# Mothers in enabling: Overcoming challenges to become better role models and an inspiration to their families

Katrina Johnston  
CQUniversity  
*k.johnston@cqu.edu.au*

**Trixie James**CQUniversity  
*t.james@cqu.edu.au*

**Anne Braund**CQUniversity  
*a.braund@cqu.edu.au*

**Louise Mullaney**

CQUniversity  
*l.mullaney@cqu.edu.au*

# Abstract

This paper explores the impact of study on mothers engaged in pre-university enabling studies. The research project it describes involved 284 female participants aged between 18 and 64 years who identified as mothers during their enrolment in an enabling course at a regional university in Australia between 2012 and 2017. The focus was on mothers engaged in coursework who were enrolled either internally or online and included those enrolled both part-time and full-time. Data was collected via a survey and analysed using thematic analysis. This research discovered that mothers engaging in enabling studies are wanting a better future for themselves and their families; however, they face many challenges that impact upon their studies that traditional students likely do not have to contend with. Balancing family, study and work obligations, along with limited academic skills were some of the main challenges faced by these students. Similarly, their main competing commitments also included children, work and family. Additional themes to emerge include ‘impact on families’ alongside ‘strategies’ that mothers employed to overcome the challenges. Students also identified how their study experience was transformational and shared examples of how these changes and impacts on family were both positive and negative and, for some, had far reaching consequences.

# Introduction

Many Australian universities offer pre-tertiary preparation courses, known as enabling, preparatory, transition, access or bridging studies, to increase the opportunities for non-traditional students to access entry into further study. Due to this, there are additional factors that need to be considered as these students often enter with lower level academic skills, are first in family, come from low socio-economic backgrounds and may require provision through equity support. Mothers are just one of these non-traditional groups and the struggles they face can seem insurmountable. Many mothers engage in enabling studies to provide a better future for themselves and their families, seeing undertaking an enabling course as their gateway to a new career and an improved life. However, they face many challenges that school leavers and other unencumbered students may not. The overarching research question being investigated is identifying the competing issues that mothers face by making the decision to enter further study and how they can best be supported through their studies in an enabling course. This study investigates the challenges faced by this group and the impacts of these challenges as the women juggle study alongside competing commitments. Additionally, it considers the positive and negative impacts of study on family and considers the transformational aspects identified by the women within this study.

# Literature Review

For many years, the non-traditional student cohort has had a significantly higher proportion of enrolments of female students. This trend has stayed consistent from early research (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Scott, Burns & Cooney, 1996), which indicated that non-traditional female students aged over 25 years were one of the fastest growing cohorts in tertiary education. While there is significant literature on female non-traditional students in tertiary education, there are limited studies on mothers engaging in enabling studies. Scott, Burns and Cooney (1996) investigated the reasons mothers did not complete their course of study once enrolled in a bachelor’s degree. They noted that the primary reason for leaving study was the challenge of managing family responsibilities and this was followed closely by work obligations involving practical difficulties. Mothers often enter study with lower academic skills, are first in family, require equity support and come from low socio- economic backgrounds (Klinger & Tranter, 2009). Financial difficulties and lack of familial support were also highlighted (Klinger & Tranter, 2009). Research by Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) found that married women were more likely to complete their degree if they had partners helping support them, both financially and with housework. Reay (2003) notes that juggling childcare and study leaves mothers little time for themselves. Women with children deal with a relentless balancing act between studies, domestic responsibilities and earning an income.

