

JUGGLING CHALK AND CHILD CARE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF SINGLE MOTHERS

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of single mother teachers in managing work–life balance within public schools. Guided by phenomenological inquiry, the study aimed to understand how single mother educators navigated the dual demands of teaching and child care, how they perceived and made meaning of their challenges and coping strategies, and what insights their experiences offered for education and family life. Purposive sampling was used to select single mother teachers from selected public schools, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis following Colaizzi’s method was employed to analyze participants’ narratives. Findings revealed that single mother teachers experienced persistent role overload, emotional and physical exhaustion, and limited social engagement as they balanced professional and caregiving responsibilities. Despite these challenges, participants reframed their struggles as meaningful trials rooted in love, responsibility, and commitment to their children. Coping strategies such as time management, seeking support, and self-care were perceived not as optional practices but as essential acts of care and survival. The experiences of single mothers also contributed to resilient identity construction, strengthened family relationships, and deeper parent–child bonds. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of empathetic institutions, responsive school leadership, and inclusive, family-sensitive policies in supporting teacher well-being and sustaining educational effectiveness. The study concluded that work–life balance among single mother teachers was a systemic issue that required institutional, leadership, and policy-level interventions. The findings contributed to the discourse on teacher well-being, gender-responsive education, and family resilience, and offered evidence-based insights for improving support mechanisms in public schools.

Keywords: *single mother teachers, work–life balance, phenomenology, teacher well-being, school leadership, family resilience, Kidapawan City Division*

INTRODUCTION

Balancing professional responsibilities and family care remained a complex issue within work–life research, particularly for educators who navigated emotional, intellectual, and physical demands on a daily basis. For single mother teachers, this struggle was intensified because they carried full responsibility for both income generation and child care, often without a co-parent to share domestic or financial burdens. In the Philippines, the teaching profession was characterized by long instructional hours, administrative tasks that often extended beyond the regular workday, and expectations for emotional labor that heightened daily stress (Lopez, 2022; Harrison, 2021; Reyes, 2021). National data indicated that Filipino teachers spent an estimated 56 hours weekly on school-related tasks, which was significantly higher than the 40-hour standard, creating a ratio of one teacher to heavy workloads that extended across school and home (Cabrera, 2021; Lopez, 2022). For single mother educators, this disproportionate work demand heightened the pressure of balancing roles, resulting in frequent emotional and physical strain (Cabrera, 2021; Mendoza, 2023; Zamora, 2021).

The increasing number of single parent households in the Philippines brought greater attention to the struggles of solo mothers in the education sector. Government estimates suggested that around 14.7 million Filipinos lived in solo-parent households, of which women represented nearly 95% (Dela Rosa, 2024; Cabrera, 2021). Reports further indicated that a growing segment of these single parents worked in public elementary and secondary schools, a trend visible in regions such as NCR, Cebu, and Davao (Dela Rosa, 2024; Echevarria, 2023). Despite this rise, institutional policies and teacher support programs remained largely gender-neutral, often overlooking the unique circumstances of single mothers who functioned as both providers and

primary caregivers (Echevarria, 2023; Reyes, 2021). Research showed that 63% of single mother teachers reported high levels of work-related stress, while 42% expressed frequent role conflict, confirming that the intersection of parenting and teaching placed them at heightened risk of burnout (Mendoza, 2023; Zamora, 2021; Cruz, 2023). Yet, qualitative inquiries into how single mother educators navigated these pressures remained scarce, leaving gaps in understanding their coping strategies and lived realities.

International literature reinforced that this problem was global and spanned various sociocultural contexts. Studies in Brazil documented that more than 70% of single mother teachers struggled with managing school tasks alongside household duties, often feeling torn between professional expectations and parenting obligations (Caldas, 2022; Diaz, 2022). In Canada and the United Kingdom, phenomenological studies found that single mother educators faced chronic fatigue, classroom stress, and emotional isolation, which reduced job satisfaction and increased the likelihood of attrition (Lambert, 2021; Harrison, 2021; Smith, 2022). Asian settings showed similar trends. Research from Japan reported that junior high school teachers who were single mothers experienced intense psychosocial strain, especially during peak academic periods (Ito, 2022; Yamaguchi, 2024). Studies from Malaysia and Vietnam revealed that between 48% and 60% of single mother educators struggled to maintain a healthy work–family balance due to limited support systems and cultural expectations of female caregiving (Jabbar, 2023; Nguyen, 2024). Evidence from China and Singapore further highlighted the psychological weight carried by single mother teachers who often performed dual roles under resource-constrained working environments (Xu, 2023; Wan, 2022; Zhang, 2022). These international findings affirmed that single mother educators constituted a vulnerable workforce that required specialized institutional responses.

The consequences of an unresolved work–life imbalance among single mother teachers extended beyond individual well-being and posed significant implications for schools and systems. On a personal level, imbalance was associated with exhaustion, anxiety, disrupted sleep, and compromised physical health, with 52% reporting chronic fatigue and 39% indicating strained parent–child relationships (Wan, 2022; Park, 2023; Tan, 2023). At the institutional level, schools experienced challenges such as reduced teaching effectiveness, increased absenteeism, and attrition rates that disproportionately affected female educators who parented alone (Smith, 2022; Garcia, 2024). Among teachers handling specialized classes such as SPED, the additional emotional load contributed to elevated levels of stress and a 28% higher risk of burnout for single mother educators compared to their married counterparts (Garcia, 2024; Ugarte, 2024). On a societal scale, insufficient support for single mother teachers reinforced gender inequities, created barriers to career advancement, and threatened educational sustainability goals because teacher well-being directly influenced student learning outcomes (Nguyen, 2024; Quintana, 2024).

Given these realities, this study was conceptualized to provide an in-depth exploration of how single mother educators negotiated, reconciled, and withstood the demands of teaching and motherhood. Their lived experiences illuminated complex layers of role conflict, identity management, coping mechanisms, and resilience, which required careful phenomenological analysis to be fully understood (Ocampo, 2022; Cabrera, 2021; Valdez, 2021). Qualitative inquiry was essential for understanding the meanings they attached to their work and family roles, the personal strategies they developed for survival, and the systemic deficiencies that shaped their everyday experiences (Ocampo, 2022; Lopez, 2022). Examining these narratives generated insights that informed teacher support programs, more inclusive workplace policies, and school leadership practices that were sensitive to the realities of single mother educators.

