

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT MOTHERS IN A  
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN KENYA**

**KAMARA MARGARET KOSGEY**

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**MOI UNIVERSITY**

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**2021**

**DECLARATION**

**DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university

Sign..... Date.....

KAMARA MARGARET KOSGEY

EDU/D.Phil.PGF/1007/15

**DECLARATION BY SUPERVISORS**

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as university supervisors

Sign..... Date.....

Prof. I. N. Kimengi

Department of Educational Foundations

Moi University

Sign..... Date.....

Prof. John K. Chang'ach

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to those whose inspiration has kept me going in educational pursuit; to my husband Kosgey and sons John, Edwin, Manu and Silas, for their love and immense support; to my supervisors Professor Kimengi and Professor Chang'ach, who believed in my ability to achieve and encouraged me; to the faculty; Dr. Kefa Simwa and team; Dr. George Kegode, Dr. Felicity Githinji and Dr. Samson Barasa, whose presence and indefatigable spirit of unity of purpose became a prop when things were difficult; to the study participants who provided the bulk of content and to my friends who provided support. To you all, I am greatly indebted.

## ABSTRACT

The key purpose of this research was to shed light on the undergraduate student mothers' experience and their coping strategies at university. Becoming mothers mid-course their undergraduate programme and when they are barely out of adolescence presents a significantly unique experience from any other students. The focus of the study is to explore that unique experience and establish the sources of strengths behind the hardy persistence of this group of schooling mothers. The gist of the research is; to amplify the voices of the voiceless; the undergraduate student mothers so that those student mothers who are like them, those around them and those who deal with them at university, may learn from their lived experience. Set in the constructivist paradigm and oriented in the Straussian tradition in studying lived experience, the basically qualitative study adopted the descriptive phenomenology research design. The study adopted a three tier theoretical framework, with social exchange theory representing the reward/cost scenario at play with motherhood and the triple role; Grounded theory, that arose as a theory and a method in data collection, and resilience theory as the emergent theory in data interpretation in the Grounded theory approach. The study targeted undergraduate student mothers in the third year of study that had lived motherhood from their first or second academic year. The study was guided by objectives: to investigate the daily engagements of an undergraduate student mother in schooling and parenting; to identify factors that define the undergraduate student mother experience; to establish the sources of strength and support for the undergraduate student mothers. Five mothers and four Deans of schools were purposively sampled and identified through snowball sampling, while the sample size was determined through saturation in the collected data. Data was collected through interview schedules that were piloted and scrutinized by faculty to establish trustworthiness. Collected data was transcribed, coded and discussed under themes with verbatim quotes. The findings indicated that the triple role comes in the backdrop of little motherhood socialization, limited psychosocial support, tight schedules of lectures, baby care, household chores, social engagement and assignments. As a result, they encounter missed opportunities in leisure, discussions, company, social activities, lectures and examinations. They however draw strength from self-efficacy, resilience, self-sacrifice, commitment, and support from neighbours and supportive masculinity from the men in their lives. Other reasons were dedication to motherhood, self-assertion and humility. The study recommends that a student-mother-desk be established at university for tracking student mother demographic trends, progression and support; establish a student mother policy at university for intervention; engage effective mentorship for all students and sensitize stake holders on their critical role in inclusive education for the undergraduate student mothers. Further research can be carried out on the university management perception of undergraduate parenthood in order to create some level ground in addressing undergraduate student mother issues.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

USTM	Undergraduate student mothers
CAT	Continuous Assessment Tests
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
RDF	Research Development Framework
IGERD	Institute for Gender Education Research Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IWPR	Institute for Women Policy Research
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

This first chapter contains the background to the research with an overview of the global picture regarding the place of undergraduate student mothers. This places the research as a global concern and not just a local issue affecting education participation. The global view is also set against the African perspective of child bearing and the contemporary student mother situation in Kenya. The chapter also includes the statement of the problem and draws the purposed role and aims of the study. It sheds light into the area of young undergraduate student mothers in the backdrop of glaring inequalities in policy and practice of Higher education in Kenya. A justification of the research has been presented in the realms of other existing research and the alluded need to bridge the gaps in knowledge, policy and practice at Higher Education.

In addition, the significance of the study been discussed while the study objectives and research questions have been designed in line with the expected research outcomes. Further, the theoretical and the conceptual frameworks have been constructed to link the study with relevant existing theories, presuppositions and concepts at play in the research. Finally, the chapter stipulates the operational definition of key terms used in the research as indicators of the contextual direction the research terms are intended to take and the ideal scope of each identified area.

Being a mother before enrolling into a degree course at university can present a significantly different experience than getting a baby mid-course. This is the scenario that distinctly brings out the difference between the undergraduate student mothers and any other student mother in school or college. Though there are other student mothers on mature entry at university, this study is basically focused on the Undergraduate Student Mothers (USTM) who enter university often on what is referred to as the mass post-secondary school 'regular intake' at university. It focuses in particular those girls who get babies tentatively at second or first year of study. This group of young girls, who are barely out of adolescence, and who get babies mid-course their undergraduate degree programs are the key subjects in this research.

Demographics from many universities globally reflect a constant increase in the number of undergraduate student mothers at university as evidenced in global surveys' reports (IWPR, 2019 & Lyonette, 2015). In addition, there has been an outcry from individual researchers and collaborative educational research in student mother issues over their plight. Researchers tend to highlight great challenges that student mothers go through with lots of concern for their wellbeing. This comes out clearly in their research recommendations as they implore universities to intervene in the plight of these USTM (Shemjor, 2015; Mahugu, 2014; IWPR, 2019 & Lyonette, 2015). Despite this alluded plight, it is remarkably clear that some of these undergraduate mothers still work through their studies to successful completion while numerous of such mothers cannot cope. Those who find it hard to cope with motherhood and schooling end up dropping out of university or they take too long to complete their courses.

It is this forbearance and persistence; the drive to beat the obvious odds that is the main focus and preoccupation of this research. The study is basically narrowed down to seeking insight into their lived experience to discover the underlying strengths, and other features or factors of influence in the student mother phenomenon. Essentially, the study process paid particular attention to the USTM narratives. Such were the stories of success, their failures, the joys and sorrows of parenting as students, their view of impediments towards quality education and achievement, their engagements and relationships in everyday life; their lived experience. .

Historically, and as gathered from oral traditions, parenting in the olden days in a typical African context was a preserve of people who were married and considered of age. The age factor as such did not matter in this context because some of the girls would get married and have babies at age fifteen or even less. The role of parenting was a communal factor. In some communities, the marriage age was limitless and some girls would be given out for marriage at twelve or thirteen years. This implied that a host of assistants like some seasoned mid-wives, domestic assistants from the neighborhood or the kin were perpetually around such a girl upon marriage. This was to cushion her from trauma that may arise from the sudden social role of early parenthood. Welfare providers like herbalists and village well-wishers, all surrounded a new mother till she became of age or the baby grew to the level of its mother's self-sustainability.

The new mother was generally cushioned against physical and social - cultural trauma that may result from lack of skill and which may grip young mothers on the coming of first babies. This early motherhood period was characterized by thorough hands on



training of new mothers by family and community experts to enhance mothering skills in the new mother. Such a mother was also exempted from normal social tasks during the period of confinement (late prenatal and early postnatal). This phenomenon implied that wholesome psycho-social and cultural needs of an expectant or nursing mother were so very well-articulated and catered for, that they unconditionally cushioned the young mother, age, status or background notwithstanding. Such a scenario obviously lessened the strain that comes with the intrigues of parenting especially with young parents. As a result, childbirth and baby care, were traditionally not a challenge due to exemption of new mothers from other rigorous social roles and engagements. The excessive endowment, the presence of baby sitters and the aura of celebrations for the new-born that came from the extended family, all tended to create an ambience of fulfillment for both physical and emotional needs of such young mothers. It is this scenario that blurs the sight of challenges for young mothers in school, being seen as no big deal.

A glimpse at early western education reveals social dynamics in the field of education in Kenya that contrast the young mothers' scenario. The emergence of institutionalized schooling and the missionary influence in education introduced value systems that excluded mothers in schooling. Evidently, childbirth during schooling was unwelcome and pregnancy was not condoned in the Kenyan education system right from pre-independent Kenya to the new millennium. Any such a student who became a mother while schooling, was condemned to expulsion from school. This tragically meant the end of schooling and the end of related formal careers that were the major focus of formal education. This was especially so because re-admission of girls who became pregnant

was never part of the education policies up to 2006 (MOEST, 2007). With time though, interest arose and the gender policy in education was introduced in 2006. Since then, education policies have lessened strictness and rules have been relaxed to allow student mothers readmission in school and as a result, their presence is tolerated in public secondary schools and universities.

Such change is seen in the background of the Ministry of Education Gender Policy (MOEST, 2007) that spells out the re- entry policy and the unconditional re-admission of student mothers in Kenya at whichever level. After the 2007 Gender Policy in education, student mothers are allowed to continue pursuing their education and careers save for some few private schools, universities and colleges that insist on suspending studies for a part of the prenatal and post-natal nursing period. Despite it being introduced as a means of education retention, a disconnect exists in the practice of the policy in education. Challenges of motherhood in school are way beyond the influence of the policy and difficulties continue to be experienced. As Gale (2001) would put it, lack of an effective policy analysis, with articulated critical policy sociology, has led to loopholes in the Gender policy implementation. It has been rendered inadequate as it does not address other crucial aspects of support and social accommodation of young mothers, especially those in higher institutions of learning. It does not also deal with unique categories of student mothers either. Such generalization as displayed in the policy tends to favour some groups of student mothers; in fact, those in primary and secondary schools only.

As indicated in studies related to student mothers at universities in Kenya, (Shemjor, 2015 & Chemjor, 2013) who present a mature category of university student mothers, universities have failed to support student mothers. If compared with parenting among the undergraduate students like those in their first or second year of study motherhood may today be occurring within similar age brackets of very young mothers just like those in their teens in the traditional set up. In contrast with the familiar traditional early marriages, modern individuality that exists in institutions does not nurture support for the schooling mothers. It has become a single individual's affair or an issue of the immediate family only.

As observed in a study carried out in 2017; *Student Mothers and the Changing Social Phenomena*, the changing education phenomenon has affected young mothers in the realms of schooling. A researcher in a related study, Shemjor (2015) clearly brings out that picture of student mother challenges in Kenyan universities with a particular focus and a thorough investigation of a single university. According to Creswell (2014) such in-depth study as in qualitative designs as that of Shemjor (2015), often brings out credible results of the phenomenon under investigation, especially when the subjects are reached out for lived experience. The scenario presented with the undergraduate student mothers is that of young mothers in a situation where the baby comes when they are still schooling at various levels especially in public universities. Such births take place mid-session within university academic semesters and therefore demand readjustment regarding normal schedules and routines in the lives of such student mothers.

Incidentally, while student mothers are common phenomena at higher education, the undergraduate student mothers particularly form a special category of students. They fall between mature student mothers enrolled as mature entry students and the sheer teenagers on transition from high school and who fall into teenage pregnancy before they are out of secondary school. Due to early school enrollment, many girls complete secondary school before the age of 20 and are barely out of adolescence when they take their first and second academic years at university. This places such undergraduates in a category similar to the high school teenage mothers. They face challenges of parenting as young inexperienced mothers within tight academic programmes that can be overwhelming (Artfield, & Behle, 2010). The implications are that being assumed to be mature; the much emphasized 2007 MOEST policy favours teen mothers at secondary school. This excludes the undergraduate student mothers despite their having similar experiences with the high school teenage mothers. In fact, the social-economic support offered teen mothers by schools and by their parents or relations may not be forthcoming for those at university.

In comparison with mature entry student mothers, the USTM are disadvantaged. While the mature entry mothers may possess well thought out intervention to beat the odds in their 'triple shift' the USTM may not have such plans. The triple shift as a term used to denote multiple tasks a student mother undertakes like baby care, university academic assignments, motherhood roles and domestic chores is more challenging to the USTM situation. Schooling may probably have some implications like organized funding of their

education (Lyonette, 2015), yet majority of the ‘freshers’ or freshmen at undergraduate, are hardly out of the teen mother bracket, and are still financially dependent on parents.

With limited knowledge in parenting roles put alongside the inadequacy of education funding in Kenya, and the automatic and almost mandatory post-secondary mass transition to higher education, the USTM, have limited choices. The system dictates that qualified students get enrolled en-mass into undergraduate programs; an offer once forfeited, may lead to economic, emotional and social complexities (Temblador, 2014). At such a level, parenting might leave no room for relaxed enrollment while social occurrences like motherhood may leave a young USTM alone, braving herself against the odds in order to remain in the school system. This complicates realization of adequate participation and achievement at university (Lyonette, 2015).

Glaring missing links in understanding social change and student motherhood are also evident in Kenya. This is especially so in the background knowledge regarding the student mother phenomena (Mahugu 2014 & Shemjor 2015). Incidentally, when a problem such as inequality in education accessibility persists in society, like the USTM case at hand, a number of factors can be attributed to the phenomena. Either, it could be that current education policy and measures of intervention have turned obsolete due to social dynamics or the problem has mutated. It could also be that society is passive and not doing much about it and therefore not much of intervention has been sought especially if it touches on non-material culture of society which is known to be rigid despite waves of change (Giddens, 2006& Schaefer 2006). Basically, much of the existing knowledge in student mothers may be just speculation for stakeholders. For this

reason, the contextual realities surrounding these students as young undergraduate mothers actually requires that they be given voice and a chance to express their lived experience to pave way to intervention. Such voices are echoed in a previous study on the challenges facing teenage mothers in secondary schools. Great resource was derived from the study regarding readmission and accommodation in schools. For instance, contrary to the re-entry policy principles, (MOEST, 2007), the student mothers' narratives during the research revealed that the recommended transfers in the policy were detrimental in their stay in new schools. Through face to face interviews and quite resourceful focus group discussions, the study revealed contradictions. The young student mothers preferred to remain in their own schools. They cited supportive friends and accommodative teachers, majority of whom went out of their way to accommodate the teen mothers' unique differences and difficulties. Though great challenges of acceptability, accommodation and completion were a common experience for all of them, those who had continued to study in their own schools did not go through as much torture and none of them had dropped out of school (Kamara, 2012). It was a mere assumption on the part of stakeholders that they understood the challenges and even had solutions in place.

It is such a lesson learnt that prompted the researcher to undertake this research in order to answer questions regarding undergraduate student mothers' experiences at university. Since their challenges in higher education participation have been highlighted and explored at length in other research findings (Mahugu, 2014; Shemjor, 2014), this research sought to listen to their narratives of success; of failure; of achievement; of

shared or lived experience. One of the aims in this study was to discover and therefore guard against assumptions and detrimental malpractices in handling USTM through exclusion or erroneous intervention. It presented a need and a purpose to know and understand their world in wholeness; their lived experience.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite multiple challenges that cause student mothers to drop out of university or defer studies, a few of the undergraduate student mothers persist in education to completion. This persistence forms the focus of investigation in this study. From existing demographical statistics in universities, the number of undergraduate student mothers is on a rapid increase and therefore a social phenomenon that is there to stay. The age bracket at which undergraduates enter university constitutionally ranks them as adults but in the triple role scenario, they may not have the requisite skills and resources to manage schooling while parenting.

Again, as the number of the Undergraduate student mothers grows, existing research unfortunately paints a bleak picture of these student mothers as faced with great challenges owing to the responsibilities and experiences that come with parenting and schooling. In fact, motherhood may occur barely months after high school since only a short duration marks the high school - university transition in Kenya. This leaves no room for induction into non-academic skills. Worse still, such undergraduates are still heavily dependent on parental support emotionally, socially and financially, making a

sudden plunge into motherhood quite alienating. This definitely implies great impact into their education participation and achievement.

Despite this bleak picture, some of these mothers still see their studies to completion. Observable phenomena of students carrying babies of varied ages from a few months to three years on campus during preparations for graduation; during clearance with departments and during graduation ceremonies is an indication that despite the challenges, so broadly researched, published and publicized, such mothers have made it to completion. It leaves one with a question of; what has life been for them? How did they make it while many of their counterparts did not? What did they do to successfully attend to the triple role of a student mother? These questions form the basis of the statement of the problem.

While one may attempt to fathom their situation, one thing that definitely stands out clearly is this glaring gap in knowledge regarding undergraduate student mothers. Current educational research as gathered from research journals across the world indicates great gaps in the epistemology or accumulated knowledge of undergraduate student mothers and the ontological foundations of the truths and realities that shape their lives and success at higher education. The fact that the area is under-researched is actually evident in Kenya because majority of researchers in the reviewed literature reflect overemphasis on mature entry student mothers who are presumed to carry family and school responsibilities. Such literature tends to leave out the undergraduate mothers who may be assumed insignificant in terms of population yet the motherhood experience is the same across the stage irrespective of when or where the baby comes.



On the other hand, education policies in Kenya regarding pregnancy and schooling are also discriminatory. They tend to feature either teenage mothers in primary and secondary school or mature student mothers on mature entry at university. For the USTM, there is little of policy except the intimidating caution in some student hand books in certain universities that demand that they vacate hostels and defer studies and examinations on becoming mothers. Undergraduate student mothers, barely out of adolescence present a marginalized group without forum or voice to air their predicament and impediments. For this reason, the qualitative researcher should seek to investigate their place in higher education; how they cope with the triple roles; their everyday engagements; the motivating factors; their pains and joys; narratives of perseverance: their lived experience. This is the gist of this research; amplifying the voices of the voiceless (the USTM) so that those students who are mothers like them, those around them and those who deal with them at university, may learn from their lived experience.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate lived experiences of the undergraduate student mothers. The study was aimed at getting an insight into their coping strategies with regard to the triple role. It was also focused on defining the social dynamics that are at play in higher education institutions that have had a bearing on USTM as persons, their accommodation; both physical and social, courses participation, academic achievement, progression and completion; the general quality of education they access. As an example, this research becomes hardy to stake holders to highlight the need to address the USTM challenges on campus while the other USTM learn lessons from the lived experience.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

- i. To investigate the daily engagements of a day in the life of an undergraduate student mother in schooling and parenting.
- ii. To identify factors that influence the undergraduate student mothers.
- iii. To establish the sources of strengths and support for the undergraduate student mothers.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

- i. What activities make a normal day in the life of an undergraduate student mother?
- ii. What are the factors that influence undergraduate student mothers as students and as mothers at university?
- iii. What are the coping mechanisms that contribute to the strengths and wellbeing of undergraduate student mothers in their triple role?

#### **1.6 Assumptions of the Study**

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- i. That there are undergraduate student mothers in undergraduate programs at the target university
- ii. That the USTM are willing to share their experiences and that they would honestly answer the research questions.

## 1.7 Justification of the Research

This study is a responsive gesture in enhancing the Gender Policy in Education in Kenya. The research comprehensively fits the Gender Policy in Education 2007 as part of the national responsiveness required of educators as part of the education team as expressed by the then Education Secretary Professor Godia whom in the policy document proclaims,

...it is therefore my hope that we shall all work towards realizing the targets set for this policy.... Being an educator at higher education, I have a duty to address any noted issue of inequality as targeted by the education gender policy... (pp. xii)

In the introductory chapter, the same policy reveals initiatives addressing gender disparities as clearly highlighting teen pregnancy and the prescribed re-entry policy as intervention into existing inequalities. The policy advocates for lobbying or advocacy against gender discrimination or any form of inequality or bias that may lock out individuals from participating meaningfully in education (ibid. pp 6-7). Closing the gender gap means engaging in relevant intervention, for instance, through increased education accessibility and retention and through research. Though not directly mentioned in the policy, researchers have a responsibility to highlight the student mothers' plight or stories of success.

Incidentally, this research is a response to; and fulfillment of, the Gender Policy in the education goals and objectives numbers 11-17, especially objective 15 that dictates to the Ministry of education the responsibility to, '*promote gender responsive research*' (MOEST 2004 pp. 9). The policy clearly stipulates the need for gender responsiveness

and inclusiveness to enhance women participation in education. It is this support through gender responsive research that culminates in closing the gender gap and addressing inequalities in the said policy and practice that institutions of higher learning have undertaken and must continue to undertake. This therefore makes this research endeavour justifiable and crucial.

In the background of inherent change in society, it is crucial that educational institutions be in consistency with social dynamics. A study done at the onset of this doctoral research concept paper in 2016 revealed a changing phenomenon in undergraduate student mother cases at a public university. The number of women getting babies at undergraduate was rising steadily reflecting some of the mothers dropping out or deferring studies for over five years due to the failed support structures for the mothers (Kamara, 2017). Such changes as sexuality and parenting patterns that have a direct influence in education may demand tolerance and accommodation in policy and practice in education since they are there to stay. In fact, institutions of higher learning need to retain their credibility in the realms of change, the reason as to why this research is justifiably relevant in investigating this inequality. The findings amplify key experiences that can help in gender mainstreaming as intervention towards schooling and motherhood.

In Kenya, there has been wide debate on the toll parenting takes upon the college students. Many writers cite women who become mothers mid-course as more affected than other women and men with regards not only in entry behaviour but also with

numbers in enrollment and the triple role that comes with schooling, social engagement and parenting as a basic life experience. Being a global phenomenon it is modest that researchers join the rest of the world in advocacy in student mothers' social mobility, career choice and completion in higher education.

Very current research reveals that it is an area highlighted as in dire need of intervention for effective student mother accommodation and completion (Lyonette, 2015; Chemjor, 2013 and Maynard 2016). Also, in Kenya, student mothers' population is definitely on the rise due to certain societal dynamics, and in such a failure as to establish intervention, it will be detrimental in higher education attainment.

Again, research on the USTM is apparently scanty and therefore causing glaring gaps in knowledge about their experiences. In its background lies epistemological and ontological contradictions in policy and practice and therefore requires insight such as the one revealed in the outcome of this research. The study ensures the purge in knowledge, which involves getting rid of obsolete knowledge and assumptions through collection of new data in the background of social dynamics. Old knowledge gets to be identified and cleared while institutions are furnished with current research findings. Such findings are likely to be applicable in current trends in higher education. Great solutions to current problems in student mother education are likely to be achieved in this study. In pursuit of this, it is important that the voices of these student mothers be heard, bearing witness of stories of success that can be used not only to inspire future student mothers but also to advice policy makers on issues of students' social mobility and inclusive education.

In the background of Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory, (Bandura, 1999), being aware of the triple role demands and the possible 'crack' under its weight, the USTM opt to concentrate on their conviction that they have what it takes to manage the roles to be successful. Other student mothers, to whom the findings will continue to be disseminated, might find the lived experience as a lesson book for motivation, insight and reference in their schooling within motherhood and its related challenges.

### **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This study deals with an area that is currently under - researched as reflected in the scanty data available on-line in relation to education and socialization. Furthermore, the research focuses on a category of students that are marginalized both in society and in research, attempting to identify not only the sources of their strength and perseverance but also those aspects of inequality that society needs to be aware of, especially the underlying factors of impediment in quality education and achievement. This not only builds and accumulates educational research at university but also articulates theory and practice in education. To illustrate this phenomenon is a case scenario of the MOEST Gender Policy of 2007, developed from the earlier mentioned MOEST policy of 2004. This policy requires that, institutions engage affirmative action to ensure education accessibility and inclusiveness for girls.

This research is therefore expected to generate a product intended to become a document for reference by stakeholders like the MOEST in student mother policy review in the face of social dynamics and emerging needs in education for women. In view of the need for

relevant policies, policy analysis is best done with the subjects lived experience approach (Fimyar, 2014). In this way, the gaps and missing links are exposed when USTM are placed in the policy historiography, genealogy and archaeology (Gale, 2001) as measures of testing for policy effectiveness.

The recommendations of the research are expected to be of use in influencing universities to put in place policies and mechanisms that enhance quality education for the undergraduate student mothers. The student mother input in policy analysis and formulation could enhance policy validity. The recommendations of this research can therefore be a guide by policy makers and directorates like Institute for Gender Education and Research Development IGERD in one of the public universities, to improve education accessibility for USTM and help to close the gender gaps, enhance mobility, as well as widening the scope of engagement and offering equal opportunities in education.

The research has contributed to the pool of knowledge in Sociology of Education as a discipline as it has led to publishing and has consequently contributed to new creative and interesting research results in sociological issues in education with the aim of attracting readership and or collaborative study in the discipline. The findings are therefore expected to be instrumental in education planning to avail both material and human resources that fit the needs of the undergraduate student mothers. Such needs can only be realized if the USTM are accepted as part of inevitable change at university in addressing change and management of change.

As a teacher educator at higher education, the research is a great resource in shedding light into the experience of a special group of students. The research results therefore bear a focal point in higher education experience of student mothers. This study actually offers a unique experience with undergraduate student mothers.

### **1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study involved USTM at university within the active semester session and in a natural environment of a campus. Various Schools within the campus were represented in the identified participants although purely by chance not by design. A preliminary survey reached out to the Dean of students to establish whether USTM were a reality within the student body. The research's scope too, was limited to undergraduate student mothers on the main campus only. Being a special group of individuals, it may not have been possible to establish the actual population of the USTM for lack of statistical data on numbers. The sample size was limited to five student mothers in third year cohorts.

Data on the student mothers from the various schools captured their varied experiences within the structural and academic diversity of the schools. In-depth investigation for each participant was done with follow ups, a process that took six months to complete. The study was also limited by chance to undergraduate schooling mothers who got babies in first or second year of study and from purposely the regular intake groups in transition from secondary school. This group excluded the privately sponsored students whose experience may be equivalent to that of the mature entry student mothers. Involving such groups may alter the basic intended outcomes of the research.



The research site was limited to a single institution that excludes the satellite campuses; a factor that may appear to limit credibility of the findings. However, in the grounds of qualitative research, the single institution is not meant to be a generalization of the USTM in Kenya. The setting as social phenomena in this phenomenological study is basically for the purpose of in-depth exploration (Creswell, 2014 & Fahad 2018) that might get compromised working with a huge scope and large populations and a range of samples of participants if all campuses or universities were featured. A diverse cite like the various campuses of the university may provide different data that will otherwise compromise the intended in-depth exploration of individuals' lived experiences through narratives (Sandelowski, 2010). Such narratives are seen at two levels; the literal narratives and the constructed meaning as a result of interpretation. Furthermore, with qualitative research, the outcome is more of shared experience rather than deductions from huge generalized samples.

Another limitation is that social-cultural variables from the university environs were not factored in, though they may have had an influence in the lives of the USTM. For these limitations, grounded theory was employed where such factors as those that arose in the narratives were articulated as defining and designing the USTM lived experience. Being a theory and a method in data collection, Grounded Theory facilitated new knowledge on the social cultural backgrounds that have such a bearing on the student mother experience. Such factors were keyed in when they came up during the interviews.

The study also locked out potential contribution from those not on sessions at the time of the research while the participating group was picked by chance and not representation.

The argument is that the focus was lived experience of individuals not that of representative groups.

There was also anticipation that, some USTM may not share deeply enough on first encounters. This was enhanced through follow ups with participants in the process of participant - check of the transcribed data (Creswell, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to establish whether the transcribed copy had captured their input articulately and in detail. A clarification of unclear issues in the conversations was sought as well.

Other limitations were anticipated in data collection where the outcome gets to be compromised, altered or influenced by researcher bias, or where language may affect meaning during transcription. For such a case, 'bracketing' as advocated for by Creswell, (2014) and Van Manen (2018) was used to temporarily suppress researcher influence during interviews. Bracketing suspends one's own experience or natural assumptions about a situation to avoid prejudice. This allows the narrative voice of the participants to be heard (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Each of the participants was also given a soft copy of their interview details after transcription to read and check for errors, misquoted statements or misguided observations. This feedback from participant check for each of the participants helped to certify the correctness of recorded data regarding what they meant during narration to avoid researcher bias, a limitation that affects reliability of the study (Creswell, 2014). Induction of participants on their role in the research was quite instrumental in retaining the boundaries in shared information to overcome instrumentation limitations.

### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework in this research is fitted within research in lived experience and the use of grounded theory as a theory and a method of data collection. The framework consists of a three tier experience. The first level represents the theoretical orientation of the research within the social exchange theory by George Homans (1958). The theory views human interaction and social behaviour as a form of exchange involving costs and benefits.

The second tier of the theoretical framework draws from the research process where the theoretical orientation allows the theory and the research process to merge in Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 2015). This occurred during data collection where the open ended questions of the interview schedule revealed during piloting that the research was basically within the realms of Grounded Theory approach.

The third tier of the theoretical framework appears at the level of data analysis as an emerging theory from the research process (Charmaz, 2014). It comes out of the results of the research endeavour and outcomes. The theory, resilience, in this tier emerged as a theory at play in the lived experience of undergraduate student mothers. Initially, it is often a black area, inconceivable before data analysis is done. On doing literature, on resilience theory, it was placed within the female identity theory, foundations upon which intrapersonal resilience is built as manifest in the data analysis. Though discussed within resilience, they are well expounded in the literature review. Such theories as self-efficacy or even the Josselson's identity theory (Josselson, 1998), are derivative of the forces at play in the USTM experience, an attempt by the researcher to create a mental picture of

the social phenomena surrounding undergraduate motherhood and education. To an extent, this is the essence of Grounded Theory; theory that emerges slowly with each bit of collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The research, as earlier noted, at the proposal level drew from two basic theories; the social exchange theory and grounded theory. These two theories have been to an extent viewed as theories and as processes and for each, a brief history, theoretical concerns and relevance to this research has been done in this framework.