Quimby and O’Brien (2006) note that non-traditional students feel different when entering university in comparison to more traditional students. Firstly, the age gap is evident as non-traditional students are generally older, due to entering university at a time in their life that is more conducive to including study. In addition, Quimby and O’Brien (2006) found that interaction with younger peers, who have different values and priorities, can create more stress for these mature age students. This can be a contributing factor to why mothers may feel ostracised and left out. The concept of following a traditional student lifestyle, embodying individuality, leisure and academic work is alien to mothers. For most mothers, embarking on studies embodies an entirely different experience from that of younger traditional students. Reay (2003) comments that where aspects of a person’s social life is forfeited, “time poverty” becomes an issue and in the process many students lack time to care for themselves (p. 9). Specifically, the concept of a social life is forfeited upon embarking on tertiary study. This can be seen as a “form of poverty: a paucity of time for ‘care of the self’” (Reay, 2003, p. 9). Additionally, mature female students are more likely to lack confidence in their ability to succeed at tertiary studies and this low self-confidence can add to the “psychological distress” which increases the chance of these students not completing a degree; furthermore, mothers commented on feeling guilty. “Their own learning was seen as an activity which subtracted time and energy from their maternal responsibilities” (Reay, 2003, p. 10).

Although non-traditional female students tend to have less sources of support, they performed better academically than traditional students, and non-traditional students only returned to study if they felt they could accomplish the demands of study without compromising their other roles (Carney-Crompton &Tan, 2002). Mature women tend to note a “love of learning” as one of the reasons behind embarking on study as they see the gaining of knowledge as fundamentally valuable (Reay 2003, p.10). Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) also note that most non-traditional female students make the decision to embark on higher education mindful of the demands of tertiary study and are willing to take on these added responsibilities. Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) also note that mothers as students are “very capable and resilient participants in the academic world”. These variables, in combination, result in greater academic persistence and higher levels of success for non-traditional female students.

# Methodology

Transformative learning theory underpins this research as enabling programs can be the stimulus for driving transformation through disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). This theory fits very well into this paper’s research perspective as it transpired when Mezirow (1978) was intrigued by the experiences his wife had when entering higher education (1975). His research into her experience identified stages of a learning cycle that began with a disorientating dilemma and resulted in a changed perspective. Mezirow came to identify personal perspective transformation as “a structural reorganization in the way that a person looks at himself [sic] and his [sic] relationships” (1978, p. 162). Transformative learning theory purports that perspective transformation has three dimensions: psychological change where the person experiences changes in their understanding of themselves; convictional change where belief systems are questioned; and behavioural change that better suits the new identity (Mezirow, 2009). Disorientating dilemmas often occur in academic environments where students are engaging with new ideas, critically questioning their own assumptions and beliefs and bouncing ideas off each other through peer interaction (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). However, critical to transformative learning is the notion that until students actively take steps that acknowledge their new belief, true transformation cannot take place (Learning Theories, 2017).

# Participants

Data used in this paper focuses solely on the experience of mothers within the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) enabling course at CQUniversity, Australia. For the purpose of this research, the definition for mother is: “*a mother, caring for dependent children, whilst undertaking study*”. The focus of this study was on mothers engaged in an enabling course where enrolment was part-time, full-time or via distance study. Data was collected via a survey and analysed using thematic analysis. An initial email was sent to 5,880 female students who had been enrolled in the STEPS enabling course at CQUniversity inviting them to undertake a survey in relation to their experience within the course. The emails were sent to students who had been enrolled in the enabling program from 2012 through to017. Figure 1 (below) shows the number of mothers who commenced study in each of those years.

*Figure 1.* Mothers per year commenced study

From 410 responses to the email, 284 students identified as mothers and participated in this research project by completing an online survey. From the resulting 284 respondents, the demographic footprint encompassed mothers aged 19 to 64 who commenced the enabling course between 2012 to 2017, with a varying number of children in their care, ranging from one child through to seven plus children and a variety of different cultural, experiential and diverse outlooks. A breakdown of the number of mothers compared to the number of children in their care can be seen in Figure 2.

