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Motherhood during studies in the opinion of female pedagogy students – research report

Macierzyństwo podczas studiów w opinii studentek pedagogiki
– komunikat z badań

Abstract

Introduction. Motherhood is experienced by women of different ages and different life situations. One such situation is being a student. Although the age of entering the role of a mother is delayed, a considerable percentage of pregnant students and studying mothers can be observed at universities.

Aim. The aim of this article is to present selected results of two preliminary (pilot) studies on the perception of motherhood during studies, including student-mothers and pregnant students from the perspective of women studying pedagogy. The aim of this research was to find out their opinions on student motherhood.

Material and methods. The study used the diagnostic survey method, in which the questionnaire technique was used. The surveyed population consisted of 199 students of pedagogy at various universities in Poland.

Results. The results of the presented research revealed that a rather positive perception of motherhood prevails during studies at universities of female respondents; that the favourable attitude of lecturers/academic teachers and the student body to studying mothers and pregnant students prevails. Students of pedagogy notice both positive and negative aspects of motherhood during their studies and the difficulties associated with it. As the most common reason for becoming a mother while studying, they point to unplanned motherhood.

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Conclusion. The presented analyzes show a positive perception of studying mothers and pregnant students, which may be conducive to making proactive decisions while studying. Nevertheless, reconciling these roles at the same time is challenging and difficult. Therefore, women who decide to become mothers during their studies and student-mothers should be supported – in this context, the university support is also important, manifested, among other things, in the generally attitude of the entire university environment. It is crucial to introduce and develop solutions that support them (or student parents in general).

Keywords: student motherhood, student-mother, female pedagogy student, research results.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Macierzyństwa doświadczają kobiety w różnym wieku i będące w różnych sytuacjach życiowych. Jedną z nich jest okres studiowania. Mimo że wiek wchodzenia w rolę matki opóźnia się, to obecnie można zaobserwować w uczelniach niemały odsetek studentek w ciąży i studiujących matek.

Cel. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie wybranych wyników dwóch badań wstępnych (pilotażowych) dotyczących postrzegania macierzyństwa w trakcie studiów, w tym studentek-matek i studentek w ciąży z perspektywy kobiet studiujących pedagogikę. Celem tych badań natomiast było poznanie ich opinii na temat studenckiego macierzyństwa.

Materiały i metody. W badaniach posłużono się metodą sondażu diagnostycznego, w obszarze której wykorzystano technikę ankiety. Badaną zbiorowość stanowiło 199 studentek kierunku pedagogika różnych uczelni w Polsce.

Wyniki. Wyniki przedstawionych badań ujawniły, że przeważa raczej pozytywne postrzeganie macierzyństwa podczas studiów na uczelniach respondentek, że dominuje przychylnie podejście wykładowców/nauczycieli akademickich i grupy studenckiej do studiujących matek i studentek w ciąży. Studentki pedagogiki dostrzegają zarówno pozytywne, jak i negatywne aspekty macierzyństwa w trakcie studiów i związane z tym trudności. Najczęstszą przyczyną zostania matką podczas studiowania jest według nich nieplanowane macierzyństwo.

Wnioski. Z przedstawionych analiz wyłania się pozytywne postrzeganie studiujących matek oraz studentek w ciąży, które może sprzyjać podejmowaniu decyzji prokreacyjnych podczas studiowania. Niemniej jednak jednoczesne godzenie tych ról stanowi wyzwanie i trudność. Stąd też należy wspierać kobiety decydujące się na macierzyństwo w trakcie studiów oraz studentki-matki. Ważne jest w tym kontekście również uczelniane wsparcie, przejawiające się m.in. w przychylnym nastawieniu całego środowiska akademickiego. Istotne jest wprowadzanie i rozwijanie rozwiązań wspomagających matki (czy w ogóle studiujących rodziców).

Słowa kluczowe: studenckie macierzyństwo, studentka-matka, studentka pedagogiki, wyniki badań.

Introduction

Motherhood is the subject of analysis by many researchers (including demographers, sociologists, psychologists, and educators) and is constantly present and popular in

scientific discourse as well as in social discussion. The word “motherhood”, irrespective of the culture of a particular country, has virtually the same meaning defining the mother-child diad (Aksamit, 2019). It is most generally defined as being a mother and as the process of becoming a mother (Pryszmont-Ciesielska, 2011). It is experienced by women of different ages and in different life situations. One of the situations is the period of study. However, there are no comprehensive and reliable statistics on how many female students get pregnant and become mothers, as this is so-called “sensitive data”. Although the age of entry into the role of mother (or parent in general) is delayed, it is now possible to observe a not inconsiderable proportion of people at universities who are already performing the double role of student and parent (especially mothers). It is indicated that up to one in five female students already has a child or is expecting one (Socha, 2017; Rogowska, 2022). The results of the present study confirm this and even show that this percentage is higher.