### **1.11.1 Social Exchange Theory**

The social exchange theory is a sociological theory that applies in the social psychology field of knowledge as well. It was introduced by George Homans in 1958. Homans did lots of studies between 1958 and 1961 on the sociological implications of the theory which culminated into what he called 'social behaviour as exchange' in 1961. To Homans, social encounter for humans involves interaction and behaviour. Such interaction is determined by the way individuals view things and situations. Individuals in normal interaction are viewed as actors on social stage or social phenomena. An actor in the social world is driven by economic or social gains that are aimed at satisfying a social need. Such social needs are love, respect and acceptance irrespective of whether one deserves it or not. They could also be material or economic gains. The schooling undergraduate mothers are seen enduring the challenges of motherhood in order to achieve academically, graduate in good time and probably acquire employment.

In the social exchange scenario, interaction is viewed as involving social exchange where an individual is driven to acquire or attain a certain value that Homans called reward that involves sacrifice of another value he called the cost. For every reward, there must be a price to pay. Challenges like fatigue and denial of luxury reflect a price paid for being a mother. For Homans, the reward in every situation must be of greater value than what it cost to acquire it. Rewards are viewed as positive gains like appreciation, love, and satisfaction. Such values may not have an economic measure but their contribution to social existence is immeasurable.

Cost on the other hand involves things that are perceived as negative or detrimental to progress. They may act as stumbling blocks to education progression in the case of the USTM progression in academics. Benefits in this case may be associated with the gains in their endeavour like the social support and education participation. A key factor in such social exchange is equity where the reward is the same for everyone in situations of similar costs. Inequality however may occur where some people are rewarded more than others for the same cost or where some people pay more than others for the same value reward. This is the picture that comes out of the USTM and other students without babies. The triple role is an extra price for them to pay yet they finally end up with the equalising degree (same value).

Another social feature that comes out of social interaction is reciprocity where reward is reciprocal. It involves expectations for value addition in a relationship. One does a favour to another expecting another favour in return, such that if a person failed to return a favour, one should not expect another favour another time. For a normal stable life, the

benefits should be seen to outweigh the costs in the exchange of value resources in interpersonal or organizational relationships. This explains social change and social stability from the point of view of social processes of negotiated exchanges like in comparison of alternatives. It involves a kind of cost/benefit analysis with economic and social outcomes. This can be seen in their resilience when faced with challenges like the triple role. Perseverance for the sake of keeping the baby, achieving in academics involve weighing the cost of career loss that comes out of deferred courses. Coming in to intervene in student mother challenges by friends and stakeholders means they on the other hand will work against the odds to reciprocate the assistance given to them.

Social exchange basically leads to development of certain social patterns that contribute to social wellbeing like the decision making processes. Costs are elements of a negative value while benefits are positive values. In everyday life, it addresses issues like decision making that involve alternatives so that one picks what one is comfortable with. This choice however is guided by a cost and benefit analysis; a kind of looking at the pros and cons of a phenomenon. In encounters like the choice to keep the baby against thoughts of abortion, seen in the lived experience of the USTM involve weighing the impact of each alternative.

### **1.11.2 Grounded theory**

At the second level, grounded theory is employed as a theory due to the nature of researching lived experiences. This is because the researcher in this situation sets out to discover what lies beyond the known; the unknown. When the subjects; the USTM, begin

narrating their live journeys, the researcher begins to discover that world. Historically, grounded theory has its roots in psychology, as it was first developed and used for patients with terminal illnesses (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 2015). It was in attempt by social-psychologists to gain insight into the patients' lived experience. This was essentially to prevent preconceptions of patients' experience in a generalized or prejudiced approach, but to treat each patient in their own individuality as seen through the stories of their lives. Developed by Glaser and Straus from the University of California, the theory gained popularity as a means of helping medics intervene professionally in patients' varied issues (Glaser, 1978, Glaser & Straus, 2015).

Grounded theory neither begins as a definite theory in an individual research engagement, nor with predetermined theories. It actually forms its theories as the discovery unfolds with the shared experience with participants during the research process. Grounded theory displays a spectrum of tenets adopted from theories at play in each of the observed phenomenon as displayed in the lived experience. First, it is closely associated with symbolic interaction theory (Giddens, 2006) in the description of the social phenomena regarding lived experience. The theory claims that the meaning people derive from their lives heavily relies on their interpretation of the symbols of interaction, that is; the derived meaning that defines how they react to the world around them. Individuals are viewed as actors in the world and interaction as part of social phenomena (Giddens, 2006 & Schaefer, 2004).

In this background of interaction, theories at play are grounded in the lives of the USTM and therefore become an aspect of the research process. They become part of the

literature to be reviewed and part of the discussion of findings in the research development. Without prior knowledge of the participants' lived experience, the researcher cannot preempt or preconceive the research outcome till the USTM bring it out themselves in their narratives derived from the history of their lives.

From the second perspective, grounded theory is applicable as a method of data collection. The grounded theory's convenience with phenomenological research methodology has been cited by Crooks (2001), who finds grounded theory useful in generating theory from data as one explores social phenomena for situations of lived experience, exploring and identifying those aspects. As a method, grounded theory is well articulated in chapter three under the methods of data collection, with interviews as key methods employed in the data collection procedures. The purpose of this introductory part of grounded theory methodology is essentially to denote the dual role of grounded theory as a theory and as a method.

### **1.11.3 Resilience theory**

This theory arose from the research process in the correction of data. As indicated by experts in grounded theory research, (Bryant 2018, Creswell, 2014), the narratives or in this case the stories of the lives of the undergraduate student mothers brought out distinct features of resilience that pointed to the resilient theory. Resilience theory emerges in the background of psychology with Garmezy Norman, a doctor in mental health designing the theory in his studies in mental health. As a clinical psychologist, Garmezy found a relationship between healing and certain disposition of a patient that influenced them towards the recovery process. It is this influence that he calls resilience. The theory



indicates that individuals have the potential to react positively to challenges and challenging events through evoking self-will to prevail against adversity. With regards to mental health, he saw adversity like rape, abuse, trauma and loss as catastrophes that represent adversity. Such resilience that emerges from an individual is seen as the prop upon which the individual thrives against adversity or difficult situations. Such individuals face the difficulties as though they were sources of strength.

The student mothers can be seen in this resilience when the threat of deferment of courses or dropping out of college for lack of support at the university is encountered. The fatigue, frustrations and the demands of the triple and quadruple roles of a student mother are threats to perseverance that is critical in maintaining them in the system against all odds. The fact that the concerned student mothers are seen overcoming such challenges one after the other reflects the withstanding force that we are calling resilience.

### **1.12 Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework emerges from multiple factors in the research. Modelled from the recommendations of Corbin and Strauss (2015) framework, it presents the USTM journey in lived experience where the USTM stands as an independent variable. The framework explores relationships of initial concepts developed before undertaking the research, theories and methods emerging during the research and the emerging coded themes during data analysis in the research process; all culminating in the new insights of the lived experience (figure 1.1). The framework focuses on the life journeys of the USTM as seen through narratives in the phenomenological inquiry into their lived experience in the background of the social exchange theory.

The framework highlights the multiple marginality of an USTM as a student like any campus girl and as a mother with a triple role. In a diagrammatic representation as highlighted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2017). The framework is presented at two levels; before the research and after the research. The first one presents a circular framework that indicates in the outer circle the existing knowledge like the USTM in the background of social exchange theory. It indicates the triple role as shouldered by the vulnerable USTM as she stands out in the social exchange theory as indicated in figure 1.1:

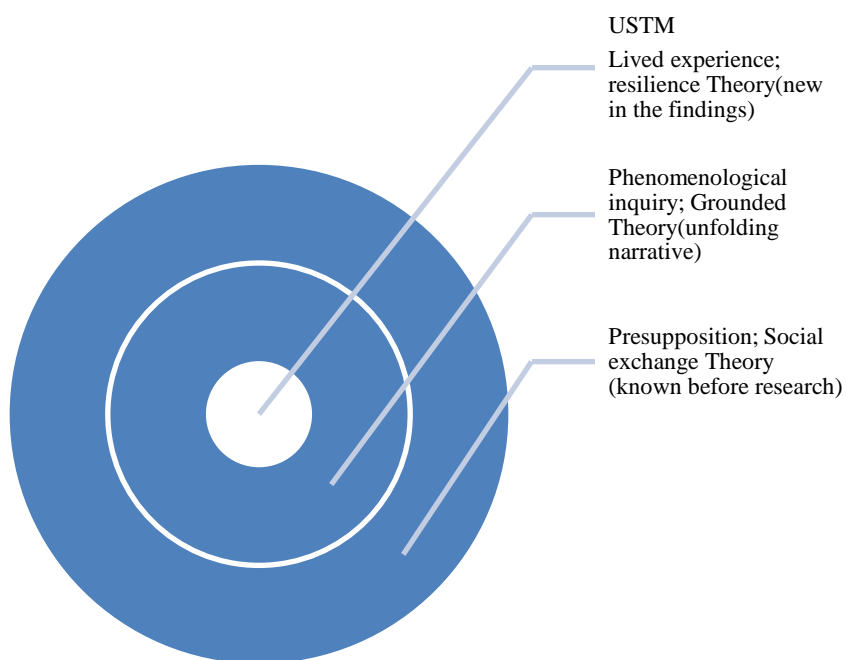


Figure 1.1 USTM Conceptual Framework

As the study progresses, through the phenomenological presentation of lived experience of undergraduate motherhood, so deepens our knowledge of the USTM phenomenon. Their narratives yield lots of unfolding truths as one moves into the core of their lived

experience. Through grounded theory approaches in data collection the study yields the core findings that define the student mother; the resilience theory.

In conceptualizing the framework, the triple role represents and generates academic, domestic and social roles, with extra duties, chores, responsibilities and engagements of motherhood and schooling. That kind of engagement may cause anxiety, fatigue, pain, ill health, emotional turmoil, and a feeling of alienation.

Despite such a predicament, the USTM is seen thriving against adversity, physical strain and mental anguish and achieving academic fulfilment in academic progression, achievement of quality education and completion. If the negative experience overpowers the student mother as intervening variables then the USTM defers classes or drops out of college as illustrated in figure 1.2.

The independent variable is the undergraduate student mother who has an obligation to perform her roles as mother and as student. Being a mother is the fact that may not be altered. She either thrives in education or drops out of university. On the other hand, the dependent variable is education, which depends on the resilience and success of a student mother especially when the intervening variables are positive. Education processes may stall or fail when the intervening variables are negative and the USTM is unable to cope. For them, education thrives in their ability to develop a thick skin against the extraneous variables. Such variables as the gossips and alienation from friends who desert on discovering one was pregnant need to overcome. This is seen as the connection that provides support towards the development of resilience as illustrated in figure 1.2. the

extraneous variables are either positive to keep the USTM in school or negative to result into failed education endeavour..

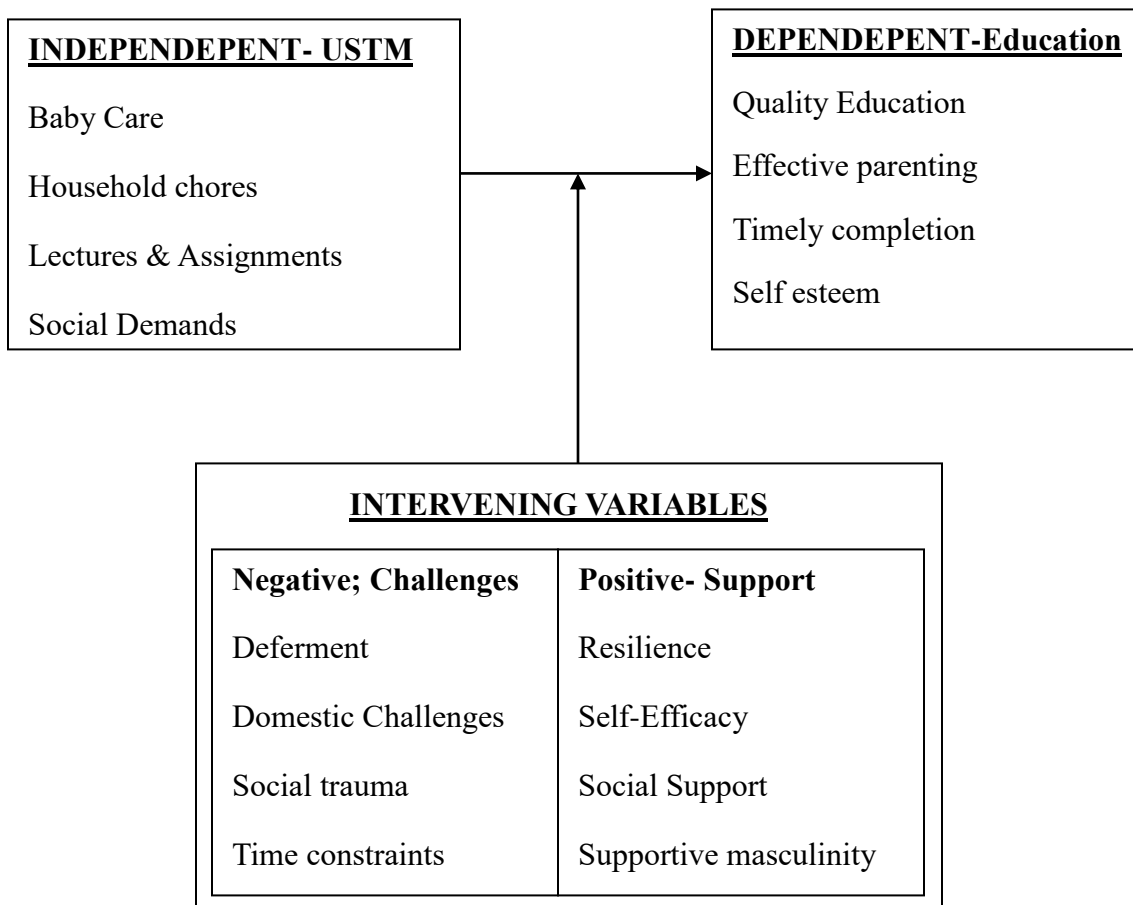


Figure 1.2 The Triple Role Concept

Finally, as seen from the findings, the ability for the USTM to remain on session while others with babies drop out of campus or defer courses is seen as emerging from the psyche; that positive thinking. It is this psychic strength that represents the resilience, the self-efficacy, the self-sacrifice and the positive psychology that enhance USTM retention and academic achievement.

The USTM educational outcome, their experiences as mothers and their place among other students is seen as unique among the post-secondary lot. This is because the coming of a baby creates some kind of Intersectionality, with the USTM placed at crossroads in the undergraduate academic journey. While the young mother should be proceeding with attending to lectures, co-curricular like sports, social events and leisure with her peers, motherhood comes in with a host of responsibilities that defy a common youth's engagement yet the social mechanisms of a mature entry mother like family support, financial security and expert parenting, may be lacking due to limited exposure and experience for the said USTM. This implies that full engagement into university lifestyle may be barred by parenting responsibilities without the crucial resilience that makes the difference.

### **1.13 Operational Definitions of Terms**

**Lived experiences:** Life journeys: Activities, engagements, feelings and emotions of USTM in schooling and parenting

**Regular entry:** Mass post-secondary university intake

**Mature entry:** voluntary enrollment into university mostly by those already in formal employment and have families.

**Freshers:** freshmen or first year undergraduate students

**Barriers:** factors that contribute to the difficulties of USTM in undertaking normal routine at university

**Quality education:** Education that addresses the participation, accessibility, and inclusiveness of the USTM just like the other students.

**Achievement:** The ability to tackle academic and motherhood roles successfully without compromising any of them

**Triple role:** Multiple tasks an undergraduate student mother undertakes like baby care, college assignments, motherhood and domestic chores

**Adversity:** Gossips, physical and emotional pain or discouragement that threaten to deter the USTM progress

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

Being a phenomenological study, the literature review traverses the period before and after data collection, as illustrated by Bloomberg and Volpe (2017). The two claim that in qualitative research, there exists a back and forth movement between data collection and revisiting literature review to track emerging concepts and their relevant details. This was found necessary in the grounded theory approach built on the Straussian tradition in qualitative research methodologies. The literature review in this case was a dynamic process driven by the need to clarify issues that emerged during the research in addition to the initial literature that came up in the stages of development of concepts in the research proposal stages. The literature covers pertinent issues that were presented at the onset of the research regarding existing knowledge of student mothers in general and what emerged in the research process and resilience that emerged at data analysis. The general approach was adopted on the discovery that existing literature was scanty and it existed within generalized situations like student parents. As observed by seasoned qualitative researchers the literature review in qualitative research is critical as it enhances research trustworthiness or dependability and also validates some of the claims that arise in the research (Creswell, 2017, Charmaz, 2014 and Fahad 2018). For this reason, the literature on student mothers was pegged on previous scholarly work obtained from research sites in educational institutions and in the education context of student motherhood, inclusive education and student academic engagement. It also touches on

challenges of motherhood and schooling and the place of student mothers in higher education institutions. A background into relevant methodological and theoretical traditions has also been delved into in an attempt to place the study in a definite approach according to the school of thought by Glaser (1978), Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014) with regard to phenomenological studies and grounded theory.

Collected from global contexts, the research largely relied upon scholarly work and research findings from collaborative research from universities and foundations that fund education like the Nuffield Foundation in Europe (Pierre, 2012). Such research tends to derive its findings from across many nations, often in comparative studies that credibly bring out reliable social phenomena of a social issue like student mothers especially where relevant literature is scanty in qualitative enquiry.

With regards to the subject, the first part of the literature review discusses the student mother within global contexts with highlights from America and Europe. The picture emerging around this is the fact that issues of undergraduate student mothers occur in the context of the larger group of student mothers globally, some of whom are working and take a break to further their education. Further, the literature traces the features of student mother experience in higher education through scholarly research in the African context and with a special focus on Kenya and the student mother population in higher education. Emerging issues like theories and methods that become entrenched in the research during data collection are also included. The study background in the challenges of the government in ensuring inclusive education also takes a bit of the literature.



## **2.1 Tracking Student Mother Experience in Global Contexts**

Seen from this global context, student mothers in general present a phenomenon reenacted in every continent irrespective of the level or degree of development in higher education. Challenges in education affordability, accessibility, participation, retention and achievement are echoed in America, Europe, Australia and Africa with regards to student parents. For instance, in Europe, in a funded research report on college opportunities by the Eleanor Roosevelt fund, undertaken collaboratively across many nations, chapter 4 of the compiled report is dedicated to student mothers. The report explores the place of student mothers in higher education and focuses on meeting their needs as a special group. The report also reveals that student mothers require attention in their endeavor to enhance the access and pursuit of education for mobility and social-economic preparedness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Basically, the report takes a wider scope in student parents in higher education by addressing matters regarding enrollment per gender, ethnicity and age and their enrollment status for a long duration, capturing the annual enrolment trends between the year 2003 and 2010. Though basically addressing non-undergraduate student mothers, or mature entry students in the Kenyan experience, the point of intersection can be felt in the collective concern and response towards student mother challenges. It addresses the student mother roles for instance childcare, socio-economic challenges and social support. Such issues are reflected as cutting across many participating nations in the research on the student mother experience, whether undergraduate or mature entry student mothers. This concern arises from the fact that student mother phenomenon is a social reality whose epistemological background and the

ontological implications of motherhood need to be addressed. This student mother reality comes out with research carried out in education and motherhood (Behle, 2014 and Brook, 2014). Accumulated data credibly leads to the fact that student mothers remain a special group requiring contextual assessment of individualized challenges that continually bedevil education advancement and cause social-economic retardation of mothers especially those pursuing higher education.

Another study from Toronto USA (Ajadi 2011), reveals student mother experience that is to an extent a replica of the mature entry student mothers' case in Kenyan universities. Her cohort of student mothers, though mixed, is composed of a mixed category of mothers as PhD students, Masters Students and some working students on part-time with only two of the mothers as undergraduate students.

The student mothers in this research are portrayed as not having as much of difficulties as compared to the traditional student mothers. It would be of value however to identify any similarities or disparities occurring in some similar phenomena in Kenya. Seen from a wider perspective, the study is quite resourceful in highlighting the sources that student mothers derive strength and achievement from. It would again be all so important to find out such strengths among the undergraduate student mothers in the Kenyan experience, given that the state support may be far much higher in USA than in Kenya. In fact, such support in Kenya is tentatively nonexistent (Mahugu, 2014; Shemjor, 2014) and one would be curious to find out just how the USTM make ends meet. Absence of such similar strengths may inform best practices in the student mother management at university as well, especially during dissemination of the research findings. Looking at

such a scenario, we are left convinced that student mothers may be requiring attention if meaningful and equitable education is to be achieved. A major contribution of the research is its use of a similar methodology that echoes success to the current research that makes use of interviews.

From Europe, Professor Claire Callender of the University Of London- Institute Of Education, in a series of seminar papers (Callender 2016) presents a current picture of student mothers in Europe (and probably in the rest of the world) as in dire need of specialised attention. She cites the need to increase participation of student mothers in higher education through inclusive education that does not marginalise such groups as the student mothers. Professor Callender sees a double blessing in student mother support in that it not only increases social mobility through access to higher education but it also paves way to tackling poverty.

This current view towards student mothers no doubt illustrates student motherhood as a challenge in the global picture, affecting even the developed nations. Though her suggested solutions lie in the curriculum designs and the introduction of relevant social sciences courses, a common focus is still clearly outlined; the fact that without support of student mothers, due challenges will result into a vicious circle of poverty. Inaccessibility to education because of the triple role leads to a scenario where their children like themselves, will lack support and proper foundations in education, fail to get into careers or good enterprise hence leading to poverty. Such a view is also shared by studies in teen motherhood in Zimbabwe where the offspring of teen mothers also got babies early and

dropped out of school young and poor to relive the lives of their mothers and complete the vicious circle of poverty.

This need to support student mothers is echoed by the former American President Barack Obama in his attempt to increase the number of college graduates through identifying and tackling challenges of retention and completion (Obama2009). In the success of his endeavor, some of the realized and cited achievements in the increased college enrolment are enhanced affordability of education through support of student mothers, access to a range of programs that accommodates their triple role and subsidized rates at university for such students. Great success was noted with low income mothers who could afford the subsidized rates.

New policies also ensured that student mothers could manage school, family and work responsibilities, resulting to their mobility and completion going very high. A comparison with Kenya may reveal aspects of special programs like the 'school based' or part time programs for the general population of mature teachers who are out to further their studies but never on the basis of special cases like student mothers. There is again nothing to do with subsidized rates in the Kenyan experience. This scenario is proof that if those in community colleges in a developed nation like America still encountered difficulties despite the heavy support, then our undergraduate student mothers in Kenya are likely to be badly off due to the strained socio-economic background of baby raising expenditure and high college fees with tight program schedules, that may leave no room for personal engagement, their age and in-experience notwithstanding. The student

mothers' participation, retention, achievement and even graduation time could also be badly compromised.

Another wide study done in ten universities across England revealed that generally, university policies did not address student parents especially the student mother needs. As a result, the study indicated, retention and progression of student mothers in their course work were badly compromised (Moreau and Kerner, 2012). It is such a scenario that is reenacted by the activities of the Institute for Women Policy Research (IWPR) in America. The institute has a strong foundation in establishing support initiatives in education for student parents.

A remarkable part of the initiative which everyone should learn from, is their commitment to education for student parents. They have thorough research engagement that releases findings regularly to track down student mothers' phenomena through updated statistics, tracing emerging issues and engaging intervention through policy and practice. While the Kenyan situation may look exaggerated, there is need to dig deeper into the scenario through research and advocacy. The institute is famed for their technical assistance in offering funds for the students with extra responsibilities like baby care, commuter and accommodation funds. The rich research outcomes at a glance reflect lots of activities within a very short period as revealed by the articles:

Single mothers in college: growing enrolment, financial challenges and the benefits of attainment...September 30<sup>th</sup> 2017

Time demands of single mother college students and the role of childcare in their post-secondary success (Cruse et al) May 10<sup>th</sup> 2018

Investing in single mothers' higher education: costs and benefits to individuals' families and society (Gaunt et al) June 6<sup>th</sup> 2018

Single mothers with college degrees much less likely to live in poverty (Cruse et al) ... July 30<sup>th</sup> 2018

Parents in college by the numbers (Cruse et al) ... April 11<sup>th</sup> 2019

In the United States of America, the student mother phenomena are perhaps given focus more than anywhere else in the world. The few activities in research outlined in the IWPR activities indicate such a commitment as one that realizes change. Such focus may occur only when the society around student mothers is sensitive, responsive and supportive towards them.

## **2.2 Inclusive Education and the Parenting Experience in Kenya**

Inclusive education may refer to the kind of education that is accessible, accommodative and convenient with regards to multiple phenomena in admission, accommodation, progression and retention of students, irrespective of race, colour, gender, age, background or physiology (Musili, 2018; Blessinger, 2018). It should be an education that embraces equality for the marginalised people like in disability or student mothers; people who are socially or biologically different in a way as to affect equality and fair participation in education.

Inclusive education is basically a mandatory venture for any nation that subscribes to basic human rights as stipulated by UNESCO, in the view of education as crucial in social sustainability. This is why inclusive education is stressed upon as a way of minimizing or eliminating multiple marginalities in the delivery of quality education. Such marginality may be resulting from backgrounds like race and ethnicity; from the

cultural context like gender or fateful circumstances like poverty, physical inaccessibility or motherhood. Inclusive education therefore becomes a central theme in this study, as the study highlights motherhood as a key source of marginalisation of USTM as a minority group at university. Research in this field reveals parent roles as barriers towards quality education (Musili, 2018; Mahugu, 2014; Kaplan, 2017; Taukeni, 2014) as student parents are on a daily struggle against suppressors towards education achievement (Shemjor, 2015). They do so against difficulties as single mothers (Temblador, 2014) and in the background of little or no socio-economic support (Mark, 2013).

Elsewhere, just like in the Kenyan experience, being a student mother is seen as a challenge with regards to education accessibility and participation (Lyonette, 2015; Callender, 2016). Noted as missing links, are the areas of equity and inclusivity in education phenomena regarding those who become parents at university like the case of undergraduates, or those who join university as parents in the part time and mature entry programmes. For this reason, major research endeavours have been undertaken to unearth challenges encountered in ensuring quality education (Moghadam, 2017, Bosch 2013 and Brooks, 2014). This might be viewed as the gist as to why various scholars and researchers suggest the need to increase participation of student mothers in higher education if higher education relevance is to be achieved. Some of them see policy as behind the strength or failure in inclusive education for student parents (Chemjor, 2013) while others view it as related to support (Callender, 2016; Mark 2013).

In whichever level of marginality and whatever the cause of it, Van Manen (2018) in researching lived experience recommends that there is need to engage the student

mothers themselves to share with us the stories of their lives for us to identify both individual and contextual issues that lead to marginalization. It is such identification that might lead to the identification of solutions. Echoing Van Manen (2018), Gale, (2001) who claims that many strategic activities regarding such phenomena as student mother marginality tend to fail for lack of proper policy sociology, a policy that involves critical policy analysis through the direct involvement of the subjects of the policy under question (Fimyar & Gale, 2001).

To achieve inclusiveness in student mother scenario, many views have been expressed. Some researchers see strength in the formation of support groups for student mothers as a way of ensuring mainstream retention at school, whether higher education or otherwise. The student mothers are reflected as feeling disempowered or devalued in an environment that is silent on their predicament. Though researchers address psychological challenges like depression their observation is valid in the student mother emotional state as indicated by Brooks (2014) whose study reveals being a schooling mother as causing mental anguish despite the pleasantness that comes with being a mother.

Basically, being a mother at undergraduate can be disconcerting owing to the intrigues of the new mother status (Moghadam, 2017). Contrary to traditional settings where childbirth is a social occurrence often accompanied by close attendance by family and friends, getting a baby at university and most probably bringing it up in a private residence away from home can be quite disconcerting. In fact, if it ever occurs when the



circle of college friends is out on examinations, concern and support for the new mother can be badly compromised and therefore detrimental to the health of mother and baby.

Research methods that derive data from wide populations too reflect the same experiences and challenges for such mothers. This adds credibility to the student mother global view of motherhood as a challenge. The triple role is viewed as a burden, something that weighs heavily on the shoulders of the USTM. In fact, Moghandam (2017) refers to such parenthood as a liability in an environment that offers little student mother support. The scenario does not seem to change for a survey conducted on student mother experiences and how they handled their parenting roles by Brown et al (2007) that was transformed into a medical publication, and one that highlights the experiences of student mothers. They are literally overwhelmed.

Of importance to note is that for many researchers, the major focus has been the mature student mothers, though the triple role effect comes out clearly in both mature entry students and the USTM. Just like Anaya (2014) found out, there is the reflection of the graduate student mothers being at crossroads since they are bare adolescents faced by parenting and attempting to balance the good mother and good student roles (Brooks, 2014). It is this feature that may require a deeper insight regarding the Kenyan experience. Motherhood in many communities is associated not only with marriage, but also with the out-of-school young adults. This explains why the student mothers hide pregnancy or feel ashamed of their situation. They feel guilty for letting down their parents by getting babies before completion (Brooks, 2014, and Moghadam, 2017). This indicates aspects of prejudice and discrimination where the motherhood is almost viewed

as deviance against the norm. As if it is not bad enough for the student parents to be ridiculed, the triple role is demanding and requires lots of strategizing in order to fulfill the student and mother role effectively (Moreau and Kerner, 2013).