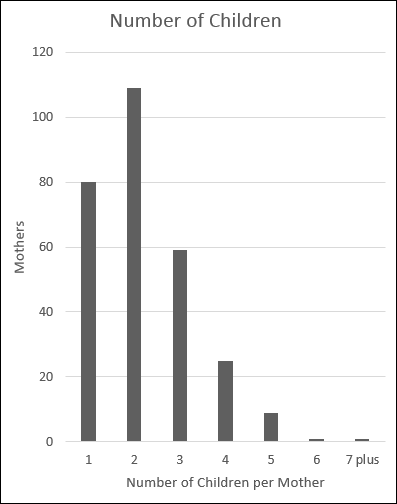
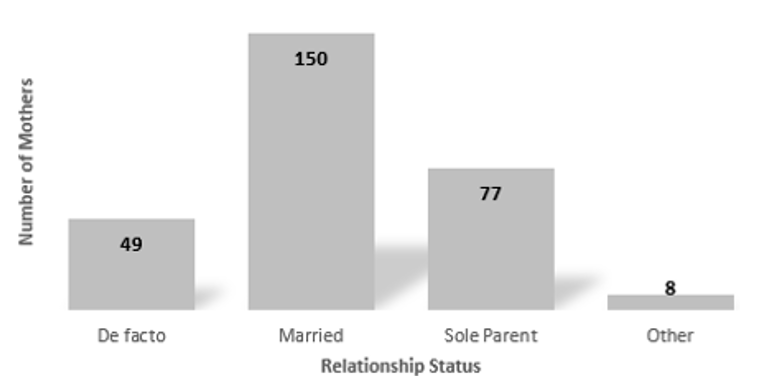


Figure 2. Number of children per mother upon embarking on enabling education

The marital status of the participants ranged from married, to sole parent, or in a de facto relationship, to a small group who identified as other (Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Mothers relationship status upon embarking on enabling education

Of the 284 respondents, 97 are still enrolled in the enabling program, 130 have progressed to undergraduate studies, four participants moved onto vocational studies and 53 have chosen not to embark on further study for a variety of reasons (Figure 4).

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# *Figure 4.* Participants current study paths

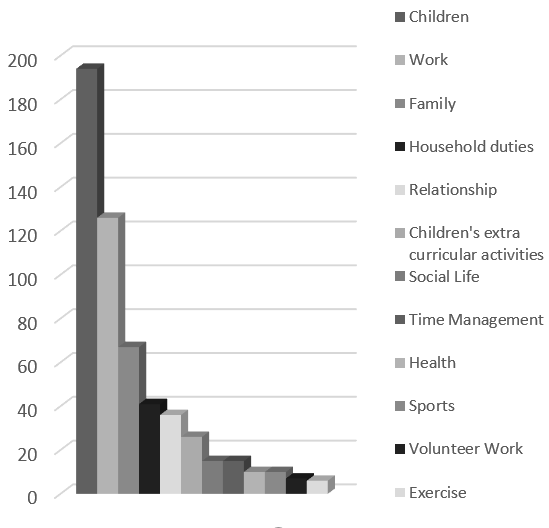
# Data analysis

Data from the surveys was scrutinised and the analytical framework of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied. Thematic analysis involves the search for common threads that extend across the entire set of data and provides a purely qualitative, detailed and nuanced account of the data being viewed (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Using thematic analysis involves a relatively low level of interpretation as it allows the data to guide the findings; Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach was used. Firstly, the data set from Survey Monkey was uploaded to a data management program (NVIVO). The responses to the open-ended questions were read and reread to gain an overview of the variety of responses received. The responses from each question were then coded and descriptions written to inform the context behind the codes. The researchers then searched for themes and allocated the relevant data to the themes. These were scrutinised, and the researchers considered how the themes supported the overarching theoretical perspective and related to the research question. The findings report on two main issues that were determined during the data analysis: ‘Challenges’ and ‘Competing Commitments’ for mothers enrolled in the STEPS enabling course. The findings have considered the strategies that mothers used to combat these challenges and how these issues have had an impact on families and the changes in themselves.

# Findings

## *Competing commitments*

Students were asked to identify the competing commitments that they faced during their time in the enabling course (see Figure 5 below). The study identified a diverse range of competing commitments, with most of the women noting that the largest competing commitment was related to the responsibilities involved in raising their children: *Trying to study with kids is next to impossible. School holidays and uni holidays don't line up which means during exam time, I had to find someone to look after my kids, which is very hard when you don't have family in town and classes being held outside of school hours meant I couldn't attend*.



