



Young university women and their transition to motherhood: training, challenges and parenting

Jóvenes universitarias y su transición a la maternidad: formación, retos y crianza

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Abstract

This article uses a qualitative, exploratory study to explain the challenges faced by young mothers at the National Pedagogical University, Unit 153, in Ecatepec. It highlights the diversity of motherhood experiences, shaped by their context of origin and characterized by how they mother as university students. This implies different personal challenges that overlap with their studies, raising their children, and working. Throughout their university careers, resilience is present, as are their efforts to complete their studies and care for their children. The theoretical basis of the text was the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. And, on the other hand, from microsociology, Erving Goffman's theory of stigma, considering that the condition of being young, a mother, and a university student is often affected by socially constructed stigma, and within the institution aimed at discrediting the identity of student mothers, relating it to irresponsibility and abandonment of their studies. In reality, various studies, including this one, show that being a mother (university student) encourages and motivates them to continue and complete their studies, both for personal growth and to set an example for their children.

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However, the study also highlights the disadvantages of being a mother and pursuing a university degree at the same time, as evidenced by cases of those who temporarily or indefinitely suspended their studies. The research methodology was qualitative, combining biographical narrative interviews and a Google Forms questionnaire to collect, organize, reinforce, and interpret information on the subject.

Keywords: Study; Mother; Narrative; Young; Pedagogy; University.

Resumen

A partir de un estudio exploratorio cualitativo, se muestran los retos que afrontan las jóvenes madres de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, unidad 153, Ecatepec. Visibilizando así la diversidad de maternidades condicionadas por su contexto de origen y caracterizadas por las formas de maternar a partir de su condición de universitarias. Lo cual implica diferentes desafíos personales que superponen los estudios, la crianza de sus hijos y el trabajo. En su trayectoria universitaria, la resiliencia está presente, así como sus agenciamientos enfocados a concluir su carrera y el cuidado de sus hijos. Con respecto a las bases teóricas del texto, fueron: la reproducción de Pierre Bourdieu y Jean Claude Passeron. Y, por otro lado, desde la microsociología, la teoría del estigma de Erving Goffman, considerando que la condición de ser joven, madre y universitaria, muchas veces se ve afectada por el estigma construido socialmente y dentro de la institución orientado a desacreditar la identidad que aguardan las madres estudiantes, relacionándola con la irresponsabilidad y el abandono de su carrera. Cuando en realidad, diferentes estudios, incluido este, demuestran que ser madre (universitaria), las alienta y motiva a continuar y concluir sus estudios, por superación personal, pero también por dar un ejemplo de vida a sus hijos. Aunque el estudio también visibiliza las desventajas de ser madre y estudiar al mismo tiempo una carrera universitaria, considerando los casos de quienes suspendieron sus estudios temporalmente o de manera indeterminada. La metodología utilizada para la investigación fue cualitativa, combinando entrevistas narrativas biográficas y un cuestionario en Google Forms, para obtener, organizar, reforzar e interpretar información al respecto.

Keywords: Estudiar; Madre; Narrativa; Joven; Pedagogía; Universidad.

INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, the number of higher education institutions, both public and private, has increased between the 20th and 21st centuries. According to data from the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, 2025) through the Integrated Higher Education Information System and based on the Statistical Profile of the National Higher Education System, there are 4,336 higher education institutions: 1,078 public and 3,258 private. Consequently, enrollment and coverage have increased, and the educational offerings have diversified through the creation of different degree programs. However, challenges surrounding higher education remain, including funding and quality-related issues.

Regarding undergraduate enrollment in public and private universities nationwide, the same source reports 4,890,145 students enrolled between 2023 and 2024. Of these, 545,466 were enrolled in federal public universities; 1,264,687 in state public universities; 68,938 in state public universities with solidarity support; 562,424 in the National Technological Institute of Mexico; and 232,114 in technological universities. Polytechnic universities had 102,548 students enrolled, and intercultural universities had 24,036. Enrollment in public higher education institutions (HEIs) totaled 185,718. Public teacher-training colleges (normal schools) had 116,700 students, and the National Pedagogical University (UPN) had 59,060. CONACYT research centers enrolled 361 students. Meanwhile, private universities enrolled 1,728,093 students that same year, and private teacher training colleges (normal schools) enrolled 15,238. Therefore, in general terms, enrollment continues to grow rapidly in private universities and schools. These figures reflect the large number of students enrolled in higher education institutions, which provide educational opportunities for young people. However, many young people of college age (18 to 22 years old) are still unable to enter a public or private university and remain indefinitely excluded from higher education, despite higher education becoming mandatory in Mexico in 2019. This also applies to those who interrupted their high school studies or never even enrolled.

For those who had the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree (primarily at public universities), after graduation, they often experience other challenges such as prolonged unemployment or intermittent employment. In this regard, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) highlights the rate of young people who are neither employed nor in education or training as a key indicator.