The period of study generally fits into the stage of early adulthood, during which procreative decision-making becomes important. This stage is also referred to as the so-called “study age”. It encompasses student youth between the ages of 19 and 27 (taking into account such phenomena as, among others, passing several university examinations, repeating a year, dean’s leaves, etc.) (Górska, 2003). Nowadays, having a child at a young age – also at the age of studies – is less frequently associated with social stigmatisation than it used to be. Student motherhood is fostered by a change in attitudes towards children, who need not be an obstacle to continuing education. However, student mothers, and pregnant students, in particular, are still a group exposed to stereotyping. They are sometimes perceived as counting on the mercy of lecturers, skipping classes for no reason and taking advantage of their different statuses to obtain credits without demonstrating their knowledge. Conversely, young mothers are sometimes perceived as claimants, unjustifiably counting on preferential treatment, and sympathy from lecturers (Dudka, Piecuch, 2014, p. 7).

As research indicates (e.g., Krause, 2019a; Krause, 2019b), the most important thing for a student parent is a supportive environment – including the university one. Hence, it is worth permanently investigating how student mothers and pregnant students are perceived and whether this is changing. The opinions of various stakeholders about them, including their peer group, are important. Research interest has been directed towards young women studying pedagogy in this context for several reasons: women are (invariably) the majority of students (e.g., *Główny Urząd Statystyczny* [Central Statistical Office], 2022), women dominate pedagogical faculties, and pedagogy is a field of study in the social sciences whose curriculum focuses on issues in education (upbringing and learning) and on activities that support human development at different stages of life. It is therefore important for the individual to be supported in their developmental tasks, among which is motherhood. The aim of

this article, therefore, is to show selected results from two preliminary (pilot) studies on perceptions of motherhood in the course of study, including student-mothers and pregnant students from the perspective of women studying pedagogy. Before that, however, the methodological basis of the presented research and the characteristics of the respondents are presented.

Methodological information and characteristics of the study population

The research aimed to explore the opinions of female pedagogy students on perceptions of motherhood during their studies, including student mothers and pregnant female students. The research problem was thus the question: How is motherhood during studies perceived in the opinion of female pedagogy students? The quoted question indicates the diagnostic (exploratory) character of the research. Hence, the formulation of research hypotheses was abandoned (as there is not always a need to formulate them). The results of the presented research may also be used to start a discourse in the academic environment on student motherhood and the difficulties related to this issue, the need to create and develop solutions to support student-mothers and pregnant students. The research used a diagnostic survey method, in the area in which the survey technique was used, and the research tools were two survey questionnaires, which were completed by a total of 199 female pedagogy students.

The research area was the various universities in Poland, which offer the field of study pedagogy. Hence, the research was nationwide. It was conducted online as part of a master's seminar by Anna Podgórska¹ (February 2021) and a bachelor's degree by Agata Radecka² (March 2022). The study included female students of pedagogy. Results were obtained through questionnaires created on Google Drive and shared on the online forums of public and non-public universities and their social networks.

In the first study, 150 female pedagogy students participated, among whom more than $\frac{1}{5}$ (21.3% – 32 women) were in the role of mother. The vast majority had therefore not yet engaged in motherhood (78.7% – 118 women). The majority of respondents (60.7% – 91 women) were aged 20-24 years and almost $\frac{1}{4}$ (24% – 36 women) were aged 25-29 years. Individuals represented the age range 30-34 (6% – 9 women), 35-39 (4.7% – 7 women), under 20 (3.3% – 5 women) and over 40 (1.3% – 2 women). The vast majority undertook their education at a public university (84.7% – 127 women) and the remainder at a non-public university (15.3% – 23 women). The majority

¹ Graduated in pedagogy (full-time studies, master's degree) from the Faculty of Pedagogy at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz.

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of respondents in the study were studying full-time (64.7% – 97 women) and more than 1/3 part-time (35.3% – 53 women). Women who were economically active made up more than half of the respondents (58.7% – 88 women). Urban residents were the vast majority (71.3% – 107 women) and rural areas were inhabited by more than 1/4 of them (28.7% – 43 women).

