available to the public by means of Thesis publication.

This research project involves making audio recordings of you.

Please indicate the following:

___ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this group.

___ I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this group

Participant's name………………………...

Participant's signature…………………………………………………...

Date……………………………………………………………………

UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE WES KAAP

Privaatsak X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2453, Faks: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3774452@myuwc.ac.za

Titel van die projek: Moeders se persepsies oor moederskap: 'n Verkennende studie.

Die studie is aan my beskryf in 'n taal wat ek verstaan. My vrae oor die studie is beantwoord. Ek verstaan wat my deelname behels en ek stem saam om deel te neem uit eie keuse en wil. Ek verstaan dat my identiteit nie aan ander bekend gemaak sal word nie. Ek verstaan dat ek op enige stadium kan onttrek uit die studie sonder dat ek hoef te verduidelik waarom. Daar sal geen negatiewe gevolge wees indien ek besluit om te onttrek nie.

Ek verstaan dat die data gebruik sal word om artikels te publiseer.

Die navorsing maak gebruik van audio-opnames.

Dui assseblief met 'n kruisie aan dat jy:

___ Toestemming verleen om onderwerp te word aan audio-opname tydens die groep.

___ Nie toestemming verleen om onderwerp te word aan audio-opname tydens die groep nie

Naam van deelnemer…………………………..

Handtekening van deelnemer……………………………………………...

Datum…………………………………………………………………

I-FOMU YESIVUMELWANO

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa `
Tel: +27 21-959 2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515
E-mail: 3774452@myuwc.ac.za

Isihloko Sophando: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

Esi sifundo sichaziwe kum ngolwimi endiluqondayo. Imibuzo yam ngaso esi sifundo iphendulwe. Ndiyakuqonda okuqulathwe kukuthabatha inxaxheba kwam kwesi sifundo, yaye ndiyavuma ukuba ndithabathe inxaxheba ngokukhululekileyo, ndibe ndinganyanzeliswanga. Ndiyayiqoda into yokuba iinkcukacha ngegama nobume bam azizi kuvezwa nakuye nabani na. Ndiyayiqonda nento yokuba ndingarhoxa kwisifundo nangalo naliphi na ixesha, ngaphandle kokunika isizathu, nangaphandle kwezohlwayo okanye ukuphulukana neenzuzo (okanye amangeniso).

Esi sifundo sophando sibandakanya ukuqotshwa nokushicilelwa kwelizwi lam. Oku kuza kuqinisekisa ukuba intembeko ephathelene nesi sifundo iyaphunyezwa kuwo wonke amanqanaba esifundo sophando. Oku kuqotshwa noshicilelo kwelizwi kuza kugcinwa ngokukhuselekileyo (ngokusebenzisa i-phaswed okanye ikhonkco labucala lokuvula apho kugcinwa khona amaxwebhu kwi-khompyutha). Emva kokuba ushicilelo lwamazwi luguqulelwe kumagama abhaliweyo, wonke amaxwebhu aqulethe ushicilelo lwelizwi azakuthi atshatyalaliswe. Nceda ubonakalise oku kulandelayo:

___Ndiyavuma ukuba kushicilelwe (kuqotshwe) ukuthabatha kwam inxaxheba kwesi sifundo.
___Andivumi ukuba kushicilelwe (kuqotshwe) ukuthabatha kwam inxaxheba kwesi sifundo.

Igama lomthabathi-nxaxheba:…………………………………………………………

Utyikityo ngesandla (signature) lomthabathi-nxaxheba:………………………………..

Umhla:…………………………………………………………………………………..

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3774452@myuwc.ac.za

Focus Group Confidentiality Letter

Project title: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

Your identity will be known to other focus group participants and the researchers cannot guarantee that others in these groups will respect the confidentiality of the group. We will ask you to sign below to indicate that you will keep all comments made during the focus group confidential and not discuss what happened during the focus group outside the meeting.

This research project involves making audio recordings of you.

Please indicate the following:

———   I have read and understood the information in this letter and have had any questions about the study answered to my satisfaction.

———   I am agreeing to have the focus group audio-recorded.

———   I agree to maintain confidentiality of information shared in this focus group.

———   I have received a copy of this information letter.

———   I agree to participate in the research study.

Participant's name…………………………...

Participant's signature…………………………………………………...

Date……………………………………………………………………

Appendix D

Interview Schedule

Screening Questions:

1. Are you enrolled at a university? _____

2. Which year of study are you enrolled in? _____

3. How old are you? _____

4. Do you have any child/children? _____

5. How old is/are your child/children? _____

6. Are you a first-time mother? _____

Section A:

1. Home Language: _____

2. Population group/Ethnicity: _____

3. Marital status: _____

4. Occupation: _____

5. Province: _____

6. Qualification: _____

Section B:

1. What is your understanding/ experiences of motherhood/ student motherhood?

2. Are there any challenges that influence your experiences as a mother or a student mother?

3. Are there any challenges you experienced or foresee while studying?

4. What would help you to cope as a student mother?

Thanking you for all your time. Much appreciated.

Project Title: An exploratory study of student mothers' perceptions of motherhood.

Dear Registrar,

I hereby request permission to conduct a study on student's perceptions on motherhood with undergraduate students as a sample at the University of the Western Cape.