On average, in OECD countries, 14.4% of young people aged 25 to 29 were neither employed nor in education or training in 2022. While this figure includes various groups, a longitudinal analysis shows that a significant proportion of university graduates experience at least one period of inactivity or unemployment in the first one or two years after graduation, before achieving stable employment... (OECD, 2023, pp. 112-115).

In addition to the often unfavorable economic conditions and the economic instability within and outside family contexts, there is a structural problem: the economic instability following the pandemic, which still lingers. This disproportionately impacts young graduates, who suffer significantly higher unemployment rates than adult workers with similar levels of education (OECD, 2022). Consequently, young people continue to live in constant insecurity (throughout the country) and face disengagement from institutions that should be strengthening their educational and professional trajectories and their transitions to work, parenthood, and so on. This is a constant reality for young people, whether or not they are students. And although current generations of young people are and will be the most educated, they currently face various hardships, including those mentioned.

An interesting phenomenon regarding higher education in the municipality of Ecatepec is that women have the same, or even slightly more, schooling than men; according to the 2020 Population and Housing Census, women have an education level of 9.8 years, and men have 9.5 years. Regarding regional data, the average years of schooling in Ecatepec is 9.7, while the state average is 10.2. Secondary school is the most common level of education among the population of this municipality.

The article focuses on a particular student group: young mothers who are university students, a clear example of youth agency within educational institutions, whose responsibilities transcend university classrooms and assume different roles inside and outside their university. The transition to motherhood during their university career is not a minor issue, as it represents a turning point that reorganizes their lives in general: their time, the organization of their activities, their personal and professional expectations, their emotions, and interests. This sometimes comes at the cost of recognition, financial support, care, and consent from the family, but there are also cases where young women have to assume their responsibilities with less support, without any family support, or only partial support from their mother, father, partner, or other relatives. In this sense, as Gonzalo Saraví aptly states: “Gender, ethnicity, and social class are, among others, some of the categories that can generate nuances and differences in how this transition to adulthood is experienced” (Saraví, 2009, p. 38).

The central purpose and justification of this text is, firstly, to understand the challenges and experiences of university mothers at UPN 153; secondly, to highlight the inequalities and similarities among some of these young women based on their family and social backgrounds; and thirdly, to contribute to a better understanding of this student population, which is often disadvantaged compared to those who are not university mothers. Similarly, this text seeks to highlight the experiences, stories, and support networks available to these young mothers, beginning with their close relatives. In addition to raising awareness about their situation, the intention is to implement more effective inclusive practices within the university context.

The theoretical perspectives guiding this work and from which the research object is analyzed are: Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006; Bourdieu, 2011), which explains social and educational inequalities as structural processes involving cross-cutting factors such as social class and the availability of economic and cultural capital (objectified, institutionalized, and embodied). Consequently, education, access to it, and the type of educational institutions one can access depend on one’s social class. They are directly related to the availability of capital from the family of origin, which conditions and, in some cases, determines their educational and formative trajectories. On the other hand, Erving Goffman’s theory of stigma (2006), from the perspective of microsociology and interactionism, explains that stigma is a social phenomenon that arises from the discrediting of people because of certain physical, racial, cultural, economic, and other conditions. It is generated by what the author refers to as the situation of the discredited and the discreditable—that is, someone prone to being discredited at some point due to one or more social conditions—it is the discrimination faced by young students who, by choice or oversight, became mothers during their school or university studies.

So, what is known about the topic addressed in the article? Various studies indicate that student mothers tend to experience greater inequalities, an accumulation of disadvantages, and lagging development. When occupations are incompatible, they tend to become difficult, especially when different roles are assumed. Arvizu (2022), in her work entitled: “Educational trajectories of student mothers and fathers in differentiated universities: UIA and UAM-C”, employed a qualitative methodology, including ethnography

and interviews. This study examined the educational trajectories of young mothers and fathers from two universities in Mexico City: the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), Cuajimalpa campus, and the Ibero-American University (UIA). It identified that mothers primarily bear an overload of domestic and academic responsibilities, while fathers bear academic and work-related responsibilities. The differentiating factors include their social position and the lack of equity between students at UAM-C and those at IBERO, leading the author to emphasize the importance of life experiences in shaping educational paths. Furthermore, the study highlights that traditional gender roles are reproduced within educational spaces, making it crucial to change traditional gender norms and address the needs and activities of university mothers, such as providing resources like lactation rooms, scholarships, and baby changing facilities.