The second survey involved 49 women, including 31 female student-mothers (representing 63.3% of the total respondents). Over 1/3 of the respondents were child-less (36.7% – 18 women). This is probably because almost 3/4 of the respondents (73.5% – 36 women) undertook part-time study and some (26.5% – 13 women) full-time study – therefore differences can be observed regarding the percentage of mothers compared to the first survey. The vast majority (79.6% – 39 people) chose a public university and □ (20.4% – 10 people) a non-public university. More 1/3 (36.8% – 18 of the students) were women aged 23-24, some were 21-22 years old (18.4% – 9 students) and 25-26 years old (14.3% – 7 students). A few were between 31 and 32 (8.1% – 4 female students) and 35/36 and 29/30 (6.1% each – 3 female students). The vast majority (69.5%) were therefore between the ages of 21 and 26. More than half of the respondents (59.2% – 29 female students) were economically active. The majority of the respondents (61.2% – 30 women) resided in cities and the remaining (38.8% – 19 women) in rural areas. Both groups of respondents were therefore similar in the indicated characteristics – however, it is worth emphasising the basic difference, which was the mode of study – in the first study, female full-time students prevailed, while in the second study, female part-time students prevailed.

The results obtained were statistically analysed. Percentages and descriptive statistics expressed in averages were used to characterise the study group, as well as to summarise the answers given to the questions in the survey questionnaires. The analysis of the research material was conducted because of the opinions of the surveyed women on:

- perceptions of female student-mothers at their universities;
- attitudes of academics/lecturers and students/peer groups towards female students in a maternal role and who are pregnant;
- reasons for becoming a mother during their studies;
- positive and negative aspects of student motherhood;
- disincentives to motherhood while studying;
- the prevalence of difficulties in fulfilling two roles at the same time: student and mother.

The next part of the study presents selected results of research conducted by A. Podgórska and A. Radecka (the authors agreed to present the results of their research), which were obtained as part of the diploma theses written under the supervision of the author of this article.

Results of the study

The results of the study on the perceptions of students with a maternal role at the universities of female students studying pedagogy are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Perceptions of female student-mothers at the university of respondents

Specification	Research 1 (N=150)		Research 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	%	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	34	22.7	14	28.6
Rather positive	65	43.3	28	57.1
Rather negative	10	6.7	2	4.1
Definitely negative	1	0.7	-	-
I have no opinion	40	26.7	5	10.2

Source: Author's own study based on Podgórska (2021) and Radecka (2022).

An analysis of the results of the first survey indicates that the majority of respondents felt that female student-mothers at their university were perceived positively (66%, of which 22.7% felt strongly positive and 43.3% rather positive). More than ¼ (26.7%) had no opinion on this issue. Only a small percentage perceived a negative perception of them (7.3%, of which only one respondent was definitely negative). The results of the second survey confirmed the university's favourable attitude towards student-mothers and even revealed that it was higher. However, it should be noted that this group of women was much smaller in number – it accounted for ⅓ of the previous one. The vast majority of female respondents believed that female students in the role of mother are perceived positively (85.7%, of which 57.1%, or more than half of the respondents, rather positively, and for 28.6%, or more than ¼, definitely positively). Few (10.2%) had no opinion on the issue, and only two respondents (4.1%) indicated a rather negative perception of female student-mothers at their universities and none a definitely negative perception. The results of both surveys thus showed that positive perceptions of female student-mothers at the respondents' universities predominate (a total of 141 women, or 70.8%, responded in this manner).

The next table presents respondents' answers regarding the attitude of lecturers/academics towards female students who are mothers and pregnant.

Table 2
Approaches/attitudes of lecturers/academics towards pregnant and mothering students according to respondents

Specification	Research 1 (N=150)		Research 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	%	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	22	14.7	12	24.5
Rather positive	76	50.6	30	61.2
Rather negative	11	7.3	3	6.1
Definitely negative	1	0.7	1	2.1
I have no opinion	40	26.7	3	6.1

Source: Author’s own study based on Podgórska (2021) and Radecka (2022).

The results of the first survey reveal that the majority of female respondents felt that this attitude was positive (65.3%, of which 50.6%, or just over half, indicated that it was rather positive and 14.7% that it was definitely positive). Few thought that university staff represented a negative attitude towards pregnant students and student-mothers (8%, of which only one person thought it was definitely negative). The same percentage of respondents, when asked about the perception of student mothers at their university, had no opinion on the subject (26.7%). The results of the second survey again confirmed that the opinion of female pedagogy students was dominated by the favourable attitude of academics and lecturers towards student-mothers and pregnant students. The vast majority believed that they were treated positively by the academics (85.7%, of which 61.3%, or a majority, answered that the attitude towards them was rather positive and 24.5%, or almost ¼, that it was definitely positive). As with the first survey, a small percentage considered the attitude to be unfavourable (8.2%, again for only one person definitely negative). Individuals found it difficult to determine (6.1%). The results of both surveys demonstrate that a positive attitude of lecturers/academics towards student-mothers and pregnant women prevails (a total of 140 women, or 70.3%, responded this way).