Inclusive education which is a major focus on quality education, accessibility and completion is on the other hand a counter attack towards marginalization. It is basically meant to enhance equity. The United Nations and the UNESCO reflect education as a basic human right and have therefore worked towards ensuring that everyone has access to education. Success does not however come easily due to impediments like ill health, physical and mental impairment and other social and environmental predicaments.

### **2.3 Undergraduate Student Mother Vulnerability; a Disparaging Image**

Scholars featuring student mothers often present a picture of student mothers as in dire need of support. As per the findings, Callender (2016) in her survey claims that student mothers as non-traditional (regular) students have challenges in the face of motherhood. The study however reveals attempted intervention into their plight. This is dissimilar with undergraduate students who are mothers and yet given neither favour nor consideration as a special category of students in many institutions. The USTM may have even more challenges than other student mothers despite the assumptions and misconceptions surrounding them and lack of focus on their plight. Against family responsibility and academic career aspirations, doing well in one area like in academics may mean compromising another side of the parenting life or even their social wellbeing and vice versa. Callender saw the student mother issues as inadequately explored. In the survey, the aim was to discover the place of the student mothers. She acclaims the efforts of her

nation in accommodation of student mothers where colleges and universities had become more flexible in their approach, offering day, evening, online, accelerated and mixed modality courses and programs to accommodate students who are mothers. The Kenyan school based program is the closest in such intervention and evidently it has just nothing to do with student mother schooling intervention as it is more of staff development based as it is basically open to all teachers and gives no special considerations to student mothers on session.

In most of the available literature in Kenya, it is clear that the student mother issues have been a concern in the field of education with many scholars engaging their masters or doctoral research in the field (Brooks, 2012, Wekesa & Nelima 2011, Mahugu, 2014, Anaya 2011 and Shemjor 2015). The reviewed literature, seen from a spurn of six years reveals common challenges as well as contextual unique ones owing to the socio-economic wellbeing of the higher education institutions. While parenting challenges and the triple role are common in many of the reports, other problems are seen emanating from intervention strategies. In fact, when some universities do not even recognize their plight, others are way ahead offering on-line education assistance and doing research on the on-line studies as intervention into student mother challenges. The point here is that there is need to engage institutional responsiveness.

According to USAID (2019) report, they proclaim in a report on the organization activities to deal with women and girls issues meaningfully, to enhance participation of all in education. Where research reveals challenges, intervention should be sought and

any new intervention requires further research to watch out for emerging issues and challenges in the face of social dynamism in student mothers and social change.

#### **2.4 Student Mothers in Public Universities**

Literature from Kenya reveals the area of student mothers as under-researched and most of what is available deals with basically mature entry student mothers while a bulk of them concentrate on the more critical teen mothers at high school or primary school. The few studies in higher education tend to feature challenges facing the student mothers with little of intervention (Mahugu, 2014 & Shemjor, 2015). These two studies that are a close semblance of this research dwell on the challenges faced by student mothers and their focus is basically across the various groups of student mothers. They view student mothers from a broader perspective of administrative structures that support inclusive education by offering education accessibility-friendly programmes like the part time programmes.

While the part time student mothers can adjust their sessions to fit individual availability in terms of schedules and work planning, the undergraduate students have rigid programmes that are sometimes erratic and unpredictable in seasons, especially when disruptions occur during curriculum harmonization, increased enrolment with formation and shifting of cohorts or after long absence due to suspending of programmes during student unrests. During such dynamics, student mothers get disoriented. It also highlights areas that require intervention as derived from the views of the student mothers and the administrative stake holders.

Right from the policies in education theory and practice, gaps in policy and practice has not adequately addressed the USTM issues. A current gender policy (MOEST, 2007) in Kenya reflects an attempt to bridge the education gap and ensuring education for women and girls as a human right and a step towards gender parity in education. Education for girls requires affirmative action as it forms one of the major pre occupations of the global effort to enhance equitable and meaningful education. Organizations have made a commitment to affirmative action. A researcher from Kenya, Nelima (2011) refers to this student mother issue as a global agenda as seen from the United Nations convention of human rights. While seeing girls as an investment for economic participation, she articulates that such an achievement can only be acquired through effective participation of girls in education by elimination of abuse and discrimination by establishing rights in education and rights through education.

One of the organizations, USAID, which is committed to education for women and in this case the student mothers, does this through advocacy, campaigns and gender mainstreaming. Working with the community, one of the USAID projects targeted women education in the face of gender inequality in exposure to education and the need for empowerment of the marginalized women, the resultant fact sheet had this observation:

“Our partners are bringing the perspectives of women and girls and their full participation to the front lines; and men and boys are important partners in this effort.” USAID statement: factsheet, March 13<sup>th</sup> 2019.

Establishing the power relations that Nelima (2011) feels might interfere with accessibility, accommodation and participation of student mothers in education, Nelima’s

major focus is girls' education at secondary school. Just like in her endeavor, this research has sought to understand the place of student mothers at university. Though the annual regular intake ramps students together at university in Kenya, for the girls, getting a baby mid-course may raise the same issues of accommodation, accessibility and inclusive to lectures and educational activities and in the long run pose challenges towards quality education. This is the scenario that is investigated in this research.

## **2.5 Education Policies and Student Mothers Education in Kenya**

Discourse on policies reflect a disconnect between policy and practice in the gender policy in Kenya that was developed in 1996 and revised in 2006 and adopted in 2007. This policy raises issues of university policies and USTM: as observed in the theoretical framework with regards to gender policies and as brought out in the background to the gender policy in Kenya. Global trends reflect laxity either in implementation of existing policies, inadequate address of pertinent issues affecting student mothers, a skewed approach to the different student mother categories, application of discriminatory approaches and policies or policies reflect an outright and complete avoidance of recognition of the existence of such marginalized groups.

Though the initiative towards quality education is dogged by economic vulnerability, it may not be just a matter of lacking finance but much of misplaced priorities as reflected by Rotich in a social media twit, via the Katiba Institute's twitter forum (26<sup>th</sup> January, 2018), on government commitment towards achievement of vision 2030. Education is

expected to be non-discriminatory and expected to focus on special groups and ensure devotion towards those with greater impediments towards quality and inclusive education. Just as the United Nations monitors state performance in education through supervisory committees, so should be all other interested parties engaged with the inclusive education endeavour.

In Kenya, education policies have tended to feature more on special groups like the special needs categories, putting force in the provision of funding, teaching materials, schools and other physical and health facilities but fail to articulate intervention regarding student mothers. The case here, one may argue, could be the measure of vulnerability that blurs the view of such groups as the teen mothers and the USTM as marginalized. It is about the interpretation of marginalization and therefore the view of vulnerability.

The question of undergraduate student mothers with regard to education policies is rather complicated. First, except in the realms of gender, inclusive education views education marginalization in the realms of disability; physical, mental, multiple disabilities and the need for inclusive education through addressing their special needs. Focus by scholars and educationists in education policy and reforms as observed by Muricho and Changach (2013) have been geared towards relevance in practice, employment and individual development for all yet such achievement as set in the vision 2030 and the MDGs fail to be realized due to political interference. Government reforms are coercive and sometimes lack professional backing. The educational reforms prescribed by education commissions get partially adopted or get eroded by political declarations and directives that are not professionally founded.

Student motherhood, seen in the perspective of marginalized groups in education may be seen in the interest of the Koech report (MOEST 2007) that sought to eliminate marginalization on issues of gender, disability and social economic challenges through enhancing accessibility, progression and completion of programmes and observance of diversity and flexibility in education.

While universities outside Kenya see it as an individual institution's issue and have favorable and integrative programs, in Kenya it is generally viewed as a personal issue safe for some universities where a single individual's endeavor may attempt to bring them together for support. This could be a case of lack of a critical policy sociology (Gale, 2001). Back in the 1980s when student mother challenges began to gain focus, a public University in Kenya went out to seek intervention through provision of special accommodation hostels for student mothers. Later, the policy turned unpopular and many student mothers avoided the very hostels reserved for them. The same was attempted at another university in the the new millennium and the same phenomena was observed. All in all, the situation reveals obvious issues of epistemology and ontological gaps regarding such intervention into their *assumed* challenges of accommodation. Such phenomena lead to multiple questions; are the measures of intervention addressing the actual challenges or what policy makers may assume to be challenges? Are there challenges in the first place? Is the implementation of any corrective intervention properly done? Whose values do existing policies address? Has concrete educational research informed such decisions? These and other questions form the core of this research; establishing the place of the undergraduate student mothers in higher education, their participation in education,



barriers towards education achievement, how they cope, their achievements and failures, their opinion with regard to existing policies and their take on best practices as seen from the USTM themselves through their lived experience. Opinions, of relevant stakeholders have been found crucial to enlighten on previous activities, shared knowledge, institutional challenges in addressing student mother issues and intervention experiences as gathered through the literature review

In fact, USTM present an even more desperate scenario in the background of their age and experience. with little time spent outside school in the tight education schedules in Kenya. The secondary school-university transition does not make a difference in their tender age and proximity to teenage motherhood and being plunged into parenthood especially when alone at university can be alienating. This further deepens the curiosity; just how do they make it? It is noted that some measures of intervention earlier undertaken to alleviate challenges of parenting and schooling provision of affordable housing for such mothers are not popular. Lack of understanding, awareness or responsiveness towards USTM issues is evident in the few people who engage in research in this field.

By addressing policy issues, a nation may find it necessary to close educational gaps like education accessibility, like in the case of student mothers. A 2019 IWPR initiative reflects such an endeavor, where they are advocating for the support of student parents to increase higher education accessibility as a means of economic growth. They recommend engaging thorough research on student parenthood, increasing funding for such student parents and ensuring enhanced baby care support in institutions (IWPR, 2019). These are

seen as measures that remove the parenting burden to ensure productivity and improved economic growth.

## **2.6 Student Mothers and Identity Theories; Self-efficacy Theory**

In the background of the identity crisis that mothers face is what gives them the foundation for identity; the self-efficacy. Seen from the background of a theory as well as a process, self-efficacy as defined and developed by Bandura (1999), explores the psycho-social mechanisms at play in an individual in the process of socialization. Motherhood, despite age or financial comfort brings with it certain realizations of the motherhood role that one often had never had chance to fathom. As noted earlier in the background of the research, the cultural construct of childbirth like the mentioned African setting makes a difference in how such mothers construct their identities. Issues of acceptability, accommodation, support and integration tend to lessen challenges of such mothers, cultivate self-efficacy, become motivated and therefore achieve more in education (Levi, 2017, Rowe, 2017 and Moghadam 2017).

Self-efficacy may be best understood from the point of view of how the undergraduate student mothers view themselves and their construction of the realities of their lived experience as they undertake the motherhood role. Such student mothers are seen as developing an identity that fits their new role. According to Josselson (1998) identity takes certain directions in their development in an individual. She sees this development in a four key direction; the foreclosures, identity achievement, moratoriums and identity diffusion. The foreclosure stage involves seeking love and emotional attachment and concentrates on emotions and connection with significant others. The identity

achievement is reflected as more bent towards acceptance by those with whom they associate and the community connection regarding interests and hobbies, against the serious world of work and career. At such a stage, such individuals remain hopeful that difficulties are not permanent.

The third is the moratoriums who, in the student mother context could be viewed as dreamers with lots of inspirations about life. Though they are not sure how to achieve their desired achievements, they never lose focus of what they want in career and opportunities. Danger however comes in when they sense failed support by the significant others. This is because such perceived failure makes them abandon the efforts and give up on their endeavor. The last perspective, the identity diffusion reflects a certain amount of independence from attachment to career or even relations. Such individuals are victims of a damaged ego for they develop low self-esteem. Often, they suffer from guilt and anxiety especially in the face of adversity. The undergraduate student mothers may represent such phenomena in identity development may be placed in the more balanced identity achievement with a balance on career, work at home and other interests that come with the triple role. Though not addressed in this research, the other perspectives zing the findings of the support or lack of self will.

## **2.7 Resilience Theory and Educational Achievement**

This theory emerges towards the end of the research process when summarizing the findings of the third objective of the research, through the research question; *what factors contribute to the strength and wellbeing of undergraduate student mothers?* According to Bloomberg (2017), in a phenomenological study, such as this one, much of the literature

review is done after the collection of data. Resilience theory emerges as a central theory whose principles characterize the formidable strength the USTM reflected and highlighted in their lived experience.

The resilience theory, seen from various perspectives has its essence in the ability of an individual to be indefatigable in the burdens of life that often make an individual weary and sometimes tired of life, a factor that causes many to lose hope, give up or become incapacitated (Van Breda, 2018; Timonen, 2018). If the concerned maintains the strength of will or displays a strong resistance to the oppressive forces, then such individuals may be described as persevering. It is such personalities that Van Breda (2018) says are resilient as they display resiliency in the maintaining calm even when they were expected to breakdown (Garrett, 2016). This kind of resilience has been brought out in the 'seven C' model that brings out competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control as aspects of personality that can be instilled in an individual in the process of learning. The assumption is that with such grounding in personality, the learners will develop and grow in resilience. They become hardened in the face of challenges and they develop an ability to identify their inner and also their physical strengths in dealing with the challenges. Although developed for teaching children in lower classes, such a model would be indicative of ideal stance in approach to live even when people are mature. It could be that when faced with difficulties like the sudden realization that one was expecting a baby, there is a way in which one's background, current or in the past may influence the way they respond to the predicament.

Coping during adversity may be associated with the confidence that one has in dealing with a challenging situation. It can also be determined by the skills or competence that an individual may have like the multitasking factor that determines how well a student mother may articulate common household chores. This scenario may require some personal confidence that one can make it; a self-direction that sees one accomplish goals. Such self-direction is enhanced by a strong character that registers that indebtedness towards the inevitable mother roles and the obvious commitment to the pursuit of education. Competence may be displayed through various connections through which achievement is attained especially in the control of forces of adversity. Resilience can be associated with the process of socialization that an individual goes through actively or in passivity. In the face of active and passive theories of socialization, resilience can be understood best if viewed through psycho-social experiences of individual experience in socialization and its impact on personality. The emergence of the self in socialization is seen as founded in the persistence of the self against difficult experience and if one learnt by design or by association to be hardy, then the same appears when faced by motherhood challenges. The hardy will persevere to graduation while the vulnerable give in and bulge to the triple role.

## **2.8 Feminist Theory and Multiple Marginality**

The student mother scenario seems closely articulated with the feminist theory and feminist perspectives. First, the feminist theory addresses issues of minority groups a scenario that reflects the place of undergraduate student mothers in the general student population. Secondly, feminist theories address issues of marginalization regarding

rights, the right to education accessibility despite one's social circumstances. The question that arises regarding education involvement fits the USTM in their 'triple role', a situation that creates inequality against the male students, the likes of other female students who are not student mothers or even those seasoned mature entry student mothers with possible enduring social support. The research is framed to explore those aspects of marginalization in higher education, with questions of what the USTM think about their status and what their experiences are regarding life at university and as individuals or special groups.

From the general feminist perspective, in the student mother phenomena, the Marxist feminists' perspective questions the power structures and the forces that influence undergraduate student mothers like university policies that have been put in place by administrators to safeguard their well-being and livelihood on campus and which indicate their being recognized and factored in at university.

Liberal feminists, for example, posit that gender inequality has its origins in historical traditions that have set up barriers to the advancement of women. In addition, liberal feminism emphasizes issues such as individual rights and equal opportunity as a basis for social justice and reform. In addition, this framework assumes that the socialization of women into gender roles contributes to the inequality experienced by women in society. To bring about social change and neutralize gender inequities, feminists advocate removing barriers to the advancement of women within society and developing policies to promote equal rights for women. The liberal feminist framework has been the basis of many legal changes that have been used to bring about greater equality for women within

the United States. The liberal feminists are more interested in empowerment of the underprivileged through reenacting a constitution that enhances equity and fairness and raises the flag in demand of social justice (Patton 2000). In the USTM case at hand, empowerment is traced in the aspects of understanding of their place in higher education. This may include measures of intervention like counseling, seminars, support groups and other means of inclusiveness.

The socialist feminists tend to concentrate on power distribution and social- economic and political inclusion of women. In this category of feminists, the social economic support by family, community and the institutions like the university is questioned.

An even more radical view of gender inequality would be the radical feminists who advocate for exposure of the minority and often marginalized groups to education and its liberating role just like the black feminists liberate the minority blacks. In this view, patriarchy is seen as the primary cause of the oppression of women. Gender inequality stems, according to the radical feminists, from the fact that men have control over women. As a result, violence against women (rape, sexual harassment, physical abuse, sexual abuse) comprises some of the mechanisms by which men assert their power within society. Since the existing social system is dominated by men, therefore, radical feminists believe that social change in the form of gender equality cannot be accomplished through the existing social system because it is largely controlled by men and any change as Bell Hooks in her book *The Will to Change* puts it, can only occur in the will of men to make a change in the way they construct their place in society and how they treat women. In order to discover marginalization, they advocate for women exposure to education as a

means of sensitization to develop the “will” to change as designed in the female identity theories. Such radical approaches may fine-tune men to see negative domination as retrogressive and embrace supportive masculinity perspectives like the supportive men as sources of support in the USTM resilience in the findings of this research.

Although liberal feminists believe that state institutions can be reformed through political action and legislation to bring about gender equality, the radical feminists argue that this cannot happen because by its very nature the current state is male dominated. The radical feminists focus on issues of sexuality and male domination of women and denial of rights and to a large extent the exposure to education as a way of enlightening individuals to identify their individual values, their challenges related to gender exclusion and the means through which they can conquer their challenges (Handy & Kassam, 2006).

Radical feminists seek essential change in education to enhance social justice in social structures and institutions like education by ensuring equal opportunities in education accessibility and inclusion. Here, one may question the internal structures at university that address and enhance USTM acceptance and accommodation of their special nature and experience. The radical feminists advocate for sensitization of individuals to the forces of oppression or discrimination (Patton, 2000; Saulnier, 2008). This research, set in post modernism worldview seeks to understand the place of undergraduate student mothers as an emerging minority group to identify forms of exclusion, discrimination or undue disadvantage as a result of their mother status. Education participation, program convenience and performance become key issues in the endeavour to appreciate what



student mothers think about themselves in such backgrounds. Seen from the point of view of the social workers' journal, feminists who worked with women in their social work back in the 60s saw strength in women who faced challenges as emanating from their difficult experiences. In what they talk of as the 'source of oppression as a means of empowerment' allows people make meaning out of their lives among challenges and oppressive circumstances (Nadesen, 2002; Almaseb & Julia, 2007). At another level, the question of the USTM support needed investigation. The liberal feminists view women as victims of policies that are skewed in favour of the dominant class; the males. The policies, emerging from a male dominated decision making groups are seen as less considerate of the plight of women, a situation on point in view of common university student policies that exclude them.

## **2.9 Researching Lived Experience; the Straussian Tradition**

The lived experience as indicated in all the chapters of this dissertation is the focus of the research. In chapter three, the methodological orientation of the research is grounded theory adopted in the in-depth, approach of individual experience from the first person point of view. Grounded theory also appears noticeably as a theory upon which concepts and themes in the lived experience are grounded or oriented. The choice of grounded theory emerges from the Straussian tradition (Corbin & Strauss 2015); the constructivist grounded theory as a distinct philosophical paradigm which is also explored and articulated by Fahad et al (2018), as opposed to the Glasserian tradition that seems to start with no predetermined concepts about the research.

The Glasserian tradition in grounded theory research begins from a blank slate approach, a kind of delving into the ‘unknown’ (on the part of the researcher) to unearth the ‘known’ in the world of lived experience for research subjects. The Straussian tradition is best suited in research on lived experience where one is not operating on that kind of blank slate phenomenon (Corbi & Strauss 2015, Charmaz, 2014 and Fahad, 2018). As stressed by Tarrozi (2013) and Charmaz (2014) in their qualitative inquiry, a researcher often begins with some insight into the research area and this familiar social context lays the foundation upon which the research is carried out. It is this grounding that is the researcher prior knowledge that affects or determines data collection methods, research questions and form of enquiry like narratives. They however warn against the researcher influence or inhibition into the research a situation that is controlled through employing “bracketing” especially if the researcher may have undergone similar experience and likely to make assumptions or probably influence the participants.

In essence, and as proposed by Fahad (2018), the research questions of any particular study, will determine the grounded theory approach one uses because lived experience more often tends to demand the use of in-depth approaches like face to face interviews as the more familiar methods of data collection. The same situation is observed by Creswell, (2014).

## **2.10 Summary**

The literature reviewed from Britain, USA and Asia reflect the student mother research as a global concern with many scholars engaging in the student mother research. Mega research from global surveys and single researchers all highlight it as a global

phenomenon. The literature also reflects a skewed concentration on mature student mothers at the expense of the marginalized and the less researched undergraduate category. Whether mature entry or regular programme, and whether in the US or in Africa, the experience is the same, challenges, perseverance and multiple marginality. The difference comes up in the intervention strategies and the nature of challenges where some nations offer socio-economic support while the poorer African nations hardly notice their own. Programmes management differs across nations too, creating a whole world of a difference. Education policies are also more pronounced in developed nations and the more relaxed high school-university transition does not force undergraduates into rigid entry sessions. They easily join when they are ready and relaxed.

In Kenyan universities the picture painted is that of increasing numbers of the USTM, great challenges in the triple role, socio-economic difficulties, psycho-social trauma, delayed, deferred or abandoned programmes, and retarded accessibility, progression and completion at university. A glimpse at identity theories however reflects a tendency by a few of the marginalized USTM to develop a thick skin and conquer adversity to achievement; Self-efficacy, self-esteem and social support being in the foundations of such success.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the methodological orientation of the study, both at the onset of the research and during the research process. This is necessitated by the qualitative structure that involves incorporation, development and adoption of new approaches as the research unfolds (Creswell, 2014). The chapter also deals with the world view and research paradigms at play, explaining the interpretivist paradigm within the constructivist world view, the phenomenon upon which the research is founded. In this process, the chapter explores an interlock of relevant research paradigms that appeared in interplay during the research process, a process that Sincovics et al. (2012) claims can be quite messy if no proper interaction between theory and data is duly traced and followed.

Further and deeper into the chapter, the research qualitative design; descriptive phenomenological design, as adopted at the beginning of the study is explained at length, reflecting its typicality in qualitative standards and within the realms of USTM as key participants. This has been done with close reference to the recommendations of seasoned qualitative research experts like Patton, Creswell, Maxell, Sincovics and Van Manen (Creswell, 2014; Maxell, 2017; Patton, 2002 and Sincovics et al, 2012 and Van Manen, 2018). Other references included modern scholars with great insight in qualitative research like Bryant (2017) and Fahad et al (2018). Data analysis procedures are also explained with an overview of the research questions and objectives that the research was

designed for. The research limitations and delimitation processes are also laid out in this chapter as a way of establishing trustworthiness in the research.

### **3.1 The Research Paradigm**

This study can be located in post modernism that emerges from the post positivist paradigm in research development. The term ‘paradigm’ has its roots in American philosophy back in the early 1960s. The term was used in philosophical thought by Thomas Kuhn (1962) in an article *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* who saw it as a way of thinking; a philosophical thought. A paradigm therefore may indicate a pattern of thought as well as shared or common beliefs. A paradigm, sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘worldview’ may expose research beliefs about the world especially as it occurs within a certain period or generation of scholars. Due to shared beliefs it may determine how researchers see the world and how one individual researcher interprets that world or phenomena during any particular research undertaking as is the case with phenomenology; the core of this research.

As observed by Thomas Kuhn, Paradigm shift from positivist traditions to post positivist acceptance of qualitative research can be traced with the rise of pragmatism and the assertion of ‘experience’ as a critical factor in understanding phenomena rather than purely dwelling on the scientific procedures common with the natural sciences in the positivist traditions at the time. This deviation from empirical or scientific research was seen as deviant of common research practice and therefore branded as ‘radical empiricism.’ According to William James whose ideas were further developed by John

Dewey during this paradigm shift, the ‘experience’ of humanity that comes with the realities of everyday life are crucial in understanding social problems that science, in positivist’s empirical research basically sought to solve. It is this radical turning point that saw scholars in support of qualitative research that is the anchor of this research in ‘lived experience.’ This lived experience in this research is a phenomenological description of a special group of people; the undergraduate student mothers.

Central in qualitative research is the constructivist paradigm that views the world as socially constructed and requiring interpretation in order to understand that world. Within this paradigm is interpretivism, which in further depth of social construction seeks the interpretation of peoples’ lives in order to understand their world. Therefore, this study adopts the social constructivist worldview that reflects philosophical thinkers concentrating on interpretivism within these constructivist paradigms. The study basically adopted descriptive phenomenology as an approach rooted in interpretivism as demonstrated by Chilisa (2011) in a framework outlining the research paradigmatic orientation and compatibility with the nature of the research. Modern qualitative researchers see phenomenology as; how one views the world as a researcher; how one interprets the world and how one may act within that world.

Proponents of **phenomenology** argue that for research to be meaningful it must be observed through the direct experiences of people about whom and for whom the research is done. It involves “*demystifying or making clear the social reality through the eyes of different participants*” (Cohen et al, 2007p.190). In this case, the interpretation of USTM experience can truly be shared through a reflection of their own narratives; of

events and experiences that have shaped their destiny in education. The ontological orientation of interpretivism reflects reality as indirectly constructed with participants making their own interpretations and deriving meaning from events in their own lives. The USTM strengths, their major motivating factors in managing the triple role, and the meaning they give their own lives becomes crucial in interpretivism. This Interpretivist paradigm employs multiple perspectives on one incident. This is a dependable approach in this research owing to the research's qualitative nature.

Like any social based research, markers of shared feelings and opinions of participants or sometimes indicators of diversity of opinion will be used. Such opinions and attitudes involve a scrutiny of society from first-hand experience as empirically proven through individual experience of the independent reality – from word of mouth, in this case the USTM narratives of how they live their lives, against the observation of phenomena that they describe as fallible in understanding the general social phenomena of mothering and schooling.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study is basically qualitative and adopts the descriptive phenomenology research design. Though originating from psychological foundations of psychology, it is a popular research design in the social sciences in general. When developing it, Amedeo Giorgi 2009 presented a two tier approach to data in researching social phenomena. There is the descriptive aspect that describes phenomena that was adopted by Husserl and the interpretive, adopted by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) that tends to interpret or create

meaning, deductions or conclusions derived from phenomena. The latter advocated for subjective analysis of phenomena.

The descriptive approach that fits this research on lived experience was adopted by Edmond Husserl and aligned to the belief that it is acceptable for a researcher to suspend opinion through bracketing or other means and descriptively present the world as it is experienced by the research subject; 'the knower' according to William James. In this case the lived experience of the USTM is seen through their narration on their life journeys, a phenomenon that is similar to what Christensen, (2017) illustrates about lived experience. The descriptive approach in this case highlights the typical characteristics of the lives of the individuals as an objective description of life as it presents itself in the young mothers' lived experience. Being qualitative in nature, it makes use of qualitative methods recommended for qualitative designs. I found this design appropriate because the nature of the research in lived experience displays the five core characteristics of qualitative research as advocated by various scholars (Creswell, 2014 and Ormiston, 2013) and as briefly outlined here. One such characteristic states that, in qualitative research, the natural setting is generally the direct source of data and the researcher becomes the instrument in data collection (Fahad 2018; Creswell, 2014). This implies that the researcher is part and parcel of the research process as explained in the background to the research.

Experience with student mothers through such positions as being an actor-observer (in teaching) and in participant observation research when I encounter them. The research process also placed me in the experience as I interacted with them. In the current study,



the university presents a natural setting where different actors; student mothers, other students and Deans of schools are all in the university's natural setting. The researcher goes to the very subjects for data collection and her participation and insights matter in the research.

Secondly, in qualitative research, data is often in form of words or pictures rather than numbers. In this study, data is basically document analysis summaries, field notes and recorded interviews' narratives. Some occasional illustrative diagrams that present concepts, pictures and photographs have been used to exemplify physical phenomena. Feelings, opinions and attitudes as derived from such data cannot be reduced to numerical representation (Patton, 2002; Mack 2010; and Cohen et al, 2007). Again, in qualitative research, no data is ever treated as trivial or unworthy of notice and a good researcher pays attention to the small details that may contain issues of interest in the phenomenon under study such as, gestures, pauses, facial expressions, tone and other nonverbal cues. The USTM issues take such details in the interviews. During the research, chuckles, sly smiling, lowered voice, hesitation and frowning were noticeable during the face to face interviews. Such nonverbal cues helped identify areas that required further probing or even a rephrasing of questions if and in case such a question caused any discomfort to the participant.

Another aspect of qualitative research is concerned with both the process and the product of research, paying attention to the meaning people attach to things and occurrences or even experience (Creswell, 2013). The student mothers' view of their mother status is crucial, that is; to them, is being a student mother a blessing or a curse? Also, the

meaning attached to being a parent by others or how the university views them, are factors that are central in this research. In fact, the gathered data reflected varied experience for each of the cases. For instance, for one of them, friends had a double blessing. Those in the village isolated and ridiculed her while those on campus gave her support in visits and offered to get her notes if she missed a class.