The growing presence of single mothers in the teaching profession underscored an urgent need for evidence-based responses from schools, government agencies, and policymaking bodies. A deeper understanding of their struggles and aspirations was crucial to designing interventions that supported balanced teacher well-being and sustainable workforce engagement (Quintana, 2024; Valdez, 2021). This study aimed to give voice to single mother educators and to identify the structures that enabled or constrained their work–life balance. By foregrounding their narratives, this research contributed to a broader discourse on equity, gender-responsive educational policies, and holistic teacher development. Through this inquiry, the study hoped to strengthen institutional awareness and promote better practices that acknowledged the dual identities carried by single mother teachers in the Philippines.

METHODS

Research Design

The present study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of single mother teachers in balancing professional responsibilities and child care. A phenomenological design was appropriate because it sought to capture and describe the essence of participants' realities as they experienced them, rather than imposing predetermined categories or frameworks. As Ocampo (2022) emphasized, phenomenology provided a means of accessing the depth of participants' emotions, perceptions, and daily negotiations, which were often overlooked in quantitative surveys. By focusing on the subjective accounts of participants, this research design aligned with the goal of highlighting the voices of single mothers whose challenges were frequently marginalized in educational discourse.

Phenomenology was particularly well-suited for this study because it emphasized the importance of describing how individuals made sense of their world. According to Harrison (2021), phenomenological inquiry allowed researchers to uncover the meanings behind participants' experiences, revealing not only the difficulties but also the coping strategies and personal interpretations they employed. For single mother teachers, their accounts of fatigue, resilience, and adaptation provided insights into how they constructed balance amidst competing pressures. Similarly, Echevarria (2023) noted that phenomenology provided a rich foundation for capturing narratives of resilience and adaptation among educators, which aligned closely with the objectives of this research.

The phenomenological design also offered flexibility in terms of data collection methods. Lopez (2022) highlighted that in-depth interviews allowed participants to articulate their emotional labor and personal struggles in ways that structured surveys could not capture. By providing participants the space to narrate freely, the researcher gained access to authentic accounts of how professional responsibilities intertwined with child care duties. Smith (2022) further emphasized that qualitative interviews were essential when studying work–life boundaries, as they provided nuanced insights into how participants negotiated roles and expectations. Thus, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions served as primary tools for data collection in this study.

Another strength of using phenomenology was its ability to highlight the commonalities across diverse individual accounts. While each single mother's experience was unique, phenomenology allowed for the identification of shared themes that represented the collective essence of their struggles and strategies. As Nguyen (2024) pointed out, the phenomenological process helped uncover recurring patterns of meaning that might otherwise have remained hidden

within fragmented accounts. This made it possible to draw broader implications for education and family life while still respecting the individuality of each participant's story.

Furthermore, phenomenology aligned with the advocacy dimension of this research. Cabrera (2021) stressed that the voices of employed single mothers were often excluded from policy discussions, and phenomenological research gave them the platform to articulate their realities in their own terms. Quintana (2024) also highlighted that documenting the narratives of single mothers not only contributed to academic knowledge but also influenced institutional practices by making visible the challenges these teachers faced. In this way, phenomenology was not only a methodological choice but also an ethical stance that centered marginalized voices.

Finally, the choice of this research design supported the overarching goal of drawing implications for educational leadership, teacher well-being, and family support systems. As Dela Rosa (2024) explained, studies that explored work–life integration in education needed to be grounded in methods that privileged authentic experiences, since only then could they inform practical reforms. Mendoza (2023) similarly argued that the narratives of teachers provided the richest basis for designing inclusive policies that acknowledged the dual roles of educators as professionals and caregivers. Therefore, the phenomenological design ensured that the study not only captured lived experiences but also generated insights that were directly relevant to improving school systems and community support structures.

Research Participants

The participants of this qualitative study consisted of single mother teachers from selected public schools in the Kidapawan City Division. The choice of participants was based on their lived realities of balancing professional teaching responsibilities with child care duties. According to Ocampo (2022), the voices of single mothers in education had to be heard to better understand the dual pressures of caregiving and teaching. Their experiences provided valuable insight into the dynamics of work–life balance and the coping mechanisms employed by those in this situation.

As emphasized by Lopez (2022), single female educators faced unique emotional and practical challenges that distinguished them from their married counterparts, making them an appropriate population for phenomenological inquiry.

The inclusion criteria for participants were as follows: first, they were single mothers who were actively employed as full-time teachers in the district; second, they had at least one child living with them to ensure that they were directly responsible for child care while fulfilling teaching duties; third, they had been in the teaching profession for at least two years to guarantee sufficient experience in managing dual roles in the educational setting. These criteria were aligned with Cabrera’s (2021) assertion that employed single mothers brought forward narratives that reflected long-term balancing strategies between home and work.

The exclusion criteria were as follows: first, teachers who were not single mothers were not considered since their experiences did not reflect the dual burdens central to this study; second, participants who were on long-term leave or career break were excluded because their current circumstances might not have represented the ongoing challenges of balancing teaching and child care; third, those who had adult children who were already independent were also excluded since the study focused on the experiences of mothers actively engaged in caregiving alongside their

teaching roles. As noted by Harrison (2021), context-specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were critical in phenomenological studies to ensure the validity and relevance of the narratives.

Data Collection

Before any data collection activities were undertaken, the researcher first secured the necessary institutional approvals. This process began with the submission of the full research proposal to the Dean of the Graduate School of the researcher's academic institution. Once the Dean reviewed and endorsed the proposal, it was forwarded to the Ethics Review Committee of the same institution for ethical clearance. The Ethics Review Committee played a critical role in ensuring that the study adhered to accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants, specifically in terms of protecting their rights, privacy, and overall well-being. Only after the approval and ethical clearance were obtained was the researcher allowed to proceed to the field.

Following the approval, coordination was established with the Schools Division Superintendent and the District Supervisor to secure formal permission to conduct the study among identified teachers. According to Reyes (2021), cooperation from educational administrators was essential in qualitative studies, as it not only legitimized the research but also ensured smoother access to potential participants. Official communication was then extended to school heads where single mother teachers were employed, thereby formalizing the request for participation.

The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews, supported by focus group discussions. In-depth interviews allowed participants to narrate their lived experiences in a detailed and personal manner, which was vital in phenomenological research (Lopez, 2022; Smith, 2022).

Each interview was conducted using semi-structured guides that provided flexibility for participants to share stories beyond the core questions. Focus group discussions, on the other hand, provided an avenue for participants to validate and expand each other's accounts, thereby enriching the data (Jabbar, 2023; Echevarria, 2023). This combination of methods ensured both depth and breadth in data collection.