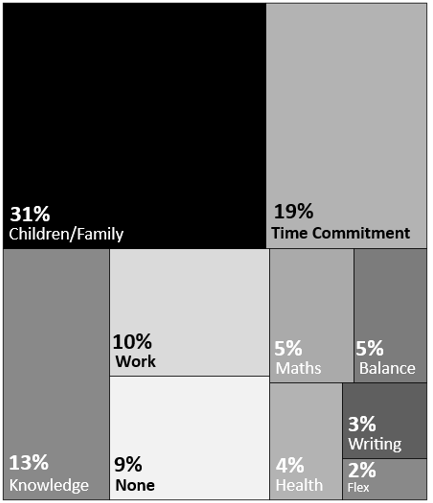
*Figure 5.* Competing commitments upon embarking on enabling education

One major problem that was raised was university classes that occur outside of school hours: *some lecture times conflicted with school hours and I had to miss lectures due to having to pick up kids from school*. Work was acknowledged as being the next significant competing commitment. *I work 30hrs a week in quite a senior role that also required me to work from home after hours at times; Working full-time … is physically demanding so I wouldn’t have much energy to study sometimes.*

Family was noted as another common competing commitment while other commitments noted were housework, their relationship with their partner and children’s extra-curricular activities. *I am the sole income earner in my household. So I had to work whilst studying. I am also the secretary of my soccer club so I had meetings to attend. I also played soccer along with my partner and children. If I wasn't at uni or work, I was at soccer. I don't get much down time.* Factors such as a social life, health, sports issues, exercise and volunteer work were mentioned less frequently. However, some mother’s found that the time their children were at school allowed them to study: *For the most part it was manageable, because I studied during school hours.* Overall, there was a broad spectrum of commitments noted by the mothers including competing commitments. *Spending time with my children … housework, making meals, time to work out at the gym, volunteer work at my younger children's school, a nana who needs visits at a nursing home, a mum who needs to be monitored and an ex-partner who is putting pressure on me.* These results demonstrate the sheer scope of competing commitments that many mothers contend with on a daily basis.

*Challenges*

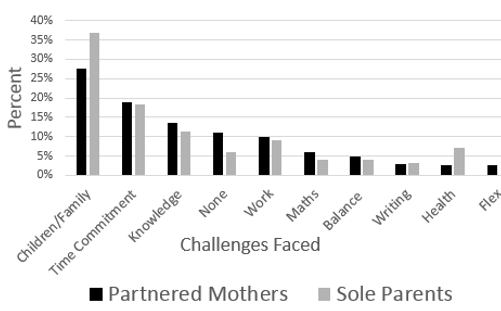
When students were asked what challenges they faced during their studies, a similar trend to competing commitments appeared, with the largest challenge identified as balancing family with study (Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Challenges faced by mothers in enabling studies

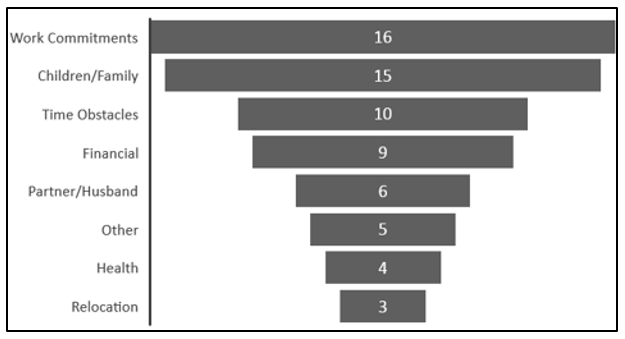
*Finding time for study and family while working a minimum of 8h days was very exhausting.* The time commitment required was the second highest challenge with skill level following as the next largest challenge. *Family felt I committed too much time and I was not encouraged.* Health and personal challenges also rated a mention as challenges. *The long hours that are needed to complete units/modules which takes the time away from family and friends. The impact to my health trying to juggle a time frame to study and be a full-time mother.*

When looking at a comparison of the challenges faced, both sole parenting mothers and mothers with partners mentioned the same challenges with similar trends (Figure 7).



