Perseverance, Experiences and Motivation of Single Mothers to Finish College
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ABSTRACT
This study explored the level of perseverance, experiences and motivation of single mothers to finish college. A total of 5 single mothers were selected through purposive sampling as the respondents and data were gathered through mixed method research design. Semi structured interview and 12-Item Grit Scale by Duckworth (2007) were used by the researcher in this study. The results showed that the respondents have an average level of perseverance. The respondents gave up their time social needs to focus on studies and consider time spent with their child as time for themselves. The respondents experienced financial hardships but this did not stop them from finishing their degree. The timing of their motherhood was related to the stress they experience; and the struggle to perform daily duties as mother and student as well. The respondents had to sacrifice their personal and social needs to prioritize their child and their studies. The respondents were motivated because of their child. The respondents’ parents were also one of their motivations, to make up for getting pregnant at an early age and while studying. The respondents were also motivated by the belief that having a college degree would bring them success.

Keywords: Single mother, student, experiences, motivation, level, perseverance, grit

Having a college degree is beneficial to anyone as it opens many doors and many opportunities. According to College Atlas (2015), more opportunities, greater benefits, job satisfaction, job, stability and benefits to your children are some of the benefits of having a college degree. Today, early pregnancy and early parenthood is common. In the Philippines, according to Trade Union Congress of the Philippines as of 2012, there are at least 13.9 million Filipino single parents. Due to this, most of the time, the education of the mother has to suffer to give way to the coming of the baby down to the guidance of their child. Single parents have the same amount of responsibilities as a dual parent in their families.

Single mothers juggle many responsibilities including financial provision, house keeping, and parenting (Rani, 2006). According to Institute for Women’s Policy Research (2013), educational achievement for single mothers benefits themselves, and their child/children. Educational attainment of single mothers relates to many aspects of the life of the child (Attewell and Lavin 2007). Single mothers who are student face pressures academically as well as from their parental responsibilities (Tehan, 2007). Wright (2010) stated that being a parent and a student is challenging as to having financial problems and scheduling their time.

Grit/Perseverance
Spilovoy (2014) stated that there are lower persistence rates among married students due to inadequate spousal support, emotional support, and lack of help with housework and childcare. On the other hand, Strayhorn (2013) studied the importance of grit to the academic success. The results showed that grit is related to the college grades. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) examined the importance of grit – a non cognitive trait defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Results showed that grit didn’t relate to IQ, but it did relate to success over and beyond IQ and conscientiousness.

Experiences
High levels of stress were experienced by single mothers as they strive to fulfill their role as a mother such as self-sacrifice for their children for them to be able to have a better life. In addition to that, single mothers were reported feeling challenged with their role being a student and acceptance from the academic community. Struggle to perform their daily occupation
resulted to negative implications of life imbalance (Maloney, 2011). Even more, Gibson (2012) states that psychological distresses were experienced by single mothers who are students. Common challenges of these single mothers were financial, social support, cultural and career challenges. Personal factors and environmental factors are included in their resiliency factors.

McLaughlin (2008) stated that single mothers are dependent in financial aid in trying to get their degree. Even more, Nora, Barlow & Crisp (2006) were also cited by McLaughlin (2008) and found that students who left college tend to re-enroll once their financial problems are resolved. Crisp and Nora (2009) identified insufficient financial resources as a negative predictor of success for community college students. On the other hand, Thorman, Otto and Gunn-Wright (2012) also state that housing is one of the challenges of single parents in college. McLaughlin (2008) cited Merill (1999b) stating that student-mothers that their study time takes place when child/children were sleeping. On the other hand, a study made by Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, and Zhou (2014) showed that for single mothers living alone, less time with children reflects long work hours and work-related stress. Stone, Nelson & Niemann (1994) quoted in a study done by Tehan (2007), “For participants [of the study], working hard not only meant compromising their family life to meet their academic responsibilities, but compromising their social and personal needs as well”. Sufficient amount of time to study while taking care of their children as well is difficult for students.

In a like manner, Looze (2014) studied the influence of motherhood status to women who became mothers in their early 20s compared to women who became mother in their 30s. Results stated that young mothers, make fewer wage-enhancing voluntary job separations and often receive lower wage returns for these separations. Thus, women with less education are at disadvantage as educational attainment is a big factor. Leese (2014) also studied the experience of young mothers who were between the ages of 16 and 19 years, the experiences of young women who become mothers in their teenage years. The collected data showed how the young women who become mother in their teenage years experienced a range of difficulties as they made transition into motherhood. It can be significantly different from the experience of older mothers, and it identifies the importance of appropriate support to mediate the challenges that they face.