For their part, Cerros-Rodríguez and Flores-Ávila (2023) focus not only on mothers pursuing a degree but also on a broader group of women in the university context: students, professors, and administrative staff. For their study, they used a qualitative and interpretive methodology, analyzing responses from a questionnaire in Google Forms designed for the project: “Reconciliation between parenting, work and study at the university: the case of the University of Guadalajara”, differentiating aspects of each type of motherhood. For example, the authors explain the case of mothers who are researchers, identifying narratives of the different difficulties they experience, on the one hand, with academic work, and, on the other, with family, which affect their professional performance. They cite as an example the disproportionate number of women recognized by the National System of Researchers (SNII) compared to men, a disproportion that, they indicate, worsens at levels II, III, and emeritus. The authors also point out that, in the case of university mothers, this is a sector for which the authorities do not advocate improving their conditions, especially by opening spaces and providing support. In this sense, university mothers turn to their informal networks to study and work.

While a public policy exists that recognizes some rights related to care during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as care in the first months, it is insufficient to meet the care needs of children at different stages when they require such care. In the case of university policy, the issue of motherhood and raising children has not been a priority. Support for those in this situation (being mothers and raising children) is more a reflection of acts of goodwill and empathy from the supervisor or professor on duty; that is, they are individual acts of “helping or supporting.” Because, to date, there is no public policy that recognizes the inequality present in the university (Cerros-Rodríguez and Flores-Ávila, 2023, p. 20).

Hernández (2020) conducted a quantitative study on stigma, university perceptions, and their effects in the workplace, academic, and social spheres. She explains that the men who participated in the study continue to hold beliefs related to motherhood as an obstacle to professional access and development. The author concludes that institutions need to raise awareness among university stakeholders (authorities, professors, and students) to curb school dropout rates resulting from a lack of flexibility or financial support for pregnant women, expectant parents, and heads of households. Thus, various studies highlight, on the one hand, the ongoing prevalence of prejudices and stigmas associated with being a mother and a university student. While it is true that during this process they assume different roles and face disadvantages, such as reorganizing their time, it is also important

to emphasize the needs that arise from this condition, which are generally undervalued or overlooked by educational institutions, stakeholders, and administrators (directors, teachers, and even students).

In this way, becoming a mother and father is a decision and a responsibility exclusive to those who decide to become parents; although the family plays a very important role, influencing or determining the course of the pregnancy, as well as the unconditional and conditional support it can give to first-time mothers and fathers in terms of moral and financial assistance. Thus, decisions about pregnancy and birth often shift from individual to family decisions, not only for the couple but also for the couple's families.

Therefore, the purpose of this text is to present an analysis of the challenges and subjective experiences of young mothers at the National Pedagogical University, Unit 153, Ecatepec, as they raise their children, taking into account their family, marital, and institutional circumstances. This analysis also encompasses the meaning of motherhood from their perspective as university students, as well as the other characteristics of each young woman and her approach to mothering, shaped by her cultural and economic circumstances. It reflects on their transition to motherhood as a prelude to their transition to adulthood. It is worth noting that the role of Mexican families, at least based on the reviewed studies, represents a support system that not only provides emotional and economic assistance but also functions as part of institutional support networks, such as the family, first and foremost, followed by the school, the university, the workplace, the church, and so on. This, however, does not mean that every student has the support of each of these institutions. There are even those who do not have even two of these, relying on partial support from their mother or spouse.

The text is divided into three parts: the first introduces the topic of motherhood among young students and its implications. The second explains the methodology, and the third presents the research findings, including the analysis and conclusions. It posits that motherhood, or the experience of being a mother, is largely a result of the contexts and practices of the student's family of origin, the type of family support or networks available during and after pregnancy, among other factors. Furthermore, it examines the agency of university mothers, present in the contexts that shape them, but which do not determine their role as mothers. Finally, the conclusions highlight the diversity of motherhood within a context such as a feminized university, as well as some of its characteristics, and close the text with proactive reflections and questions aimed at rethinking the implications of being a mother while studying for a degree.

METHODOLOGY

To carry out the present study, a qualitative methodology was used, based on nine biographical narrative interviews and 12 questionnaires administered via *Google Forms* to the same people, with the intention of reinforcing their narratives and some private ideas. It should be noted that pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities. The main objective was to understand how young female students at UPN 153 who were pregnant at the time of the interview or who had children under 22 years of age navigated their

transition to motherhood. It is worth noting that the life course encompasses trajectories (educational, professional, etc.) and transitions (implicit within those trajectories), such as the transition to adulthood, motherhood, fatherhood, entering the workforce, and leaving a particular educational level (e.g., graduating from university), among others.

The course of life is not shaped individually, but is interwoven with the trajectories and experiences of other individuals, while changing and adjusting to social rhythms and times; for demographic and sociological approaches, these changes establish asymmetries crossed by gender, class and social origin that are reflected in the objectives, motivations and experiences, either in a general or individualized way (Miller & Arvizu, 2016, p. 20).