A fourth characteristic is that such qualitative research analyses data inductively, allowing things to unfold within the research process as in grounded theory (Fahad, 2018; Patton, 2002). Rather than hypothesizing, qualitative researchers gather information in parts and pieces and construct an ontological understanding of the subjects under study. Rather than working with a presumed notion or hypothesis, grounded theory as used in this research unfolds USTM experiences through their narratives. Things are allowed to unfold as the researcher moves from an individual interview to another or from simple questions to hard facts in a face to face interview, the type designed in this study.

Finally, qualitative research makes explicit how people make sense of their lives as in their own narratives. The USTM in-depth interviews reveal their view of their experiences, how they cope with the triple responsibility and their place in the academic institutions. In this qualitative design narratives of lived experiences tend to increase the research dependability and trustworthiness of the findings.

The design adopted the grounded theory method of data collection designed from the Straussian tradition as illustrated by Corbin and Strauss (2015). Seen as a theory and as a method, grounded theory is earlier discussed in details in chapter one in the theoretical orientation of the research. As a method, grounded theory is a popular method in

researching lived experience; working perfectly with instruments like narratives and open ended questions in interview schedules that form the key instruments in this research.

Both Timonen et al (2018) in *Challenges When Using Grounded Theory; a Pragmatic Introduction to Doing GT Research*, and Van Manen (2018) on *Researching Lived Experience*, have delved into grounded theory useful in generating theory from data by exploring social settings for factors of lived experience. This can be lived experience of individuals or even those of groups within social structures (Crooks, 2001). Factors in an individual's life are sought and this explains the close relationship with studies in psychology. Used at first with patients, grounded theory gained popularity through Glaser, who in 1967 worked closely with Strauss in the University of California in the school of nursing. The two used it with patients and this triggered much of the publications on the procedures and success in the use of grounded theory.

### **3.3 Sources of Data**

The core data was derived from the undergraduate student mothers in the university's regular program through face to face interviews. This group of students is referred to as the regular intake characterized by entry into university straight from high school. It tends to comprise of young students between 18 and 22 years. Such students are often indicated by the university registration number format and series against the privately sponsored students who form a kind of mature entry lot. Content analysis of university documents and field notes formed major sources of data.

Secondary data through literature review was illustratively used in the foundations of the initial draft of the proposal, as validation of the student mothers as a reality within higher education institutions. This was derived from research in Kenya and elsewhere in the world that dealt with student mother phenomena and related and relevant methodology in successful data collection. Great insight into this was found in the works of researchers like Creswell, (2013, 2014 & 2017); Castillo, (2016); Marjid (2017); Bryant, (2018) on methodology, and others like Mahugu, (2014) and Shemjor, (2015) who deal with research on student mothers.

### **3.4 Location of Study Area**

The area of study is a single public university in Kenya. The identity will remain concealed for the purpose of ethical considerations.

### **3.5 Target Population**

The target population was the undergraduate student mothers, those who have become mothers at either first or second year of study.

### **3.6 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

Basically, purposive sampling was used for the undergraduate student mothers as illustrated by Crossman (2017) who recommends consideration of accessibility, timing, expertise, typicality or scarcity as guiding factors in the choice of a purposive sample. Also referred to as deliberate, judgmental or subjective sampling, this sampling technique involves selection of the participants on the basis of the objectives and study requirements in answering the research questions. A critical case purposive sampling of a

single public university in Kenya was adopted with the assumption that the huge population and student diversity leads to great insight into the case. A mixture of homogeneous groups with the characteristic of being student mothers at undergraduate was used. A criterion purposive sampling is employed, where the target population qualifies into some criteria (Palys, 2008). This group was on session during the data collection and the cohort was deemed rich in numbers of student mothers to partake the interview and the requisite information for the research owing to their years of stay and experience on campus. The sample size as indicated by qualitative research scholars may not be definite and fears of a small sample (Crossman, 2017, Creswell, 2014, Patton, 2002, Palys, 2008) are unfounded because it is not meant for generalization. Each sample even as few as just three will offer enough insight into uniqueness in experience in qualitative research (Fahad, 2018).

### **3.7 Data Collection Instruments**

Basically, the key instrument in the research was face to face interview that sought to gather data on the lived experience in the background of Riessman's 'Narrative turn'. Riessman on the *Analysis of personal narratives* (2008) reflects an approach that tends to deviate from the traditional trends and dependence upon quantitative frameworks and removes the need to 'prove' qualitative research. The researcher basically shows interest in stories people tell, not as 'truth' but as the 'truths' of people's sense of identity. On narratives Riessman explains how people use narratives in a situation where all identities are 'situated and accomplished in social interaction' in narratives as performance of a 'preferred' self.

Being qualitative in nature, one cannot take chances with the interviews without establishing the effectiveness of the interview process (Majid, 2016, Montoya, 2016) and caution was applied in the various stages of the interview. Basically, the research made use of face to face interviews of undergraduate student mothers to collect data through individual narratives; stories of their lives. The narratives that came out from the interviews found deemed convenient with student mothers due to the lived experience of motherhood that requires in-depth inquiry through close investigation of their daily experience (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The free sharing of personal stories in face to face interview also allows for probing for deeper insight into phenomena and encourages deep sharing of thoughts and insights while reducing inhibition and, or withholding information.

Informant biases or prejudices that often pose challenges in qualitative research got eliminated as individuals narrated their daily experiences and personal beliefs as constructs of their lives from their very own world of experience. As indicated earlier, the interview schedule was prepared with close reference to the research questions to ensure relevant and exhaustive data. The schedule was scrutinized by faculty for relevance too. For a successful interview, the recommended nature of questions and their format in questioning was adopted from Creswell, (2014) and Maxwell, (2013) who extensively dwell on Qualitative Designs in research.

Probing open ended questions were used to dig for feelings, views, opinions, beliefs and attitudes of participants, for the in-depth investigation and access to rich data. The data

actually unearthed new knowledge and clarified existing knowledge in student mother issues especially that which had been collected through the literature review.

The interview schedule had questions that were clearly stated in a precise and concise manner so as to maintain focus on outcome. For the purpose of authenticity and reliability of the research instrument, a hierarchical order of probing questions, follow up questions and exit questions were done for clarity of information.

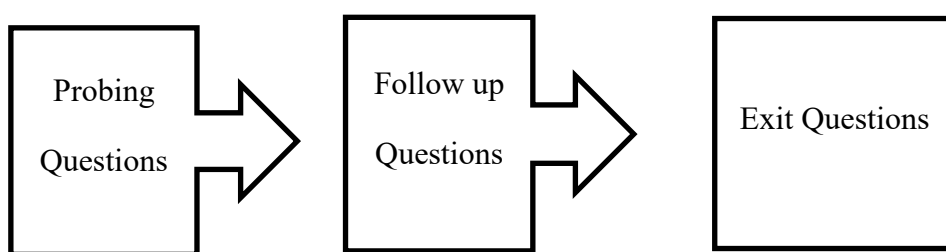


Figure 3.1 Mode of questioning in the face to face interviews

Field notes were kept as records of observable behaviour of participants and researcher insights gained during the research process. With details of time, date and interview reference, the field notes; descriptive in nature, were used to capture other relevant details during interviews.

### **3.8 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments**

Had it not been for set procedures in the writing of a thesis, the title for this section would have been *Trustworthiness of the study and the research instruments*. Though reliability and validity as terms have been used as conventional terms, being qualitative in nature, the actual terms acceptable in qualitative research are trustworthiness and confidence

(Elo, 2014). Coming from individuals' lived experiences and containing much of personal views, opinions, feelings and convictions, the question of the validity or reliability of what they say may not be established or even measured. Each response is as unique as each individual's life.

To cultivate validity or trustworthiness, therefore, the research interview schedule was aligned to the research questions, scrutinized by faculty, piloted, adjusted and designed in a way that the last question was open in a way as to allow any relevant addition to cover up for any inadequacies in the research. During data collection, participant responses were recorded and transcribed accordingly and after transcription, a copy of the transcribed data was provided for each of the student mothers to verify authenticity. It should be noted here that on discussions over the said transcripts, immense exposure of their lived experience came out then. As some of them commented, hearing their voice in the transcript was a reminder of much more of their lived experience they had failed to capture earlier. Another feature used to enhance reliability of trustworthiness was the shared similarities of experience and some kind of uniformity in the results of the transcribed data. Also, observance of research ethics and protocol was adhered to while a research audit trail a systematic documentation system was maintained for the research procedures like collection and, analysis of data was kept with regular follow ups on clients for clarification when data was being analyzed.

For reliability during the research, the researcher worked with experts (instruments and data review by faculty) in order to add credibility to the research process. Transcribed data and communication items like e-mails and chats were well fitted within the time



schedule as detailed events of the research with supporting documents as part of the audit trail.

In addition, reflexivity has also been used to foster reliability in qualitative research. In essence, reflexivity may refer to the suppression of the possible influence of a researcher's prior knowledge upon the research process. Such factors as prior experience, beliefs, opinions, predisposition and personality are aspects that may be part and parcel of the researcher that may result to the researcher being biased in the course of the research process. It is argued that a researcher may get into research with preconceived ideas that may lead to generalization of findings, biases or prejudices and an open mind is therefore deemed necessary. Reflexivity therefore demands that the researcher should practice accommodation without seeking to influence participants (Maxwell 2018). This being the case, the researcher was careful not to let my prior experience with student mothers inhibit the interaction with participants or redirect participant response during the interviews. Discretion of what was gathered from one participant while dealing with another was also maintained.

Regular peer reviews through follow ups to establish facts, minimize research bias and manage researcher prejudices were done and participant check was engaged to help clear doubts over statements and implications of certain words and behaviour (nonverbal expression like tears) noted during the interviews in the USTM narratives and this enhanced accuracy and ensured reliability of the research (Maxwell 2018, Patton 2002); all these strategies were engaged to maximize reliability of the whole research process.

### 3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis

During data analysis, insight into qualitative data analysis was sought first from qualitative researchers like Harding (2013) who focuses on qualitative data analysis. Data analysis and presentation of findings was done at various levels. At the first level, verbal data was transcribed and the notes on the nonverbal record's description incorporated. The transcripts were given to each individual participant for verification and authentication and to make suggestions for any information they thought needed addition. Each transcript was then analysed separately for details on the lived experience of each of the mothers with axial coding. The presentation was descriptive, with verbatim quotes meant to present the voices of the participants. Such quotes were selected on the basis of relevance to the key features that answered the research questions and were already highlighted during coding.

The second level of analysis was geared towards research question two. It involved identification of pertinent issues regarding resilience or any display of persistence. This was presented under chapter four section three to address the research question '*What are those strengths and driving forces that contribute to the well-being and experience of USTM at university?*' The first three of the themes addressed the nature and sources of challenges and another three addressed the underlying resilience. The last theme addressed the question '*What is the place of USTM in a public university in Kenya today*' seeking to fulfill the last objective on establishing the place of the USTM in a public university in Kenya.

### **3.10 Ethics during the Research**

With due regard to the recommendations of various qualitative research scholars, (Charmaz, 2014, Fahad, 2018 and Creswell 2014), the informed consent of the participants was sought first before engaging each of the clients in any formal participation in the research. This was done on first contact with a potential participant who was taken through the research interests in undergraduate student mothers, the study focus on their lived experience, the intended publication of their input in the dissertation and the implications and impact on them individuals. Time was taken to explain to each participant their rights to withdraw from the study if they felt uneasy or uncomfortable with the exercise, coerced or even compromised to undertake the research. They were also given direction as to alert me when a sensitive issue that they did not wish to talk about ever came up in our discussion. With snowball identification and ensuing nomination of participants; a common feature when identifying purposive samples of special populations, it was necessary to establish the fact that it was out of each individual's self-will and choice to participate in the study without feelings of indebtedness. In fact, all the five participants whose experience was captured in this study were actually identified through friends or lecturers as the researcher found it modest not to intrude into their private lives before they understood my involvement and my interests in their lived experience of motherhood.

During the interviews, the researcher was careful to observe the body language; the facial expressions, the tone of voice or even the non-verbal cues that are telltale signs of an individual's position within a conversational participatory session. If discomfort was

noticed further clarification was sought to find out if one had a question regarding the things that needed clarification and if they were comfortable talking about certain issues that would be sensitive. Such precautions were meant to enhance the understanding of the participant role for each of them and to create an enabling environment for in-depth sharing that is characteristic of lived experience and which is the central focus of this research.

A duly approved letter of introduction and authorization to carry out the intended research had been sought from the university through the department of Educational Foundations and a research permit had been applied for on-line from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology through NACOSTI.

Ethical considerations in this research involved a number of factors. One, it featured issues of informed consent of participants which is a mandatory and legal requirement in any research to avoid infringing on individual rights. Secondly, considerations were made with regards to documentation and procedures in the background of participant protection, social safety and etiquette during research. A third factor that was considered paramount in this research was the application of an articulate Research Development Framework (RDF) that enhances researcher commitment, originality of the research, its depth in content, accuracy in the methods of data collection and the genuineness and reliability of both the data collected and the disseminated results.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

Due to the bulky nature of qualitative research, this chapter is subdivided into three parts to enhance coherence and avoid shadowing of relevant data. Part one presents the USTM personal narratives of lived experience and the Deans experience of the undergraduate student mother scenario at university. This part addresses objective 1 of the study that looks at a day in the life of an USTM. Since it captures data presentation of lived experience, participant input has that descriptive phenomenological approach without interfering with their response. It is therefore dominated by verbatim quotes of the actual words participants used. The second part of chapter four analyses the commonalities in the participants' responses experience like the triple role, the challenges and intrigues of parenting and the factors that define their lives as in objective 2 that seeks insight into the challenges student mothers face at university. Their experience is analyzed alongside the Deans input in understanding of the student mother experience, a feature that complements and qualifies the USTM narratives. The third section of chapter 4 discusses the themes that were derived from the data analysis and for each; related literature is incorporated to answer to the third objective of the research, which seeks to establish the place of undergraduate student mothers at university.

These life journeys of the undergraduate student mothers as presented in part one with regard to the research objective number one was in response to the research question: *'What activities make a normal day in the life of a student mother?'* The question sought

insight into the lived experience of undergraduate student mothers in schooling and parenting. Data from five undergraduate student mothers was presented in narrative form, bringing out a brief introduction of each participant in terms of whom they were, and the key life experiences as mothers and as students. In addition, data from four Deans of schools from the same institution was also brought in to complement what was recorded in the USTM input.

#### 4.1 Data Presentation

This section covers five USTM as given in the table, with bio data capturing crucial information that helps in the conceptualization of the lived experience of these mothers. Such details as age and session, background and distance from campus were all found crucial in deriving meaning out of their lives so as to fathom their place within the university phenomena.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

USTM	Age when baby came	Distance from campus	Session during the research	Background
Mum Adrian	19	1km	End of 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Lives with spouse, & house help at rented rooms
Peris	21	1km	3rd year semester two	Lives alone, takes baby to day care
Mercy	18	2km	Just through 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Lives with spouse; a 4 <sup>th</sup> year student and baby
Meg	20	5km	3 <sup>rd</sup> year semester one	Lives at home with mother and baby
Doreen	19	5oom	Just cleared 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Lives with spouse; a 4 <sup>th</sup> year student

## **4.2 Life Journeys of Undergraduate Student Mothers**

This section analyses data from individual participants. Due to the uniqueness of lived experience, each individual participant was discussed separately for an explicit ontological encounter. It has been presented so, with the assumptions that in life, we encounter individuals whom we see, we talk to, we share ideas with but we do not live their lives. We can attempt to imagine, assume and guess what they go through but it is only them who feel, act and live their lives and so it is about their lives, their encounters and activities, their daily engagement; their lived experience; no one can put it better in words and in reality except them. This therefore necessitated quoting verbatim much of what they said, in order to enhance originality of their input. It is a feature of reflexivity that is often crucial in narratives of lived experience (Tamboukou, 2016). It should be noted however that the names used are not the true names of the research participants.

In terms of background, these USTM were from the same university but from different schools by coincidence not by design. The study revealed they were economically from average families with financial support basically coming from parents or the fathers of the babies. For all of them, the baby came in their first or second year of studies and when the research was undertaken, they were in their third year of study having travelled two years or more of the motherhood journey.

### **Mum Adrian**

Mum Adrian, a mother of one is a composed young lady, 22 years old; looking almost too young to be a mother. She got her baby at 19 years. Her stature and personality reflect some seriousness rare among young third year girls at university. She said she got her baby when she was in her first year at university. When undertaking this research, she was in the second semester of her third year of study. Her residence was a rented two roomed structure about one kilometer from the university - chosen, she says, not for comfort but for convenience. For lack of someone to look after her, and the vulnerable age she was in, the father of the baby had moved in with her. She has a house help who takes care of the baby.

When narrating her live journey, she said she got pregnant just before entry into university when she wanted to do a medicine related course but she had to drop that idea because of the academic pressure in such courses. Her husband persuaded her to opt for teaching where the pregnancy or the presence of a baby would be condoned so that she did not defer her course. In medicine she would have to postpone the course to get the baby first. When the baby came, life was hectic with loads of responsibility and hardly any breathing space. The intrigues of the coming of a baby were overwhelming and she chuckled as she narrated...*at that time I did not know about being a mother. I had never even slept with [near] a baby and such but somehow it gave me a new perspective on life*". As time advanced, Mum Adrian accepted what life offered with the birth of the new baby. As she explained later in a follow up, the presence of the father of the baby at their residence meant she was taking up the wife role on top of the mother she already was.



The added responsibility especially in a typical African setting meant a man who was there to be attended to. Mum Adrian brought it out in a lamentation delivered with the tone of a victor and the gait of a paragon:

... being a mother is complex. You have to tackle many issues. Here you have a baby, your studies, your husband to be with and you have to handle them all at once. The baby is crying here, the husband is waiting for food and your books also since you have CATS and assignment. So maybe you choose to sleep early so that you can wake up early to read for CATS and take care of the baby when they wake up. At that time, you have to take care of the baby, you can't wake up the house help to look after the baby since it's too early. Sometimes you breastfeed while reading at the same time...

Mum Adrian here gave a glimpse of what an evening looked like. The responsibilities included baby care, cooking, cleaning the house, washing dishes, attending to the husband, doing assignments and reading for examinations. She hinted that while some of the chores are internalized and look normal, there were moments when she got overwhelmed and had to take a break, or even divide chores into sessions just so as to cope. She brings out such a scenario in the following excerpt:

Mum Adrian: Mostly I would do them during the night since during the day you have to do the chores since when my husband comes in the evening and finds the house dirty it will be a problem. That's why I start with cleaning then breastfeed the baby, sleep for a few minutes then wake up to do the assignments but you can't finish them all at once so you have to wake up early to finish up. The baby also wakes up early so you do the assignments as you look after the baby.

As if it is not bad enough she claimed that, on a typical bad day, the house help would be passive and fail to do the household chores and she would arrive in the evening to find them awaiting her attention, the house would be dirty and the sink overflowing with dirty utensils. On the challenges Mum Adrian sited, dealing with the house help was top on her

list because it would mean breaking the routine to accommodate her duties as well. She had to make drastic changes at her schedules to accommodate other duties meant for the house help. The house help turns out dependent as well. She hinted at breaking down when she let out that things do get out of hand and the father-in-law comes in to encourage and pray for them...*My father in law was always supportive and always prayed for us and would always come to our aid when we had difficulties, he would call to check on me and the baby and to pray for us.* On the difficulties alluded to and not sought on the day of the interview, she later shared during a follow up that they would encounter financial difficulties or emotional flare ups that resulted into a conflict. On such a day though, resilience would prevail as she summarizes:

Mum Adrian: sometimes the house help is very lazy, not doing everything as expected, she cannot handle the baby and the house chores so you find everything is still in a mess and the house is very dirty, the utensils overflowing in the sink, generally the house is in a mess. So you have to start cleaning up the mess yourself and its quite overwhelming. But as long as the baby is well fed, healthy and okay the rest can wait.

Seemingly, seeing her baby happy and contented seemed to weather the storm. The baby's comfort was paramount. This comfort, added to the prayers and support of a caring father-in-law were a prop when things got difficult. Another thing she claimed to be a source of her strength was her religious commitment. She was prayerful and strong enough to derive strength from her spirituality as she declares:

Mum Adrian: What kept me going was my husband who was supportive and always encouraged me to keep going on. Sometimes I felt like taking the baby home to stay with my mother but he always insisted we stay with our baby and struggle to the end. My father in law was always supportive and always prayed for us and would always come to our aid when we had difficulties, he would call to check on me and the baby and to pray for us. God has been my greatest

source of inspiration, I am God fearing and I would always take my troubles to him and it would always comfort me and give me strength to fight on.

The encouragement of her husband was also a factor. He had dissuaded her from surrendering her baby to her mother to help her as she studied. The challenge insinuated in the statements; '*struggle to the end*' and the '*come to our aid when we had difficulties*' tend to highlight the plight of Mum Adrian. She however considered herself lucky to be in college unlike the sort of her friends who were rejected by the fathers of their babies and had to result to dropping out of university or doing odd jobs as she puts it. A remarkable challenge, one that led into a near breakdown was when the baby was sick and there were classes or even examinations. She wouldn't know what to sacrifice and her mind would switch off from studies at such moments.

When questions arose of her view of herself in comparison with other students, Mum Adrian claimed that in looks, one wouldn't pick an USTM from among others for they looked the same in the lecture rooms. However, when it came to life outside the classroom, they were a world apart. The USTM couldn't afford endowment like leisure or have adequate time with friends because of the demands of the baby and the family members. Thus she summarizes the experience:

The difference comes in when it comes to leisure or recreational activities, you have no time to interact and do leisure activities and such, you have to focus on your baby. During your free time on weekends while others plan for parties and outings you have to be at home with your baby. As a mother at no time will you find yourself with free time to spare and attend to leisure activities? Even the dress code has to change following restrictions from your husband and generally

being a mother. You just switch automatically; some things you just have to stop.

Being a mother meant foregoing parties and recreational activities. Her mannerisms were also different especially with the dressing code. Further clarifications revealed that she was not supposed to look girlish like her peers. As a parting short, mum Adrian feels that the stakeholders have a role to play in the lives of the USTM for it is a phenomenon that is there to stay. Being part of the university, Mum Adrian suggests that acknowledging their presence and being humane when dealing with them would alleviate the social predicaments they find themselves in when carrying out their student role. She shares with the university the following counsel from the question: *“Finally... now, what would you tell the university about student mothers? What do you think they should do? What lessons can we learn from this? Be it administrators, lecturers...”*

Mum Adrian: mph... ...to the administrators, they should create awareness programs for student mothers and offer guidance and counseling to the same. They [USTM] should feel welcomed wherever they go within the university. To the lecturers, they should treat her well and be understanding and be willing to offer assistance and be considerate in terms of attending lectures, CATS and assignments and accept the situation.

The tone of plea in her voice echoed in the terms *‘feel welcomed’*, *‘treat her well’*, *‘be willing’*, *‘be considerate’* and *‘accept the situation’* tend to summarize the environment surrounding Mum Adrian at the university as further clarification revealed.

## PERIS

Peris, a young woman in her 24<sup>th</sup> year resided one kilometer from the university, a preferred distance to be near her family. At the time of the interview, she was in her second semester of her third year of study. She had had two children in her undergraduate, where one came at first year and the second at third year, first semester. Unfortunately, at first, she lost the first baby [the interview had to stop briefly for me to condole over the loss], though she has moved on as she claimed. During the interview, which we held in the privacy of a borrowed office room, at the convenience of her class schedule and break to rush and breastfeed, she presented a pleasant personality, soft spoken and almost timid or reserved. All the same she was enthusiastic with the discussion. As per her experience with her first pregnancy, Peris claims that it had disoriented her.: ‘INT: ... *When you discovered you are expecting a baby ...that time you were in 1<sup>st</sup> year and the 2<sup>nd</sup> time as well. Maybe you can clarify what came into your mind? ...*

Peris: In first year I had so many options [in a dilemma] since I wasn’t married, I even contemplated abortion but my mother convinced me to keep the baby as long as I continued with my education. I wanted to defer[studies] but my mother convinced me to just stay in school and when I was almost due for delivery I ask for permission from school. I was not sure if there was a possibility of being given maternity leave when you are a student. I had no clue about the university policies and I did not have anyone to guide me through the whole process. After the semester I feared going back home as I was afraid of my brother’s reaction to the news so I went to stay with the father of the baby but in the course of being there I lost the baby.

What came out of the revelation was the obvious uncertainty that Peris found herself in, upon the coming of a baby. In her predicament, she even contemplated abortion [a capital offense in the Kenyan constitution] for want of a solution. The situation was made worse by the family expectations upon her conduct. She was scared of her brothers. Peris cited the presence of her mother as an aspect of her support to avoid deferring studies because of the coming of the baby. She was lucky to have been home when the baby was born and she smiled at having had such an opportunity. However, she laments that she missed out in her academics with missed classes, missed continuous assessment tests while the interest of reading disappeared.

The role of baby care also had a toll on her. She admitted that sometimes she would leave before classes were over or she would be absent altogether because of the baby. She could not afford a house help and an available day care unit was not doing so well hence the need to sneak off school to see the baby. She was absent where classes come too early or come late in the evening. Due to the strain caused by sleeping late and waking up early to accomplish the household chores, Peris claimed she often suffered from fatigue. This however does not bring her down because she perseveres to ward off gossip and trauma that comes with postponing studies or dropping out of university.

Peris: It affected me a little but not so much. Waking up early to wash and its cold can be difficult. ...sleeping late as a result of fatigue and other times lack of sleep as a result of maybe the baby not feeling well. You wake up exhausted and life gets difficult.

Earlier on she had avoided class due to morning sickness and a withdrawal syndrome. She said she never wanted to be with people, *'I never wanted to talk to people, I just wanted to be alone.'*

On the question of daily encounter, Peris operated on a tight routine. She has to accommodate class, household chores and the baby. She answered to the question; what makes your normal day, [you can make specifications during exams or during normal lectures.] How is your day? Where do you begin and where do you end?

Peris: Okay, during normal days, I go to classes. I have a timetable for classes that begin at 11. So I wake up at 5:30-6am wash, then at 7 prepare breakfast while the baby is still asleep. When the baby wakes up at 9am, you breastfeed and wash the baby, then prepare lunch before taking the baby to the day care at around 10:30 then go for class till 3pm, go pick the baby then head back to my place and start cleaning again.

During examinations, the daily schedule is adjusted to fit the examinations timetable. This means; add a bit more of the time for studies and postpone household chores where necessary. Waking early and sleeping late become the norm. Unfortunately, living alone with the baby, she cannot attend class discussions with the peers. She only got a bit of relief on occasional visits by the father of the baby. When asked the question; 'what about the father of the baby, does he help a bit with the chores?' Peris replied:

Peris: He helps with looking after the baby when am doing the chores or helps with the cooking when the baby needs my attention. It's normally easier with him around since I can get time to read as he takes care of the baby.

At the mention of leisure activities, Peris put on a sly kind of smile and indicated she has had no such a chance for leisure. There was neither time nor money for leisure. Asked about her personal attributes that have been responsible for her perseverance in education irrespective of the difficulties she encountered, as in; Q: If you are to look at yourself, what would you think are your personal attributes? By attributes I mean what are the driving forces that keep you going? Peris explained:

Peris: The encouragement from my husband that he is there for me and pay the school fees. He was telling me that he wants me struggle and ignore what others say since he was not able to complete school. Also my mother in law who was encouraging me that she wants me to study hard so that I can improve my standards of living and have a good life.

Earlier, Peris had cited her resilience as driven by a self-drive to prove the idle gossips wrong, those who expected her to drop out of University because she had a baby and from a humble background. She had the notion and drive that she could be a role model to other girls especially those who were in a similar dilemma like herself when faced with the same predicament of motherhood while schooling. When the question regarding challenges she had faced arose, Peris kind of briefly switched off; withdrew into some distance thought like she had not heard the question. Just when some prompts were about to follow, she started talking, the earlier jolly mood all gone as she continued:

Peris: challenges were many but some you have to cope with. The main ones were fatigue, lateness to class, pressure from my husband due to quarreling over small things, house chores, and pressures from home like crops destroyed by animals, the baby getting sick at night and I don't have the means to take the baby to hospital.



It was clear she had trouble with the husband and some neighbours in the rural home were a source of trouble, allowing animals to break off and destroy her crops. A sick baby in the absence of a house help was an intimidating encounter too. As earlier indicated, the day care facility was not appropriate when baby was unwell.

All has not been lost however, because in the background of this, Peris has had a formidable network of social support. She attributed her resilience to the people around her like the church pastor, her high school teachers and loyal friends. She had retained her social connection with her high school teachers and she has also connected with a social support group; that of fellow USTM, people with whom she shared the mother status. Incidentally, much of the encouragement, so badly needed at this time was derived from the group. She derived the support from the fact that she was not alone for there were quite a number of student mothers from her class. When that question of supportive individuals was asked, she readily responded:

Peris: I have been guided by my high school teachers who encouraged me, my pastor for her prayers and direction and my mother in law who looks after my property while am at school... At the university I have had friends whom we were in the same class and are also mothers whom we share our problems and offer support to each other.... yes, they [other friends] would also advise me on the topics taught and offering encouragement that I will make it despite the challenges.