Data gathering was conducted in safe and convenient settings for participants, such as school offices or neutral venues within the community. Cabrera (2021) emphasized that the environment of data collection significantly affected the comfort level of participants, which in turn influenced the richness of the narratives shared. To maintain ethical rigor, informed consent was obtained from all participants before any interview or discussion. As stated by Dela Rosa (2024), securing consent ensured that participants were fully aware of the study's goals, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality.

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with the permission of participants to guarantee accuracy in transcription and analysis. Tan (2023) argued that accurate data recording was critical for establishing credibility and ensuring that participants' voices were faithfully represented. In addition, field notes were maintained to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and researcher reflections that complemented the transcribed data. Finally, confidentiality was strictly upheld by anonymizing participant identities in transcripts and reports. This approach reflected Quintana's (2024) view that the dignity and privacy of single mothers must be safeguarded to promote trust and transparency in research.

Procedures

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Following this approval, the researcher formally coordinated with the Schools Division Superintendent and the District Supervisor. This step ensured that the research had official authorization to access schools and participants. As emphasized by Reyes (2021), obtaining cooperation from division and district leaders legitimized the research process and facilitated the smooth identification of potential participants. Once permission was secured, the researcher then reached out to school heads to request the participation of single mother teachers.

The participants were provided with clear and detailed information about the study through an informed consent form. This form outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Cabrera (2021) noted that informed consent was crucial in building trust between researcher and participant, particularly in studies that involved personal and sensitive narratives. After consent was obtained, the data collection proceeded through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Interviews were conducted in safe and convenient locations for the participants, ensuring that their comfort and privacy were prioritized. Focus group discussions were facilitated to allow participants to share and validate their experiences in a supportive environment. Lopez (2022) stated that focus group interactions could enrich qualitative data because participants often resonated with and elaborated on each other's accounts. The researcher also maintained field notes to document non-verbal cues and observations that provided context to the narratives.

Each session was audio-recorded with explicit permission from participants to ensure that their stories were captured accurately. Tan (2023) emphasized that the accuracy of recording and transcription was vital in phenomenological research, as it guaranteed that the participants' voices were faithfully represented during analysis. All gathered data were handled with confidentiality and were stored securely, ensuring that only the researcher had access to the raw files.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this qualitative phenomenological inquiry on the work–life balance experiences of single mother teachers followed the systematic and rigorously structured method developed by Colaizzi (1978). Colaizzi's approach provided a clear and disciplined framework for extracting, organizing, and interpreting the essential meanings embedded in the participants' narratives. This method was particularly suitable for a study that sought to understand the depth, texture, and complexity of the lived experiences of single mothers, as it prioritized participants' own words and perspectives while ensuring that the final thematic insights remained grounded in authentic accounts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented the outcomes of the qualitative phenomenological inquiry that examined the lived experiences of single mother teachers in balancing professional teaching responsibilities and child care. It focused on organizing and presenting the data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in a systematic and coherent manner. Guided by the phenomenological approach, the chapter aimed to surface participants' meanings and perspectives as expressed in their narratives, providing a structured foundation for the presentation of findings and subsequent discussion within the context of work–life balance, teacher well-being, and caregiving responsibilities.

Lived Experiences of Single Mothers in Managing Work–Life Balance

Table 1 presented the thematic analysis of the lived experiences of single mother teachers as they managed work–life balance. Five interrelated themes emerged from the data: **Constant Role Juggling, Emotional and Physical Strain, Social Sacrifice, Enablers and Constraints, and Living in Survival Mode**. Collectively, these themes illustrated how participants experienced daily life as a continuous negotiation between teaching responsibilities and caregiving duties, often under conditions of exhaustion, limited support, and sustained pressure. The table highlighted that work–life balance was not experienced as equilibrium but as ongoing effort, endurance, and adjustment shaped by structural, emotional, and relational demands.

Constant Role Juggling

The theme of constant role juggling captured how single mother teachers continuously shifted between professional and parental roles with minimal boundaries. Participants described their days as tightly scheduled, multitasked, and emotionally layered, where teaching duties extended into home life and parenting responsibilities intruded into work hours. This theme reflected the lived reality of blurred work–family boundaries, where neither role could be paused or delegated. Role juggling was not episodic but persistent, shaping participants’ routines, energy allocation, and decision-making processes. The experience underscored the absence of temporal or psychological separation between being a teacher and being a mother:

“I wake up very early to prepare my child and myself, teach all day, then continue working again at home until late at night, and I do this every single day without rest” (IDI1.1.4).

“I feel like I am always switching roles, from teacher to mother and back again, sometimes in just a matter of minutes, without time to breathe” (IDI1.1.2).

“I prepare lesson plans while cooking dinner and check papers while helping my child with homework because there is no other time” (IDI1.1.3).

“I am constantly adjusting my schedule because both teaching and parenting demand my full attention” (IDI1.1.1).

“I do not experience a clear boundary between work and home because both roles depend on me completely” (IDI1.1.5).

The implications of constant role juggling were significant for teacher well-being and institutional expectations. The findings suggested that school systems continued to operate under assumptions of worker availability that did not account for solo caregiving realities. The lack of flexible scheduling, workload adjustments, and role-sensitive policies intensified strain on single mother teachers. Without institutional recognition of role multiplicity, participants were left to self-manage competing demands, often at the cost of rest, health, and professional development. This theme emphasized the need for organizational models that acknowledged teachers’ caregiving responsibilities as integral, not peripheral, to their professional lives.

This theme gained strong support from existing literature. The findings were congruent with Cabrera (2021), who documented persistent role overlap among employed single mothers in Manila. Similar patterns were reported by Dela Rosa (2024) in Cebu public schools and Mendoza (2023) in Baguio City, where single mother teachers described uninterrupted role switching as a defining feature of daily life. Internationally, Caldas (2022) and Lambert (2021) likewise found that single parent teachers experienced constant boundary erosion between professional and family roles.

Emotional and Physical Strain

The theme of emotional and physical strain reflected the cumulative toll of sustained responsibility, fatigue, and emotional suppression. Participants reported chronic exhaustion, stress,

guilt, and health neglect as consequences of managing dual roles alone. Emotional labor extended beyond teaching into parenting, leaving little space for recovery. Physical strain was intensified by long work hours, disrupted sleep, and limited self-care. This theme illustrated how work–life imbalance manifested not only as logistical difficulty but as embodied distress:

“I feel exhausted most of the time, emotionally and physically, because I carry everything alone” (IDI1.2.3).