Therefore, the life course is crucial for understanding micro-interactional scenarios across diverse contexts (family, school, friendship groups), their interrelationships, and how the individual, immersed in these, creates meaning and opportunities (Saraví, 2009). But at the same time, it can also disrupt the linearity of their trajectories (educational, work, etc.) when starting a transition that involves building a new family, such as becoming a mother during their studies or becoming a mother before entering college and postponing their entry.

The idea that universities generally aim to produce ideal students with linear trajectories contradicts what actually happens in higher education and at other educational levels (secondary or upper secondary education). Reality teaches us that during educational trajectories, there are simultaneous events, such as interrupting their studies due to a lack of financial resources, a personal or family health issue, the program or university not meeting their expectations, or deciding not to continue their studies because they disliked it or became pregnant. This text arises from an interest in understanding what happens to the student population when they become mothers while at university. It also aims to identify the challenges they face, considering that this is not a minor issue, especially given the relatively frequent pregnancies at the institution, particularly during the first half of their studies. Some of the questions used in the interviews were:

1. What level of education do your parents have?
2. How many siblings do you have, and what level of education do they have?
3. Can you briefly tell me at what age you became pregnant and how your partner reacted when you told him you were pregnant, as well as during the process of that transition (to motherhood); how you broke the news to your mother, father, or relatives, and what they said.
4. Why did you decide to enroll at UPN 153 to study pedagogy?
5. Who is paying for your studies?
6. Since becoming pregnant (during and/or after this), have you considered interrupting your studies?
7. How has your daily routine changed since you found out you were pregnant or when you were pregnant?
8. What are your main challenges or difficulties in managing your time between your studies, pregnancy, and/or your children and other responsibilities?
9. What are your main responsibilities currently?

10. What kind of support do you receive (or not) from your family and university to balance your academic responsibilities with pregnancy?
11. Do you have a scholarship? If not, why do you think you would need one?

These questions guided the interviews and the questionnaires on the forms.

The population interviewed (between January and May 2025) consisted of nine young female students from the UPN 153 undergraduate program in Pedagogy, enrolled in one of the semesters of the 2024-2025 academic year. Another criterion for selecting the population was that they be mothers with children no older than 22 years or were pregnant. Twelve questionnaires were administered to the same individuals who were interviewed (except for three who could not be interviewed). Regarding the young women's ages, they ranged from 18 to 34 years, distributed as follows: two were between 18 and 20 years old; four were between 21 and 23 years old; two were between 24 and 26 years old; one was between 27 and 29 years old; and three were between 29 and 34 years old. Regarding the semester of studies, six were in their second semester, four in their fourth, one in her sixth, and one in her eighth. It should be noted that almost all of the young women interviewed (except one) are the first in their families to pursue a bachelor's degree. Their parents' education levels range from primary school to high school and/or technical training. Only one student's mother holds a bachelor's degree in education, and in another case, only the older siblings have higher education: two with bachelor's degrees, one with an engineering degree, and one with a master's degree. In this sense, the interviewed population consists of young women without a family tradition of education, understood as one in which all family members (parents) hold bachelor's degrees.

This contrasts with certain experiences and challenges related to the normative life course, which implicitly includes trajectories, transitions, and turning points (Elder, 2000). While the life course approach contributes to understanding these categories and processes, it analyzes them from a chronological/or linear perspective that may not accurately reflect reality. Events such as transitions, and even more so in national contexts, are influenced by cultural and economic factors, personal decisions, incidents, and so on. In other words, other events that can shape a person's life, such as entering university, starting to work, or dropping out of school, are not always considered. Getting pregnant, changing institutions, leaving one's home, or other decisions are the result of personal choices, but they are contextual, circumstantial, and subjective.

Therefore, this text offers an exploration of the challenges and experiences of being a mother pursuing a degree in education at a public university. Without idealizing or romanticizing this social condition (motherhood), the aim is to highlight the strategies employed by the young women who participated in the interviews and questionnaires, as well as their approaches to succeeding in their undergraduate studies. These young women come from diverse backgrounds and family circumstances, and their access to resources is largely determined by their parents' education and occupations.

ANALYSIS

Over the last four decades, student enrollment in both public and private universities has increased considerably, as mentioned in the introduction. This is due to various factors, including increased space and enrollment across public and private institutions. Other important factors in the entry of young women into university include the promotion of public policies related to gender equity in access, coupled with retention policies such as scholarships and programs that encourage enrollment, retention, and graduation. Thus, family perceptions of both men and women regarding women's entry into higher education have changed over the past several decades. Although traditional and conservative family environments still prevail, in which women assume a traditional role focused on housework and motherhood, centered on childcare and caring for their spouse, the changes that have reduced the gender gap in education are gradual. They have modified practices, perceptions, and representations of womanhood across different social contexts, including educational, business, and political contexts. Table 1 shows the increase in female enrollment in the last two years::

Table 1

Enrollment, graduation, and degree conferral in higher education, school year 2023-24

Federal Entity	Enrollment women	Enrollment men	Enrollment total	Incoming women	Incoming men	Graduates women	Graduates men	Graduates total	Women with a degree	Men with a degree
Mexico City	520,939	469,010	949,119	119.602	124.026	84.213	69.533	153.746	68.081	55.967
Mexico State	329.308	275.468	604.776	94.139	77.480	62.115	45.637	107.752	51.910	36.927
Total	850.247	744.478	1.594.725	213.741	181.506	146.328	115.170	261.498	119.991	92.894

Source: ANUIES (2024). Statistical Yearbook 2023-2024.