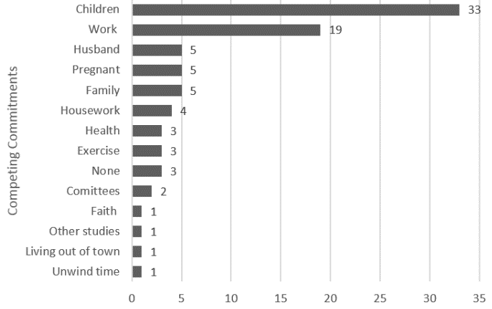
*Figure 7.* Comparison of challenges of partnered mothers to sole parents

## While many students found strategies to combat these challenges, a number found the challenges overwhelming and did not continue on to complete further studies. The main reasons behind discontinuing study was work commitments with family comitments a close second. Time and financial issues were next with lack of support due to husbands working away, health issues, relocation and a variety of other factors impacting the decision to discontinue study (Figure 8).



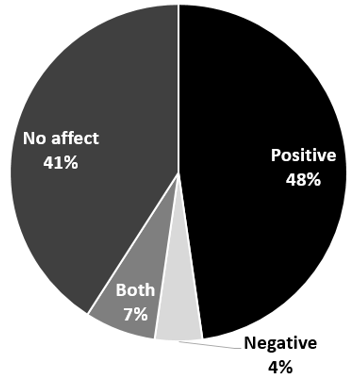
*Figure 8.* Reasons for mothers discontinuing study

Comments such as: *Father in law got cancer and I had to take him to* *appointments and was working 2 jobs due to husband becoming redundant; Divorce and separation, teenage children, poverty, life was a challenge at that point of time;* and *Didn't finish STEPS. No support at home and too time consuming with work,* show that it was a combination of these challenges that caused the mothers to discontinue study.One woman commented: *Financial, emotional, psychological abuse and infidelity from husband. Major stress caused an auto immune disease, anxiety and depression questioning everything in my life and what I want to do with my future … I became very stressed and physically unwell, which led me to drop out.* The competing commitments for discontinuing students mimicked the main findings with children and work again major commitments (Figure 9).



*Figure 9*. Competing commitments for discontinuing students

While not continuing onto futures studies could be seen as a negative outcome, the positive impacts that enabling studies give students and their families cannot be disregarded. As one discontinuing mother stated: *“I have the confidence to get involved in issues that matter to me and to step outside my comfort zone. My son doesn't see uni as something he will never do anymore. I also understand better how I function. For us, the impacts have all been positive.”* A majority of twenty-one of the fifty-three discontinuing mothers stated that engaging in enabling study had a positive impact on their lives while only two believed it had a completely negative impact. Eighteen stated that there had been neither a positive or negative impact while three believed that there were both positive and negative impacts (Figure 10).



*Figure 10.* Discontinuing students’ opinions on whether study impacted their family positively or negatively

Of the 53 women who discontinued their studies, nine identified as sole parents. As the literature review notes, one of the elements that affects whether mothers continue on to further study is their support network (Carney-Crompton &Tan, 2002). The survey

asked women to note their primary, secondary and tertiary support networks. Significantly, both continuing students and discontinuing students valued the lecturing and supporting staff highly. Further to this, partners, family, friends and fellow students also rated as highly supportive. When looking at the mothers who were sole parents, lecturers and staff were highly rated, along with friends and family and their external support arm (Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 below).