The attitudes of other students/peer groups towards student mothers and pregnant students are, according to female respondents, even more favourable than those of faculty. The results of this point of the research are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Approach/attitude of other students/peer group towards student mothers and pregnant women according to respondents

Specification	Research 1 (N=150)		Research 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	%	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	30	20	16	32.6
Rather positive	76	50.7	29	59.2
Rather negative	9	6	2	4.1
Definitely negative	2	1.3	–	–
I have no opinion	33	22	2	4.1

Source: Author's own study based on Podgórska (2021) and Radecka (2022).

The results of the first survey indicate that the vast majority of respondents felt that the peer group was friendly towards student-mothers and pregnant students (70.7%, of which 50.7%, or just over half, indicated a rather positive attitude and 1/5 a definitely positive attitude). Only a few perceived their treatment to be negative (7.3%, including 6% rather negative and 1.3% definitely negative). More than 1/5 (22%) had no opinion on the subject. The results of the second survey are even more optimistic, as they reveal that the vast majority perceived a favourable attitude from other students towards female students (91.8%, of which 59.2%, or more than half, it was rather positive and for 32.6%, or almost 1/3, definitely positive). Only individuals described this attitude as rather negative or could not comment on it (4.1% each). The results of both surveys thus again show that a positive attitude of the student group towards student-mothers and pregnant women predominates (a total of 151 women, i.e., 75.9%, responded in this manner).

In the context of the subject undertaken, it was important to find out respondents' opinions on the reasons for becoming a mother during their studies. The results of the two surveys are presented separately because they differ in terms of the cafeteria of answers to the multiple choice question, where it was possible to add one's own statement. However, these results can be compared (which is done below). Table 4 presents the data from the first survey and Table 5 from the second.

Table 4

Reasons for motherhood during studies according to respondents (N=150)

Specification	l. odp.	% odp.
An unplanned pregnancy	88	58.7
Desire to be a mother	38	25.3
I don't know, it's hard for me to say	22	14.7
The belief that it is easy to combine the role of student-mother	16	10.7
Impact of the partner	11	7.3
Young age	11	7.3
Impact of the family on the decision to parenthood	10	6.7
Others	1	0.7

Source: Author's own study based on Podgórska (2021).

From these results, it can be seen that more than half (58.7%) of the female respondents indicated that the reason for becoming a mother during their studies was an unplanned pregnancy. Just over ¼ (25.3%) believed that the reason was internal – it was the desire to fulfil the role of mother. A small group of female respondents indicated the other answers. A low percentage (14.7%) found it difficult to identify the reason. There was one answer in the category other, “reaching maturity”, which can be categorised as an internal reason. In the next table, the results of a second survey on the same issue are presented.

Table 5

Reasons for becoming a mother while studying according to respondents (N=49)

Specification	number of answers	%
An unplanned pregnancy	38	77.6
Willingness to start own family	32	65.3
The belief that it is possible to be fulfilled as a student and a mother at the same time	22	44.9
The belief that after graduation one will already have a “grown-up” child	12	24.5
The belief that the study period is the best time to become a mother	12	24.5
Impact of the partner	8	16.3
The belief that lecturers treat students-mother “with a grain of salt” (with favourableness)	6	12.2
Impact of the family on the decision to parenthood	4	8.2
I do not have an opinion on this	2	4.1

Source: Author's own study based on Radecka (2022).

The vast majority of respondents taking part in the second survey indicated that the reason for becoming a mother during their studies was an unplanned pregnancy (77.6%). The majority also thought it was due to a desire to start their own family (65.3%). Less than half (44.9%) considered that the reason could be the belief that it is possible to fulfil two roles at the same time: student and mother. Almost $\frac{1}{4}$ (24.5%) thought that the period of study was the best time to fulfil oneself as a mother and that one would already have a “grown-up” child after graduation. Unplanned motherhood (a total of 126 women, or 66.3%, responded) was therefore the most frequently indicated reason for motherhood during university by respondents from both surveys, with the second reason being the desire to fulfil the role of mother precisely at this educational stage (a total of 70 women, or 35.2%, responded).