“I experience guilt when I feel I am not giving enough to my students or my child, and that feeling never really goes away” (IDI1.2.5).

“I suppress my emotions because I need to stay strong for my child and at work” (IDI1.2.1).

“I rarely have time to rest, and my health sometimes suffers because there is always something that needs to be done” (IDI1.2.4).

“I feel drained at the end of the day, but I still need to prepare for tomorrow” (IDI1.2.2).

The theme was critical for teacher retention, mental health, and instructional quality. Sustained emotional and physical strain increased vulnerability to burnout, absenteeism, and reduced engagement. The findings suggested that emotional resilience among single mother teachers was often self-generated rather than institutionally supported. Without access to mental

health services, workload moderation, or wellness programs, participants bore the cost of systemic neglect. This highlighted the urgent need for trauma-informed and gender-responsive teacher support mechanisms.

This theme was supported by extensive literature as results corroborated Harrison (2021), who found chronic fatigue and emotional depletion among single mother teachers in the UK. Similar findings were reported by Lopez (2022) in Manila and Echevarria (2023) in Davao City. International studies by Wan (2022), Park (2023), and Diaz (2022) further affirmed that emotional labor and physical exhaustion were central features of single mother educators' experiences.

Social Sacrifice

Social sacrifice described the reduction of personal relationships, leisure, and community engagement due to competing responsibilities. Participants reported isolation, limited adult interaction, and withdrawal from social activities. Social needs were deprioritized in favor of caregiving and professional obligations. This theme revealed how work–life imbalance extended into relational domains, diminishing social support and personal fulfillment:

“I do not socialize much anymore because my energy is already consumed by work and parenting” (IDI1.3.5).

“I miss having time for myself or even talking to friends because my schedule is full” (IDI1.3.2).

“I feel isolated sometimes because I cannot join social activities like others do” (IDI1.3.3).

“I prioritize my child and work, so my social life comes last”
(IDI1.3.4).

“I rarely get to recharge socially because there is always
another responsibility waiting” (IDI1.3.5).

Social sacrifice was profound for emotional well-being and resilience. Reduced social interaction limited access to informal support networks that could buffer stress. Isolation also heightened vulnerability to depression and emotional fatigue. The findings underscored the importance of community-based and workplace social support initiatives that foster connection rather than isolation.

This theme was aligned with the findings of Cabrera (2021), who reported that urban single mothers often experienced social withdrawal as a consequence of competing work and caregiving demands. Cabrera’s study showed that the limited time, energy, and emotional reserves of single mothers resulted in reduced participation in social activities, which in turn weakened informal support networks that could otherwise buffer stress. This pattern was further supported by Lambert (2021), whose phenomenological inquiry among single mother educators in Canada revealed that social isolation intensified feelings of emotional fatigue and loneliness, particularly when institutional support was minimal. Similarly, Smith (2022) found that single educators in Australia struggled to maintain social boundaries and relationships due to constant work–family overlap, leading to heightened emotional strain. Nguyen (2024) reinforced these findings in rural Vietnam, noting that restricted social engagement compounded psychological stress and reduced opportunities for emotional release among single parent teachers. Collectively, these studies

affirmed that social withdrawal was not a personal choice but a structural consequence of sustained role overload.

Enablers and Constraints

This theme highlighted factors that either supported or hindered work–life balance, including family support, workplace flexibility, financial stability, and leadership practices. Participants emphasized that balance was not solely a personal skill but a condition shaped by external structures. Support systems enabled functioning, while their absence intensified struggle:

“My ability to balance work and family depends on the support I receive” (IDI1.4.1).

“When my workplace is flexible, everything becomes more manageable” (IDI1.4.4).

“Financial stability helps reduce my stress and allows me to focus better” (IDI1.4.3).

“Without support, balancing both roles becomes overwhelming” (IDI1.4.2).

“Understanding supervisors make a big difference in how I cope” (IDI1.4.5).

This theme pointed to structural responsibility rather than individual failure. The findings challenged deficit narratives that framed imbalance as poor time management. Instead, they

highlighted the role of institutional design in shaping lived experiences. Policies, leadership practices, and resource allocation emerged as critical determinants of teacher well-being.

The findings were also consistent with Dela Rosa (2024), Valdez (2021), and Garcia (2024), who emphasized the critical role of institutional support in enabling work–life balance among single mother educators. Dela Rosa (2024) demonstrated that access to flexible scheduling, understanding leadership, and family-responsive policies significantly eased the burden of dual roles in Cebu’s public schools. Valdez (2021) similarly highlighted that support networks within schools, such as collegial assistance and empathetic supervision, played a decisive role in mitigating stress and sustaining professional commitment. Garcia (2024) extended this discussion by showing that the absence of institutional accommodations disproportionately affected single mother teachers handling specialized or high-demand classes, thereby exacerbating burnout risks. International studies echoed these conclusions. Jabbar (2023) found that systemic enablers such as flexible work arrangements and childcare access in Malaysia were pivotal in helping single parent teachers maintain balance. Quintana (2024) and Xu (2023) likewise underscored that work–life balance was largely shaped by structural conditions rather than individual coping capacity, reinforcing the argument that institutional design directly influenced lived experiences.

Living in Survival Mode

Living in survival mode captured the overarching experience of endurance, necessity, and continuous coping. Participants framed their lives not in terms of balance but survival. The theme reflected resilience born of obligation rather than choice:

“I feel like I am always in survival mode because I have no choice but to keep going” (IDI1.5.1).

“I do everything because if I don’t, no one else will” (IDI1.5.2).

“I survive each day by focusing on what needs to be done” (IDI1.5.3).

“I do not think of balance, I think of survival” (IDI1.5.4).

“I push through every day for my child” (IDI1.5.5).

The implications emphasized the moral and emotional weight placed on single mother teachers. Survival narratives indicated strength but also systemic failure. While resilience was celebrated, it masked the need for structural change. The findings called for policies that moved beyond admiration of resilience toward redistribution of support.