I am Unarine Nembanzheni, and currently registered for a MA Research Psychology (Structured, Course code: 8671) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

In this research study, participants will be requested to participate in a focus group after informed consent has been acquired. The study will consist of two focus groups which will consist of 7-10 participants each. The main purpose of the focus groups will be to elicit in-depth information regarding student mothers' perceptions of motherhood. The focus groups are anticipated to take about 180 minutes (3 hours) to be completed, each focus group taking about 90 minutes ($1^{1/2}$ hours).

Should you have any queries or concerns regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me on my email address 3774452@myuwc.ac.za. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisors, Dr Erica Munnik at emunnik@uwc.ac.za and Prof Nceba Z. Somhlaba at nsomhlaba@uwc.ac.za.

Kind Regards

DEPUTY REGISTRAR:
Academic
Administration
Administration Building, 1st Floor
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, nschoeman@uwc.ac.za
021 959 2110

24 August 2019

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Name of Researcher	:	Unarine Nembanzheni
Research Topic	:	An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood
Date of issue	:	24/08/2019
Reference number	:	UWCRP240819UN

This serves as acknowledgement that you have obtained and presented the necessary ethical clearance and your institutional permission required to proceed with the above referenced project.

Approval is granted for you to conduct research at the University of the Western Cape for the period **24 August 2019 to 09 July 2020** (or as determined by the validity of your ethics approval). You are required to engage this office in advance if there is a need to continue with research outside of the stipulated period. The manner in which you conduct your research must be guided by the conditions set out in the annexed agreement: *Conditions to guide research conducted at the University of the Western Cape.*

The University of the Western Cape promotes the generation of new knowledge and supports new research. It also has a responsibility to be sensitive to the rights of the students and staff on campus. This office will require of you to respect the rights of students and staff who do not wish to participate in interviews and/or surveys.

It is also incumbent on you to first furnish this office with a copy of the proposed publication should you wish to reference the University's name, spaces, identity, etc. prior to public dissemination.

Please be at liberty to contact this office should you require any assistance to conduct your research or specifically require access to either staff or student contact information.

Yours sincerely

DR AHMED SHAIKJEE
DEPUTY REGISTRAR
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

UWC
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
PRIVATE BAG X17, BELLVILLE
STUDENT ADMINISTRATION

24 AUG 2019

This document contains a qualified electronic signature
and date stamp. To verify this document contact the
University of the Western Cape at
researchperm@uwc.ac.za.

UWCRP240819UN
Page 1 of 3

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

ANNEXURE

CONDITIONS TO GUIDE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

The onus rests on the researcher/investigator to observe and comply with the conditions set out below with the aim to conduct responsibly ethical research. Clarity must be sought from the authorising office should the interpretation of the conditions be unclear.

1. ACCOUNTABILITY

1.1. The University reserves the right to audit the research practices of the researcher/ investigator to assess compliance to the conditions of this agreement.

1.2. Data collection processes must not be adapted, changed or altered by the researcher/ investigator without written notification issued to the authorising office.

1.3. The University reserves to right to cease research if any proposed change to the data collection process is found to be unethical or in contravention of this agreement.

1.4. Failure to comply with any one condition in this agreement may result in:

   1.4.1. Disciplinary action instituted against a researcher/investigator employed or registered at the University;

   1.4.2. The contravention reported to the organisation employing or registering the external researcher/ investigator.

2. GOVERNANCE

2.1. Approval to conduct research is governed by the Protection of Personal Information Act, No 4 of 2013, which regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information and it is incumbent on the researcher/investigator to understand the implications of the legislation.

2.2. The researcher/investigator must employ the necessary measures to conduct research that is ethically and legally sound.

3. ACQUIRING CONSENT & RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS

3.1. It is incumbent on the researcher / investigator to clarify any uncertainties to the participant about the research.

3.2. Written consent must be obtained from participants before their personal information is gathered and documented.

3.3. Participation in the research must be voluntary and participants must not be pressured or coerced.

3.4. Participants have the right to access their personal information, obtain confirmation of what information is in the possession of the researcher / investigator and who had access to the information.

3.5. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research and insist that their personal information not be used.

UNIVERSITY of the
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FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

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UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

DEPUTY REGISTRAR:
Academic
Administration
Administration Building, 1st Floor
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, nschoeman@uwc.ac.za
021 959 2110

4.	DATA AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

4.1. Due diligence must be afforded by the researcher/investigator to:

    4.1.1.   Mitigate any risks that could compromise the privacy of participants before

    4.1.2.   during and after the research is conducted;

    4.1.3.   Collect only information that is relevant to the aim of the research;

    4.1.4.   Verify all personal information collected about a participant if the information is supplied by a source other than the participant;

    4.1.5.   Refrain from sharing participant information with a third party;

    4.1.6.   Apply for an exemption if the identity of participants should be revealed in the interest of the research aims.

4.2. The researcher/investigator must employ appropriate, reasonable and technical measures to protect, prevent loss of and unlawful or unauthorised access of research information.

Should you have any questions relating to this agreement please contact:
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, or
researchperm@uwc.ac.za

Appendix G

Ethics Clearance Letter

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
South Africa
T: +27 21 959 4111/2948
F: +27 21 959 3170
E: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za
www.uwc.ac.za

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

09 July 2019

Ms US Nembanzheni
Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Ethics Reference Number: HS19/5/15

Project Title: An exploratory study on student mothers' perceptions of motherhood

Approval Period: 09 July 2019 – 09 July 2020

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

HSSREC REGISTRATION NUMBER - 130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

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