

EXPLORING THE CHILD-BEARING AND CHILD-REARING EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN NUEVA VIZCAYA

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ABSTRACT

Motherhood is a transformative experience, yet for women with visual impairments, it presents unique challenges that are often overlooked in maternal health discourse. This study explored the child-bearing and child-rearing experiences of visually impaired mothers in Nueva Vizcaya, aiming to understand their lived realities and highlight their needs. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with seven visually impaired mothers. Participants were selected through purposive and referral sampling, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Two major themes emerged: challenges in child-bearing and child-rearing, and the fulfillment of being a mother. Subthemes under the first category included limited support systems and difficulties in performing maternal roles, such as breastfeeding and managing their child's health. Despite these barriers, the participants demonstrated resilience, strong maternal commitment, and joy in motherhood. The second theme revealed how motherhood gave them purpose, emotional strength, and a sense of identity, further reinforced by filial support from their children. The findings underscore the critical need for inclusive healthcare services, increased family and community awareness, and culturally sensitive nursing interventions. Recommendations include community-based education, accessible maternal care designed for the needs of visually impaired mothers, and emotional support systems. By amplifying the voices of these mothers, the study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of motherhood and calls for systemic change that upholds their dignity, rights, and potential.

Keywords: Child-bearing, child-rearing, disability, inclusive healthcare, maternal experiences, motherhood, visual impairment

INTRODUCTION

The process of child-bearing and child-rearing is universally transformative. Still, for mothers with visual impairments, it entails navigating complex challenges that are frequently overlooked in research and policy. Visual impairment, ranging from partial sight loss to complete blindness, affects daily functioning, independence, and access to essential maternal and parenting services. Despite this, there is a striking lack of local research exploring how visually impaired mothers in the Philippines, particularly in rural areas like Nueva Vizcaya, experience pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. This gap limits understanding of their unique needs and the structural barriers they face, underscoring the need for focused investigation.

Globally, over 2.2 billion individuals live with some form of visual impairment, with 43.3 million classified as blind, with more than half of whom are women (World Health Organization, 2023). Women with disabilities often experience compounded discrimination, including social exclusion and restricted access to maternal care, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that question their competence in fulfilling traditional maternal roles. In the Philippines, visual impairment remains a growing public health issue, with a prevalence rate of 1.98%. Yet, local literature concerning the intersection of disability, motherhood, and maternal care remains limited. Research underscores the challenges of pregnancy and

parenting for women with disabilities. Ziomkiewicz et al. (2019) noted that disability-related stressors can exacerbate biological and emotional changes during pregnancy. Ekström-Bergström et al. (2021) and Downe et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of inclusive, compassionate care in ensuring positive maternal experiences. However, visually impaired mothers often encounter healthcare systems ill-equipped to meet their needs, resulting in increased anxiety, reduced confidence, and feelings of isolation.

Similarly, child-rearing becomes more complex without access to visual cues or mainstream parenting resources, as Zhang et al. (2019) and Lanjekar et al. (2022) documented. Nonetheless, these mothers also demonstrate resilience and adaptability in nurturing their children, as seen in Nomaguchi et al. (2020). Motherhood, in this context, extends beyond biological definitions. It encompasses emotional, cognitive, and social responsibilities, intensified by the demands of disability. Scholars such as Hwang et al. (2022) and Orchard et al. (2023) have expanded the understanding of motherhood as a neurocognitive and social transformation shaped by culture, caregiving labor, and identity. Visually impaired mothers exemplify this transformation, demonstrating inner strength, adaptability, and a redefinition of motherhood in the face of adversity.

Though the Philippine government, through the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277) and its amendments, has implemented policies aimed at supporting persons with disabilities—including access to prenatal, postnatal, and parenting services—visually impaired mothers continue to encounter systemic challenges. Limited visibility in research and policy leads to services that are not tailored to their specific needs.

This study addresses this critical gap by exploring the child-bearing and child-rearing experiences of visually impaired mothers in Nueva Vizcaya. It aims to document the unique challenges they face, examine their coping strategies, and highlight both the barriers and strengths that define their motherhood journey. Through this exploration, the study seeks to contribute to more inclusive maternal health practices and informed policymaking that reflects the lived realities of mothers with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

The study, which was qualitative-descriptive in nature and employed a phenomenological approach, focused on seven (7) visually impaired mothers residing in the municipalities of Solano and Bagabag in Nueva Vizcaya. These regions were deliberately selected because of the relatively high population of visually impaired people.

The study recruited 7 mothers with partial or total vision loss through purposive and referral sampling. The study employed stringent inclusion criteria, including complete vision loss at the time of pregnancy and an age limit of 18 years and above. The study excluded individuals with other types of disabilities to maintain specificity and individuals of other nationalities to maintain focus.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted using a validated interview guide, adapted from a previous qualitative study. The questions focused on the themes of pregnancy, parenting, and daily struggles. The interviews were conducted in private, usually within the participants' households, and recorded with the respondents' informed consent. To enrich the data, follow-up interviews were conducted.