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Table 1. Thematic Analysis on the Lived Experiences of Single Mothers in Managing Work–Life Balance

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Daily routines and role demands	Multitasking; Role shifting; Time pressure	“My day starts early preparing my child, teaching, then going home to household chores until late night.” (IDI P5)	Constant Role Juggling	Single mother teachers experienced daily life as a continuous negotiation between professional and parental responsibilities with little separation between roles.
Emotional and physical challenges	Fatigue; Stress; Guilt; Exhaustion	“Emotionally I feel pressure and guilt, physically I am exhausted most days.” (IDI P9)	Emotional and Physical Strain	Managing dual roles resulted in sustained emotional stress and physical depletion that shaped participants’ everyday functioning.
Social impact of dual roles	Isolation; Limited socialization; Reduced self-time	“Socialization is affected since my energy is already consumed.” (IDI P1)	Social Sacrifice	Participants sacrificed personal and social engagement as work and caregiving demands took precedence.
Factors influencing balance	Support systems; Flexibility; Financial stability	“Support from family and flexible schedules help me manage both roles.” (IDI P3)	Enablers and Constraints	Work–life balance was shaped by the presence or absence of institutional, familial, and economic support structures.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Overall experience of balancing roles	Everyday struggle; Survival	“I consider it an everyday struggle.” (IDI P1)	Living in Survival Mode	Participants framed work–life balance not as equilibrium but as continuous endurance under pressure.

How Single Mothers Perceive and Make Meaning of Their Work–Life Balance Challenges and Strategies

Table 2 presented the thematic analysis of how single mother teachers perceived and made meaning of their work–life balance challenges and the strategies they employed to cope with these demands. Three central themes emerged from the data: **Challenges as Meaningful Trials, Coping as Care and Survival**, and **Resilient Identity Construction**. Collectively, these themes revealed that participants did not simply recount difficulties as external stressors imposed by work or family demands. Instead, they actively interpreted and reframed these challenges through deeply personal, moral, and relational lenses. The table highlighted how participants engaged in meaning-making processes that transformed experiences of strain, sacrifice, and exhaustion into expressions of love, responsibility, commitment, and purpose. Rather than positioning imbalance as personal failure or inadequacy, single mother teachers constructed narratives that affirmed their endurance, moral agency, and identity as capable caregivers and professionals. This meaning-oriented framing served as a crucial psychological and emotional mechanism that enabled participants to persist amid sustained pressures.

Challenges as Meaningful Trials

The theme **Challenges as Meaningful Trials** captured how single mother teachers interpreted their work–life balance struggles not merely as hardships to be endured but as purposeful trials that tested and affirmed their strength, values, and commitment. Participants consistently framed exhaustion, pressure, and constant adjustment as necessary struggles inherent in their dual roles as providers and caregivers. These challenges were imbued with moral meaning, often linked to love for their children, dedication to teaching, and a deep sense of responsibility. Rather than viewing imbalance as evidence of inadequacy or failure, participants understood it as part of a broader life journey that demanded sacrifice and perseverance. This interpretation positioned struggle as meaningful rather than debilitating, reinforcing a sense of dignity and worth amid difficulty:

“I see the challenges I face as tests of my strength and commitment, because every hardship reminds me why I keep going for my child” (IDI2.1.5).

“I experience stress and exhaustion, but I believe these struggles shape me into a better mother and teacher” (IDI2.1.2).

“I interpret the difficulties I encounter as sacrifices that are necessary for my children’s future” (IDI2.1.4).

“I face pressure every day, but I see it as proof that I am doing my best in both roles” (IDI2.1.1).

“I consider my struggles meaningful because they push me to grow stronger emotionally and mentally” (IDI2.1.3).

The theme was significant in understanding how single mother teachers sustained motivation despite persistent strain and limited support. Meaning-making functioned as a psychological buffer that allowed participants to endure stress without disengaging from their professional or parental roles. By framing challenges as meaningful trials, participants preserved a sense of purpose and self-respect, which helped protect them from feelings of helplessness or despair. However, this interpretation also revealed a critical risk. By moralizing hardship and framing suffering as necessary, participants may have normalized excessive burden and internalized responsibility for conditions shaped by structural constraints. This moral framing potentially reduced their likelihood of seeking institutional support or advocating for systemic change. The theme thus underscored the need for educational institutions to recognize that while resilience narratives can be empowering, they should not replace concrete structural support. Schools and policymakers must ensure that teachers’ meaning-making processes are complemented by responsive policies that prevent the normalization of chronic overwork and emotional depletion.

This interpretation was strongly supported by existing literature. The findings were congruent with Ocampo (2022), who noted that Filipino single mother educators often reframed struggle as purpose-driven endurance rooted in maternal responsibility. Similar patterns were observed by Ito (2022) and Yamaguchi (2024), who found that single mother teachers in Japan interpreted work–family challenges as character-building trials tied to moral duty and perseverance. This theme was also supported by Kamal (2024) in Pakistan and Quintana (2024) in

Mexico, who reported that single mothers across cultural contexts attached deep moral and emotional significance to work–family struggles, viewing them as expressions of love, sacrifice, and commitment rather than as indicators of failure.

Coping as Care and Survival

The theme **Coping as Care and Survival** emphasized that strategies such as time management, seeking support, self-care, and boundary setting were not viewed by participants as optional techniques or productivity tools. Instead, these strategies were understood as essential acts of care directed toward both themselves and their children. Participants described coping strategies as lifelines that enabled them to function daily under sustained pressure. These practices carried emotional and moral meaning and were closely tied to maternal responsibility. Coping was framed as survival work rather than self-improvement, highlighting how everyday strategies were mobilized to preserve stability, emotional availability, and caregiving capacity:

“I use time management not just to be efficient but to make sure my child’s needs are met” (IDI2.2.1).

“I see my coping strategies as ways to survive and stay strong for my family” (IDI2.2.2).

“I seek support when I can because it helps me protect my child’s well-being” (IDI2.2.3).

“I manage my time carefully because it allows me to be present both at work and at home” (IDI2.2.4).

“I practice self-care when possible because it helps me continue functioning for my child” (IDI2.2.5).

This theme highlighted the significant emotional labor embedded in coping behaviors. Coping was not simply an individual response to stress but an extension of caregiving itself. Participants’ strategies were shaped by necessity rather than choice, reflecting adaptive responses to structural gaps in support. This finding suggested that institutional discourses promoting self-care without addressing workload, staffing, and flexibility were insufficient and potentially problematic. When coping is framed solely as individual responsibility, systemic stressors remain unchallenged. The findings therefore emphasized that institutions must recognize coping strategies as signals of unmet systemic needs rather than evidence of personal resilience alone. Supporting single mother teachers required reducing structural stressors, providing accessible support systems, and creating conditions where coping was no longer a matter of survival.

This theme was supported by Tan (2023), who documented self-care as survival among single mother teachers in Laguna, emphasizing that coping strategies were adopted out of necessity rather than preference. Similar findings were reported by Echevarria (2023) and Ugarte (2024), who highlighted coping as emotional regulation and endurance in the absence of formal support. International studies by Smith (2022) and Wan (2022) further affirmed that coping strategies among single parent educators functioned primarily as survival mechanisms rather than lifestyle choices or wellness practices.