She felt she was among the few lucky student mothers for she had not had to experience same challenges as other mothers. Some USTM she claimed are rejected by their boyfriends after they conceived. When they turned to parents for support they were not

provided for and they dropped out of college or deferred studies till someone came to their aid.

As a parting shot, Peris felt everyone at university has a role to play in the lives of USTM at various levels. She felt that the student mothers must develop resilience by forbearance, persistence and readiness to sacrifice for the worthy course; education. She suggested that they should seek help from parents to help with babies and avoid postponing studies. The friends were advised to offer a helping hand instead of being vindictive and mean towards the USTM as she declared:

Peris: To my friends, I want them to know that you have to accept everyone, marriage doesn't stop me from discussing with group members about class work and to avoid despising the student mothers and the married ones....to the lectures, it's important to take into consideration those student mothers when it comes to class attendance, CATS and exams. They should be willing to accommodate and support student mothers ... [university administration] should improve the guidance and counseling departments, encourage student mothers to continue with their studies instead of deferring, to also form support groups and start awareness campaigns and programs on student mothers at the university.

She called upon lecturers to exercise humane treatment of such mothers in teaching while administrators were implored to offer counseling to such student mothers and spread awareness through affirmative action.

## MERCY

Mercy, a cool and composed person carried the gait of a professional, handling the interview with the seriousness of a typical journalist session. She said she got her baby when she was in third year. Both she and the father of the baby were students in the same university, without an established source of income of their own. Mercy therefore relied on her parents for upkeep before and after the birth of the baby. She discovered she was expecting a baby after her teaching practice. When asked how she felt and reacted to the coming baby, she claimed she had been horrified that one could assume she had planned for it as in: ... *Of course I did not plan to have that baby [silence, shakes head] for the baby to come this early? So the first time I realized I was expectant, I was shocked.* Consultations with friends reflected contemplation of abortion while positive advice stopped her from carrying it out. Her first worry was the reaction of her father since her mother was a housewife without a direct source of income. How would he view an extra economic liability? No wonder she knew it was important 'kujipanga' [organize herself] meaning doing wise planning. Though the baby's father was serious with their relationship and had taken steps to introduce her to his parents, they had no income to settle into marriage. The months that followed were quite a strain because the parents of the man were not willing to be involved because they were not economically in a position to do so as Mercy puts it: ...*but his parents of course did not... were not willing to support him. Actually... mmmmh the... the... the father of the kid is... I can say, he depends on himself more than the parents.* It was soon clear that despite the introductions, Mercy was expected to spell out the plans she had for the baby yet she had none. The in-

laws accepted her but could not do much in terms of upkeep so it became an issue of Mercy and the father of her child. At five months, they were back on session and Mercy was scared of the appearance of the obvious bulge that would betray her pregnancy. Fearing her father's discovery that she was expecting a baby, she shrewdly made him pay a whole year's college fees. At least she was assured that she would finish her course in case he abandoned her on discovering she was expecting a baby. Then the second problem arose; the financial preparation for the coming of the baby. Now that she had accepted the baby, she needed to think of the future, her studies and the coming baby.

Mercy, concerned about the coming baby started saving a portion of her pocket money to create a baby's account for the initial utilities like attending prenatal clinic and buying some clothes in preparation for the coming baby. She was keenly aware that she was not expecting much from the father of the baby as he was just a student as well. Mercy explained:

Mercy: ...from there I had to accept that [hesitation] am going to be a mother... [hesitation]] ...and now that I am going to be the mother and I don't have a source of income, [mh...] ...I had to think of a way possible...am going to save because the father is here, he has nothing... he is a student ... so I thought of may be [pause] at least *nijinyime ile* [I sacrifice] maintenance.

So Mercy went ahead and denied herself treats, expensive hair-do and make up to cut down on some utilities to accumulate the baby kitty, a kind of piggy bank where she would drop small cash as the savings. Being in a rental house (room), it was easier to get

some extra cash from home in the name of upkeep. The process of saving led to a number of issues. She would be sometimes without basics but the resolve to keep off the baby kitty was there. She had to persevere and preserve it for the intended purpose.

Mercy: so I decided to do some saving...So I looked for a saving kit not that actually I was saving a large amount ... but somebody gave me an idea that even if you have a 20bob. ... each day and you place it in that kit. It will really help by the end of the nine months...so I looked for a saving kit I would place all the coins that I have ...a times I... I may not have any amount or any cash in the house ...I will just have to fit in the situation ...and I was like... aaa ...it was sacrifice actually.

With time, the effects of carrying a baby proved to be a challenge to attendance in classes. Mercy often got tired and attending class was a struggle and she would sometimes miss class. Doing assignments and keeping with academic activities got affected. Often, she suffered stressful moments especially in the dilemma that she was undergoing over disclosing the pregnancy to the parents and friends. She seemed to relive the moments when she said:

Mercy: okay, aaaah of course with the changes in my body, the mood swings and all that... it was hard for me to do some other things... like waking up in the morning, I was getting tired, a time I don't feel like doing some other things... class work, but I would just struggle because it's just...me... and if I leave everything...it will be my fault...it will not take me in the right direction, so I would struggle...as I could in whatever I could do, yeah, classwork and the assignment, at least attend some classes but I could not attend all the classes... at times I can wake up, am not feeling well, am just feeling unwell, tired. Yeah

As if it was not bad enough to suffer the stress, the mother got to know about it at her fifth month which set in a new form of stress for the mother who did not know how to

break the news to their father. To avoid the father noticing, Mercy moved to campus early before beginning of semester and resolved to avoid home over weekends. Her absence was soon noticed and the father kept calling to inquire why she was not going home. She on her part was full of faked reasons and excuses which finally drove her father to suspicion. At one time he came to see her on campus and she lied she had traveled to see some friend far away. Luckily, the father to the baby had requested his parents to make a show up for initial negotiations for marriage in order to save Mercy the embarrassment that comes traditionally, with pregnancy before marriage. She said that it was necessary because of his temperament as echoed in; *'...yeah, so we thought of that because my dad is too harsh, very harsh.'* So at her eighth month, the issue was resolved though her parents continued looking after her and her needs.

When the baby came, Mercy faced great challenges. She was mid-semester and that meant absence of not less than two weeks. Being a student, the father of the baby would not take her to his home either. He was also from a humble background as well. Mercy, amidst post-partum pain and fear of the academic semester at stake had a difficult time with the baby. It was a new experience although she had her mother assisting her with baby care for her to rest. She suffered from guilt for bringing her parents to such trouble. Through a varsity connection, she kept pace with some courses but she unfortunately missed two examinations and had to sit for special examinations later on. By the time of this research, she had not managed to get her marks uploaded into the electronic results system and had no idea when it would be done. Though her other grades were not very

good, getting a baby she said did not lower her scores despite her obvious absence mid semester.

At home, Mercy reported that her piggy savings, amounting to six thousand Kenya shillings had been useful in the initial shopping for the baby and had facilitated her moving back to the rentals where she moved in with her boyfriend to save the rent cash and use it for household utilities. This was necessary because operating from their home was proving difficult and she could not manage the baby and class effectively. When asked about the changes that occurred in her life, Mercy says that during pregnancy and even after the birth of the baby, she was isolated from friends who gossiped about her and almost alluded like she was crazy to go for a baby at such a time. Neighbours at home were no better in the same and it made her feel lonely. She had to deny herself luxury and lots of rest to catch up with chores, while she did university assignments with the baby on the back and sometimes she would work late into the night.

Questioned about the message she would pass to various individuals given the chance, she felt that student mothers at undergraduate should be considered as marginalized and treated in a humane manner by lecturers for they are not incapacitated but circumstances may not favour them. She cited the case of one lecturer who allowed her to do a take away CAT in compensation for one that she had missed. She advised girls to avoid getting babies mid-course their undergraduate studies. However, she quickly added that if it ever happened to anyone, then keeping the baby was the better option for despite the painful process, the joy of a baby suffices all. She recommended a friendly student

mother policy that could enhance academic progress and avoid loss of marks for courses that are done off season or missing out on classes.

### MEG

Meg, a young woman of 23 got her baby at 20 and in her first year at university and one year after she had lost her father in her fourth form in high school. To her it appeared tragic for she was young and inexperienced and economic prohibitions clearly a stumbling block. She lamented:

Meg: I was shocked. I started imagining how life would be being a mother. I thought about my mum and how my mother is our sole provider and she works at... [a local shopping center] and doesn't earn so much. We are four kids at home and I am a self-sponsored student at university [no fees subsidy from government].

This predicament led her into a dilemma of choices to make. What would happen if the boyfriend rejected her? She would go ahead and have an abortion or even keep the baby to spite the boyfriend. Finally, Meg's sister broke the news to their mother who later confessed to crying the whole night in apprehension of what would happen. All the same, she accepted the situation and reassured Meg. The coming of a baby was not easy on her. It marked the onset of challenges ranging from rejection by old friends to her schedules.

On answering the question: *“Let me first track you to when you had a baby. When you finally became a mother . What was life like? What adjustments did you make? Were there drastic changes in your life”?* Meg had this to say;

Meg: Yes, my life changed drastically. My friends changed especially on matters we used to previously talk about, now the script has changed to the topic of



discussion being my baby while for them it is their boyfriends so there was a lot of contradiction. I lost many friends and instead started being friends with other student mothers both on and off campus. All your focus and attention goes to your baby, you have to talk about sensible things and act like a parent. You find someone telling you of how they went out and for you, you have no time for that. My life changed, concerns became too many.

This was at the beginning of her 2<sup>nd</sup> year at university and it found her a young inexperienced mother, working tirelessly to see to her studies and to the household chores. She had shed off the friends whose interests in leisure got misplaced within her tight schedules. She shed off her youthfulness and claimed she needed to think and talks like a parent. Carrying the pregnancy at least was not so tedious for she operated from home. The coming of the baby also coincided with a long vacation so that the baby was two months by the time they reported back for the new semester. The new semester marked the beginning of trouble. She had opted to commute to the university from home. Being a rural environment, chores at home were heavier and more difficult to accomplish. On a normal day, Meg had to attend to lectures during the day and in the evening, look after the baby, and accommodate as well the household chores. She would make sure she washed the nappies, do the dishes, and sometimes when tired she would leave the rest of the chores to wait till late night or even the following day. She said that to make the mother happy, she would prepare supper, pick up chores left the previous night, and milk the cow, fetch water for the cow so that by the time the mother got home she would be done with chores. They would then take supper, and she would bathe the baby and rock the baby to sleep. She would lastly do the college assignments before going to bed. Meg, on how she managed her duties and classes in her incredibly heavy schedule of activities

claimed that she had managed but not without difficulties as some incidents were unforgettable. Meg put it:

Meg: ...I remember one time my house help left, it was very tough, I was all alone, I had to leave the baby with my neighbours. I used to wake up early prepare his clothes, prepare the baby's meal and I would sometime get late for class, at times I would wake up at 4am to be able to complete all chores before classes. I would then take the baby to the neighbours before leaving for class. I would wash the baby in the evening and the cycle continued.

Waking up from as early as 4am left Meg in fatigue but she pushed herself to the limits. To avoid disappointing her mother, Meg would even have to milk the cow as part of the morning chores. If the baby woke up early, she would have to work with it strapped on her back and it would mean getting late as well. Lateness and missing classes, added to the fatigue she often suffered were part of her major challenges. In answer to the question regarding a normal day's experience, she narrates:

Meg: ...Sleep became a problem, sometimes the baby refuses to sleep so you have to stay awake and you have a CAT or early classes and you did not sleep. You can't miss a CAT, you just have to persevere go for the CAT and come back sleepy and tired.

Whether she was tired or not, coming home meant taking over the domestic chores because in any case the house help was nonresident and uncooperative. Sometimes the house help would fail to turn up and her sister, who was a third in the same university, would come to her aid. If the sister had classes, then she would have to make hasty arrangements with the neighbours, to come in and help. In a normal day, she made two

trips to campus from the two kilometer distance from home to campus. So another question is posed: *Now, I have gotten that during the day you have mentioned about reading also apart from attending the lectures, how did you change your routine? To be able to read or even maybe attend discussions, what did you do?* to which Meg had a ready answer. Her classes generally started at 8a.m and she was lucky if a lecturer did not organize a make-up lecture to begin at seven. She would leave home at 7.30 for lectures. Between 10 o'clock and noon, she had to rush home to breast feed whether a class was on or not; the baby is just two months and cannot be left for long. In the afternoon, if there was no class, she would go to the library for personal studies. Discussions would come on Fridays as she explained:

Meg: ...like my school at least what favoured me was that classes would end on Thursday. ...I would talk to my group members to push all discussions to Friday. Sometimes when classes bounce or I just have a single class then I would take that opportunity to visit the library and read since when I get home I would not get time to read as you have the baby to look after and other chores to attend to. I cannot get time to read till the baby falls asleep. I would use my afternoons to read till 5pm then rush home to be with the baby. Discussions on weekend were hard to attend since you have no one to look after the baby. Everything had to be done during weekdays.

Meg enjoyed some social support. There were the supportive individuals like other student mothers with whom she confided, her classmates who interactively did discussions at her convenience, her mum, her neighbours and her sister who helped with the baby. When asked to mention other individuals like lecturers or university administrators who are instrumental in her student life as well, Meg is quick to note with a smile her appreciation of the role of her lecturers:

Meg: ...most of them [lecturers] they were nice, [before the baby was born] ...sometimes when I get late to class they would understand and let you have a seat at the front, they encouraged me and it was hard since I was the only expectant one in class. I would feel ashamed at times.

The lecturers would listen to her like when she had to attend clinic, they would tolerate her missing class. There were other old friends who accommodated her, buying gifts for her and keeping pace with her progress as well. She was however unhappy about some relatives who talked ill of her mother and herself, an issue that greatly disturbed them.

Like a normal girl still within the brackets of adolescence, I inquired how she managed her social life; her leisure time and such, to which she replied:

Meg: I have no time for leisure, I have totally forgotten about that. The little time you have you spend it with your baby and instead of using that time for leisure you take up other chores. You sacrifice the time to help the neighbours who assisted in looking after the baby during the week.

To Meg, realistic living meant denying oneself leisure to make ends meet. The absence of a house help would mean the neighbours stepping in for her and to show gratitude, she needed to be of help too. For Meg, her major source of strength had been her baby's presence; she wanted to work hard, complete her studies and be able to give her child what others give like basic utilities, treats and outings. It was not going to work if she allowed weakness to set in and cost her the crucial education she so badly needed to achieve such dreams:

Meg: ...I depend on my mother who can only provide the basics and when you look at other babies who are well groomed and you tell yourself if only I had

money. Let me just work hard for my baby, they are taken to recreational parks and you don't have the money...

Asked about what she considered to be her major challenges, Meg highlighted the extended family who blamed her mother for culturally failing to mentor Meg when she got pregnant. This had resulted to emotional stress for the mother and herself. Another factor was the house helps who often quit job over low wages yet the family economic status could not accommodate higher wages, she lamented that she had already had so many of them. The time factor was also cited as a challenge in the background of her schooling and baby care like when a CAT coincided with baby clinic days. One got torn between what to do and what to sacrifice as they are both crucial and fatal if missed.

In the face of such challenges and the obvious success she had recorded in her schooling and her mother roles, Meg as a parting shot gave advice to various individuals at university; derived from her lived experience as lessons learnt from her undergraduate student mother life. This forms part of her message:

Meg: For the student mothers, being a mother is not easy. I would encourage them to be careful since being a mother in school is hard and if you already have you just accept and move on. You need to sacrifice a lot to bring up the baby.... For the administration, they should consider the student mothers who go through lots of challenges juggling school life and motherhood. ...The institution should set up a daycare [unit] to assist those who cannot afford the services of a house help. Sometimes other students carry them to school and you can't go with the baby to class....

To Meg, the acceptability of the USTM of the reality of a baby is the beginning of success in the role of schooling and motherhood, it is indicated as challenging though, and she felt institutions have a responsibility in inclusive environment for the USTM as

part of the student body and factor in the babies through a day care unit. Since academics are the co-values of a student's life, Meg felt inclusivity in classes attendance is crucial and due measures needed to be taken to prevent alienation of the USTM. She offered the following advice:

Meg: ...they [lecturers] should consider that especially for late classes and also classes that come really early, they should adjust the timetable to accommodate the student mothers. The student mothers should be given more time to complete assignments and also be given a chance to do CATS online and submit them via email.... [when baby is too young] ...They should consider that like some form of tele-conferencing where you can attend the lecture from your house. It is much better and efficient

Meg saw technology working for the USTM to enhance academic participation. She was of the opinion that physical absence over the child's infancy period should not keep the USTM out of class. On-line learning could be an inclusive tool. Though not viewed as an individual right, it was a privilege that could mitigate absenteeism and avoiding make up classes or unnecessary schedules that often come off working hours. It could also be another gesture that could ensure ample time for the USTM to attend to babies and at least make it to class in good time. It would minimize absenteeism.

### Doreen

Doreen, with the composure of a young professional had just done her 3<sup>rd</sup> year final exam. She said the baby came when she was in her late first year when both herself and her husband were students. Though in different faculties, they were in the same university; her husband was a semester ahead. He was engaged in some small scale enterprise to earn some little cash for upkeep and to help him stay around with family when he was off session. At the time of the interview, he was winding up his fourth year. They had rented a room at a residential location less than a kilometer from campus; a home away from their village home more than 300 kilometers away. Asked about what came into her mind when she realized she was expecting a baby, Doreen relived the moments of joy at the thought of the coming baby though she alluded at her discomfort regarding preparedness for the baby as she said:

Doreen: okey... [ mischievous smile] the moment I knew I was expecting a baby, I had to inform the father and of course he took it with a lot of joy and we were eager waiting for the baby, although we did not have any... [a shrug of the shoulder], we were not prepared financially to keep the baby... well...but we had faith...

Doreen saw the baby as a great blessing. She claimed that when one recounts the experience of those who can never get babies even if they badly wanted it, the baby was a welcome gift. She said she expected the parents to be disappointed with her and the boyfriend as they were relying on their parents financially and the baby was like an added responsibility. In the prevailing situation, she said, the parents did not have much of a choice. The impact of the coming baby Doreen claimed, gave them a determination to work hard also and support their new family though they were both students:

Doreen: ...that made us so proud and gave us the morale to work hard because you live... if you notice you don't have a child... [*shrugs*] ... you are still students, still expecting some money from home but you know now at the moment ...[*shrugs*]...you know that you have a child, we know that we have an added responsibility for ourselves, obviously they will lose morale in us and it's like... [*shrugs, open arm gesture as in; do I have a choice?*]... they will just decide to keep us the way we decided to live.

Determined to spare their parents the financial burden, Doreen and the father of the baby engaged '*side hustles*' as part time engagement to support the family. Through friends, they got paid for online assignments like research and the little cash helped with upkeep. Luckily, Doreen observed, there had been circumstantially long breaks from university schedules that amounted to months of vacation before and after the baby was born. She did not go through difficulties with the baby initially. When college resumed, the father of the baby had stepped in to baby sit when she went to college. She recounted moments after the baby came, it was as they had planned:

Doreen: Ehh, so... on my behalf, I was so happy, because I was a mother, I eeh... I just admired my daughter and everything about her and the way we expected life to be. It came just exactly as we expected, we lacked nothing and it was due to our efforts not from... not depending on any one, it was because of our efforts that life became smooth.

For Doreen, things fell into place when the baby came, and she attributed it to their financial preparedness and success. Apart from the financial support, the father of the baby agreed to participate in baby care, taking it positively and looking after the baby when she went for classes. When the question of adjustments that she made in her life when the baby came, Doreen replied:



Doreen: The changes we made is like the responsibility of bringing up the ...the child when am in class...mmmh aaa... I gave it to the father and in fact he took it so well. He just [*pause*] cared [*for*] the baby well. I found everything in order.

Doreen found household chores a normal encounter and not disconcerting. She woke up early when she had classes so as to cook and do other chores before class. On more relaxed schedules at campus, she would indulge herself and oversleep.

Doreen: To start with aaah... okay. I have to wake up early but mmmh...mmmh my mmmh my waking up time is not fixed. I may decide to over sleep or if I have class let's say 8:00am...let's say I wake up at 6:30 am, I cook for the baby, and make sure everything is on ...is in order, her clothes. [*eeh eeh...Make the food in the morning, interruption from the interviewer*] yeah make the food and make sure that everything for her is in order because you know I can't give the father a lot of duties.... [*little stammer*] so I make sure before I leave, everything will be easy for... for him, like he... he ... [*little stammer*] just have to go to the kitchen have the food ready and just give the baby no struggling...

When asked about how she articulated her academic activities in a day, she explained that in college, she attended to scheduled classes and when free she would take time to attend to personal reading in the library as well. She had to ensure personal assignments were done in school for the baby demanded attention throughout when she got home. If there were discussions, which often took place over the weekend, she attended them though it implied lots of adjustments in her weekend activities as she puts it.

Doreen: Okay... if there is a discussion group, let's say during weekends, I just have to prepare myself early before I go out, the normal duties I do every day, making food for the baby... I may decide to wash her before I leave, then... I just make sure everything is okay. If the discussion is scheduled let's say to be at 11, I'll make sure that I've done all the things am required to do before the 11

Doreen said she owes her success in school to the support from her circle of friends, the father of the baby and the family among whom she delivered the baby. Later when they reported back to college, the friends would visit them and play with the baby.

When asked to talk about her personal attributes, drives or strengths that have been behind her success as a mother and a student, Doreen cited her acceptance of the fact that the baby had come. She was up to the challenge and it gave her satisfaction. She claimed that instead of feeling inferior or developing stress like ‘other girls’ [USTM] she incorporates the friends into her life and sees life as okay as she explains:

Doreen: I can say that what has kept me going is the ability to accept myself, the situation I was in and I took it positive although it...it...it [*stammering*] might ...many students think it's something that will... that might give them stress but if you accept yourself really you know who you are, you take it positive and see the advantages in which you are in the situation you are in... you just find everything good

She preferred a positive way of looking at things; a positive attitude that concentrates on the advantages of her situation. During a follow up, she recounted the advantages of overlapping the parenting role with that of studies. Future benefits were apparent. Being able to organize herself economically while friends without babies sat and did little about managing their lives gave her a feeling of satisfaction. Even when financial difficulties came, they did not break that self will:

Doreen: ...So the ability to accept myself and to persevere like in...mm that time, the time we realized we are having a baby, we did not have money, in fact we are... we were almost going without food; we were almost sleeping hungry...

Instead, Doreen was more determined to move on. She cited too, her parents' acceptance of her situation; getting a baby while schooling was a consolation. She did not suffer from guilt. The parents had been positive about it. They did not show signs of disappointment and they were supportive.

When asked about the challenges she encountered on becoming a mother, Doreen observed that her first challenge was the reaction of the friends who withdrew from her. She became lonely and devastated. Though they had later on accepted her and the motherhood situation, she had suffered the isolation and loneliness:

Doreen: The first challenge was during pregnancy period, some friends would ignore, isolate me, reject me... I would walk in isolation except for my husband, I would feel like I've sinned, like I tended to look at myself as in am I young, is it a sin or have I done anything against them.

Their obvious silent condemnation had made her feel almost guilty, as though she had offended people. Another challenge was the gossip from the neighbours and some members of the extended family who interfered and gossiped about their vulnerability as a young family. Asked to offer some advice regarding student motherhood experience Doreen outlined pieces of advice to each group as a parting shot. It went thus:

Doreen: ...now for the student mothers, ... they need to accept themselves... they should take up responsibility... even if men don't take up responsibility, we have our hands, our minds, our legs we can take up responsibility for our children. No need to look for sponsors [illicit affairs] ...illegal things... they need to look for money for upkeep. They will make it... for the undergraduate young girls... the message is: avoid abortion, keep the baby... things will fall into place. The Dean of students... consider being sensitive, be a bit lenient with the 100% fees payment to do exams. ...lecturers be a bit humane about missed exams. The counseling office can motivate the student mothers especially someone feeling abandoned...inferior...and the student may not know what to do... they feel like

committing suicide because they do not know what to do... they [counselors] should create awareness and give female students the morale...

In this, Doreen felt that success as a student mother at undergraduate rested on self-acceptance and the need to think critically as well as establish some means of getting financial independence or support. She was however quick to add that students on campus should not be engaging in illicit sexual relationships for monetary gain as it would result into unplanned parenthood. She dissuades the USTM from thinking about short cuts like terminating pregnancy to avoid the motherhood role. Doreen also addressed some of the challenges of motherhood at undergraduate as financial; the inability to pay fees against the strict rules on fees payment. She felt that it would help if the university would allow them take examinations even with fees balances. This, she explained, would reduce the chances of missed examinations and probably delayed completion. Issues of missing or displaced marks occurred when examinations are skipped or done off session. To such, Doreen felt that awareness of lecturers about their plight would help if lecturers would mark examinations and articulately update entry of such marks without the USTM following each of them individually. She highlighted collective responsibility in addressing issues of undergraduate student mothers at university as the only way out because they are a glaring reality of the social environment at university.

### **4.3 Deans of Schools' Response**

While one may wonder at the inclusion of the Deans in a study exclusively on lived experience of USTM, it is important to note that they have been included, not on their behalf but on behalf of the undergraduate student mothers for whom they are directly answerable at university. The Deans' contribution was immense and instrumental in the visualizing of the USTM challenges and success. Listening to what they go through from a second or third party reveals the depth of resilience they display. The Deans also acted as the backdrop to student mother phenomena so that one is able to understand their place in higher education (one of the key objectives of the research. To some extent, they amplify the voices of the USTM lamenting the failed policies and support mechanisms that the USTM stoically defy by remaining in the system and bravely getting to completion of their studies.

It should also note that the USTM could easily fail to expose some issues that touch directly on the university administration or fail to praise themselves where applicable in the exercise of modesty. In fact, so much of the extreme challenges and insight into resilience came out through the Deans. Only four Deans were interviewed in the background of saturation as earlier indicated in data collection procedures. The number of participants was insignificant, for what was important were the responses and the thematic issues the said Deans addressed. Each of the Deans was taken through the research interview schedule whose last question allowed them free expression of any issues regarding the USTM they felt needed to be addressed. This open window to discover new insight was a great venture into the realms of grounded theory.

## DEAN 1

Dean 1 was a male administrator who dealt with academic and social wellbeing of students. He had been working at the university for the previous twenty years with eight years as a Dean. Asked about the knowledge regarding the presence of undergraduate student mothers at university, Dean 1 indicated that his office did not have existing mechanisms of identifying the undergraduate student mothers. The statistics available in his office reflected a small group of USTM that included only those who volunteered to report their motherhood status and this happened only for those who were faced by crisis like conflict with a spouse that required protection or intervention. Reporting was also noted when maternity leave was necessary especially if the date of delivery coincided with examinations. In such a case, the Dean reported, USTM tended report to the office for documentation purposes, since they needed the documents as reference, to access special examinations that were often offered to those who miss the mainstream examinations in the university almanac. He however observed that many others were unaccounted for.

Of those who identify themselves by seeking maternity leave, Dean 1 noted, about 60% of them appear for special examinations and join their mainstream cohorts in the proceeding semester. The other 40% however tend to disappear without consultation or feedback after maternity leave. Of the 40% who fail to report back, only 10% are later traced by the Dean's office. A few successful follow – ups with such USTM or their kin whose contacts are available in the students' first year admission details, reflect that such students got married and or just naively dropped off the institution without bothering to

write deferring letters seeking to extend their leave. The rest, about 30% of the population just ‘disappears into thin air.’ This is an indication that there are possibilities of university drop outs among this minority group.

Dean 1 also indicated that another means of identifying USTM was by chance especially during tracking of student absence from the system. This often took place through academic staff reports where, in small classes, a lecturer notes some lengthy absence in class. This was reported to be however rare as it was also dependent on a Don’s initiative to track his clients but not a common practice at university. Yet another way of identification is through remote methods like observation of great numbers of girls who walk around heavy with child and whose private world is known to them only.

Asked about university policies regarding student mothers, Dean 1 said that apart from the general gender policy that applied in inclusive education, and a 21 days’ maternity leave that they are entitled to after getting a baby, elaborate policy guidelines were nonexistent. The university did not have special programmes to accommodate the USTM and even the mature entry category. With a helpless gesture Dean 1 explained the futility of ever trying to get to real figures in the USTM population at the university:

It is difficult to get to know the number [of student mothers], some of them you just see... they are all over, you can see they are expecting babies but you can’t ask them directly about their experience, or even the need to report... you see, they come to us only if there is a risk of missing exams but if the baby comes for instance during holidays, you don’t get to hear about them at all.

When I enquired why he thinks they do not come to report, he explained that the modern university students are not assertive probably because some of them are still too young to

gauge the repercussions of the added roles to their academic workload. The Dean further explained that it was a right to retain as private their private lives and that does not allow the administration to involve themselves in the USTM issues. A new housing project that had earlier started on campus to house the USTM had failed due to misuse by occupants and failure to have strong management mechanisms. Another policy guideline was that the student on getting pregnant has to leave the students hostel and seek accommodation from rentals outside the university, an ordeal majority of them are not able to withstand. It had often taken the effort of the Dean's office and the counseling department to intervene for parents to support such students especially when boyfriends who father the babies abandon them.