Respondents from the second survey were asked whether they perceived positive aspects of motherhood during their studies. The results on this subject are included in Table 6

Table 6

Respondents' perceptions of the positive aspects of motherhood during their studies (N=49)

Specification	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	8	16.3
Rather positive	14	28.6
Rather negative	8	16.3
Definitely negative	4	8.2
I have no opinion	15	30.6

Source: Author's own study based on Radecka (2022).

A large proportion of respondents saw the positive aspects of being a studying mother (44.9%, of which 28.6% rather and 16.3% definitely saw them). Almost $\frac{1}{4}$ did not see the issue of combining these roles optimistically (24.5%, of which 16.3% saw it rather negatively and 8.2% definitely negatively). Less than $\frac{1}{3}$ (30.6%) had no opinion on the subject. Respondents who answered the above question in the affirmative were asked to indicate specific positive aspects of motherhood during their studies, in their opinion (open question). In the view of most of them, bringing up a child is not a reason to give up studies – it is, in fact, a mobilising factor for obtaining higher education and thus, according to them, for finding a job providing adequate living conditions for their offspring. For many of the respondents, fulfilling the role of the mother during their studies means that after graduation, as one of them described it: “the child will be big enough for the young mother to fulfil herself in her new job without any obstacles”. Hence the opinion that university is the right time to become a mother. Af-

ter graduation and a job, a woman will not have to interrupt her career because of, for example, a pregnancy, because she will have “already raised the baby”. Respondents were also of the opinion that studies are more flexible than a professional job and that lecturers are more understanding than employers. Several respondents felt that being a young mother in such a situation “gives a lot of opportunities and positive energy”.

The next question asked whether female pedagogy students perceived negative aspects of motherhood during their studies. Information on this question is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Respondents’ perceptions of the negative aspects of motherhood during their studies (N=49)

Specification	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	6	12.2
Rather positive	10	20.4
Rather negative	18	36.8
Definitely negative	3	6.1
I have no opinion	12	24.5

Source: Author’s own study based on Radecka (2022).

The negative aspects of combining the roles of mother and student were perceived by almost 1/3 of the respondents (32.6%, of which 12.2% definitely perceived them and 20.4% rather perceived them). However, a larger proportion was of the contrary opinion (42.9%, of which 36.8% tended not to notice the negative aspects of the situation and only a few, 6.1%, definitely did not see them). Nearly 1/4 (24.5%) answered that they had no opinion on the subject. Thus, when comparing the results in Tables 6 and 7, it should be emphasised that more respondents (about 12.3%) saw positive (44.9%) than negative (32.6%) sides of motherhood while studying. However, it should be recalled that the responses were presented by female respondents, almost 3/4 of whom were part-time students. Perceptions of the glories and shadows of motherhood during full-time study may be different from these. Respondents who answered affirmatively to the above question were again asked to indicate specific – this time negative aspects related to their role as a mother while studying at university (open question). According to the women interviewed, combining roles is not facilitated by, as one of them described it: “too many responsibilities with combining daily errands with studying” and the associated experience of stress. In addition, they felt that dividing time between education and taking care of the child was “very limiting” for studying mothers. According to the respondents, the child takes up “a lot of time”, which leaves student-mothers with less time for studying, making their plans or having

a social life. The lack of appropriate care while the mother is at university is also a problem. For this reason, according to them, many young mothers often skip classes or are only physically present, because often, as one wrote: “they reflect on what is going on at home and thus focus less on their studies”. The respondents’ statements also reveal the problems experienced by pregnant students. These inconveniences can adversely affect their well-being. Having to deal with pregnancy ailments during classes is another negative aspect. Respondents mentioned in this context: vomiting, dizziness, shortness of breath, back pain, or cramps. Uncomfortable for mothers-to-be in their opinion is/can be sitting in one position for too long and the lack of freedom to satisfy more frequent physiological needs while at university. At the same time, the respondents stressed that not every lecturer has a positive attitude towards female student-mothers. They indicated that there were unfavourable stares and even teasing from them, as well as from other students. Among the comments heard were such as: “studying is more important”, “either study or have a baby”, and “pregnancy is not a disease”.

The next table indicates the factors discouraging student motherhood as perceived by the respondents (respondents ranked each item on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant that the factor was definitely not important to them, while 5 meant that it was very important).

Table 8

Factors discouraging motherhood during studies in the opinion of respondents (N=150)

Specification	Mean	Place in the rating
The need to have/ realise a personal life	3.95	I
No plans to start a family	3.71	II–III
Young age	3.71	II–III
Being in an informal relationship	3.47	IV
Emotional and psychological considerations	3.45	V
Conflicts with parents	3.15	VI
Non-adaptation of universities	2.63	VII
Religious issues	2.45	VIII

Source: Author’s own study based on Podgórska (2021).