The thematic analysis process entailed familiarization, coding, generation of themes,

identification and analysis of patterns, defining and naming themes, and write-up. The research protocol was approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board (SMUREB). The participants were treated respectfully, given ample time to make decisions, and informed about their rights. The confidentiality of the study was ensured by using codes instead of names, storing data in a locked database, and destroying all data after completion. Although the participants were not paid, they benefited from the research, as the findings would be used to inform policy and practice. The study's findings were intended to raise awareness regarding the experiences of blind mothers and improve support mechanisms.

A brochure targeting visually impaired mothers is distributed to families and agencies after the university approves it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study included seven visually impaired mothers from Nueva Vizcaya, selected through purposive and referral sampling. The participants' ages ranged from 31 to 54 years old, with the number of children ranging from 1 to 6, and some had support from spouses, parents, siblings, or none at all.

Also, two major themes emerged from the thematic analysis.

Section 1. Challenges in Childbearing and Child-rearing

- o *Limited Support System*: Participants shared difficulty accessing consistent assistance from family or healthcare services during pregnancy, childbirth, and early childcare.
- o *Difficulty in Maternal Role*: Many faced struggles in performing maternal duties such as breastfeeding and caring for a sick child due to the absence of visual cues and a lack of proper support.

Section 2. Fulfillment of Being a Mother

- o *Purpose and Commitment in Motherhood*: Participants expressed a profound sense of purpose and emotional strength drawn from their roles as mothers.
- o *Filial Support*: Children were reported to provide practical help (e.g., reading medicine labels), reinforcing the bond and improving caregiving.
- o *Resiliency*: Despite social stigma and functional limitations, participants showed acceptance of their condition and a positive outlook on life.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with global literature emphasizing that visually impaired mothers encounter both systemic and personal challenges throughout their motherhood journey. As noted by Acar et al. (2024), participants in this study also reported being excluded from healthcare environments that failed to accommodate their specific needs, such as not allowing personal guides and inadequate breastfeeding support.

The limited support system reflects failures at both the mesosystem and exosystem levels in Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model. Healthcare workers often lacked sensitivity training, and community structures were not adequately equipped to assist. These confirm Ozcan et al.'s (2025) assertions that supportive family involvement and

inclusive care are critical for better maternal outcomes.

Despite this, many participants demonstrated emotional resilience, confirming Hanko et al.'s (2024) observations that motherhood can enhance self-efficacy even in the presence of disability. Notably, children were often caregivers themselves, which aligns with Hanko's findings on early maturity and empathy development in children of disabled parents. The resiliency shown by participants also reflects the chronosystem level, highlighting how their roles and adaptive strategies evolve over time. Faith and inner strength were often cited as anchors of hope and healing.

However, the study is not without limitations. The small sample size (n=7) limits generalizability, and all participants were from only two municipalities. Moreover, excluding fathers' and extended family perspectives creates an incomplete social picture. Nonetheless, the study's strengths lie in its use of rich, first-hand narratives and culturally rooted analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study explored the child-bearing and child-rearing experiences of visually impaired mothers in Nueva Vizcaya. The findings revealed that these mothers face unique challenges due to their disability, particularly in accessing consistent support and navigating healthcare systems not designed with inclusivity in mind. Difficulties in performing maternal tasks such as breastfeeding, managing illness, and attending check-ups were compounded by social stigma and limited family assistance.

Despite these challenges, the mothers demonstrated strong emotional resilience, a deep sense of purpose, and a commitment to their children's well-being. Many found strength through faith, their children's support, and their evolving sense of self-worth as parents. These findings highlight the need for healthcare, community, and policy systems to adopt a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to maternal care.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on disability and motherhood. It suggests that with appropriate support, visually impaired mothers can raise their children effectively and meaningfully. These insights can inform future nursing education, community health planning, and policy development toward more equitable maternal care services.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, it may be beneficial to consider a range of supportive measures to improve the childbearing and childrearing experiences of visually impaired mothers. While this study does not claim to offer universal solutions, the insights gathered point to areas where gradual, thoughtful improvements could make a meaningful difference.

Healthcare providers might consider incorporating more inclusive approaches in their practice. For instance, they could explore ways to communicate more effectively with visually impaired mothers through verbal guidance and tactile demonstrations, especially during procedures such as breastfeeding instruction. Allowing trusted support persons to accompany mothers during check-ups and hospital stays—particularly when these individuals serve as essential guides—may also help reduce anxiety and improve care experiences. Sensitivity and compassion in these moments can have a lasting impact on the

mother's sense of confidence and safety.

At the community level, raising awareness through localized health education efforts may help reduce the stigma often faced by mothers with disabilities. Involving families, neighbors, and barangay health workers in these discussions could foster a more supportive environment. Simple, respectful education campaigns that emphasize understanding rather than pity could help families better appreciate the capabilities of visually impaired mothers and respond more effectively to their needs.

From a policy and administrative perspective, improving accessibility in maternal healthcare facilities and services might also be explored. This could include ensuring physical spaces are navigable and that informational materials are available in alternative formats such as audio or large print. Policymakers may also find it beneficial to involve women with visual impairments in discussions about service design, allowing their perspectives to inform future programs directly.

Finally, future research may explore related topics, such as the experiences of family members, caregivers, and healthcare workers who support visually impaired mothers. Understanding the broader context in which these mothers live and raise their children can lead to more well-rounded interventions. Educational institutions, particularly those involved in nursing and public health, may also want to reflect on how disability-inclusive care is taught and consider strengthening this component in their curricula.

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