The inclusion of women in research and academic niches has been key to advancing gender parity among female students, academics, and scientists, though there is still work to be done. This is due to a shift in perception regarding conventional gender roles and the increasing number of women entering university programs, to the point that it is possible to speak of a feminization of university enrollment. According to the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), in its 2023-2024 Statistical Yearbook of the Student Population in Higher Education, women's enrollment in that academic year exceeded men's in both Mexico City and the State of Mexico.

While the data above shows that women are increasingly present in educational institutions, prejudices still prevail regarding some careers "for women", such as Psychology, Pedagogy, or Social Work, generally with a high percentage of female students. On the other hand, there are careers with higher demand from men, such as Engineering, Airline Pilot, or Business Administration, among others. This not only creates or reinforces an inequality gap based on prejudices and stereotypes in the process of selecting for certain careers, but is also part of the social construction of prejudices and stereotypes about those careers and the population that should enter them. Thus, the decision to choose one

field of study or another can be influenced by stereotypes from institutions, including the family and schools, that directly or indirectly shape people's choices, or even lead them to make decisions based on stereotypes developed within families.

There are negative and positive social stereotypes, both of which play a fundamental role in intergroup relations, since they help to establish the role that people are supposed to play in the context of those relations, and it is assigned according to the group in which each person is located; therefore, the stereotype manages to determine, most of the time unconsciously, the functions that the different individuals or groups must perform within the framework of social relations (Pérez, 2010, p.40).

Therefore, it is necessary to eradicate these prejudices both within and outside educational institutions and families. Not assuming the expected traditional roles, not being able to reconcile occupations such as studying, working from home, fulfilling imposed roles, having a job, and raising a child or children, is seen by various institutions, social and educational actors as a problem that transcends family or marital relationships, with the construction of stigma or stereotypes present, generating tensions in the different situations experienced by university mothers:

Situations in which they are segregated, criticized, or isolated by their peers, professors, and/or family members for not conforming to the stereotypes and expectations associated with traditional profiles. For the participants, in addition to the difficulty of balancing their multiple work schedules, they also suffer discrimination and are criticized for being mothers, since, in the collective imagination, gender roles remain in force, where motherhood and higher education continue to be incompatible (Arroyo-de-Anda et al., 2023, p. 278).

In this way, stigmas respond to principles related to "Social discrediting," while stereotypes are more oriented towards "what should be" according to certain normative views or adult-centric, institutional, familial, etc., guidelines. Both categories trigger discriminatory practices based on class, ethnicity, gender, age, student status, and so on. This is related to equality and equity within educational contexts, especially with young university women who are also mothers:

It is not enough to have equal educational opportunities for women and men; it is not just a matter of numbers, but nowadays it is also about having gender equity in higher education institutions (De-Garay and Del-Valle, 2012).

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2023), in the fourth quarter of 2022, 56 million women aged 12 and over resided in Mexico. Of these, 67% (38 million) were mothers. Seven out of ten single mothers were economically active. According to the same institute, the 2020 Population and Housing Census found that 57% of Mexican mothers had completed only primary or secondary education; 19% had completed high school; and only 17% had completed a university degree. Another factor to consider is the opening of fields with a female predominance, or simply the persistence of an educational tradition focused on women, that is, depending on the field of study, such as education, psychology, pedagogy, among others. Therefore, due to social prejudices, there are not usually as many men. It should be noted that family support is essential for young people to complete their studies, but among young men, it is more common for them to enter the workforce earlier than women, and they often take low-ski-

lled jobs that generally do not require higher education. And although there is currently a nationwide trend of delaying higher education, pregnancy, or even prioritizing not having children to extend their school, academic, and professional careers. However, the Mexican government also seeks to prevent unplanned births. According to the National Strategy for the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy (Mexico: Government of the Republic, 2018), in 2021, there were 147,279 births to adolescents aged 15 to 19 in Mexico, and 3,019 to girls under 15. However, beyond delving deeper into this population, which is also of utmost importance, this text focuses exclusively on the situation of young women who have decided to become mothers during their university studies.