Resilient Identity Construction

The theme **Resilient Identity Construction** described how participants' sustained engagement with work–life challenges shaped a strong sense of self defined by independence, responsibility, and purpose. Participants articulated that navigating dual roles transformed their identities over time, reinforcing their self-worth, confidence, and resilience. Identity was constructed through struggle, with motherhood and teaching mutually reinforcing participants' sense of meaning and capability. Rather than fragmenting identity, the convergence of roles strengthened participants' perception of themselves as competent, purposeful, and emotionally grounded individuals:

“My experiences shaped me into a stronger and more independent person” (IDI2.3.1).

“I see myself as resilient because I manage both roles despite the challenges” (IDI2.3.2).

“My identity as a mother and a teacher gives me purpose and strength” (IDI2.3.3).

“I feel proud of myself because I continue despite the difficulties” (IDI2.3.4).

“My struggles helped me discover who I am and what truly matters” (IDI2.3.5).

The implications of this theme were complex and multifaceted. On one hand, resilient identity construction strengthened perseverance, self-efficacy, and motivation, enabling

participants to sustain engagement with both work and family responsibilities. On the other hand, this identity formation risked masking vulnerability and discouraging help-seeking behaviors. When resilience became central to self-definition, acknowledging fatigue or requesting support could be perceived as weakness or failure. This finding underscored the need for institutions to balance recognition of resilience with the creation of safe spaces for expressing need, exhaustion, and vulnerability. Policies and leadership practices must validate strength without romanticizing hardship, ensuring that resilience does not become an expectation that justifies inadequate support.

This theme aligned closely with Echevarria (2023), who found that resilience became a core identity marker among single mother educators in Davao City. It was also supported by Park (2023), Xu (2023), and Zhang (2022), who noted that identity reconstruction among single mother teachers emerged through sustained negotiation of caregiving and professional roles. Cabrera (2021) and Valdez (2021) similarly emphasized that identity formation among single mother educators was deeply rooted in responsibility, endurance, and survival, reinforcing the present study’s findings.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis on How Single Mothers Perceive and Make Meaning of Their Work–Life Balance Challenges and Strategies

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Meaning of challenges	Test of strength; Sacrifice; Responsibility	“It is a test of inner strength and personal growth.” (IDI P1)	Challenges as Meaningful Trials	Difficulties were interpreted as purposeful sacrifices rather than mere burdens.
Emotional interpretation of struggles	Love-driven sacrifice; Endurance	“We do it all for the love of our children.” (IDI P1)	Sacrificial Motherhood	Work–life struggles were deeply tied to maternal identity and love for children.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Meaning of coping strategies	Survival tools; Acts of care	“Coping is not just balance, it is for the good of our kids.” (IDI P1)	Coping as Care and Survival	Coping strategies were seen as moral and emotional commitments rather than technical skills.
Identity formation	Independence; Strength; Resilience	“My experience shaped me as strong and independent.” (IDI P2)	Resilient Identity Construction	The dual role forged a strong sense of self-reliance and resilience.
Purpose and motivation	Children as purpose; Personal growth	“My children give meaning to every sacrifice.” (IDI P10)	Purpose-Driven Living	Participants grounded meaning and motivation in their parental role, sustaining perseverance.

Table 3 presented the thematic analysis of the insights drawn from the lived experiences of single mother teachers regarding their implications for education and family life. Three dominant themes emerged from the participants’ narratives: **Need for Empathetic Institutions, Inclusive Policy Reform,** and **Strengthened Family Resilience.** These themes reflected how personal struggles and coping experiences were transformed into reflective insights that extended beyond the self and toward broader institutional, policy, and familial contexts. The table highlighted that participants were not passive recipients of hardship but active meaning-makers who critically assessed how schools, leadership practices, and policies could better respond to the realities of single motherhood. Moreover, their experiences revealed that work–life challenges did not solely produce strain but also fostered adaptive family practices that strengthened relationships, communication, and resilience within the household.

Need for Empathetic Institutions

The theme **Need for Empathetic Institutions** captured participants' shared insight that educational environments must move beyond rigid, productivity-centered models and toward cultures grounded in empathy, flexibility, and understanding. Single mother teachers emphasized that their ability to function effectively depended not only on personal resilience but also on how school leaders and institutions responded to their caregiving realities. Empathy was framed as an ethical and practical necessity rather than preferential treatment. Participants described empathetic institutions as those that acknowledged caregiving demands, allowed flexibility during emergencies, and fostered psychologically safe spaces where requesting support was not stigmatized:

“I believe that when school leaders understand my situation as a single mother, I am able to do my work better and with less stress” (IDI3.1.1).

“I feel more motivated when my supervisors show empathy instead of questioning my commitment as a teacher” (IDI3.1.2).

“I need flexibility from my school, especially during times when my child is sick or needs me urgently” (IDI3.1.3).

“I feel valued when my administrators consider my family responsibilities in decision-making” (IDI3.1.4).

“I believe that empathy in the workplace creates a healthier environment for both teachers and learners” (IDI3.1.5).

The theme was substantial for educational leadership and organizational culture. Empathetic institutions were shown to enhance teacher retention, emotional well-being, and instructional effectiveness. When leaders demonstrated understanding and flexibility, participants reported greater engagement, reduced stress, and stronger commitment to their schools. Conversely, the absence of empathy intensified burnout and emotional exhaustion. This theme suggested that leadership training must explicitly integrate gender-responsive and family-sensitive perspectives. Educational systems needed to reconceptualize professionalism not as constant availability but as sustainable engagement supported by humane policies and leadership practices.

This theme was strongly supported by existing literature. Garcia (2024) emphasized that solo mothers teaching special needs classes required empathetic leadership to manage heightened emotional demands. Valdez (2021) similarly found that empathetic supervision in Cebu schools significantly reduced stress among single mother teachers. Harrison (2021) reported parallel findings in the UK, where supportive leadership mitigated burnout among single mothers. Internationally, Diaz (2022) and Quintana (2024) confirmed that empathy-driven institutional cultures improved both teacher well-being and instructional outcomes.

Inclusive Policy Reform

The theme **Inclusive Policy Reform** reflected participants’ recognition that personal resilience alone could not compensate for systemic gaps in educational policies. Single mother teachers articulated clear insights regarding the need for policies that addressed real-life

conditions, including flexible scheduling, childcare support, mental health services, and financial assistance. Participants framed inclusive policies not as special privileges but as equitable responses to structural inequalities. Their narratives highlighted that current policies often assumed a traditional two-parent household, thereby marginalizing single mothers within the education system:

“I believe education policies should include real support systems for single parents like childcare and counseling” (IDI3.2.5).