**Motivation**

Participants believe that college has a big role for their success. Austin and Mcdermott (2004) stated that benefits of having a college education pushes single mother students to finish it. Haleman (2004) examined the motivation for attending college of single mothers. Results showed that single mothers experience a lot of barriers to in completing their degree. However, these barriers eventually became their source of motivation (McLaughlin, 2008). Moreover, Single mothers increasingly seek college degrees at community colleges in order to provide economic security for their families (Wei, Berkner, He, Lew, Cominole, & Siegel, 2009). Wainwright and Marandet (2010) identified links between the motivations to study: the desire to be a role model to children, their personal development, and the perceived impact that studying has on their self-confidence and their family.

**Synthesis**

Grit was related by to success and academic success as well (Strayhorn, 2013; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007). However, Spilovoy (2014) stated that there is lower persistence rates among married students. Single mothers who are students have a lot of experiences. The stresses of single mothers studying are doubled compared to non students (Gibson, 2012). The timing of their motherhood was related to morality of the mother and to their status (Perrier, 2013 & Looze, 2014). Safe and affordable housing was also one of the problems of these women as stated by Thorman, Otto and Gunn-Wright (2012). The financial hardships are experienced by single mothers and they are dependent on this area (McLaughlin,
Success and their children are the reason for these women in going back and finishing their college education as stated by multiple authors in different researches.

For many years, lots of papers were made about single mothers, however, only few studies focused on single mother who are student compared to just single mother. Also, there is limited research about the perseverance and specifically, the level of their perseverance. Stress, poverty or low incomes were the usual topic of the various researches available. Hence, the researcher would like to delve on the experiences, motivation and perseverance of single mothers who are students at the same time. To achieve the goal of this research, the study would like to answer the following questions; (1) What is the level of perseverance of the respondents? (2) What are the experiences of the respondents in terms of: a.) Time b.) Finances c.) Stress d.) Priorities? And (3) What motivates the respondents to finish college?

**Method**

**Research Design**

The study used mixed method. Mixed method is the use of quantitative and qualitative as the method of this study to fully understand and provide clear results from both methods. According to Creswell (2009), a mixed method is more than simply collecting and analyzing data from a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative method covered the experiences and motivation of the respondents. Quantitative research on the other hand, was used to measure the perseverance of the respondents. The qualitative method provided the gaps that the quantitative method cannot provide or measure.

**Participants and Sampling**

The researcher used purposive sampling to meet and focus on certain characteristics. The criteria of the chosen participants are: single mothers who are enrolled in tertiary education ranging from 17-25 years old, with child/children 0-5 years of age. A total of five single mothers for the qualitative data along with the 12-item Grit Scale; followed by thirty two (N=32) participants for the 12-item Grit to supplement the results.

**Instruments**

12-Item Grit Scale. The researcher used the scale that was made by Dr. Duckworth in 2007, to measure the perseverance of an individual for long term goals. The said scale has an internal reliability of α = .79 in the research made by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) with the sample of Ivy League undergraduates. The scale consists of 12 questions answered on a 5-point likert scale (1 - not like me at all, 2 - Not very much like me, 3 - Somewhat like me, 4 - mostly like me and 5 - very much like me). All points will be added and will be divided by 12. Numbers 1, 4, 6, 9, 10 and 12 were given corresponding points; very much like me – 5 = very high; Mostly like me – 4 = High; somewhat like me – 3 = Average; not much like me – 2 = low; and not like me at all – 1 = very low. For numbers 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 11, the scoring, the range and verbal interpretation was reversed.

Semi-structured interview guide. A total of seventeen (17) questions were asked to the participants. The questions used were open ended, and follow up questions were asked according to the participant's’ response and for clarification. The instrument was used to focus on the experiences of the single mothers in finishing their college education. Voice recorder, pen and paper were also used for data gathering with the consent of the participants. The researcher scored the respondents’ answers according to themes.