Regarding the influence of family and social capital, they play a crucial role in the university mother's experience. Young mothers find themselves at a crossroads with maternal and paternal family structures, which influence their success and well-being. In this sense, economic capital is a resource, but it is also the foundation upon which they can continue their studies. It allows them to pay for childcare, access material resources or tangible cultural capital (such as a personal computer or internet access), or dedicate more time to university activities, including assignments, studying, and so on. Conversely, a lack of this capital will jeopardize their ability to continue their studies. Furthermore, social capital, or a support network (family or partner), becomes a vital source of support while the young mother studies or fulfills her university responsibilities.

In this way, capital largely shapes the transition to motherhood, creating better opportunities or, in its absence, creating a lack of them, thus accumulating disadvantages and even generating feelings such as guilt for not meeting certain personal, marital, or family expectations related to responsible motherhood or being a good student. In other words, a young mother from a privileged social class who has economic and family capital will be able to attend to university commitments and responsibilities, while those without such resources will have to be more resilient, patient, and create strategies that allow them to cope with their situation as a student, relying on institutional resources such as a scholarship or relying on friends from the institution.

DISCUSSION

Educational institutions do not always consider motherhood to be a phenomenon present in different school and university communities. Regarding the study population at UPN 153, interviews and questionnaires were administered to students who already had children before entering the university, as well as to those who became pregnant during their first three semesters of undergraduate studies. This clearly demonstrates that the linearity of events, as proposed by the "life course" approach, does not correspond to the reality of many people. On the contrary, the linearity of events or specific timelines is not possible. That is, the life course does not correspond to the order in which events occur as if it were a fixed itinerary. Events such as starting a job, becoming pregnant, dropping out of school, and so on, are the result of spontaneous, improvised, poorly considered, and often unplanned decisions. The same is true for the turning points that can affect educational trajectories. Evidence of this in this study is that at least eight of the twelve young

women reported having interrupted their studies during and after their pregnancies. Also, based on the narrative during their interviews, practices linked to the influence exerted by some mothers on their daughters were identified.

Some important aspects regarding the young women who participated in both the interviews and questionnaires: they decided to enroll at UPN 153 due to their interest in becoming teachers and in the field of education in general; they were also interested in entering this university for personal reasons: personal and professional development. It is worth mentioning that the majority are pioneers in pursuing a university degree. Their parents have only a primary, secondary, or high school education. Another recurring response is that they consider the field of education to be diverse and broad. Unfortunately, the current labor market reality is very different from students' expectations.

The interviews also revealed the coexistence of two distinct perspectives on motherhood and academic life, identifying two distinct profiles among the participants: those who were already mothers upon entering UPN 153 and those who became pregnant during the first semesters of their studies (between the first and third semesters). There were also those who became pregnant immediately after graduating. However, these young women were not approached for interviews, nor did they respond to the questionnaire. This information comes to light due to observations within the academic unit and informal conversations. Motherhood is not as it could be, or one might wish to think: ideal, harmonious, and comforting. In several cases, family and spousal consent and support were expressed. But two cases also drew attention, in which their discontent and resignation about becoming mothers before entering university were explicit; that is, they had their children between the ages of 16 and 20. In this respect, the mother's role was important, as they urged their daughters to have the baby. As Antonia, one of the young women, recounts:

I got pregnant at 16, he was very happy, my boyfriend was four years older than me, so they decided I should have it. I didn't want to be a mom! But my mom told me I had to take responsibility for my mistakes. And so I had to continue with the pregnancy, the father left me and well, here we are taking care of our mistakes (Interview 6: Antonia, 29 years old, second semester student of pedagogy).

While those who had their children while at university so far, have shown resilience and expressed interest and motivation to continue studying, in addition to expressing their desire to enter a professional career on their own. Before getting pregnant, they longed to have a university degree. One aspect worth highlighting about pregnancies during their studies is that at least half of the young women expressed, in their narratives, a desire to have a baby. Also noteworthy is the positive reception of the news by both families (paternal and maternal).

At 22, our pregnancy was planned, and the test was a surprise for both of us because we saw it together. But from his perspective, and from what I saw, it was incredibly emotional, something neither of us could believe, and even days later we still hadn't fully grasped it. We would have a baby, on his side of the family, everyone was very happy, they congratulated me and his mom was super happy because it was something she had wanted for a very long time from my family, my mom told me that she already knew, she was very happy for us, and congratulated us (Interview 1: Federica, fourth semester student of pedagogy).

As Miller and Arvizu (2016) rightly point out, the transition to motherhood in the students' experiences does not necessarily conform to the normative life-course model. A piece of data that reinforces the authors' argument is the National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID) (INEGI, 2018), which shows that half of young women aged 22 have already had at least one child.