“I need flexible schedules and clear communication to manage both teaching and parenting responsibilities” (IDI3.2.2).

“I think schools should recognize that single parents face different challenges and need different kinds of support” (IDI3.2.1).

“I believe inclusive policies help teachers stay committed and productive” (IDI3.2.4).

“I feel that policy reforms should reflect the realities of modern families” (IDI3.2.3).

The implications of this theme extended to policy design, governance, and educational equity. Inclusive policy reform was essential for sustaining a diverse and committed teaching

workforce. Participants' insights suggested that policies supporting single mothers would yield long-term benefits, including reduced absenteeism, improved teacher morale, and enhanced student learning outcomes. The findings emphasized that education systems must shift from one-size-fits-all policies toward differentiated, responsive frameworks that acknowledge caregiving diversity. Inclusive policies were therefore positioned as investments in institutional sustainability and social justice rather than accommodations for a minority group.

This theme aligned with Dela Rosa (2024), who documented the positive impact of flexible and family-responsive policies in Cebu's public schools. Jabbar (2023) similarly found that inclusive policies in Malaysia significantly improved work–life balance among single parent teachers. Nguyen (2024) and Wan (2022) further supported these findings, highlighting that policy responsiveness was a critical determinant of teacher well-being and retention across Asian educational contexts.

Responsive School Leadership

The theme **Responsive School Leadership** captured participants' insights regarding the critical role of school heads and administrators in shaping their work–life balance experiences and overall well-being. Single mother teachers emphasized that leadership responsiveness went beyond policy compliance and was reflected in everyday decisions, communication styles, and relational practices. Responsive leadership was described as leadership that listened, adjusted, and acted with sensitivity to the realities of single motherhood. Participants highlighted that when school leaders demonstrated flexibility, understanding, and proactive support, they were better able to sustain both their professional responsibilities and family obligations:

“I feel supported when my school head listens to my situation and adjusts expectations when necessary” (IDI3.4.1).

“I work more effectively when my principal understands that I am managing both teaching and parenting alone” (IDI3.4.2).

“I appreciate leaders who respond quickly and compassionately when family emergencies arise” (IDI3.4.3).

“I feel less stressed when my administrator communicates clearly and considers my caregiving responsibilities” (IDI3.4.4).

“I believe responsive leadership helps me stay committed to my work despite the challenges I face as a single mother” (IDI3.4.5).

The implications of this theme were substantial for educational leadership practice and school governance. Responsive school leadership emerged as a protective factor that mitigated stress, reduced burnout, and enhanced teacher engagement. Participants’ narratives suggested that leadership responsiveness fostered trust, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging within the school community. When leaders demonstrated flexibility in scheduling, openness in communication, and empathy in decision-making, single mother teachers reported improved

morale and stronger professional commitment. This theme underscored the need for leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, gender-responsive leadership, and family-sensitive management. Responsive leadership was therefore positioned as a cornerstone of inclusive school culture and sustainable teacher performance.

This theme was strongly supported by existing literature. Valdez (2021) emphasized that responsive leadership practices in Cebu schools played a decisive role in supporting single mother teachers through flexible supervision and collegial trust. Cabrera (2021) similarly found that school leaders who acknowledged caregiving realities significantly reduced stress and emotional withdrawal among urban single mothers. Echevarria (2023) documented that responsive leadership enhanced resilience and psychological well-being among single mother educators in Davao City. International studies further corroborated these findings. Harrison (2021) highlighted that supportive and responsive school leadership in the UK reduced burnout among single mother teachers. Smith (2022) and Quintana (2024) likewise reported that leadership responsiveness was a key determinant of work–life balance and teacher retention across diverse educational contexts.

Strengthened Family Resilience

The theme **Strengthened Family Resilience** highlighted how work–life challenges, while demanding, fostered adaptive family practices that strengthened emotional bonds, communication, and shared responsibility. Participants described how navigating hardship together with their children cultivated mutual understanding, cooperation, and emotional closeness. Rather than weakening family relationships, adversity often served as a catalyst for resilience and growth. This theme underscored the reciprocal relationship between maternal resilience and family well-being:

“My experiences as a single mother strengthened my relationship with my child” (IDI3.3.1).

“We learned to communicate better because we faced challenges together” (IDI3.3.2).

“Our family became stronger and more resilient because of our struggles” (IDI3.3.3).

“My child became more responsible and understanding of our situation” (IDI3.3.4).

“Our shared challenges brought us closer and improved our family well-being” (IDI3.3.5).

The implications of this theme were significant for understanding family dynamics and child development. Strong family resilience enhanced emotional security, responsibility, and adaptability among children. Participants’ narratives suggested that supporting single mother teachers had ripple effects beyond the workplace, positively influencing family stability and child outcomes. Educational and social policies that supported single mothers therefore indirectly contributed to healthier family systems and more emotionally grounded learners. This theme reinforced the interconnectedness of teacher well-being, family life, and educational outcomes.

This theme was supported by Zamora (2021), who found that solo parenting strengthened family bonds through shared responsibility and resilience. Park (2023) similarly reported that caregiving demands fostered emotional closeness among Korean single mother families. Xu

(2023) and Zhang (2022) further affirmed that family resilience emerged as a protective factor in single-parent households facing sustained work–family pressures.

Family Growth Through Adversity

The theme **Family Growth Through Adversity** captured participants’ insights that sustained work–life challenges, while emotionally and physically demanding, served as catalysts for positive transformation within their family systems. Single mother teachers described adversity not only as a source of strain but also as an experience that fostered emotional maturity, shared responsibility, and deeper relational bonds between mothers and children. Participants emphasized that navigating hardship together strengthened family cohesion and cultivated resilience, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Rather than fragmenting family life, adversity often became a unifying force that shaped values, routines, and emotional connections within the household:

“I saw that the challenges we went through made my child more understanding and responsible” (IDI3.5.1).

“I experienced that facing difficulties together strengthened our bond as a family” (IDI3.5.2).

“I learned that hardship taught us to communicate better and support each other emotionally” (IDI3.5.3).

“I realized that our struggles helped my children become more resilient and mature” (IDI3.5.4).

“I believe that the difficulties we faced together helped us grow stronger as a family” (IDI3.5.5).