**Procedure**

The researcher asked for the permission of Dr. Duckworth to use the 12-Item Grit Scale. After getting the permission, the researcher started to gather data. For the interview, the researcher gave consent letters to the participants consisting of the venue and the availability of the participant.. When the participant approved the consent, the researcher started to brief the participant about the flow of the interview. After the briefing, the researcher started to conduct the interview. The researcher used voice recorder at the beginning of the interview, pen and
paper to take down some notes. The participants were debriefed by the researcher and assured them the confidentiality of the data gathered after the interview. After the interview, the researcher asked the respondents to answer the 12-item Grit Scale. To validate the answers of the five respondents, an online scale survey was conducted and hard copies of the scale were distributed to gather data. The researcher sent the link of the survey to the participants, wherein the researcher made sure that the participants were okay with answering the scale. The hard copies of the scale were personally distributed by the researcher in a university in Biñan, Laguna. The researcher thanked the participants afterwards; tallied the gathered data and transcribed the interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the scoring provided by the author in the said scale. Frequency percentage was also used by the researcher to know the level of perseverance of the respondents. Descriptive statistics was used by the researcher to describe the data gathered. Trochim (2006) said that with descriptive statistics you are simply describing what is or what the data shows.

Results and Discussion

The results presented according to research questions stated from the synthesis.

Research Question No. 1. What is the level of perseverance of the respondents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Perseverance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>N= 37</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Mean</td>
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<td>3.162</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that 20 or 59.46% of the respondents (inclusive of the 5 respondents from the qualitative data) have an average level of perseverance to finish their college education. However, 2 or 5.41% of the respondents fell under very low level of perseverance. The remaining number or percent of the respondents were low level of perseverance. This is in line with the study of Spilovoy (2014), states that there are lower persistence rates among student parents due to many responsibilities they have to do. 22 or 59.46% of the respondents fell on the average level of perseverance. Quoting participant 2, “Iniisip ko lang din yung baby ko. Determined talaga. Para sakanya to eh.” The respondents are driven to finish their college. However, due to juggling multiple roles on and off the school, the respondents cannot fully focus on studies alone. In line with this is the study of Strayhorn (2013) who stated that perseverance is related to college grades, thus, important to the academic success. Moreover, the study of Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) said that grit didn’t relate to IQ but it did to success.

Research Question No. 2. What are the experiences of the respondents in terms of:

Time

Time Management

The participants do school stuff when they are in school but the moment they get home, they focus only on their child and only get to do their school related stuff after putting their child to sleep. Participant 1 said “Pag tulog na sya, ayan sisimulan ko ng gawin yung kahit among related sa school”. Participant 4 also said that “Pagkatulog ni baby that’s the time na gagawa ako ng assignments or projects”. The study of McLaughlin (2008) stated that student-mothers
that they study take place when child/children were sleeping agrees to the answers of participants. However, quote from participant 2, “Kapag ano, kapag may pasok, pag uwi ko siya kaagad yung a-asikasuhin ko… Kapag okay na yung anak ko, sa school naman. Salitan lang, kapag free na sa school, kay baby; kapag free na kay baby, school na. Pero syempre lagi kong uunahin ang baby ko.” Participant 2 mentioned that she gives time for school and child whenever possible not just when her child is asleep.

**Time for self**

Participants 3 and 5 said they go home straight after school. Quote from participant 3, “Yung mga time na after school, instead na i-ga-gala mo, uuwii ka talaga agad. Tapos 'pag weekends, walang pasok, magdi-date kami. Kasi syempre mas maraming time yung napupunta sa school than sa anak mo most of the time lalo na pag weekdays.” Participant 3 considers time with her child as time for herself, as well. However, a quote from participant 5, “School bahay ako. Yung time palang na hinihingi ng school ko at pagiging mother ko eh hirap i-manage eh. Pero syempre mas priority ko pa rin yung anak ko.” Participant 5 goes home straight after school since her course requires duties in hospital that eats up her time. Nevertheless, participants answers’ agrees with Tehan (2007), who quoted Stone, Nelson & Nieman (1994), “For participants, working hard not only meant compromising their family life to meet their academic responsibilities, but compromising their social and personal needs as well”.

**Finances**

**Financial hardships**

Participant 1, 2, 4 and 5 said that they experience financial hardships. As stated by Gibson (2012), financial is one of the challenges the single mothers who are students. A quote from participant 2, “Dapat nga isang sem lang ako mag-stop kaso di kinaya ng budget kaya naging 1 year.” Participant 2’s experience is in line with the study of Nora, Barlow & Crisp (2006), who found that students who left college tend to re-enroll once their financial problems are resolved. And, as stated by Gibson (2012), financial is one of the challenges the single mothers who are students. Furthermore, Crisp and Nora (2009) identified insufficient financial resources as a negative predictor of success for community college students.