The answers of the respondents reveal that an important disincentive to motherhood while studying is the need to have/ realise a personal life (M=3.95). Lack of plans to start a family and young age are also important disincentives (M=3.71). Being in an informal relationship (M=3.47) and emotional-psychological considerations (M=3.45) received slightly lower rankings. The above factors probably cause postponement of procreative decisions. In the next position, respondents have conflicts with parents (M=3.15). Below the mean of 3 were the non-adaptation of the university

(M=2.63) and religious issues (reluctance to have a child before marriage) (M=2.45). The results of the study thus showed a mixed view of the factors discouraging women from student motherhood.

In the context of the subject discussed, it was also worth asking whether, according to the women interviewed, fulfilling the role of mother and the role of student at the same time is difficult to combine.

Table 9

Difficulties of being a mother and a student at the same time according to respondents (N=49)

Specification	number of answers	%
Definitely positive	9	18.4
Rather positive	15	30.6
Rather negative	19	38.8
Definitely negative	3	6.1
I have no opinion	3	6.1

Source: Author's own study based on Radecka (2022).

Almost half of the female respondents from the second survey thought that fulfilling the role of mother and the role of student at the same time was difficult (49%, including 30.6% who rather thought so and 18.4% who definitely thought so). However, a slightly smaller percentage held the contrary opinion (44.9%, including 38.8%, thought it was rather not difficult and only 6.1% thought it was definitely not difficult). Individuals had no opinion on the subject. However, it should be taken into account that these results are not representative and concern a small number of respondents.

Discussion

The results of the present study confirmed the predominance of rather positive perceptions of student motherhood at the respondents' universities – there are favourable attitudes of lecturers/academics and the student group towards both mothers and pregnant students. The study presented by Ewa Krause and Oliwia Herba (2020)³ also confirms this. However, the opinions of university students (obtained as part of this study) about student parents, including student mothers, were divided. Most of those surveyed believed that student-mothers skip classes at university and devote themselves more to their role as a parent than to their role as a student, but at the same

³ This study was conducted in 2019 among 100 students (between 19 and 27 years old) from various universities and faculties in Poland (the method used was a diagnostic survey).

time are well organised and show commitment to the study process as well. It also showed that, although in the opinion of university youth, student parents are perceived positively at the university or like all other students, the vast majority of them do not consider the study period to be suitable for becoming a parent, and the most common reason according to them for fulfilling this role during their studies is an unplanned pregnancy (Krause, Herba, 2020). The present study also points to that fact. After all, unplanned parenthood while studying is nothing new. Another study by E. Krause (2019a)⁴ confirmed that only half of the female student-mothers surveyed declared that they had planned motherhood during their studies.

The results of the presented research showed that female pedagogy students perceive both positive and negative aspects of student motherhood and the difficulties associated with it. The research of E. Krause cited earlier also revealed this, as the female student mothers surveyed by the author

[...] perceive changes in the quality of their studies as a consequence of reduced or no study time, opportunities for quiet study at home, non-participation in classes, and difficulties in obtaining learning materials. However, they do not give up their aspirations in achieving their desired education. The experienced effects of the dual role are thus both negative (manifested in physical and psychological failure to reconcile roles, lowered motivation to study, lack of time to study, or the need to limit other activities) and positive (there is, among other things, increased motivation to study, higher grades, better time organisation, and self-management in time) (Krause, 2019a, p. 128).

According to a survey conducted within the project *Student jako potencjalny rodzic – badanie postaw prokreacyjnych studentów Wydziału Nauk Społecznych SGGW*⁵ [Student as a potential parent – a study of the procreative attitudes of students of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the SGGW], student parenthood is encouraged by: emotional-psychological considerations, a young age that is suitable for becoming a parent and enables open and tolerant parenting, treating the period of study as the right time in life to decide on parenthood and the need to do so already emerging during the study and perceiving offspring as a factor for deepening the relationship with the partner (Paprzycka, 2022b). In another project entitled *Jak uczelnia mogłaby wspierać studentów*

⁴ The author conducted a qualitative study in the 2017/2018 academic year with 10 female student-mothers who were of university age (i.e., between 19 and 27) and studying full-time.

⁵ This study was carried out as part of the *Mama na uczelni* [Mum at university] Foundation campaign under the leadership of Emilia Paprzycka by a research team consisting of Paulina Puk, Paula Ruszczak, and Angelika Sobańska. It was based on a non-standardised interview.