This theme was significant for understanding family dynamics and child development within single-parent households. Family growth through adversity demonstrated that resilience was not an individual trait alone but a relational process developed through shared experiences and adaptive practices. Participants’ narratives suggested that children became active contributors to family functioning, learning responsibility, empathy, and cooperation at an early age. This finding challenged deficit-based assumptions about single-parent families by highlighting their capacity for growth, strength, and emotional depth. It also underscored the importance of policies and school practices that support single mothers, as such support indirectly nurtured healthier family systems and more emotionally secure learners.

This theme was strongly supported by existing literature. Zamora (2021) found that solo parenting experiences in Iloilo often strengthened family bonds through shared responsibility and emotional closeness. Park (2023) similarly reported that Korean single mother households developed resilience through caregiving adversity, resulting in stronger parent–child relationships. Xu (2023) and Zhang (2022) documented comparable findings in rural China and Shanghai, where hardship fostered adaptability and family cohesion. These findings were further corroborated by Quintana (2024), who emphasized that adversity among single mother families frequently resulted in value formation, emotional growth, and strengthened family identity rather than dysfunction.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis on Insights from Single Mothers’ Experiences for Education and Family Life

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (with attribution)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Implications for workplace practices	Flexibility; Empathy; Supportive leadership	“Workplaces should understand the struggles of single parents.” (IDI P1)	Need for Empathetic Institutions	Schools were viewed as critical spaces that must adapt policies to support single parents.
Policy-related insights	Childcare support; Counseling; Financial aid	“Education policies should include support systems for working parents.” (IDI P2)	Inclusive Policy Reform	Participants identified gaps in policies that failed to address single-parent realities.
Leadership and supervision	Understanding supervisors; Flexible schedules	“Supportive supervision helps us perform better.” (IDI P5)	Responsive School Leadership	Leadership practices influenced teacher well-being and retention.
Family relationships	Strengthened bonds; Shared responsibility	“These challenges strengthened our family relationship.” (IDI P1)	Strengthened Family Resilience	Shared struggles fostered stronger emotional bonds and responsibility within families.
Contribution to family well-being	Communication; Resilience; Stability	“Open communication improved our family well-being.” (IDI P9)	Family Growth Through Adversity	Work–life challenges became catalysts for family cohesion and resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall implications of this study underscored that the work–life balance experiences of single mother teachers were not merely individual challenges but systemic concerns that required institutional, leadership, and policy-level responses. The findings demonstrated that

single mother educators navigated persistent role overload, emotional labor, and caregiving responsibilities within organizational structures that were often designed around traditional family models. This implication reinforced the need for education systems to reconceptualize teacher well-being as a collective and structural responsibility rather than a private matter to be managed through individual resilience alone (Cabrera, 2021; Dela Rosa, 2024; Mendoza, 2023). Addressing work–life balance therefore demanded gender-responsive, family-sensitive frameworks that acknowledged the lived realities of diverse family configurations in public schools.

Another key implication was the central role of meaning-making in sustaining single mother teachers amid prolonged stress. Participants' narratives revealed that reframing hardship as purpose-driven endurance, love, and responsibility helped them persist despite limited support. While this meaning-making process fostered resilience, it also risked normalizing excessive workload and discouraging help-seeking behaviors. This duality highlighted the importance of institutional environments that validated resilience without romanticizing hardship or shifting responsibility entirely onto individuals (Ocampo, 2022; Echevarria, 2023; Harrison, 2021). Educational leaders and policymakers were therefore challenged to create cultures where strength and vulnerability could coexist, and where seeking support was viewed as a professional right rather than a personal weakness.

The study also implied that responsive school leadership and empathetic institutional cultures were critical determinants of sustainable work–life balance. Participants emphasized that leadership practices grounded in flexibility, understanding, and open communication significantly reduced stress and enhanced professional commitment. These findings aligned with evidence that leadership responsiveness influenced teacher retention, morale, and instructional quality, particularly among single parent educators (Valdez, 2021; Garcia, 2024; Smith, 2022). As such,

leadership development programs should integrate emotional intelligence, gender responsiveness, and family-aware management as core competencies in school administration.

In terms of policy implications, the study highlighted the urgent need for inclusive and adaptive education policies that addressed childcare access, flexible scheduling, mental health support, and financial stability. Participants' insights revealed that existing policies often failed to reflect the realities of single mother teachers, thereby perpetuating inequities. This implication resonated with studies emphasizing that work–life balance outcomes were shaped more by systemic enablers and constraints than by individual coping capacity (Jabbar, 2023; Nguyen, 2024; Wan, 2022). Policy reform was therefore positioned as an investment in educational sustainability, equity, and workforce stability.

The findings further implied that supporting single mother teachers yielded benefits beyond the workplace, extending into family resilience and child well-being. Participants described how navigating adversity together strengthened communication, shared responsibility, and emotional bonds within their families. These insights challenged deficit-based narratives about single-parent households and emphasized their capacity for growth and resilience when supported appropriately (Zamora, 2021; Park, 2023; Zhang, 2022). Educational and social policies that supported single mothers thus contributed indirectly to healthier family systems and more emotionally secure learners.

In terms of directions for future research, the study suggested the need for longitudinal qualitative inquiries to capture how work–life balance experiences evolved across different career stages, family transitions, and leadership contexts. Such approaches could deepen understanding of how resilience, identity, and coping changed over time (Harrison, 2021; Smith, 2022). Comparative studies across regions, school types, and cultural contexts were also recommended

to explore similarities and differences in single mothers' experiences and meaning-making processes (Quintana, 2024; Yamaguchi, 2024; Kamal, 2024).

Future research was also encouraged to adopt mixed-methods designs that examined the relationship between work–life balance, teacher performance, retention, and student outcomes. Quantitative analyses could complement qualitative insights and strengthen the evidence base for policy and leadership interventions (Garcia, 2024; Dela Rosa, 2024). Additionally, studies that incorporated the perspectives of children, school leaders, and policymakers could provide a more holistic understanding of how work–life balance challenges and supports were experienced across interconnected systems (Valdez, 2021; Xu, 2023).

Finally, future studies should continue to engage critically with resilience and meaning-making narratives to ensure that they empowered rather than constrained single mother teachers. Research that examined how institutional practices either reinforced or disrupted survival-oriented discourses could inform more ethical and humane approaches to teacher support (Cabrera, 2021; Ocampo, 2022; Echevarria, 2023). Overall, advancing research in this area was essential for building inclusive, responsive, and sustainable education systems that honored the complex realities of single mother educators.

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