**Financial Status and Dependency**

Participant 1, 2, 4 and 5 said that their financial statuses aren’t consistent that somehow affects their education. A quote from the participants; “Pero minsan talaga ma-sho-short pero madalas okay naman kasi tinutulungan ako nila mama” said Participant 1; “Hindi sya steady eh. Minsan okay, minsan gipit” said Participant 2; “Fortunately, minsan lang. May mga time lang na short kami pero we get through it. Madiskarte kami nila mama eh.” Said Participant 4; “Minsan yung budget sana para sa school, hindi maiwasan mapunta sa anak ko eh. Hindi rin kasi ganun ka-okay yung status namin kahit only child ako” said Participant 5. All of the participants are also dependent to their parents as stated above. Moreover, all of the participants live on their parents’ house. The study of McLaughlin (2008) stated that single mothers who are trying to get their degrees were more likely to be dependent on financial aid. Participant 5 even said “its hard bumukod lalo na pag may anak kana, kanino mo iiwan, and of course, mas tipid kasi we don’t have to rent a house”. To live with their parents helps them save money instead of living on their own and pay rent; as Thorman, Otto and Gunn-Wright (2012) said that housing is one of the challenges of single parents in college.

**Stress**

Participant 1, 2 and 5 mentioned the timing of their motherhood. Quote from participant 1, “Mahirap. Lalo na yung parang nag-enjoy ka palang kasi bata ka pa, tapos biglang buntis nako. Hirap mag balance ng time tska ng mga gagawin.” Another participant (Participant 2) said, Kasi isipin mo diba kapag estudyante pa nga lang ang hirap na eh, tapos may anak kapa. Participant 5 shared the same response, “Syempre mahirap. Akala ng iba madali eh. Mahirap talaga. Sa isang iglap parang magbabago yung buhay mo eh. Kung dati puro ako at school lang,
ngayon andyan na si baby.” The study of Leese (2014) relates to this as she stated that the experiences of young mothers experienced a range of difficulties as they made transition into motherhood. However, Participant 3 said, “Wala, mahirap. Yung iba akala nila masaya, parang yung cute-cute, yung puro fun lang. pero hindi. Kasi marami ka talagang iintindihin. Yung health, ‘pag nagkasakit, pag-aaral, food...” Participant 4 also said, “Its really hard. Kasi sa araw araw, super dami mong inisip. As in sobrang stressful.” The responses of participant 3 & 4 is in congruence to the study of Gibson (2012) who stated that single mother students experience psychological distresses. Moreover, it also agrees to Maloney (2011), that the struggle to perform their daily occupation resulted to negative implications of life imbalance that leads to high levels of stress.

Priorities

Sacrifices

All the participants response were almost the same, and boils down to giving up their social life or social needs. “Dyowa! Naghiwalay nga kami eh. Nung una kasi sabi nila, ano, para mapagpatuloy ko si baby, at para makapag-aral ako, makipaghiwalay ako sakanya. Ayun... Kaya nung nakipaghiwalay ako, nakapag-aral ulit ako. Kasi sabi nila kapag ‘di daw ako nakipaghiwalay, sumama na daw ako sakanya, pero hindi ako makakapag-aral. Kaya ayun... mas pinili kita nang na makipaghiwalay.” said participant 1; Yung father ng baby ko, nakipagbalikan sa akin. Ang ginawa ko, hindi na ko nakipagbalikan sa kanya. Kaya mas okay na i-sacrifice ang lovelife para kay baby at para sa pag aaral.” Said participant 2; “Boyfriend. Ang hirap isingit ng dyowa no kaya ako nalang tska baby ko. Tska para di ako ma distract sa pagaaral ko.” The participants’ responses agree to Maloney (2011) that single mothers who are students self sacrifice. Likewise, participant 3 and 4, can sacrifice or sacrificed their clique, social life and time for themselves pertaining to personal needs.

