

## ABSTRACT

### The Experiences and Challenges of Single Mothers in Tertiary Education in Trinidad

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Despite women's high participation rate in tertiary education in Trinidad, little is known about the lifeworld of female students. Specifically, there is a dearth of research on the issues facing vulnerable female students such as single mothers. A Descriptive Phenomenology design was used to explore the lived experiences of 10 single mothers in tertiary education institutions. Role Strain Theory and an Intersectionality perspective informed the theoretical framework. In-depth interviews revealed that all of the participants experienced role strain from the conflict among their various social roles. Despite the negative effects of role strain on their personal wellbeing, the women were strongly motivated to persist in their education to provide a better future for their children. Further, culture-specific findings were revealed related to the role of formal financial aid and kin networks to the women's educational experiences. Recommendations for future research and practice focused on increased monitoring of educational participation of vulnerable women and fostering a supportive campus environment.

Keywords: single mothers; tertiary education; phenomenology; Trinidad