


# Chapter 9

## The Rollercoaster of Motherhood and Scholarship: Lived Experiences of PhD Moms

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### ABSTRACT

*Being a mother and a PhD student at the same time is a journey full of ups and downs, victories, and changes. This chapter discusses the real-life experiences of PhD moms who have to balance two challenging worlds through reflective narratives. PhD mom is a complex identity with internal and external expectations, but it has perks and hardships. PhD moms negotiate academic and parenting responsibilities. Depending on their children's ages, their husband's status, and their education, they negotiate daily life differently. PhD moms can feel alone, experience imposter syndrome, pride, and empowerment from a unique event while dealing with mental labour and strain. PhD moms use self-discipline, time management, adaptability,*

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*resilience, support, self-compassion, and self-care to survive. The reason of PhD mom sustain their journey were family-centered motivation, identity negotiation, tenacity, professional and institutional demand, lifelong dream and validation, and faith and spirituality. Academic success and parenting goals may complement each other with empathy, affirmation, and faith.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Balancing motherhood and doctoral study has been widely recognized as a complex and deeply transformative experience. Research indicates that women pursuing doctoral degrees while raising children navigate two demanding social spheres: the academy and the home, each with distinct expectations, pressures, and emotional demands (Ladge et al., 2012; Lynch, 2008). Within these intersecting domains, academic deadlines frequently coexist with childcare responsibilities, sleep deprivation, and emotional labour, making the negotiation of personal and professional roles an ongoing challenge. Moreover, several problems like inflexible academic culture, gender inequality in domestic and academic spheres, and lack of institutional support might hinder the balance life of PhD Mom.

Motherhood itself represents a significant life transition that reshapes a woman's sense of identity and agency. Scholars argue that this process, while often disruptive, can also catalyse personal growth and lead to the development of a redefined, more integrated identity (Laney et al., 2015; Arendell, 2000). For doctoral mothers, these dynamics are further intensified by the intellectual and emotional demands of doctoral study, which require persistence, self-discipline, and resilience (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). The dual identity of scholar and caregiver often necessitates constant boundary negotiation between academic ambition and maternal devotion, productivity and presence, autonomy and relational care.

Recent scholarship has also highlighted how this dual role can generate both tension and empowerment. While some studies document the stress, guilt, and institutional barriers faced by academic mothers (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Guy & Arthur, 2020), others emphasize the transformative potential of motherhood as a source of motivation, empathy, and creativity within academic work (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). The act of mothering, rather than hindering scholarly success, can enrich research perspectives and foster resilience, adaptability, and relational insight, qualities increasingly valued in contemporary academia.

Despite the growing body of research on academic motherhood, limited attention has been given to how doctoral mothers themselves make sense of their experiences through reflexive narratives that intertwine personal identity, emotional labour, and academic progress. Much of the existing literature remains descriptive or policy-

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