However, there are studies such as that of Pérez-Baleón (2014), which explains how leaving school can be explained by five combinations:

1. Left school – has not entered into a marital union
2. Left school – entered into marriage
3. Entered into a marital union – left school
4. Did not attend school – entered into a marital union
5. Did not attend school, nor enter into a marital union

The author also explains three interesting hypotheses about educational expectations: the first concerns role incompatibility; that is, before marriage, young women were not studying, so their interest in studies is affected. The second refers to educational expectations, indicating how schooling transforms perspectives and interests surrounding education and influences the lengthening of schooling and the postponement of marriage, and the third refers to human capital, describing education as an investment. In other words, Pérez-Baleón (2014) concludes that the beginning of married life for Mexican women represents a complex transition in which other events, such as pregnancy and leaving school or university, may be present, but not necessarily the transition to marriage or having worked beforehand. However, according to what has been identified in different sources referring to higher education institutions, there are also cases of pregnancy that do not exactly trigger an interruption of school or university. On the contrary, pregnancy encourages continuing their studies and completing the level they have reached, viewing studies as an investment that can improve their professional and economic lives.

On the other hand, some people emphatically said they would not interrupt their studies again, either because they did so before and feel even more committed to completing their studies, or because they are aware that if they do, they will disrupt their university career, at least for a while. The following were some of the interview fragments regarding whether they would interrupt their studies due to pregnancy or raising their children:

No, because I don't believe it's a reason or impediment to stop studying. No. I don't think it's necessary at the moment, since we have the support of family members, and by organizing our time, I believe it's possible to fulfill our academic obligations.

I wouldn't do it today, because it gets more complicated over time, because expenses increase, and the children's time demands are greater.

University schedules structure a large part of students' days, considering they spend between six and eight hours a day on campus. Therefore, the coping strategies that young mothers typically employ, at least in the population studied, involve managing various activities both within and outside of university. First, as they say, they "manage" to keep

up with assignments, projects, and other responsibilities related to their studies, relying on and creating support for themselves. They form teams, even for individual tasks; that is, they divide the readings among some classmates or the entire group (sometimes), further facilitating the submission of reading reports, the explanation of the reading in a presentation, and so on. Secondly, according to their narratives, they divide their time between household activities, such as cooking, caring for their children, taking them to school and the doctor, and attending school events. As Gloria describes it:

One of the biggest difficulties is time management, since in my experience, I have to divide my day between university, homework, work, the baby, household responsibilities, and even doctors' appointments, since having a child entails a lot of responsibility in every aspect, and sometimes, no matter how much you want to rest, you just can't. This kind of responsibilities- At this stage, I have experienced stress due to worry and the burden of responsibility, anxiety; I don't get enough rest, I hardly sleep, and I only have time to shower very quickly so I can keep moving forward (Interview 3: Gloria, sixth semester student of pedagogy).

Another account that aligns with the previous one is Marina's, who shares how she spends her time. She indicates that, during and after her pregnancy, it seemed that time became the most valued resource or asset:

Time for myself has ceased to exist for the moment; I do my best to cover each of my responsibilities: school, homework, time to read, food, and domestic chores, my job, and, of course, my daughter, who is involved in each of them. The time I have to do that is usually at night while she sleeps. It's complicated to establish a schedule and keep up with the activities I have to do consecutively. Last semester, I struggled with some assignments and readings, as well as attending the first classes of the day. Those were the reasons I wasn't going to enroll, but I decided to do so out of love for who I am and what I want to become in the future (Interview 1: Marina, a sixth-semester student in pedagogy).

It is important to note that some students already had a child before entering the university. They found themselves needing to interrupt their studies for a considerable period, affecting the linearity of their educational trajectory, at least temporarily. However, they chose to study pedagogy, explaining that this degree seemed interesting to them because of its focus on educational practice, a field they hoped to enter after graduation. Some excerpts from these narratives explain and make visible some of their experiences. As Katherine narrates:

Yes, 13 years ago, I had to interrupt my studies because I had to work to cover my son's expenses. Today I wouldn't do it, because it becomes more complicated over time, because expenses increase, and the demands of children's time are greater (Interview 2: Katherine, second-semester student).

One of the most striking interview excerpts is that of Antonia, who did not want to have her daughter, but her mother urged her to continue the pregnancy. In this sense, there are several elements to analyze: the resignation of becoming a mother even though she did not want to; not having the support of the child's father; dealing with her health condition and the pressure from her mother not to have an abortion, in addition to other responsibilities during and after her pregnancy, such as working, studying and raising her child:

I have borderline personality disorder (BPD), so I'm on medication. I try to diet, exercise, keep up with my responsibilities, go to school, and be a mom, but sometimes it pushes me to my limits. And I constantly want to give up. But the example of what I want to give my son is what motivates me to keep going with everything. (...) I often pass my classes, but the important thing is to finish my degree and not die trying, to continue my psychiatric treatment, to keep exercising, and not to fall back into that hole because it's not easy to get back up. And I don't want to be hospitalized again; it's very tiring, and the readings and assignments are difficult. Being there for myself is also difficult, but I have to keep to every schedule and every part of the day (Interview 6: Antonia, second-semester pedagogy student).

