A Qualitative Investigation of How Student Parents Cope with Multiple Roles

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INTRODUCTION

Postsecondary education is associated with higher incomes, positive mental health, positive parenting practices, low levels of parenting stress, children's academic success, and children's social competence. Student parents experience **stress** as **they balance multiple roles**. Qualitative interviews illuminated student parent's experiences.

METHODS

- Semi-structured **interviews** (N = 14) with parents who had a child aged <=36 mo.
- Average length: 20 min. (range = 12-30)
- Audio recorded, transcribed, reviewed
- Focused on:
  - **Sources of stress**
  - **Coping strategies**
  - How stress affected the **parent-child relationship**
- Open, axial, and selective coding phases resulted in **four categories of themes**

THEMES

Responses to being a Student-Parent

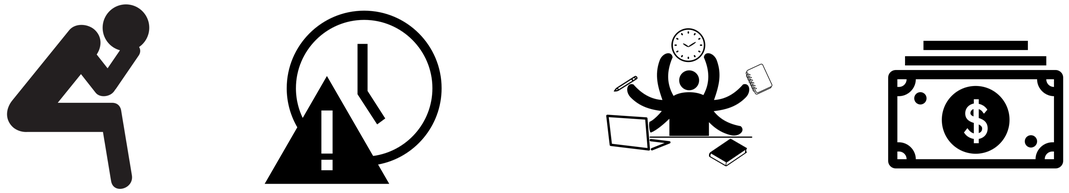
"Here I am, not planned, **wasn't what I wanted in my life, but it's turned out to be okay.** It's been good."

"We tried the whole doing homework at home and I could do it because I felt like I had to, but [my husband] was at work all day. **He didn't have time** to do it while [my son] was up and so it was just one of those things that we decided like, **'You need to go to the library to study.'** So that he could **get a lot done instead of a little over a long time**."

"I think it's just hard being a parent and going to school. But I think **most people just know it's going to be hard**."

Causes of Stress

General | Not Enough Time | Balancing Roles | Finances



Coping

Scheduling | Family Time | External Resources

Motivation

DISCUSSION

Participants had different **expectations** and **initial reactions** to being student parents. Key **sources of stress** were reported - time demands, having multiple roles, finances, and general stress - as well as **strategies used for coping** with the temporarily increased levels of stress - external resources such as family, friends, and institutional programs, spending time with family, and maintaining a schedule. **Coping strategies helped keep stress from spilling over into the parent-child relationship.** Parents found **motivation** in **themselves** and their **family** to pursue a college degree.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings should be incorporated into current and future programs and interventions, such as CCAMPIS, **focusing on** effective strategies for **managing stress**. Doing so will decrease feelings of personal vulnerability and **increase** overall **well-being** and **success in student AND parent roles**.

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