Child and studies

As stated above, the participants had to or willing to sacrifice for their child and studies. Quoting the participants: “Kaya mas okay na i-sacrifice ang lovelife para kay baby at para sa pag aaral” said Participant 2; “Syempre ‘pag single mother ka tapos nag aaral ka pa, doble, triple yung kailangan mo gawin, kailangan mo talaga mag multtask.” said Participant 3. Both Participant 4 and 5 said they no longer have the time to prioritize other things aside from their child and studies; however, participant 5 mentioned she didn’t want to get distracted from her studies. This still connects to the study of Maloney (2011) wherein she stated that single mothers who are students self sacrifice for their children and to have a better life.

Problem #3: What motivates the respondents to finish college?

For the child

All the participants want to finish their education for their child and the future of their child. Participant 1 stated, “Syempre para ano... para kay baby” Participant 4 also said “Para sa anak ko siguro”. However, they also want to finish it for themselves. Participant 2 said, “Sakin, ano...Baby! Ung baby ko din. Para sa future nya”. Another participant said “Syempre sa anak ko at sarili ko”. Participant 3 pointed out its for her child and the education of her child, “Syempre yung mabigyan ng magandang education si Astin” participant 3 shared. Furthermore, participant 1 and 5 wanted to show their child despite having a child while studying, they were able to get diploma. Quote from participant 1, “Syempre para ano... para kay baby. Tapos para ‘pag laki ng baby ko kahit nabuntis ako ng maaga (smiles), ayan may nakuha ako ng diploma (laughs) meron akong maipagmamalaki, ganun...”. Participant 5 said, Tska pala pag-tanda nakakaintindi na yung anak ko, mapapakita ko na kahit maaga ako nabuntis nakapatapos pa rin ako ng pag aaral.” This relates to the study of Wainwright and Marandet (2010) who stated that the links between the motivations to study: the desire to be a role model to children, their personal development, and their family.
For the parents

Participants feel sorry for their parents because they got pregnant at an early age, especially they are still studying. Aside from her baby and the future of her baby, participant 2 also mentioned it’s for her parents as well. Quote from participant 3, “Syempre hindi na sila bumabata, medyo hirap din.” She mentioned she feels ashamed or “nahihiya” to her parents because they are still working because she and her child are dependent to them. Participant 5 shared, “Tsaka para sa parents ko, alam ko gusto nila”. She said she always knew her parents wanted her to finish her degree, with or without her baby. This agrees to the study of Wei et al., (2009) that in order to provide economic security for their families

To be successful

Having a college degree for the participants is like a ladder to success. Quote from participant 3, “Ayoko mag work lang basta”. When asked what she meant with “basta”, the participant said she didn’t just want to work because its needed, but to work with the field she wants and related to her course. The participant has work experience wherein because she felt she just needed to work, and there was no growth in that work. Another participant said (Participant 4), “Alam mo yun, ang hirap kasi makipag-sapalaran lalo na ngayon kapag hindi ka graduate ng college, eh. Ang iniisip ko pag naka-graduate ako, mas okay yung work na makukuha ko na okay for me and my baby.” Participant 5 shared almost the same response, “Kailangan ko makatapos kasi mahirap humanap ng trabaho na okay yung sweldo para samin ng anak ko kung hindi ako tapos ng pag aaral.” She believes that the financial problems her family experience will be lessen if she finishes her education. Participants believe it would be easier to find job with a college degree. In addition, participants also believe it will help them land high paying job that will help for the future of their child. This relates to the study of Gibson (2012), that education is a factor of success. This also agrees to the study of Haleman (2004) and McLaughlin (2008) that single mothers who faced a number of barriers to degree completion but eventually became their source of motivation.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is therefore concluded that the time of the respondents goes mainly to their child and studies. The respondents had to give up their social needs to focus on their studies, and consider time spent with their child as time for themselves. Financial hardships were experienced by the respondents but that did not stop them to finish their degree. The financial statuses of the respondents aren’t consistent and were all dependent to their parents. Consequently, the respondents experience stress. The timing of their motherhood was related to the stress they experience; and the struggle to perform daily duties as mother and student as well. The respondents had to sacrifice their personal and social needs to prioritize their child and their studies. The respondents were motivated because of their child and for the future of their child. The respondents’ parents were also one of their motivations, to make up for getting pregnant at an early age and while studying. The respondents were motivated by the belief that having a college degree would bring them success. Lastly, the respondents have an average level of perseverance.

Future researchers could help raise awareness of the academic community to give assistance to single mothers and provide the needed educational services to help them graduate.
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