Most of the young women interviewed mentioned that being a student with a child was a challenge, since organizing their time is complex and they have very little time for each activity and responsibility, from cooking and homework to reading and attending university for at least six hours a day. It is an activity they do for themselves and their children. The vast majority of the young women interviewed reiterated that they are studying because they have wanted to be teachers from a very young age, and now that they have the opportunity to enter UPN 153, they do not want to give up. They talk as well of being an example for their children and have expectations that they will pursue a career:

Being a mother and a student is a challenge. But what I'm doing is also an example for my children, and obviously it broadens my horizons and those of my children (Interview 2: Katherine, second-semester student).

Regarding the stigma that may exist surrounding pregnant teenagers, who have small children and occasionally bring them to classes. It is worth noting some teachers' attitudes toward this practice, considering that babies are restless or distract both the mother and the other classmates and the teacher, generating tension in the group in some cases, while on other occasions they adapt and are more empathetic toward this situation.

It's difficult to deal with the exhaustion at the end of the day, the prejudices people point you out with, the pressure, and the lack of empathy from some teachers. And above all, the distraction of thinking about my baby when I have to leave her is very worrying, having to be away from her for so long. (Interview 4: Elvira, fourth-semester pedagogy student).

The stigma, therefore, relates to how the condition of being a mother and a university student is perceived within the classroom. From a critical perspective, it refers to a condition that reflects women's agency and breaks with the generally stipulated practices of being just a student, getting good grades, going out with friends, pursuing a romantic relationship, and so on. A university mother has the option of being accompanied by her child, investing time in attending classes and allocating money to her child's education, and perceiving her studies as a means of upward mobility upon graduation. However, stigma persists. They construct this idea based on the notion that a "good mother should dedicate herself solely to caring for her children," especially if they are babies or young children. Therefore, the stigma becomes a form of symbolic violence, perpetrated from within the academic or school context itself against student mothers.

Finally, the absence or availability of resources during the transition to motherhood will significantly shape and determine whether a student continues or is interrupted in their university studies; the intersection of economic, cultural, and social resources will

profoundly mark the experience of being a university mother, turning this transition into a discouraging event during their professional career or an experience characterized by opportunities for educational, professional, and personal development.

CONCLUSIONS

According to this study's findings, young mothers face dilemmas and challenges during their university career, which they resolve based on their social origin. Those with greater resources tend to devote more time to their academic tasks, and their responsibilities are often reduced because their mothers, fathers, grandparents, or other relatives can care for their children. On the other hand, for most interviewees, family (parents) or spouses play a significant role in providing financial support, especially in childcare. Furthermore, university mothers view their studies as a means of upward mobility and their degrees as an asset they can rely on in the future to develop professionally in the field of education, which, for many, is the primary reason they entered a teacher training college. In other words, the academic trajectories of student mothers are shaped by their family or background: while those from more privileged backgrounds manage to balance motherhood with their studies, dedicating more time to their academic performance and thus more quality time to their studies (homework, presentations, exercises, exams, etc.), those without this nuclear family support network face a different challenge. They generally begin to accumulate disadvantages not only in the university context, but also in the economic and marital spheres, making challenges sometimes impossible to overcome, even leading them to interrupt their studies indefinitely. Even those with family support drop out, expressing the need to be closer to their child, at least during the first year. Similarly, the study shows that university experiences for mothers and non-mothers tend to differ in terms of time management. Mothers face even more material challenges related to economic resources and physical health, where stress plays a significant role; without concentration, there is no productivity, interest, or even motivation, especially towards studies. This applies to both young mothers and non-mothers alike; the perception of higher education remains that it is a means to build and access upward mobility, to accumulate greater educational capital than their own parents. At the same time, they can share this educational capital with their children, guiding them to do the same: pursue a university degree despite the significant challenges involved.

Definitely, the availability of economic, cultural, and social capital during pregnancy and the postpartum period is crucial for young mothers who are university students to interrupt their studies or not. In this way, on the one hand, adversity can mark them, or, on the other, their time at university can become a stage of training, educational and professional growth, thus distinguishing between a transition characterized by disadvantages and precariousness, or another made up of accumulating opportunities and even capital.

Lastly, it is crucial that authorities pay attention to this often-invisible population within educational institutions themselves. Though the mothers (along with their partners) may be responsible for their condition of maternity, the material and economic support that educational institutions could offer to improve the student and maternal con-

ditions of university mothers will be crucial in reducing the likelihood of school attrition. This will contribute to curbing discriminatory practices and stigma towards university mothers; achieving or strengthening a university identity based on their status as mothers; and facilitating certain needs through the opening or creation of spaces geared towards this population, such as lactation rooms and restrooms equipped for them, child-care, fostering peer support networks, promoting faculty availability, and contributing to a more inclusive university environment.

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