A second question to Dean 1 required that he shared information briefly about the challenges encountered in dealing with the USTM and the challenges the mothers themselves encountered at university. The answer to this required a revelation of the special phenomena of the lived experience of participant observers in the lives of the USTM. The Dean was quick to observe that one thing he had observed was that the student parents who frequented his office were the same sort of students who also had huge fees arrears and had failed to do examinations over nonpayment of fees at one time or the other. Records in the office indicated that parents or guardians of such USTM were average in income or below average. The Dean had also noted that majority of the USTM who got babies at first year had more problems than those who got them at third or fourth year. At first year, many had babies from colleague students who sometimes refused to



take up responsibility and support them. He presented their experience as a catastrophe in the life of a student:

Some of them have come crying and broken because their boyfriends have rejected them. You can imagine these are some of those who reported to campus without identity cards because they were under 18 years and therefore not eligible for issue of Identity cards and so not eligible too for the higher education loans offered to students to cover tuition and upkeep. Sometimes it's a double tragedy when the baby issue comes in at such times.

Asked about how they cope, the Dean claimed that majority of those with difficulties end up doing supplementary examinations due to low scores in examinations. The cause of this, he observed could be as a result of missed lessons and therefore a poor grasp of courses content. Others do poorly when they face difficulties. Some tend to abandon studies only to reappear after two or three years when they have two or more children. Some have to do special examinations when they are not ready and end up performing poorly. With such long absence from university and disruption of semesters, it becomes difficult for them to fit in and their grades get affected. They cannot do as well as they did earlier before they got babies.

Another group of the USTM was reported as disoriented. When they are not able to cope, they simply vacate the hostels and disappear without informing anyone and conceal any means of reaching them. Through their friends however, administrators on campus come to learn why they left days later. Dean 1 said of such a case:

This case, I followed up because her friend confided in us that she had left university and a number of days had passed without communication from her. Through the student records we tracked her down only to realize she was expecting a baby and did not know where to go. Attempts to get her back were frustrated by the fact that the family was poor and could not support her in

housing, upkeep and baby care and so she deferred studies. When she finally resumed, she was never able to recover her previous glory in academics...am surprised it's the innocent ones who fall victims. All the chaotic ones, the alcoholics and go-lucky types don't have such issues... I bet they know how to avoid pregnancy.

This revelation reveals the helplessness that administrators find themselves in. For instance, the great financial barriers encountered in the cases that they encounter are often beyond the Deans and all they can do is watch helplessly. In some cases, the student fathers in the USTM's lives may not necessarily reject the young girls, but then they lack that financial ability to support family. Some of the men are themselves beneficiaries of community welfare funds and HELB funding and this implies not being able to support a family.

Dean 1 noted however, that there was a very small percentage of the USTM who manage to beat the odds and remain on campus to study. Such students could sometimes be seen carrying their babies around campus and sometimes appearing as young couples in church on Sundays. It is only those familiar with them, he said, who could recognize them as mothers not as sisters of the babies they carried. Often, they are too young for the motherhood role.

Answering to the question of mechanisms and policies at play in university about the USTM, Dean 1 said that intervention has been attempted a number of times. At first, to avoid looking like the USTM were being unfairly removed from the hostels, the university had offered them affordable housing where they could comfortably live with their families. Quite a number of them occupied the houses. Not before long however, the

residence became unpopular as the private lives, the conflicts of spouses and neighbours started overflowing to the university administration and they were closed down.

Other intervention strategies had also been devised with time such as campaigns and mentorship programmes for responsible living. Dean 1 explained. Such were meant to deter early pregnancy and to develop responsible behaviour for those with children. During orientation, as freshers (First year students), they often got inducted into issues of sexuality, while open forums and mentorship by the church and the community came in to address relationships, emerging issues like gender based violence and academics. The university took the initiative to invite the resource persons who came to do the mentorship. The counseling department has also been there to handle the emerging issues. Despite such intervention procedures, Dean 1 lamented, the USTM situation seemingly remained a challenge with the number of USTM going up every year.

## **DEAN 2**

Dean 2, an academic Dean claimed to have worked at the university for close to 20 years and as a school Dean for three years. This implied that the undergraduate student mothers had been a common scenario for the near 20 years he had been a lecturer. Answering to the question; *Have you had an encounter with undergraduate student mothers?... Have you come across them on campus... have they come to your office?* Dean 2 claimed he had seen the undergraduate student mothers grow in numbers in his close to twenty years stay at the university. Referring to their demographics and how they get identified, Dean 2 said that he did not have the actual figures regarding their population on campus or

even in the school he headed. In fact, he commented that such data may not all be available in any of the offices on campus. He explained that he was however aware, that they were many and spread across all academic years when he observed:

Dean 2: “For these mothers, you see them all over the university as they attend lectures or around social functions like meetings or on the office corridors as they attend to their issues. I have also met them when they frequent my office on referrals. I attend to them in numbers. Sometimes the number is overwhelming and sometimes they are queueing with the babies and I have to intervene and beg lecturers to attend to them first so that they leave to take the babies home. Often, I meet them when they voluntarily come to me with different issues especially when seeking readmission into the school after a long absence from the institution. This occurs when the USTM leave on maternity grounds without due process of filling forms to defer their studies making their absence from the student roll be interpreted as desertion of studies.”

In fact, reappearance after a lengthy absence did not mean just joining their cohort and moving on. It implied a tedious process of readmission that could involve documentation and thorough investigation of their transcripts to establish compatibility with their previous cohorts in case some academic courses or units were missed during their absence. Such processes were facilitated by the Dean. Alignment with cohorts also required booking special examinations or further deferment to join other cohorts where necessary. This process familiarised Dean 2 with the USTM predicaments.

Responding to the question, ‘*What are some of the issues regarding student mothers that are presented to you by them or by others for you to address?*’ Dean 2 observed that they were quite a range of them. Though basically meant to be reporting on academic challenges, those USTM, parents or friends who came to consult ended up exposing numerous issues. Dean 2 noted that when caught off guard by the disappearing of a house help or having none, such USTM do send their friends as emissaries to plead for their

course to be allowed leave over such difficulties. Other issues brought by friends he added, included health problems for the mother or the baby, economic hardships or maternity leave. Such friends of the USTM also came in confidence to share with the Dean peculiar issues of concealed plight, like some of the USTM face and suffer in silence. Challenges like rejection from boyfriends or colleagues, illness or going without food had been reported. Some had been reported as having developed self-pity, withdrawal or actual depression. Concerned friends or neighbours get to expose such desperation for the Dean's intervention. Incidentally, some parents to the young mothers came seeking guidance over issues as Dean 2 put it:

Dean 2: "sometimes parents come to see me over issues to do with these undergraduate student mothers. For instance, some of these young girls, on realising that they are pregnant just vacate the hostels without notifying us, they don't go home, they don't inform their parents but just elope with boyfriends and go to live in rentals elsewhere. On being missed at home when others go on vacation, worried parents come to see us about it. On investigation, we actually locate them only to discover that they have babies and their parents are not aware"

Such encounter with parents sometimes resulted to some USTM being disowned by disappointed parents or if accepted, they were subjected to undue control. Some parents could go forcing the fathers of the babies; some of whom were also mere students to take over family roles. This further generated yet other issues where the cash given for school fees was redirected to welfare and upkeep and fees payment got compromised.

When college fees are not duly paid, a host of challenges emerged that further worsened the situation for the undergraduate student mother. This emerged when Dean 2 was asked

to identify some of the challenges that the undergraduate student mothers face. He claimed that unpaid fees meant not sitting CATs and examinations and deferring them to be done in a different semester. Challenges like tedious procedures of seeking for special examinations are a major impediment because some of the mothers leave university without following due procedures in seeking leave officially and have to seek readmission before applying for the special examinations. Lack of relevant documentation and valid records worsened the situation and it could take weeks to complete the process.

Dean 2 noted that apart from personal issues, he had noted particular trends that were worrying though he added that he had not engaged meaningful attention to dig deep enough into the issues as he claimed:

Dean 2: “first of all with the classes I teach, I have noted certain trends where we admit such girls in their 1<sup>st</sup> year and they look okay; young and free. By mid or end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year, a keen person will notice many of the girls expectant or carrying young babies or infants around. The missing marks issues that come up are also conspicuously of 2<sup>nd</sup> year semesters when they are undergoing the transition.”

Other peculiar issues Dean 2 raised included regular absenteeism as indicated in class attendance or as reported by some of the lecturers. There were challenges of missing out on lessons as they lazy around or when down with fatigue on carrying the pregnancy or the baby was still too young to be left behind for long. Aspects of withdrawal due to challenges of the triple role, the disorienting leaving of hostels and seeking accommodation outside in rentals brought out distinct issues. Apparently the idea of pregnancy at end of first year and delivery within 2<sup>nd</sup> year also raised issues of missing

marks in missed tests and obvious deferment which finally pointed to challenges with transcripts that would remain incomplete. On getting babies, some do not attend classes for lack of ability to engage a house help while others face desertion by the house helps in the middle of academic semesters.

For a clear picture of motherhood and its implication to academics, Dean 2 was asked; *“Basically, what has been your experience with them in academics, performance? progression? completion? any peculiar observation?”* To this, Dean 2 observed that long absence from campus meant finding their cohorts having progressed considerably. Victims had to pick up with different groups and different course lecturers and an obvious disconnect tended to exist. Forgotten or blurred course content, and merging of CATs and Exams that were marked by different lecturers led to confusion. Depending on the attitude of the lecturer, some of the marks are difficult to retrieve especially if they existed as hard copy. Such delays had impacted on progression with some of the USTM missing graduation when they ought to have graduated.

Some of the USTM reported back to campus, when special examinations are very near and revision gets compromised and they perform dismally. This is made worse by the fact that some bit of the content in the courses is covered in their absence. The Dean claimed that though he did not have concrete samples, chances were that such a student will record a poorer graduation class due to such absence and inadequacies.

Completion in such cases of disrupted classes was reported as a challenge as Dean 2 observed. He quoted an incident where a group of such mothers came to his office over marks he could not retrieve from lecturers.

Dean 2: I had an incident recently of frustrated undergraduate student mothers; the type that do not get intimidated in the context of an office. When I stated categorically that their marks were not available and they would miss the graduation, they defiantly left their babies in my office claiming I had to intervene and have them graduate. It was so bad I had to engage security.”

Such a scenario in effect connected with the next question that was put forward regarding mechanisms that were in place at university to address such crisis. Dean 2 was asked: *“What mechanisms have been in place regarding the USTM, what are those policies addressing USTM in your institution and what challenges and impediments do you encounter as a Dean in implementing them.”* To this, the response was that student policies were actually housed in the Dean of students’ office and those mechanisms that were apparently effective tended to be skewed towards academic programs while ignoring the socio-economic predicaments the USTM faced. Such a policy as concerns deferment of sessions or semesters when someone was proceeding to maternity leave was available.

Other issues like special permission to be away like in illness, lack of college fees or other relevant social engagements were also available but the due process was tedious. The Dean normally availed copies of deferment forms for students to fill in and he facilitated readmission when the USTM came back to university. Another mechanism available was to refer serious social related cases to the counselling office for attention by



relevant counsellors. All these mechanisms, Dean 2 admitted, were inadequate in the reality of the USTM issues at university.

Reacting to what he saw as the future of the USTM scenario at university, Dean 2 felt that the numerous challenges and missing links in the student mothers' issues can, and should, be addressed by the university. He recommended a few areas he felt could be enhanced for a more meaningful accommodation of USTM as individuals to reduce marginalisation on campus as he claimed:

Dean 2: "I believe these are young girls without resources to manage to take care of their babies adequately and though I don't want to look like am encouraging them to get babies anyhow, I believe they may be assisted in housing. The university can establish some hostels probably where they can reside with their maids, nannies... to help them look after their babies. In fact, I would call on the Dean of students to take up the issue and revive the housing project where some houses had earlier on been set aside for the USTM and later closed and turned into hostels for regular students and administrative offices".

This housing endeavour, Dean 2 hoped, would secure time for academic involvement and offer security to the vulnerable mothers. Dean 2 also observed that even in the public sector, postnatal facilities for breastfeeding for mothers and basic baby care facilities for workers were available and it would be an extra mile gesture for the university to do the same. He observed that it was not a solution to always push the USTM problem to parents.

Dean 2 was asked if there was something about USTM he felt the researcher needed to capture or address for future action or intervention. Such could include among others, alerts; messages or lessons he would have liked to share with readers; some kind of

lessons learnt. To this question, Dean 2 felt that the question of intervention could be included. He identified research as a critical measure in addressing the challenges, missing links and meaningful intervention in the plight of the USTM. He identified in particular, research into the student mothers' background, to establish the type of schools they attended in high school. This was in order to establish possible correlation in causality in the early pregnancy once girls enrol at university. He felt like school types; single sex versus mixed schools; county or national schools, may have implications in prior exposure of girls at high school and therefore determine how they handle life at university.

Dean 2 also felt that students' parental social-economic background could be investigated to establish relationships with performance and retention at university. Such details as the economic wellbeing like poor backgrounds, middle or average income schools he claimed, could be revealing. This could facilitate or engage realistic intervention even through County Governments. Such intervention as fees subsidy and welfare for baby upkeep and other economically viable programmes like paid internship could help to get some of them some form of income. They could therefore directly overcome their motherhood challenges.

Secondly, from the cases he encountered, Dean 2 thought it wise for someone to engage a review of existing research on student mothers. This would aim to establish the psychosocial implications of the 1<sup>st</sup> year – 2<sup>nd</sup> year transitional phase for the young undergraduates. This could help to identify the relationship variables responsible for the motherhood phenomenon. Though without actual figures, he felt majority, in fact

overwhelming cases of pregnancy was apparent among second years than other groups. He felt that embedded in this transitional phenomenon lay a lifelong solution. The identification of such variables, he felt, could help in setting up mechanisms of intervention like establishment of mentorship programmes to help in the transition between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of study and engage the student mothers in interactive mentorship.

Finally, about the university neighbouring community, which was characterised by vice laden environs, Dean 2 felt that their influence was manifest in students' irresponsible sexuality, student motherhood being a result of such influence. He observed that near the university, were clubs, bars, free style living, permissiveness and a wide display of negative influence. All these could be addressed through collaboration with the surrounding community to reduce the impact. Being places where students majorly resided in rentals for lack of adequate room in camps hostels, Dean 2 expressed disappointment that no form of control of such environs had been initiated for a healthy coexistence. He lamented:

Dean 2: "...there is no control or influence of social facilities adjacent to the university...the university needs to extend its influence into the community surroundings and engage sensitization and mentorship because this is where problems emanate from"

It would be therefore crucial to engage sensitization and mentorship for girls on campus, he observed. Topics like family life education, responsible sexuality, social enslavement and basic rights for self and baby were critical themes he suggested that could raise awareness. The university could also establish collaborations with neighbour land owners for well-structured secure and affordable living quarters. They could also work with

County Governments to establish social security and even work with NACADA for a drug free environment. This way, he said, *“our girls will be safe and will make informed and mature decisions when it comes to motherhood”*.

### DEAN 3

Dean 3 was an academic Dean with a mixture of administrative roles like students' discipline. Dean 3 claimed she has over 10 years working at the university and had been quite interactive with students even before becoming a Dean. From the interview, it was gathered that at one time she was in the university disciplinary Board and undergraduate student mothers could on occasions appear in such forums associated with absenteeism and as victims of violence. Asked to explore the demographics of undergraduate student mothers, in her work as a Dean and her encounter with Undergraduate Student Mothers (USTM), Dean 3 had the following to say:

Dean 3: “... its true I've had a lot of encounters with the undergraduate student mothers but with the actual figures...mmm about how many they are...not really. I know they are all there, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year and beyond to post graduate but the total number is unknown...the actual figure... no. You see them around but you can only know those who come purposely to see you.”

On encounters with the undergraduate student mothers, Dean 3 indicated that more often she encountered them all over the university casually in corridors of offices, in the academic offices, lanes and avenues on campus in their daily lives. On occasions, she met them in the disciplinary forums and most frequently when she received them as clients in her office as Dean. Such encounters she explained, would be necessitated by their issues

regarding deferment of courses or examinations or when seeking readmission after being absent from the university without due release by relevant authorities. She illustrated a scenario expressed earlier by Dean 1 and Dean 2.

Dean 3 indicated in the question: “*What are some of the issues regarding student mothers that are presented to you by them or by others for you to address?*” That there were numerous issues that reached her desk regarding the USTM. Often, she claimed, they came when they had difficulties like when a house help deserted, or in case of illness for self or baby; they came to defer examinations or request for readmission or special examinations after absence. Some would be referred by other offices over issues of conflict with deserting boyfriends or disciplinary issues when they diverted fees to their own utilities and parents came to discover. Some of them came seeking intervention to be given course notes for private studies in order to catch up with others on CATs, examinations and classes while others sought time off to attend to babies when they ran out of cash for house helps. Others sought mediation between abusive husbands or boyfriends and yet others wanted intervention over parental involvement in their plight during difficult times of motherhood.

With such issues in the background, Dean 3 was asked how such student mothers fared in academics, the core of their concern in the university, in the question, “*Basically, what has been your experience with them in academics, performance? progression? completion? any peculiar observation?*” To this, Dean 3 observed that there were two distinct categories of USTM, with regards to academic performance as she puts it:

Dean 3: “well... well... well... it actually depends on the background of individual student mothers. There are some who move very well...especially where some mechanisms have been put in place like support... they have people taking care of their children; parents who are supporting them, or they have or they have relatives who are sacrificing to look after them, as well as other students... their work will not be affected, they move on well. Some even register better grades”

She reported that there was a difference however, with those who face various challenges. Such USTM who received minimal or no support or they came from a poor background tend to defer semesters or examinations and catching up became tricky. Some had family issues and were often absent losing connection with the course instruction and consequently performed poorly. Though no figures were statistically available to prove it, such a trend had been observed on campus, she said. Progression became a challenge when a baby came mid semester or during examinations. This left the student mother with little choice. They deferred studies and by the time they came back, others had moved on and they would be lagging behind. Some, she said, could lag behind by even two years. Others deferred or just disappeared only to reappear in five years. With the triple role, college fees payment was an impediment and graduation could not be achieved with college fees arrears. There were also cases of repeating when they failed examinations, especially those done after a long absence and when knowledge had faded away after a prolonged stay at home.

Another point of interest regarding the student mothers was the key challenges they encountered as in the question, “*From a general point of view, what according to you are the challenges faced by USTM in education endeavour at university?*” In response, Dean 3 observed that they faced numerous challenges, personal, economic and sociological;

depending on the support background they accessed. The ones with parental support or a responsible spouse tend to be okay. Those without background support often had it rough. She put it thus:

Dean 3: "... there are problems to do with self-esteem where some USTM may have a poor self-image about themselves... they feel like they have failed in life... like they have done something wrong... or like they are different from others. Still others may have problems with colleagues where they face rejection from boyfriends or male colleagues who feel such mothers have stooped low and hence look down upon them. Parents may reject them and withdraw their support when such girls get babies.

Apart from the personality issues like low self-esteem and the underlying torture of stereotyping and prejudices of those around them, there were deeper and even more disheartening challenges. Those friends who should have been supportive and not condemning often turned foe while on campus, the lecturers do not support them as expected. In desperation, some of them had fallen prey to sexual pests or undue control by the men in their lives. Social misconceptions about their lives led to lecturers mistreating them. The Dean had put it thus:

On campus when they request for special examinations or tests, they are given unduly hard ones by uncompromising lecturers or denied such tests over claims of irresponsible absenteeism. Out of desperation, some of these student mothers end up in unhealthy and abusive relations for survival economically and socially, in terms of upkeep for the family and their security.

She further explained that scenarios encountered in the disciplinary interrogations and sometimes reports from concerned friends tended to paint a gleam picture of the USTM,

especially those without parental support. In their areas of residence, outside the university, it was reported that mothers who apparently do not tag men around them and have babies, are often labelled promiscuous and hence prone to abuse and violence. On the other hand, men who had paraded around as husbands and they truly were not, tended to be domineering and sometimes abusive if they sensed ‘invaded territory’ of their women. They got violent or exerted too much control that it interfered with studies of the student mothers many of whom have had little exposure to life due to the tight high school life. This was also due to lack of life skills and sometimes pampered lifestyles at home. Going out on their own especially for the first time to campus and falling into the family way so suddenly tended to be both intimidating and overwhelming. Those in such abusive relationships suffer in silence so long as economic sustainability was assured.

They were desperate to complete their studies.

Responding to the question; “*What mechanisms have been in place regarding the USTM, what are those policies addressing USTM issues in your institution and what challenges and impediments do you encounter as a Dean in implementing them?*” Dean 3 explained that policies were not clear save for a few academic deferment and readmission policies.

Dean 3 observed:

Dean 3 “There is an existing Gender Policy in the university that covers everybody within the university community and stipulates that people should be treated with respect and should not be subjected to discrimination of whatever nature. Though it thus states, it is clear that it does not reach out to the USTM embedded discrimination; the rejection, for instance, another accommodation policy states that they vacate hostels when they are expectant which in itself is discriminatory as we offer no alternatives”



However, as a Dean, she further explained, the Dean had to go an extra mile to mediate or participate in ensuring accommodation of such student mothers and still follow up with lecturers on their behalf. With such a scenario in the background, one is left wondering what lay in store for the USTM in terms of the future, how the missing links could be re-evaluated and addressed. This future endeavour was echoed in Dean 3's idea of an ideal future for the university regarding the undergraduate student mothers. She felt existing policies in academics needed revision and amendment, while the gender policy should go deeper into stipulating the forms and boundaries of discrimination. She generally put it:

Dean 3: "... as a university, we cannot bury our heads in the sand and ignore the reality of the presence of these undergraduate student mothers. I would not say that we encourage them to have babies, but the reality is... we have, and we will continue to have these student mothers. What I think we should do, is to have a policy in place addressing issues of USTM as an independent policy and not just embedded in the existing gender policy"

As a parting shot, the Dean was told to share a kind of message or lessons learnt in encounters with the USTM, something she felt the research needed to capture, a kind of way forward. To this, Dean 3 indicated that there was need to make a follow up on girls when they became expectant, to establish their wellness in terms of who is responsible? Is he supporting her? Are parents or guardians effectively involved? Intervention through the relevant stakeholders could also be sought to deal with those abused, abandoned, neglected or rejected, or those in alcohol and drugs and neglecting or mistreating their babies.

Dean 3 further clarified that education and mentorship should be extended to these mothers at university; educate them on rights, enhance baby support and empower them to say no to abuse, intimidation and discrimination. She felt that universities cannot abscond their responsibility towards student mothers and neither can they wish them away.

#### **Dean 4**

Compared to the other Deans, Dean 4 sounded almost vindictive in his approach during the interview. Asked whether he had encountered student mothers as a scenario on campus or during office consultations as in: *Have you had an encounter with undergraduate student mothers?... Have you come across them on campus... have they come to your office?* Dean 4 with a sly smile simply stated:

Dean 4: ...mh... if you want to know, just take a walk down to the main academic block, all the way to the gate and beyond to the shopping centre, you will come and tell me what you see. Just time when the second years especially during common courses are leaving the halls... you won't have to ask, they are all over... [shakes head and clicks and switches to Swahili dialect] 'our children have problems'

Though he avoided the direct question of numbers, the picture captured was that of huge numbers. He was quick to note that he had encountered them in similar cases as highlighted by other Deans regarding deferment, readmission, examinations and social related issues like sexual harassment. He observed that he had encountered them even before he became a Dean as a lecturer for many years and as a Head of Department, a

position he had earlier on occupied for four years. He had a long period of encounter with the USTM.

Upon being asked about the issues he had insight into as in: *What are some of the issues regarding student mothers that are presented to you by them or by others for you to address?* Dean 4 observed that apart from the academic related issues, there were pertinent issues of strained relationships with male colleagues and even lecturers over negativity and labelling. Often, he got complaints from the mothers over harassment in the background of dominating masculinity, where men feel like getting a baby was tantamount to being loose. Dean 4 explained how such cases from their residence and even lecture rooms were referred to him and how they multiplied when the USTM discovered his great concern over them and the intervention he provided. With a throw of his hands in the air, he summatively declared, “*well, there is little you can do about the situation*”

On the issue of academic performance Dean 4 illustrated the situation with individual stories of success through his intervention. Just like his counterparts, he claimed that motherhood for the USTM did not wholly spell academic doom because some of the cases he intervened in, the student mothers had ended up reflecting better performance compared to grades achieved before motherhood. He however reported that, for the majority of the undergraduate student mothers, academic grades went down owing to the multiple vulnerability and deferment, skipped coursework, absenteeism and socio-economic challenges. This revelation came as a pre-empt of the question of challenges faced by the USTM on campus, where Dean 4 shared similar sentiments with the other

Deans. The question posed next, “*What mechanisms have been in place regarding the USTM, what are those policies addressing USTM issues in your institution and what challenges and impediments do you encounter as a Dean in implementing them?*” seemed to highlight Dean 4’s frustration regarding how the institution handled them. He felt that the institution had mechanisms that could resolve their issues but little was being done to address their plight. He illustrated for instance the office of the administrative Dean that is charged for their wellbeing. He argued that while such an office is supposed to link up with parents and guardians over a holistic response to USTM issues, little was being done. He complained that records of their numbers, their background, and other relevant welfare issues were non-existent as he put it:

Dean 4: “here on campus we can hardly talk of mechanisms because they are not properly aligned to the administrative functions. Take for instance a case of a girl who gets into the family way... first she is young, the office of .... [name withheld], they do not have records of the girls’ background as in married and supported by spouse, staying single and maybe vulnerable, no communication from parents is initiated, the health department is aloof, seeing them as constitutionally mature as in...above 18yrs, and able, the lecturers and heads of departments do not report their absence from class and such. No follow up is done....i can assure you, if the available mechanisms were articulate and responsive, we would be with less challenges”

Generally, Dean 4 was of the opinion that there existed great mechanisms that could adequately address USTM issues but they were non-functional. Dean 4 felt that such disconnect occurred when role specification was not clear or when mixed up. He felt parents should be involved and engaged fully when a student got a baby. The health people should ensure that the medical follow up guided exemption from academic programs. They also could articulate planning for special attention by lecturers in special

examinations and on-line learning during maternity so that challenges of missing marks in the transcripts would not occur.

With regards to policies, Dean 4 felt that existing policies were not clear and some crucial ones regarding human rights and gender had remained silent or were partially implemented or skewed to address university staff only. Further probing about his allegation of USTM marginalization revealed what he called calculated and intentional avoidance in policy implementation.

... you see...it's not that the relevant structures are not in place or the concerned policy implementers are not informed... no, it's not that! We are simply burying our heads in the sand, pretending issues under control. People do not want to take action; to support these girls, they fear the multiplier effects, as in assisting them will encourage others to be get babies anyhow.

Asked about what he observed in the USTM phenomenon, as in: *“As a dean, what do you see as the future of the USTM at university?”* Dean 4 reported that what he saw was a gleam picture of them. He claimed that there was a lot of hypocrisy in the institutions' approach in the case of student mothers as he puts it:

Dean 4: Basically, you will see some hidden fear of getting involved with issues of these mothers, people would wish them away. They feel like support for such students will encourage others to become mothers. It is this multiplier effects that one gets scared of; the bad influence syndrome. Some who are Christians feel like they are encouraging vice: I think they fear what a friend of mine refers to as 'turning universities into maternity institutions'. It's the fear of the 'bad influence syndrome'. Its crazy business the way such serious issues are trivialised by some of us.”

On seeking further clarification as to whether Dean 4 shared similar sentiments as those of the people he referred to, he was quick to add that his was different. Dean 4 asserted

that his exposure to the undergraduate motherhood that came through a close relative's plight in the triple role was enough of an experience to change his attitude. "*The knowledge I gained about the challenges of motherhood at undergraduate was worth a lifetime of research*". He had listened to horrifying stories of what other USTM went through. His cousin, he claims, got expectant at the end of first year and he had come in to support her. His cousin's closeness to other student mothers developed when she met them on campus or at the health clinic where the natural association with those of a similar motherhood experience drew them together. Through this connection, he learnt a lot about the place of the undergraduate student mothers at university. With such a background exposure, Dean 4 was of the opinion that the institution might have generally ignored them for various reasons. He was quick to defend the lecturers over such aloof attitude in dealing with the USTM as he observed:

Dean 4: "I think I would not blame them [Dons] because showing lots of concern is like opening floodgates of parental responsibility overflowing to the institution. You may not do much unless there is a willing and available academic structure. Our role is academic with lots of academic responsibilities. If any case, if you flout your concern in meetings, you are reminded not to compromise the academic endeavour of the university.

For Dean 4, the response was an unconscious exposure of the requirement of the research question "*What According to you, is the place of the undergraduate student mothers at university today?*" the revelations were a mirror through which we discern the challenges of USTM against the lack of responsive intervention. Those who saw it as an issue worth attention tended to avoid it while others did not care at all owing probably to lack of exposure.