*mających dzieci podczas studiów i promować rodzicielstwo? Badanie opinii studentów*⁶ [How could the university support students having children during their studies and promote parenthood? A survey of student opinions] similar results were obtained. The study highlighted that “the incentive to have offspring while studying is both emotionally based – the support of a partner, the desire to start a family, and also age appropriate” (Paprzycka, 2022a). Another (previously cited) study among female student-mothers confirmed that their procreative decisions were made due to the desire to be a parent already while studying, the desire to create a complete family, the right (young) age or simply the lack of obstacles (Krause, 2019a). However, the disincentives to becoming a parent while studying identified in the *Student jako potencjalny rodzic...* [Student as a potential parent...] project are difficulties in combining many activities, economic conditions (i.e., lack of sufficient income or own home), the need to provide care for the child (lack of time or money to pay for a carer), emotional-psychological reasons (lack of parental instinct, insufficient responsibility), conflicts with the parents (including their lack of acceptance), being in an informal relationship (risk that the relationship between the partners may deteriorate, large distance between them), young age, the need to realise one’s personal life, non-adaptation of the university (e.g., lack of nurseries and kindergartens nearby, as well as lack rooms for carers with a child), no plans to start a family, and religious issues (reluctance to have a child before sacramental marriage) (Paprzycka, 2022b). According to the *Jak uczelnia mogłyby wspierać studentów...* [How could the university support students...] study, motherhood during studies is discouraged primarily by “unfavourable financial situation and the belief that it is difficult to reconcile all responsibilities” (Paprzycka, 2022a). Thus, it can be observed that some of the same factors can both facilitate and hinder taking up and fulfilling student parenthood, including the role of the mother. From the responses of female teaching students, it appears that a significant factor discouraging motherhood while studying is the need to realise a personal life. The need to combine multiple responsibilities or to provide adequate care for the child while the mother is present at university is also a difficulty.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research included only female students of pedagogy – the sampling was therefore non-probabilistic. This is one of the limitations of the study that prevented it from showing

⁶ This study was also conducted as part of the *Mama na uczelni* [Mum at university] Foundation’s campaign, under the leadership of E. Paprzycka and by a research team consisting of Martyna Kowalska, Piotr Klimaszewski, Maciej Kowalski, and Jakub Iwański. It was carried out with a quantitative strategy using a survey method and an online questionnaire in 2014.

representative results. Therefore, in the opinion of the author of this text, the study should be treated as preliminary (pilot) research, which can be a contribution to proper research and a premise for discussion on the importance of the perception of student motherhood.

The aforementioned studies indicate that student mothers constitute a large proportion of female students. Unplanned motherhood is still considered to be the most common reason for taking on this role during university. Although the results of both surveys reveal that positive perceptions of student mothers prevail in the universities of female respondents, that a sympathetic attitude of lecturers/academics and the student group towards student mothers and pregnant women prevails, and that more women surveyed perceive positive than negative aspects of student motherhood, the majority of the women surveyed believe that fulfilling the role of mother and the role of student at the same time is difficult. In addition, according to the research, the most important disincentive to take up the mothering role while studying is the need to have a personal life, and the least important are religious issues related, for example, to the reluctance to have a child before marriage. Therefore, it can be assumed that for young female students of pedagogy, self-realisation is primarily important but not necessarily related to taking up motherhood at this educational stage. Undoubtedly, a positive attitude towards mothers and pregnant students may encourage pro-creative decisions during studies. However, the simultaneous reconciliation of these roles is both a challenge and a difficulty. It is therefore necessary to support women who decide to become mothers during their studies as well as student mothers should receive support from the University (e.g., a positive attitude from the whole academic environment). It is therefore essential to introduce and develop measures to support mothers (or student parents in general) – however, this issue requires a separate study and research into the needs of students in this regard. This section only cites examples of the opportunities outlined in the publication *Uczelnia przyjazna rodzicom: Podręcznik dobrych praktyk* [Parent-friendly university: A handbook of good practice] (Dudka, Piecuch, 2014), which included:

Individual Study Organisation;

- dean's leave (health leave, parental leave, or parental leave) and the possibility to pass part of the course while on it;
- the right to apply for rescheduling of examinations, e.g., in the case of giving birth during the session;
- the possibility of extending the deadline for the submission of the diploma thesis;
- the possibility of retaining student rights during the period of leave from classes, including the right to benefit from certain forms of financial aid;
- maintenance grant, allowance, or housing allowance;
- periodic reduction of tuition fees at non-public universities or fees related to part-time study;
- the possibility of studying via the Internet, online support (information, online registration, e-advising, etc.), and an electronic student service system;