Like other Deans, and in such a predicament as unresolved issues of motherhood at undergraduate, Dean 4 was asked, “*Is there something about USTM you feel this research needs to capture or address for future action or intervention? What alert, what message would you like to share with readers; some kind of lessons learnt?*” This was meant to exploit other intrinsic knowledge of the subjects; the undergraduate student mothers in the face of Grounded Theory. To this, Dean 4 observed that:

Dean 4: “... it is necessary to think of students at university from a holistic point of view. They are not just students but they are defined by various experiences. There are the poor among them, the weak in academics, the mothers with added responsibilities, those subjected to abuse, those in depression, the deviant ones, the drug addicts.... they are all ours. It’s true they are few with regard to the total student population but we may not just sit and wish them away. Shutting your eyes not to see a problem does not remove the problem. The undergraduate student mothers’ concerns and presence in universities is a phenomenon we may just have to accept and learn how to deal with it”

The general message was that the undergraduate mothers’ issues need to be addressed. Dean 4 further added that mentorship could be initiated on reporting to university for the vulnerable young girls. This was to prepare them for the sociological impact of university environment and the social cultural dynamics like the “*sponsor syndrome*” and the prevailing evidenced common occurrences at university. This would lay foundations of informed choices in these girls’ lives.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

In the following two sections of chapter 4, themes derived from findings have been discussed in alignment with the study objectives 2 and 3. Objective 2 that seeks insight into features that define their life at university have been discussed in subthemes: *The*

*triple role; Intrigues of Motherhood; Missed opportunities and undergraduate student Mothers and education policy.* The section tends to define the place of undergraduate student mothers at university in the research question: *what are the factors that influence the undergraduate student mothers at university.* As a direct representative of the university administration, the Deans of schools were the mirror through which the USTM at university were seen. According to the symbolic interactionism theory, as developed in Herbert Mead's *looking glass self*, the individual is a reflection of society as it is society that molds him through its values (Giddens, 2006 and Schaefer, 2004). This section looks at the place of the USTM within the university, questioning her relationship with other students and the phenomena surrounding them at university especially the challenges they face.

#### **4.5 Mothering and Schooling; the Triple Role**

In this section, the focus and concern is to analyze the findings of the USTM's response to the question of how their day was like, in the context of schooling and mothering. As indicated in the background to this study, the mothering experience in a traditional set up would be socially constructed in a way that a 15-year-old mother and a minor for that matter would effectively succeed in motherhood. This was due to the intensive social support offered to her, before and after birth. In the USTM case, a contrast of the same scenario is reflected where the coming of a baby found such a girl alone, in this case as a first or second year. She is expected to fend for herself or work within very limited social support especially when she is mid-semester at university. The research findings extensively answer the question as to how the USTM articulate not just the singular role



(baby care) of that traditional girl, but also the triple role that comes with added responsibilities in schooling and the home maker roles that form the bulk of this theme. The point of focus here is that the age at which the USTM get babies at first or second year at 18 to 21 years (Table 4.1) has nothing to compare with mature entry student mothers. It is similar to the scenario that student parent researchers have created over time through exposure of their challenges, the impact of the motherhood role, their academic implications and their influence on the quality of life for the student mothers and their children (Moreau & Kerner,2013; Shemjor, 2015 and Mahugu, 2014). In fact, when studying motherhood challenges among Iranian women scholars, as Moghadam (2017) puts it, the experience is so devastating that mothering is literally referred to as a burden.

It is also noted that in Iran, such student mothers hardly get support for they conceal their identity to avoid trauma. This is the same scenario that is brought out by Dean 3 when she refers to the challenges of motherhood that not only result to conflicts and rejection by colleagues but also result to stressful deferment of courses when they are away on maternity leave or in other crisis like baby illness. Just as Shemjor (2015) puts it about post graduate student mothers, the coming of a baby means the beginning of challenges.

This unique picture is also painted by Dean 1 where he admits that half of the first years enter university when under 18 years. He added that a great number of the same students are seen around the lecture rooms heavy with child by mid second year at the university.

As coincidence to Dean 1 in his observation, all the USTM participants in the study expressed the overwhelming nature of the triple role as mothers and as students. Each of them was in agreement that the commitment required in each of the roles was both crucial and indispensable. A best case scenario comes out with Mum Adrian's observation that the balancing role becomes tricky sometimes like when it comes to the day of taking the baby to the clinic when unwell or for immunization during examinations at university. She claims that one gets torn between attention to the baby and missing an exam. If she allows the house help to take the baby to the clinic, the doctors are cross and if she does it herself, she misses on exams because clinic is strictly in the morning and coincides with morning tests on campus.

The lecturers on the other hand seem not to accommodate such absence, while university policies indicate that failure to sit the paper may mean taking special exams later in the year or deferring studies and waiting till such a course is offered next in the academic year. The dilemma is overwhelming for one cannot tell what happens again during such special examinations and what happens when she allows just a house help to take charge of her baby with clinic matters. This desperate situation is echoed in literature from the global context with scholars highlighting the intrigues of the triple role (Taukeni, 2014; Lyonette, 2015; Kaplan, 2017 and Shemjor, 2015), its toll on the student mothers cutting across even the more mature mothers.

As applied in the study, the triple role is a term borrowed from Ajadi, (2011) on the multiple role women scholars undertake in working and in studies. It is a common expression that denotes the multifaceted responsibilities that women are often engaged in

especially when they are, or they become, mothers while working and, or schooling (Callender, 2016, Brooks, 2014). First it incorporates the housewife domestic chores like laundry, cooking and cleaning in a normal dwelling put alongside baby care, wife, or caregiver roles. For a student mother, it captures the scholarly role of a regular student with discussions, assignments, private reading, lectures to attend and examinations to do. It is that triple role that Brooks, (2014) claims that it leads to feelings of guilt by student parents when it comes to making the hard choices between the baby and the studies. It is that emotional drain that characterizes their daily engagement. In the study, such emotional conflict and dilemma is visible in the case of Peris, who has to leave the baby in a day care or Meg who has to request a neighbour to step to help when the mother cannot afford to hire a house help or a resident one disappears over poor pay.

When answering the question on their day as mothers and as students, the USTM all revealed a tight schedule, waking up as early as 4.30 am or 5 a.m. they have to cook for, and feed the baby, make breakfast for the family and pack baby's food before they leave to be on campus by 8 am. During the day, they attend lectures and even attend to private studies in the library when a free lesson is available. They have to create time to rush home in the middle of the day to go and breastfeed and wash the baby's clothes or bathe the baby when the weather is still good. The evening is no better for it is packed with regular and pending chores. Though referring to post graduate student mothers, Bosch (2013) claims that balancing such schedules and activities is overwhelming. The point here is; if it is difficult for the post graduate, how much more will it be in the case of the undergraduate young mothers. Like Mum Adrian says of the triple role; when one has a

bad day one will get home in the evening to find the house help having done little and dishes are overflowing in the sink.

The baby too, as Meg and Doreen put it, demands attention and one has to wait until the baby is asleep before undertaking any other duty. The evening chores with cooking, washing and ironing are to be attended to before bed. Being already overstretched, tiredness sometimes makes them postpone household chores like washing dishes to early morning ‘...sleep for a few minutes then wake up to do the assignments but you can’t finish them all at once so you have to wake up early to finish up...’ (Mum Adrian). Assignments and preps are also pushed to late evening or early morning when fatigue in the evenings brings drowsiness and one cannot cope. This is the picture that Southwick’s Resilience (2014) highlights regarding individuals who face difficulties but never bend to the weight of responsibility. They wake up early, sleep late or multi-task in order to accomplish their duties and responsibilities.

In addition to the three roles of baby care, household duties and schooling, the young student mothers have men to look after. Though some of the men in their lives help a bit with the baby like the case of Doreen, when around, they also demand for attention some seen as in competition with the baby as Mum Adrian puts it:

...being a mother is complex. You have to tackle many issues. Here you have a baby, your studies, your husband to be with, and you have to handle them all at once. The baby is crying here, the husband is waiting for food and your books also since you have CATs and assignment...

When things get difficult and one cannot juggle roles, they even attempt duty overwrapping albeit to avoid missing out on the crucial tasks as Mum Adrian puts it

*‘...Sometimes you breastfeed while reading at the same time ...You have to multi task in order to ensure everything is in order’* The tasks sometimes went not just triple but quadric, with added domestic undertakings as reflected in Meg’s situation in order to cushion the mother from stress. She takes up her mother’s duties as well, so that the mother can go to open up her small enterprise in good time, for their economic wellbeing.

*‘...I would prepare supper, pick up chores left the previous night, milk the cow, fetch water for the cow then by the time mum gets home am done with chores. We then take supper, I wash the baby and rock the baby to sleep then lastly do the school assignments before going to bed’* (Meg)

The ultimate within the crucial schedules is apparently not the time when the roles are performed but rather to have them complete. Although it almost sounds artificial, for Doreen, the student mother cuts the image of a paragon with regards to schooling as a student mother, providing for the baby and doing very well in college. Apart from the triple role, she is able to take up a fourth role too, a part time job for some cash to run the family finance. The background skills, character and ability to tackle such tasks may be associated with resilience; the ability to conquer adversity and flourish (Ginsburg, 2014 & Garret, 2016). The credibility of Doreen’s ability at multitasking in the triple role is echoed by Dean 3 when she talks of the two categories of student mothers, those with support and who do well academically and those not as lucky as Doreen without support. This second category do not do well as they are victims of deferring studies, being away for long and doing examinations off season. The gleam picture here is contrasted with USA or Europe where state funding through welfare covers the financial role and eases

the burden of baby care (Ajadi, 2011; Callender 2016) and ensures smooth integration of student mothers in education participation. For the case of Doreen, Mum Adrian and Peris, they are able to offer attention to the baby's needs, please their partners by attending to them and manage class work even if it means working late; a perfect picture of a student and a mother- a home maker; a paragon!

This kind of scenario is seen in the social construction of motherhood by Bosch (2013) in the presentation of the struggle to balance post graduate studies with motherhood roles. Though the post graduate class will be a notch higher regarding exposure and age, the experiences of studies with added mother roles reflect a remarkable commonality. The weight of family responsibilities, child care difficulties and financial constraints stand out as deterrents to progress in education in a variety of studies (Rowe, 2017; Rico, 2017).

The phenomenon is a global reflection with various researchers highlighting the need for intervention so as to realize meaningful development in education accessibility (Moreau & Kerner, 2013; Moghadam, 2017 and USAID, 2019). Related literature elsewhere in Kenya reflects the same picture. With regards to the triple role, Shemjor, (2015) gets similar findings in a public university. Although the researcher picked participants from the mature entry group, many of whom are settled family members likely to have support mechanisms like family, finance and flexibility, the mothers still cited similar difficulties with the mother-studies roles. In fact, her title refers to the triple role as the 'odds' that mature entry student mothers go through. Her choice of the mature entry group should not be interpreted however, to mean that an undergraduate sample was not available as such. Owing to the period of research undertaking in Kenya, the school based programme

that was meant for teacher development had pronounced challenges for the female teachers in education accessibility and anyone would pick the challenges of schooling as a contemporary topic for in-depth analysis. This was basically meant for intervention and improvement of the programme.

This is the scenario created by all the participating Deans of schools in the study with regard to accepting the undergraduate student mothers' situation. They displayed it as a phenomenon not likely to disappear. From the Deans' observation of the USTM increasing numbers, it would be prudent to begin monitoring and sensitization of these mothers in order to improve education accessibility and achievement.

#### **4.6 Intrigues of Motherhood; Able to Bear; Able to Raise**

While the paragon figure of the USTMs may deceptively paint a picture of resilience in the multiple roles, the student mothers have had their share of difficulties and intrigue. One remarkable incident reported was the disorienting experience of the coming of the baby. The prenatal mood swings mentioned by Mercy; the perpetual feeling like she was sick was something she would have borne had it happened when she was at home. *'...of course with the changes in my body, the mood swings and all that... it was hard for me to do some other things... like waking up in the morning, I was getting tired, a time I don't feel like doing some other things...'* (Mercy). Coming during college sessions made it almost unbearable and she missed classes regularly. The post-partum stomach cramps were also quite disruptive for Meg and Peris, a feature that generated great discomfort. It was a first encounter with babies. For Peris, adjusting the sleeping and waking time to fit

the baby's mood was tricky and a source of torture. The baby would lack sleep or cry the whole night especially when he was an infant with colic or general discomfort.

This desperate situation is what scholars like Callender (2016) and Lyonette (2015) reflect in their mega surveys on student mothers. Though they basically concentrate on other student mother categories, the experience is the same across the board. Normal life experiences of pain and agony were also witnessed among the study participants. Peris unfortunately lost her first baby and the pain of loss was unbearable too. For Mercy, she claimed the pain and discomfort were too much: *'...I could not attend all the classes...a times I can wake up, am not feeling well, am just feeling unwell, tired...'* Such pain and discomfort was disruptive. With no clear intervention, there is the alluded assumption that they are able to bear kids and hence able to raise

The stoic figure cut by Doreen in the coming of a baby was refuted by the rather outspoken Peris who declares that the thought of a baby shocked her; *'...I even contemplated abortion but my mother convinced me to keep the baby as long as I continued with my education.'* she declared. The same case had occurred for Mum Adrian:

*'...The feeling of being a mother, the baby is sick and you have an exam it was very tricky, I had to be strong and know how to time myself, in case you see your house help calling my mind would switch off and all I would think of was the baby and I had to rush and the interest for classes was not there...'*

The emotional turmoil reflected here and also highlighted by Levi (2017) as contributing to ill health was a threat to schooling with the possibility of dropping out of college. Another disorienting factor with the coming of a baby had financial implications. For



Meg and Mercy, it was difficult to comprehend how they were going to manage in the strained economic background of mothers as bread winners. To amend the situation, Meg preferred to go an extra mile to milk and fetch water for their cow as an economic input to save on cash meant for a farmhand. Mercy opened a piggy account while Doreen joined the husband in his 'side hustles' for some income.

All the participants had at one time or the other been involved in sacrifice of entertainment or luxuries so as to get to save for the baby. Doreen claimed that at one time they had to go without food to fit in the budget of the new baby. During a chat with Mum Adrian when some clarification of a word she had used was needed, she had jokingly declared that she had become a veteran in motherhood after months of torment with an infant. She narrated how she would get broke and secretly weep with frustration when the baby cried in pain when unwell and even medication was a challenge. The same was told by Peris who could not afford a house help and the father of the baby was far. She would watch helplessly and in anguish as the baby cried every day as she dropped him at the day care center, her heart would be in pain the whole day. She wished the day care was on campus where she could access the baby in between lectures. The bigger picture however is retained. They were able to raise their babies and still attend classes.

The task choice dilemma often gripped the young mothers. At one time, critical tasks like baby immunization coincided with examinations and one got tortured because lateness or failure to attend to any of them could be fatal. While doctors do not encourage skipping jabs, so do the Dons who do not entertain those who miss examinations or Continuous Assessment Tests. Incidentally, time is fixed for both of them. When the baby did not

sleep or was screaming for attention and one has assignments or reading to do, it creates a crisis. The mothers are forced to read while for instance breastfeeding or with the baby tied on the back. Meg has often gone milking with the baby on her back. Other times, baby's unpredictable behaviour may result to a baby sleeping a lot during the day and remains awake at night to cry or play the whole night.

The scenario expressed here is echoed elsewhere in Kenya and in the global context. The emotional response to the coming of a baby is presented as full of turmoil (Brooks, 2014). More often than not, it is the way the first experience is handled that determines a mothers' success in studies or not. The presence of people who offer emotional support like a supportive friend or partner may help build the confidence or resilience that takes one through (Rowe,2017; Rico, 2017 and Levi 2017). Some of other reasons might be rationalization of the situation like taking individual responsibility to take up the challenging situation as self-created and accept responsibility. Other factors may include moral foundations that deter one to think of abortion as a solution. This fear of the unknown could be one of the predicaments that would be referred to as 'adversity,' which people tend to overcome in resilience (Rico, 2017 and Rowe, 2017). A crying baby for lack of an attendant is an issue that is highlighted as causing student mothers to opt to drop out of college or defer courses (Pare, 2009, Estes, 2011, Bosch, 2013 and Levi, 2017) especially if there is no one to turn to for help. This kind of situation is what all the Deans talked about during the interviews, pointing at their naivety and how it resulted into college drop out. Some student mothers come to seek intervention and if they do not have the courage to talk they disappear. One of the Deans had observed:

“... In this case, I followed up because her friend confided in us that she had left university and a number of days had passed without communication from her. Through the student records we tracked her down only to realize she was expecting a baby and did not know where to go. Attempts to get her back were frustrated by the fact that the family was poor and could not support her in housing, upkeep and baby care and so she deferred studies.”

Had there been support channels like funding as reflected elsewhere, (Lyonette, 2015), all that the Dean needed to do was to refer such a girl to relevant offices for help.

#### **4.7 Missed Opportunities for Undergraduate Student Mothers**

When compared with the regular postsecondary students, the USTM are a special group with lots of missed opportunities. The coming of a baby seems to fill up their lives leaving little or no room for various engagements that would otherwise be part and parcel of their lives. To a great extent, peer socialization is curtailed and the baby takes up all the attention and the time. Take for example Mum Adrian. She never saw the inside of a girl's hostel for she had a man who would not allow her to stay on campus. Feeling alienated, she kept off the girls in her class and only occasionally spoke to male classmates. She marvels at the missed opportunities that people hardly notice:

Mum Adrian: ... During your free time on weekends while others plan for parties and outings you have to be at home with your baby. As a mother, at no time will you find yourself with free time to spare and attend to leisure activities. Even the dress code has to change following restrictions from your husband and generally being a mother. You just switch automatically; some things you just have to stop.

Somehow recreational activities like hanging out with peers or going out on tours were all forfeited. Mum Adrian tagged the missed opportunities to lack of time as time out of college is for the baby and domestic chores. She regrets that even her dressing code had

to change to make her look 'elderly' for the husband and in-laws did not want her to look girlish just in case identification with peers dressing made her miss out on her marital commitment.

As Mercy later put it, it would be crazy to go out to spend cash, when you did not even have enough for the baby. Mercy adds that she neither had the time, nor the people with whom to go out with. She was never invited by friends. For Doreen, time was taken up by working part time for cash to maintain their baby and the domestic utilities. For Meg, even buying diapers was a nightmare let alone getting cash for recreation. With a note of resignation Meg claims that she let go the thought of leisure and comfort the moment the baby came:

Meg: ... I have no time for leisure, I have totally forgotten about that. The little time you have you spend it with your baby and instead of using that time for leisure you take up other chores like washing clothes for neighbours for some little cash. You sacrifice the time to help the neighbours who assisted in looking after the baby during the week [when the house help disappeared]

When the baby is unwell or is due for health procedures like immunization, these mothers miss class and discussions, leading to academic crisis or poor performance. Other activities like talent shows, drama and music participation were all impossibilities for them as they did not have time for seminars, practice or training for such endeavor. Bonding activities like travels and tourism that students often undertake also become a missed opportunity while industrial attachment is limited to nearby institutions. This diminishes operation diversity and causes alienation.

#### 4.8 Policies and Structures in Support of Student Mothers

From the background information of the institution where the research took place, policies regarding student mothers are almost nonexistent. Though an attempt had been made to identify them, only those caught up in mid semester delivery or wanted to defer courses were captured in official records and known in the office of the dean of students. Those who got babies off season and were thriving were not known. They were not given any form of financial assistance save for an affordable housing project that had lost impact with time due to serious emerging issues surrounding the location of the facility on the campus. Like other institutions, the number of student mothers had been on the rise. A published paper at the initial stages of this study, "*The changing phenomena in student mothers at university*" reflected a major break from the norm where girls getting babies mid-course in higher education has increased. Despite traditions that prohibited getting babies before marriage (in this case majority of the school going girls), societal dynamics like modernization renders such taboos hopeless (Moghandam,2017; Shemjor, 2015 and Mahugu, 2014). In some cases, though, it depends on the adaptation to change. Some cultural contexts still retain the traditional approaches. For instance, while it may look quite normal to talk of motherhood at university in Kenya, among the Iranians, motherhood at university is frowned upon (Moghandam, 2017). It is revealed however those despite motherhood being viewed as abnormal in the institutions, and parenting being referred to as a 'burden,' student mothers are a glaring reality in Iran and the numbers are growing by the day. A gleam picture of mothers at university, hiding their motherhood for fear of discrimination, prejudice and negativity among the peers stirs up

sympathy in a reader. They do not freely move around with their babies to avoid being noticed. Further enquiry reveals denial in the social and institutional circles with no policies regarding student mother support; a sorry state.

As Shemjor, (2015) observes in her study of student mothers, institutions of learning have very little of policies guiding motherhood issues. From in-depth interviews with administrators in higher education, it was discovered that mechanisms of identifying student mothers were not in existence in policy documents and neither were their numbers or population in campus known despite the fact that the very administrators admitting knowledge of the existence of student mothers in their institutions.

A clear lack of pronounced policy is exhibited by the MOEST gender policy 2007 that ought to be addressing student mother issues. It is surrounded by inadequacy right from formulation to inclusivity. Developed in 2006 amid inequalities in education, the policy only highlights readmission of teen mothers after getting babies, there is little else to show. Research reflects failure and misconceptions (as illustrated in the background to this study). Despite current research findings, the policies have not been revised since 2007 to embrace changed social phenomena in education. Apart from primary and secondary school situations, higher education institutions are not bound by the existing policies and as Gale (2001) would argue, critical policy sociology is vital in areas highlighted by research as wanting with regard to social action for social justice. The USTM are therefore basically viewed as a marginalized group with multiple sources and features of marginalization. From the literature review, they have been seen as marginalized in not just in policy with many institutions in Kenya being silent about

them, but also in recognition. The few existing policies address the student mothers in high school or primary school yet the age gap between the USTM and those in high school is negligible. A number of Kenyan universities only mention them with regard to vacating university hostels on getting pregnant and prescribing deferring studies as a means of coping with the situation.

Within the African social structures, childbirth before marriage was an abomination and such incidents were basically unacceptable. This is the kind of marginalization that the student mothers do find themselves in. Meg and her mother are ridiculed over it. Meg is viewed as a family disgrace, a picture reflected by the kin in in the case of Peris. Her brothers harass her, part of the reason she decided to leave home. The impact of the harsh judgment follows her to the university where she tells us that she does not speak to people, preferring to be alone. The suffering from within, brought in withdrawal and near depression. Mercy too plays hide and sick scenario for months on end, hiding her pregnancy from her harsh father.

Isolation for the USTM is seen at the university as well. Friends on realizing their friends were expecting babies avoided them and gossiped about them. It is that kind of isolation that got Doreen devastated wondering what wrong she had done them. It is only later that they thaw up and support her. Mercy was a victim of friends turned foe all through her course ever since the baby came.

In class, cajoling over irresponsible and premature parenthood is also a common form of discriminative attacks from some of the lecturers especially with large classes

characterized by less interpersonal teaching approaches. In small classes however, like that of Meg, the lecturers were reported as humane especially if she came late to class. Some administrators were also quite rude, unresponsive or simply carefree when dealing with them especially when they required specialized treatment or consideration.

From the feminist perspectives, marginalization may be seen as coming out of their gender orientation in the view of African masculinity. The African traditional set up is reenacted with the woman as the home maker with cookery, washing, baby care and 'husband care' whether she has other modern roles like schooling or working. The picture brought out in the case of Mum Adrian and Peris are illustrative of the scenario where they struggle with cooking and baby care and the men do not even offer to help when baby cries in their presence. The same is highlighted in related research on the triple role (Temblador, 2014, & Kaplan, 2017) and how it causes pressure on the student mothers.

Social dynamics like dress highlight the difference between the student mothers and their regular counterparts. The dressing code is an issue as revealed by Mercy who says she has changed her mode of dressing because of the in-laws while Mum Adrian is forced to drop the girlish wear and put on something that presents a decent 'more elderly' look. Whether it is the chains of African masculinity and women discrimination or the insecurity caused by her being with peers in college, such overbearing control over her does not look fair. It could easily also pass for abuse of freedom of choice and may in the long run affect the USTM self-esteem.



When schedules are tight and the house help fails to do cleaning, Mum Adrian has to be extra careful because the husband will quarrel with her if he finds the house dirty. This is tantamount to torture because even after a long day of lectures and examinations, she has no time to rest. According to scholars who have done related research, university structures of support or marginalization tend to determine if a student mother works through her education to completion (Shemjor, 2015 and Moreau & Kerner, 2013)

#### **4.9 Developing a Thick Skin: Undergraduate Student Mother Resilience**

This part of the discussion focuses on the third objective that seeks to establish the sources of their strengths and support. It has the themes, self-efficacy and resilience as identity theories, social support and supportive masculinity.

During the research, and as predicted in the grounded theory approach, two distinct theories emerged during data collection and analysis and in the background of Resilience theory. Resilience in the context of motherhood can be viewed as the persistence and determination with which an individual handles various roles that are challenging. Originating from the American psychological association, the term was used in social work to portray persistence against 'adversity' or traumatic experience (Van Breda, 2018; Garrett 2016). In the case of the USTMs, it could be seen as the determination to persist in education against the challenges of the triple role, the intrigues of motherhood and the missed opportunities. Rather than sit and fret over their marginality, they evoke the spirit that refuses to give in to human weakness especially when working under pressure. It involves being positive in the face of oppressive and depressive experience. Whether it is

‘adversity’ in form of disability, trauma, or just vulnerability, resilience can be viewed generally, as the ability to withstand. Whether borne of the individuals’ inner psyche or from the surrounding, or even from support from significant others, the end effect is the same; the individual does not crush under the negative force or the experience causing them pain, fatigue, frustration or disappointment.

Again, whether seen as an outcome or a process, as Masten (2015) puts it, resilience points at individualized context within larger contexts like politics. To Masten, women tend to succumb to vulnerability especially over lengthy occurrence of oppressive phenomenon. She sees ‘gendered structures’ like the USTMs triple role with the care taker responsibility weighing heavily upon them.

In a demographic survey of trends in Undergraduate student mothers in a public university, a changing phenomenon was noted where participants in the research unanimously said that there was a steady increase in their numbers each year. This implies the scenario may not be wished away. From the literature, it is a global issue; probably better addressed in Europe and America than in the Kenyan situation. For instance, the Institute for Women Policy Research (IWPR) in America is a global establishment in networking addressing issues of women especially student mothers. Such initiatives engage research widely and are therefore in a position to make wise decisions regarding student mother issues.

An account of the challenges and difficulties that face the USTM in Kenya reflects such a grim picture that one is left wondering how they manage to remain in college. This

however, is refuted by the enormous display of resilience with these student mothers. This is the situation Dean 4 alluded to when he claims that the USTM wallow in their own little world, some going without meals in order to keep her baby and go to class. The USTM resilience can be seen as a micro process and an outcome that thrives in the background of higher education participation.

As a process, resilience is seen as in ‘mediating adversity’ as intervention (Van Breda, 2018, Masten, 2015 & Blessinger, 2018). In the mediation of adversity, a number of factors are seen as responsible for the student mother education persistence. Some of the factors emerge from the psyche while others are from social support; from individuals. Both sources tend to help the individuals to ‘rise above their circumstance (Van Breda, 2018)’; their challenges and difficulties that may not be wished away as Dean 3 and Dean 4 insisted upon during the interview.

An example of the resilience that emerges from the psyche are portrayed by Meg who feels that she needs to maintain herself on campus in order to spite the gossiping relatives who see her as a source of shame. This reflects social marginalization that associates premarital motherhood with loose morals; something a parent would not tolerate in normal circumstances.

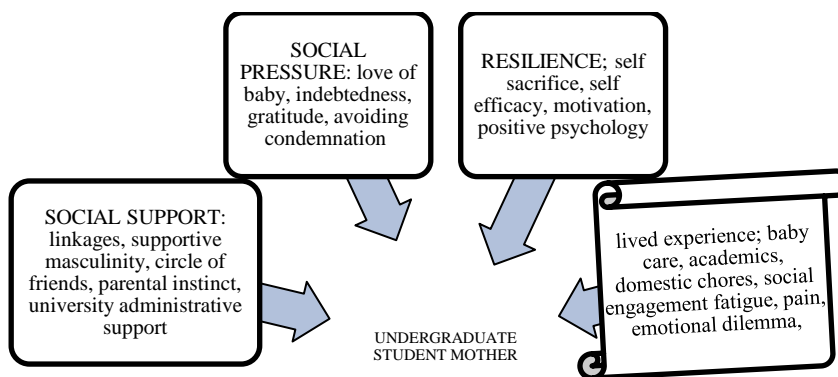


Figure 4.1 Undergraduate Student Mother Resilience

Though the term ‘adversity’ may sound almost harsh in the student mother circumstances; for missing an exam may not equal a devastating famine condition; the situation where the term was initially used; the implications of a missed examination in the education context may be as devastating. Challenges like rejection, lack of support from parents, dropping out of courses mid-semester, fatigue, lack of enough sleep, stress from articulating the triple role and ill health are potential threat to education and career (figure 3). In the face of challenges as indicated in figure 3, the undergraduate student mothers seem to possess a formidable resilience in the form of personal attributes and a circle of social support. Others are seen as cultural dictates in that one has no choice but to take up responsibility.

Resilience also emerges from social conformity where an individual seeks to put things right and conceal weakness. For instance, some of the mothers tend to work to survive in college to proof wrong the gossips who predicted their downfall with the coming of a baby. Such stoic response attributed to a strong self-will may border personality as well.

Resilience from personal attributes emerges as well with strategizing and goal orientation in attendance to duty. The student mothers reveal this in their strategizing for success and prioritizing roles by attending to crucial baby care on arriving from college and pushing household chores to later schedules like late evening or early mornings. To fight fatigue, they concentrate on the joys of being a mother; having to be called mum sometimes. They also work hard as proof of inner drive like *'after all I can manage it all; student and mother'* alongside blending of identities of wife, mother and student and pushing to be seen as the perfect paragon. Doreen, Mercy and also Meg reflected display such an inner drive, not intimidated by gossips, tedious economic engagement or lack of effective financial support.

#### **4.10 Self-Efficacy, Able to Bear, Able to Raise**

One attribute that significantly reinforces resilience is self-efficacy where the belief in oneself about one's ability is paramount (Van Manen, 2018). It involves identification of challenges and developing mechanisms of survival against such challenges. As revealed earlier in motherhood experience, the new life experience of early motherhood has been highlighted as deeply challenging by all the interviewed USTM. Self-efficacy can therefore be discerned in the background of overcoming the challenges into fulfilled motherhood. This may further touch on the fulfilling sense of being a mother, taking it as a privilege rather than a burden. The transition between being the young undergraduate girl and the student mother at university is often unprecedented and tends to result into an identity crisis for the schooling young mothers. In this, various researchers have viewed mothering as a psychological experience that involves emotional engagement especially

when responding to the basics of childbirth (Rowe, 2017; Rico et al 2017, Levi 2017 and Moghadam 2017). Their studies reflect a similar African experience revealed earlier in this study's background, which contextualizes child bearing and related procedures in an African setting.

Away from the highly supportive African structures, and in the face of modernity, getting a baby at university causes some kind of disorientation as one tries to adjust and cater for the needs of a newborn. This is the scenario Moghadam (2017), presents; a kind of age-long phenomena. Mercy and Doreen admitted that they learnt much about babies from the internet which would be full of scaring things about new baby's care. When a baby comes, one behaves differently, perceives things differently and therefore tends to handle life differently. It is seen as gendered experience, unique to the mothers in the context of school. This is that first sign of efficacy where the girls have to wave good bye to girlishness. Mum Adrian is kept from such by her husband who believes she should concentrate on household issues and dress and probably think differently.

Literature reflects student mothers of various cadres and experience as involved in an identity crisis as ideal mothers and as ideal students as in able to bear; able to raise phenomena (Rowe, 2017; Rico et al 2017, Levi 2017 and Moghadam 2017). In fact, research reveals that motherhood is the same across the stage and even those presumed mature and doing their Doctorate degrees, are not reflected as any better (Cohenmiller, 2014). Such mothers are reflected as having to exercise immense adaptability, a kind of flexibility that allows one to fit into multiple identities. The process is reflected as being achieved by the undergraduate student mothers in this case and doing better than the

doctorate students presented in the literature. It is this extraordinary inner drive and motivation that is viewed as self-efficacy. Meg has to milk cows before school in the morning on top of other duties and she is not intimidated by that. In fact, with all the stress, she claims to be doing better in examinations than she got a baby.

This stoic behaviour may be also associated with Josselson's identity achievement pathway in identity development. Self-identity is seen as dependent on the individual assessment of one's place in society (Barlow et al, 1997). If a social occurrence is figured as a fortunate occurrence, then the individual thinks they are lucky and they go to lengths to derive fulfillment and achievement. The case of Doreen feeling that the baby was a blessing can be attributed to her commitment to seeing herself succeed not only with the baby but also with her studies. She also does well with friends who are wondering how she manages 'to be rich' even though she is just a student. The 4<sup>th</sup> category by Josselson may reflect the student mothers that Doreen and Mercy mention as to having given up and deferred studies or just dropped out of campus. This is the group that Dean 1, 2, 3 and Dean 4 talk about as disappearing and suddenly turning up after some years.

Related to theories of identity is Siddel's identity theory that echoes Josselson identity achievement. In the theory, as expounded in the literature review, reveals women identity in their attitudes, values and dreams that are active in designing their place in society. The modern undergraduate mother at university in the research is reflected as not intimidated by motherhood and the circumstances that come with it as reflected by literature on student mothers (Brook, 2014 & Kaplan, 2017). Against such a picture of desperation and desertion is the picture of a hardy reaction to the motherhood challenge in the picture

painted by Levi (2017). Such a determined attitude to beat the odds evolves from the conviction that they are able, a situation reflected by Meg when she resolves to look after her own baby, whether the father of the baby is supportive or not. The same tone is noted in Mercy's case where she goes to great lengths to operate a piggy bank to have savings for the coming baby to cushion herself against economic pressure that she had observed pushing her colleagues out of the university on the event of pregnancy as Lyonette, (2015) observes; being victims of economic hardships. This is echoed in the research carried out in other universities in Kenya (Shemjor, 2015; Mahugu, 2014). Although Siddel's study was done back in the 1990s, the identity models are still applicable to the Kenyan situation. The values mentioned by Siddel are seen in the rationalization of the USTMs predicament of motherhood coming when economic resources and social support are inadequate. The silent accusation by friends and peers that is evident in the loss of friends that leads to near guilt and the thought of abortion like in the case of Mercy and Peris. It is only the moral foundations that guide them to acceptance and the ensuing struggle to play effectively their mother role. Theirs become a value guided parenting.

#### **4.11 Supportive-Masculinity; the Men in Their Lives**

The men in the lives of the USTMs seem to have mixed blessings. To an extent, they form a formidable support in the live journeys of the schooling mothers. Some of the men are helpful and offer to baby sit to allow the mothers attend lectures like Doreen's boyfriend does, or they integrate the mothers into their social circles like Mum Adrian's male classmates. The classmates talk to her even as the female classmates keep off and are aloof towards her. Her father-in-law also visits them, prays for them and even chips in



some cash when her boyfriend and herself get broke. Mercy's boyfriend eases the tension surrounding the coming baby when he brings his parents into the picture to help Mercy. Though they do not have much, the gesture of concern from the father of her baby is enough to boost her determination. In this we see men reflecting positive, supportive and responsive masculinity.

Undertones of traditional African masculinity are however evident in some of the men in the lives of these undergraduate student mothers. They represent the force of oppression, discrimination and near abuse to the vulnerable lives of the USTM. Though the student mothers are barely out of adolescence, with some getting babies at age 19, it is clear they could pass for adolescents in the college profile. While this is so, the men playing husband role as in the case of Peris and Mum Adrian do not seem to think it is an issue. They exercise the traditional gender role authority, unheeding the difficult time their partners go through as mothers and as students. Mum Adrian laments the tight role of simultaneously cooking, minding a crying baby and at pains to have the food ready for the man of the house. In confidence, she claims that he can sit unperturbed by the baby's cries so long as he gets his meal on time. Peris says her husband is traditional and he does not entertain her being girlish or lax. He cannot help with the baby either.

Whether the traditional African or modern masculinity, the support, the positive attitude and a responsive role in the lives of these mothers may to a great extent enhance their participation in education or cause alienation and deferring studies or even dropping out. The participants claimed to have witnessed cases of classmates where men deserted when they discovered the girls were expecting their babies. As a result, many had given up due

to lack of support or they got demoralized by the same men who dumped them and would in most cases pick fresh girls immediately. The resultant frustration would mean emotional torture and frustration that were attributed to dropping out or deferring courses. Notable in this scenario is the determination to move on, that is evident with the student mothers who view it as a predicament one could escape by self-conviction that one can raise a baby whether its father was available or not.

The scenario of modern masculinity may be seen as neo-masculinity a term that may refer to the supportive or socially responsive males when female support is critical in shared roles and responsibility. It creates a scenario close to the gender presentation of men as not well aligned to caregiver roles (Madrid et al 2018). This study, like similar ones done in Spain reveals for instance that 73.8% of caregivers in countrywide surveys are women as compared to the men. This may from a gender perspective seem to exonerate men from active caregiver role. The argument on masculine involvement may exclusively be attributed to the research view of the USTMs experience and the men in their lives. The feminist theory earlier discussed in this research distinctly emerges with shared responsibility with such males and student mother resilience in education. The reflections by Thomsons (2003), on liberal feminists and socialization theory, the picture of women as victims are indicated as a source of resilience. Thomsons claims that the difficult and challenging situations women encounter, like the triple role tends to demand exceptional survival skills. Such skills as studying at night, multi-tasking with cookery and assignments, early rising and cutting down on leisure; in fact, doing away with it

completely, represents exceptional resilience in coping with motherhood and schooling concurrently without losing sight of any of them.

One of the salient sources of resilience was identified as the support offered by the fathers of the babies among the USTM who participated in the research. This unique situation was outlined as outstanding by the USTM because according to their culture and traditions, it would be viewed as awkward to expect a man to play the house help' role of baby-sitting, a role that they did not take for granted. Doreen actually saw the support in baby sitting by a man as a great honour and a source of resilience in her studies; she claimed to have been driven by the desire to succeed for the purpose of pleasing the supportive man, to make his apparent sacrifice not go to waste.

The student mother experience comes out as proof of Cordelia Fines' argument in *Delusions of Gender* in the bio-social gender relationships in realms of the psyche. Cordelia argues that when the existing social scene highlights gender, then people automatically engage stereotypes for the sake of conformity with prevailing social expectations. In an environment where gender expectations are not attributed prominence, then individuals will tend to overlook or compromise the stereotypes. Surrounding environments as social phenomena tend to determine to a great extent what one is and what one becomes in a life situation. Probably, away from the rural home environment that is often characterized by cultural gender stereotypes typical of African traditions, such men are flexible and therefore engage gender role neutrality. In the university environment, they have no fear of the accusing eyes of those who propagate gender role differentiation where a man carrying a baby may be seen as an abomination.

Many young men have seemingly looked at life as their own design and they therefore feel part and parcel of the problems they have participated in creating. For some of them, it could be a display of resilience. This concurs with the looking glass self in symbolic interactionism theory (Giddens, 2006), where the individual is a configuration of societal values and therefore reflects in behaviour what society has taught him and instilled in him. Learning from society is also seen as dependent on the '*significant others*' that an individual interacts with on a day to day basis. Significant others are on the other hand seen as the people close to an individual as in the agents of socialization like the family, the school, the peer group, the media and the religious organizations. Such interplay of influence from society may not wholly be attributed to the way an individual behaves because despite societal influence, there is the existence of the 'I' whose natural and instinctive nature is guided more by values than what people say (Giddens, 2006). This distinctly brings out the difference between the men driven by traditions in gender roles differentiation and therefore view the USTMs triple role as feminine and keep off, and the more responsive males who support women in the same prescribed 'feminine roles' and do baby sitting and offer moral and financial support to the women. It is this situation that comes out with the men addressed in this research. Their resilience against binding traditions, their persistence in supporting their spouses brings them out as victors who own up to responsibility of family and resist escapist behaviour that men result to when student mothers get babies.

Many undergraduate mothers who were mentioned as having dropped out or deferred studies did so because of lack of support especially when men damped them. In the

gender perspectives this may be a reflection of the will, the self-efficacy on the part of the men to do what they think is right, despite the cultural boundaries their unsupportive counterparts adhere to. To echo Bell Hooks in her book, *The Will to Change*; it is the choice of masculinity that an individual subscribes to, not the cultural dictates. It is individual change from within that can make such a tremendous difference in the lives of the undergraduate student mothers. This is the kind of picture that one would want to see in every office, in every corridor on campus.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

Chapter has been instrumental in presenting the research findings as per each objective as indicated in its introduction. The chapter presents the life journeys of the USTM with individual narratives from the undergraduate mothers and the Deans of schools. The mothers have given detailed encounters of their lived experience; their world as they construct it; as they see themselves in the social context. The Deans of schools provided the social eye through which we saw the world of undergraduate student mothers at university, having interacted with them and being able to tell what they do not know with regards to issues of policy and rights. Since the research is on lived experience, the Deans are there not on behalf of themselves but on behalf of the student mothers. Through the Deans one can establish how the student mothers are integrated and the missing links in their interaction with institutional mechanisms. The lived experience exposed in this chapter clearly blends with, and mostly supersedes what is globally portrayed in available literature or locally discerned in public universities. It is a mark of trustworthiness; reflection of a successful research encounter

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of the findings and the conclusions that are derived and arrived at, after the research data analysis and discussion. The chapter also sheds light on the recommendations. Being qualitative, the study includes a shared insight or reflections on the theoretical and methodological experience of the researcher in order to enhance processes in undertaking future research and recommendation for further research.

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

Undergraduate motherhood has been presented in this research as a deeply challenging experience of young girls when they are hardly out of adolescence. Right from the initial study regarding their demographics in public universities, through to the interviews with the USTM, they represent a marginalized group that university education policies hardly address. The rising numbers of these mothers against the background of silence by policy makers sounds a warning of an institutional academic challenge and a social time bomb. Despite the obvious resilience, and the stoicism that the interviewed USTM reflect, a gleam picture of numerous drop outs, stagnated or disoriented undergraduate mothers were alluded to by the interviewees. A general note of helplessness was evident when the Deans talked of the plight of the USTM and the glaring lack of channels of intervention. This failure to address the host of challenges that bedevil the schooling process of the

USTM at university therefore reflects marginalization that poses a threat to the attainment of educational goals, with socio-economic retardation as an end result. Such challenges as the complex triple role, the intrigues of motherhood and the multiple marginality are a reality in Kenya today. Although the resiliency building by the research participant mothers helps them overcome challenges and move on to academic achievement, this is so for only those that are resilient and just a handful of them for that matter.

For majority of the student mothers, challenges are part of their daily encounter. The challenges highlighted by student mothers' researchers in previous studies and were echoed or magnified in this study; include economic challenges that emanate from lack of college fees or funds for baby upkeep and other family related issues. Such roles as provision for health and upkeep and social responsibilities are evidently similar across the board and one may imagine what a student mother, jobless as such does in a schooling situation.

Other factors that come up from the findings include potentially traumatizing social issues. Experiences like stereotyping and exclusion in study groups, compromised lecture attendance and loss of friends owing to the undergraduate motherhood status are common. Incidentally, some of USTM colleagues are even younger than them and without a clue of the depth of pain motherhood or their negativity causes their parenting colleagues. Instead of forming a team of support around them, many of such colleagues alienate them. The USTM admitted not having time for joining their peers due to the tight schedules they manage as a daily package. Others challenges are fatigue that comes with over-exertion in the endeavour to articulate domestic chores and homework, and the

emotional turmoil when things did not work correctly. The failure of institutions to put in place sustainable intervention is clear. Generally, the mothers' narratives from literature (Mahugu 2014, Shemjor, 2015 and Chemjor, 2013) do not feature signs of intervention in the role of the administrative structures in various institutions in secondary school and in higher education.

As outcome in the findings, resilience is seen as that unwavering attitude; a positive living in the face of difficulties. This is especially due to background support, motivation or inner drives. The kind of experience though apparently negative creates the inner drive and stirs the spirit and determination to move on in the background of resilience. This indefatigable self-image and self-will are well enshrouded in self-efficacy; the will to move on. This is the energy initiated by the presence of adversity that Van Breda (2018), refers to as positive response to adversity, the determination to conquer oppressive forces like social cultural burdens, ill treatment, bias or prejudice as in the case at hand of the oppressive men in their lives.

From the findings and the literature on USTM, from a comparative approach on how the student mothers are incorporated in higher education indicates that what happens elsewhere, can be done in Kenya. It should be evaluated and selectively adopted as befits the Kenyan situation in order to achieve best practices in higher education. For instance, globally, universities have become more flexible in their approach, offering day, evening, online, accelerated and mixed modality courses and programs to accommodate them. The Kenyan school based program was the closest in such intervention and evidently it has just nothing to do with the vulnerable undergraduates.



Men, who have been labelled as oppressors in feminism have presented in the contrary, as being behind student mother resilience. Though not applying to all of them, this triggers serious questions regarding resilience, as in; whose resilience? Who is more resilient, who has conquered the gender role battle; who is the victor in the USTM scenario? This may point at future research over the relationship between supportive masculinity and student mother academic achievement

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This research unearthed unique experience that generally looks subdued; almost trivialized yet it has far deep implications in the USTM wellbeing at university. The research revealed pertinent issues of schooling and motherhood that reflect a struggle; undiscovered or ignored, that defines the lives of the USTM as they live each day at university. The physical exertion, the compromised sleep, the demanding academic schedules, the unrelenting social pressure and the emotional battles and frustrations, were exposed as a daily reality for them. It is such a tight engagement that much of the literature reviewed before and during this research, does not capture adequately. It is the silent voices of loneliness, the condemnation to solitary struggle with mothering and schooling; it is this unspoken experience that haunts their livelihood and one that does not come out in their interviews in many studies on student mothers. It is this critical information that this study has achieved, that has probably not been sought after or has not been adequately captured in student mothers' scholarly research that can be considered a major achievement of this study.

Though this research focuses on the kind of participation in education by girls or women, it should be noted that participation is not an end to itself.

The success realized in, increasing school enrolment does not translate to completion and neither does re-admission of student mothers guarantee good grades or sustainability. In the same breath, having universities retain student mothers does not automatically guarantee timely completion, good grades, effective socialization of the young mothers or even complete participation in curricular and co-curricular programs. This is a scenario that requires thorough investigation in order to address any potential challenges towards motherhood as an impediment in education achievement and as a global agenda. The study exposes too that intervention has been skewed.

While global efforts at enhancing education for girls and women can be felt in many organizations that offer funds for research in gender and education, studying and disseminating research findings is not enough. Personal commitment at implementation of research findings and recommendations is deemed wanting by various scholars some viewing it as a personal creation of the difficult circumstances surrounding them. Lack of serious engagement can be seen both at the policy level and at the level of theory and practice. This research identifies such engagement at the grassroots level; a single institution; a case of a single well established public university. An in-depth inquiry and a search for issues regarding quality education participation by student mothers was sought. Such experiences over a period of time to record success, failures and challenges was sought at individual levels, in order to have a clear view of their place within the institution. Though the findings may never be representative of the other education

institutions, or even the public universities in Kenya, at least the case at hand can be a pointer to an existing social phenomenon. The study therefore befits consideration by stakeholders like university management, by faculty and even by students. The implications are that there could be a possible breakthrough with challenges of motherhood in education if sensitization of mothers – to - be was done and probably mechanisms put into place to travel together with experts and stakeholders in their journeys of motherhood. Sharing contextual experience and creating avenues of self-efficacy could lead to lots of success, though this remains as speculation.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

1. Stakeholders in education should accept the inevitable impact of undergraduate motherhood to education quality, accessibility, progression and completion. Some of the challenges these USTM face in higher education could be handled through simple innovation like welfare or support groups that could lead to more retention and accelerated program completion. Comparatively, shared similarities with other student mothers and stories of success from other nations reflect that it is possible to achieve equity the same style.
2. There is also need to come up with a mentorship policy at university to address issues affecting students including student motherhood. An undergraduate student- mothers- desk could be established to track education progression and achievement for undergraduate student mothers. This would ensure effective interaction with them and intervention in issues affecting them. Student mother initiatives should be enhanced through welfare, bursary funding and effective

mentorship. Lecturers and university management teams need to administratively exercise some degree of flexibility in inclusive education. This will enhance inclusive and fair treatment of all students, the undergraduate student mothers being included. Academic Departments should keep records of special cases like deferred semesters to avoid the traumatizing experience of “chasing marks” from previous semesters.

3. Gender research and innovation and resource mobilization should be enhanced for the undergraduate student mothers. Articulate and easily accessible resources like day care, hostels and rental houses could be sourced for through the university too while the USTM could be offered part time jobs during holidays to earn little cash for sustainability where parents or guardians are economically vulnerable. It is crucial through research to unearth new intervention strategies for student parents especially for the undergraduate student mothers.

#### **5.4 Implications for Future Research**

This part in qualitative research is often presented as reflections and lessons learnt. It highlights the success of the research process and expounds on any issues a researcher would want to share with future researchers on areas that require caution or special attention. In this case, the research process unearthed pertinent issues of undergraduate motherhood through the ‘lived experience’ methodological orientation. Their experience is not really what may think or imagine. Qualitative research should be the way to go in getting insight into such social phenomena through narratives of participants’ lives.

Grounded Theory, despite being tedious, proved to be resourceful and uninhibited as a method in data collection. It establishes facts way beyond the research expectations. During the write up, it was difficult to foreground qualitative terms like trustworthiness for instrument reliability and validity. I believe research is global and dynamic and researchers in qualitative analysis should embrace such terminologies and all flexibility in faculty guidelines.

Incidentally, success of any research exercise lies in the exercise of caution in methodology because faulty methods yield unreliable data. Such a process may begin with identifying the purpose of the research and whom it targets. It also, highlights the key features that guide on appropriate methods (Maxwell, 2013) for effective arrival at reliable findings. For the purposes of accuracy, the qualitative design adopted in this research was as such adopted after reflections on a good Research Development Framework. The framework therefore recorded great success in data collection, capturing the expected lived experience. With only 5 participants, focus was given to bringing forth a few experiences in details that presented life as seen and lived by the undergraduate student mothers. They were viewed as special individuals given a chance; a voice to express their concerns and their truths; truths that may not be proved but are realities of their lives. It was a way of trying as Riessman (2001) put it; 'to give voice to those without voice and to empower those who struggle on their behalf'. During data collection, it was difficult to maintain reflexivity owing to the world of experience with student mothers I have had encounter with. However, as observed by Van Manen (2018), in his work on lived experience, the process cannot divorce the presence of the researcher

in the research process. This is because the researcher is part of the research in qualitative designs. This incorporates researcher's responses, during analysis when they focus on how participants feel through nonverbal (visual or aural) field notes and memos that add meaning to the transcripts' content. This could be seen as the way to go in future qualitative research.

Basically research is often considered suggestive and not definitive as in qualitative data according to Mauthner and Daucet (2003). This can be viewed as playing a crucial role in research. First, it generates ideas, new and unique ones from personal encounters and therefore qualifies what is often quantitatively encountered during literature review. More often than not, theoretical concerns of the research; foreseen or emerging in data collection are enhanced. This gives new directions in understanding an individuals' experience or understanding society. The USTM phenomenon had a touch of new theories like grounded theory that emerged with data collection and the self-efficacy and resilience theories that emerged during data analysis.

Data collection was quite spectacular with stages of the research being all integrated and analysis being intermingled with data collection. In such a process, one may need to keep focus of the research questions to avoid losing track of the research. It is not surprising however to stumble across some information that may necessitate addition of new questions in order to capture that which was not anticipated but is relevant to the data being collected. This experience proved the statement that qualitative research begins and ends with questions; one can never really get to the end of it. One must however be cautious to check that any new question or new information directly answers the research

questions. If obscure, or answers the research questions vaguely, some follow-up with participants was very instrumental. Such follow ups yielded more and richer data than during the formal sittings in face to face interviewing.

One area that was found messy though was the organization of data. Issues of pronunciation interfered with the transcription output till for the manual processing was adopted. Some content was in the local dialect and it confused the electronic software that was configured to detect English. Coding the content was tedious while the emerging themes tended to be intertwined and placing them in various categories according to theme relevance was quite repetitive. Once the descriptive themes emerged, the incorporation of the notes and memos was yet another lengthy exercise before the conceptual themes could be derived. Data reduction to presentable topical content required time and commitment.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

Research should be done on undergraduate student fathers whose role is not apparent at university, in order to establish their roles, experiences and coping strategies. This is because they were mentioned during the undergraduate student mothers' interviews, which implies that they form a silent group, probably marginalized and under researched as well.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Participant Biodata

Insert your answer to the questions or tick the suggested response

Age bracket when baby came: <input type="checkbox"/> below 18yrs <input type="checkbox"/> between 19 and 22yrs <input type="checkbox"/> above 22yrs
Residence when baby came: <input type="checkbox"/> university hostels <input type="checkbox"/> home <input type="checkbox"/> rentals others (specify)
Current residence: <input type="checkbox"/> university private hostels <input type="checkbox"/> home <input type="checkbox"/> rentals    others (specify)
Who pays for upkeep: <input type="checkbox"/> self: <input type="checkbox"/> spouse <input type="checkbox"/> parents others (specify)
Academic year when baby came: <input type="checkbox"/> 2014/2015 <input type="checkbox"/> 2013/2014 <input type="checkbox"/> 2012/2013 <input type="checkbox"/> below 2012
Distance of residence from campus: <input type="checkbox"/> within campus <input type="checkbox"/> Below1km <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 2km <input type="checkbox"/> 4-5 km <input type="checkbox"/> Beyond 5km
Who babysits: <input type="checkbox"/> hired house help <input type="checkbox"/> relation <input type="checkbox"/> self alone    others (specify)

Other information:

## **Appendix 2: Undergraduate Student Mothers' Interview Schedule**

1. To begin with, talk a little about the demographic information you gave in the form I gave you prior to this interview...as in age, marital status, economic background, year of study, residence, when and where the baby came...such.

2. When you discovered you were expecting a baby, what came into your mind, were you surprised...? may be shocked? Or were you just calm? Had you planned it?

3. Now, when you became a mother, what was life like? What adjustments did you make in your life? Was there drastic change or things just fell into place? How did it feel? Schooling?

4. What about the people around you, your people, your friends...how did they react? How did they treat you, what did they say...? Did you have to notify university administration?

5. If one was to ask you to describe your day as a mother and as a student, what is your day like? the must Dos, the routine...a kind of diary. How do you articulate such responsibilities?

What personal attributes, major drives, strengths and abilities do you feel you possess...as in those upon which you can peg your success as a mother and a student.



6. What have been your major sources of strength? If you were told to list them down, which are those that may be peculiar, remarkable? What inspires you in career pursuit, motherhood...?

7. What have been your major challenges and how have you managed to overcome those challenges? Were people of help? Who are those people who have particularly assisted you in your motherhood journey? Were there particular people who you feel made a difference in your ability to attend to your studies? Who are those people and what did they do to help?

8. In summary, talk a little about yourself being a woman; a mother, what motherhood means to you. What lessons have you learnt; what would you see as your greatest source of strength? When you compare yourself and other student mothers, what you have been through. Have you faced failure as well? What happened?

9. Finally, what would you tell those people out there, that student mother, that undergraduate young girl, the dean of students, the men...a kind of message...are there lessons learnt?

### **Appendix 3: Deans Interview Schedule**

1. To start us off, please talk a little about your work as a Dean and your encounter with Undergraduate Student Mothers (USTM), the demographics, how you identify them and such. Have you had an encounter with undergraduate student mothers? Have you come across them on campus, have they come to your office?

2. What are some of the issues regarding student mothers that are presented to you by them or by others for you to address? You could briefly mention them
3. Basically, what has been your experience with them in academics, performance? progression? completion? Any peculiar observation?
4. From a general point of view, what according to you are the challenges faced by USTM in education endeavour at university?
5. What mechanisms have been in place regarding the USTM, what are those policies addressing USTM in your institution and what challenges and impediments do you encounter as a Dean in implementing them.
6. As a dean, what do you see as the future of the USTM at university?
7. Is there something about USTM you feel this research needs to capture or address for future action or intervention? What alert, what message would you like to share with readers; some kind of lessons learnt?

#### **Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form**

Dear prospective participant,

This is to request you to be part of an on-going research on undergraduate student mothers. The study entitled *The lived experience of undergraduate student mothers in public universities in Kenya* is being carried out for a doctor of philosophy degree by Kamara Margaret and therefore meant for academic purposes. The study seeks information regarding research questions; 1. *What activities make a normal day in the life of an undergraduate student mother (USTM) on a school day at university?* 2. *What are the strengths and driving forces that contribute to the wellbeing and experience of USTM at university* and 3. *What is the place of USTM in public universities in Kenya today?*

Please note that this is a voluntary exercise and you are allowed to withdraw from it any time without penalty or a feeling of indebtedness. There are no known potential risks regarding the study as confidentiality will be maintained and pseudonyms used to conceal both your identity as a person and any identity characteristics in case of publication of the research results. In fact, your identity is known and will be known by the principal researcher only. You will be expected to participate in a face to face interview of approximately 1½ to 2 hours' duration. The session will be arranged at your convenience and at a location of your choice. You will be asked to respond to questions during the interview and also called upon later to help cross check data correctness after the recorded data is transcribed. This implies that follow-up contacts may also be requested

for to allow communication during the draft writing for the purpose of verification of accuracy (participant check).

Feel free to ask questions, make additions or point out anything you feel will be of value to this research using my email or cell phone contacts [kamarakosgey@gmail.com](mailto:kamarakosgey@gmail.com) or Phone: 0721933715. If you are willing to participate in the study, please acknowledge with your signatures below your consent to participate and your consent to have the interview recorded.

I consent to participate in the study. Signed: ..... Date: .....

I do allow the interview to be recorded. Signed: ..... Date: .....

## Appendix 5: Research Permit

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:**  
**MS. MARGARET KAMARA KOSGEY**  
 of MOI UNIVERSITY , 1294-30100  
 ELDORET, has been permitted to conduct  
 research in *Uasin-Gishu County*

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/18/75553/21456  
 Date Of Issue : 5th April,2018  
 Fee Received :Ksh 2000

on the topic: **THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF  
 UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT MOTHERS  
 IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA.**

for the period ending:  
**5th April,2019**



.....  
**Applicant's  
 Signature**

*[Handwritten Signature]*  
 .....  
**Director General  
 National Commission for Science,  
 Technology & Innovation**

### CONDITIONS

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