- rooms for parents/carers with children, feeding areas, and play areas in the university;
- nurseries, toddler clubs, kindergartens, and daycare centres;
- building adaptations (e.g., ramps/slopes/lifts for prams, lowered kerbs, entrances from ground level, wide entrance doors, mechanical pram platforms, and toddler-friendly bathrooms);
- storage facilities for pushchairs (so-called “pram rooms”) and play areas;
- availability of family rooms in halls of residence (adapted to family needs);
- the appointment of persons responsible for communication between the university and student-parents (e.g., a student-parent representative or a student-parent spokesperson);
- public services campaign and social programs in support of student-parents;
- integration of the university community with students’ families (e.g., excursions, picnics, tournaments, workshops, balls, Children’s Day celebrations, etc.);
- the offering by the university of free and individual pedagogical and psychological assistance;
- work-family reconciliation coaching as an individualised form of family support.

It is also worth referring to the proposed solutions developed as part of the project *Rodzice na Uniwersytecie* [Parents at the University] carried out at the University of Warsaw⁷, among which the issues of access to information, support during and after pregnancy, and assistance with childcare and returning parents to study were indicated. In the context of access to information, attention was drawn to the cyclical, continuous updating of knowledge by the university’s HR and administration department in the form of regular courses on the rights and responsibilities of a parent at the university. This should be reflected in a handbook (regularly refreshed and widely available) – also in an online form (e.g., in the form of a bookmark on the main website of the respective university), containing knowledge about the available subsidies and leaves for student-parents. It is also necessary to create a catalogue of good practices in the approach to parents. It should contain structured, standardised and implementable uniform rules for their treatment at universities. This is important in the context of decisions taken so that they do not depend on the interpretation of the rules or the favour of those who take them. Good practice also includes the appointment of a university Student-Parent Coordinator and/or a Student-Parent Spokesperson. A return to studying can be helped by implementing the principle of priority for parents

⁷ The *Rodzice na Uniwersytecie* [Parents at the University] project was conducted as part of the first edition of the UW participatory budget as a grassroots workshop and research project. Its main aim was to create a space for discussion about changing the UW into a more parent and child-friendly place.

of young children in choosing the dates of classes at the university (which makes it possible, for example, to breastfeed, or spend time with their children after their return from the childcare institution) by unlocking enrolment in USOS (*Uniwersytecki System Obsługi Studiów* [University Study Support System]) for studying parents earlier (e.g., 6 hours) than for other students (Wieczorek, Schreiber, & Krzesicka, 2019).

A very useful solution (already mentioned above) is to create places on university premises where a studying parent could leave their child for a few hours, e.g., nurseries, children's clubs, or kindergartens. It is therefore necessary to have a suitably located room, equipped with the necessary equipment and competent people to take care of the students' children. For this purpose, it would be possible to "use", especially, the students of pedagogical faculties, particularly those modules or specialities that directly concern the care of young children, their nurturing, and support of their development. There are two (at least) advantages to such a solution – the children of student parents would be adequately cared for in their absence and students would have the opportunity to do their internships at their university.

Being a student involves not only studying but also a lot of paperwork at the university. The student services office, dean's office or other places often have limited days and hours of operation. This often results in queues while waiting to enter the place in question. It would therefore be helpful if there were notices stating that students with children or pregnant students had priority access to all offices and service points. Such information would make it clear that parents are obvious participants in university life and that their presence within the university is expected and anticipated.

The most important support for student-mothers, however, is the possibility to use the Individual Study Organisation (see research conducted by Krause, 2019b). Studying mothers agree that they would not be able to manage simultaneous motherhood and studies without obtaining permission for this facility. *Ustawa dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce* [The Act of 20 July 2018. The Law on Higher Education and Science] already regulates this: a pregnant student and a student who is a parent have the right to study according to the Individual Study Organisation until their completion and to benefit from a leave of absence for one year from the date of birth of the child, which is granted at the request of the studying parent (*Ustawa*, 2018, bill article (art.) 85, points of the article (pkt.) 2, 3, and 4). The Individual Study Organisation thus appears to be a necessary condition for combining the role of a student with the responsibilities of a young parent, but it is certainly not sufficient support from the university (Krause, 2019b). Recognition of student motherhood and the issue of engaging in a discourse about it in the academic environment is desirable (if only because of the significant proportion of people combining the role of mother and student), and the results presented here may be used to develop it.

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