Table 1

*Discontinued students support networks*

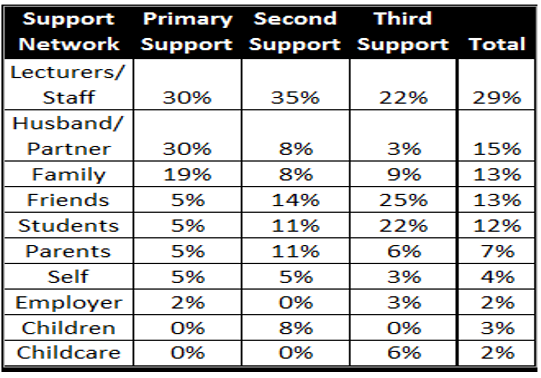


Table 2

*Continuing Students Support Networks*

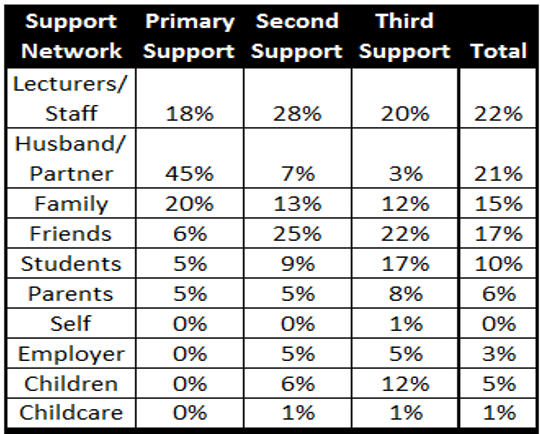
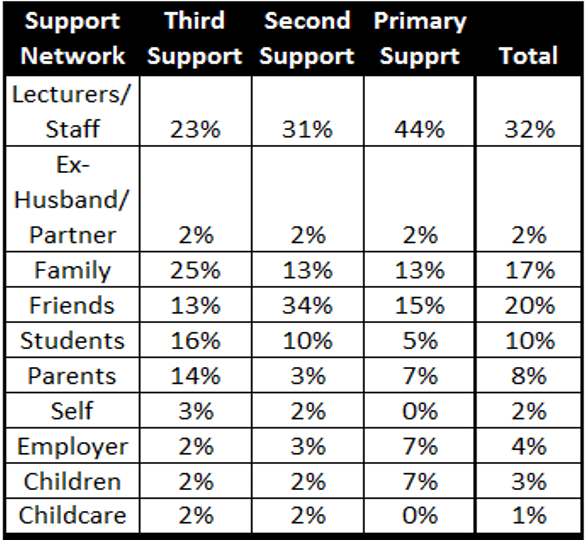


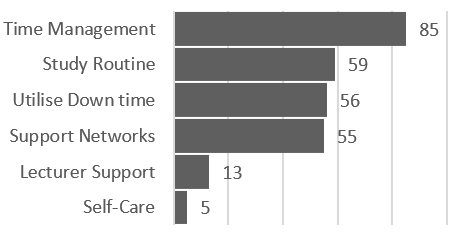
Table 3

*Sole Parents Support Network*



## *Strategies*

When describing how mothers managed to balance study alongside their external commitments and what strategies they found most beneficial, two main themes of time management and support networks emerged (Figure 11).



*Figure 11.* Strategies to balance study and external commitments

Lee, Ybarra, Gonzalez and Elsworth (2018) reflected that having supportive social relationships can lead people to a career that encourages personal growth over a higher paying career. Additionally, people feel more self-confident when having access to a support network. Time management was identified in several forms, including utilising down time, setting up a study routine and good time management. Utilising down time: *I actually stopped studying during the day and decided to sleep during the day at the same time as the baby and then I would stay up for long periods during the night to study;* setting up a study routine: *Stopped watching TV and dedicated all evening hours to completing studies;* and good time management, where common comments were: *I studied during nap or bed time. Made sure I had a planner of when things were due, set goals to have x amount completed so I could do other things.* While support from family and friends, lecturer support and self-care were other themes that emerged from the support strategies: *An extremely supportive partner and friends who were also studying checking over my work and supporting and encouraging me* and *I have utilised friends for shipping the children out if I have had a particularly tough week where I needed to put some study time in.*

In many cases a combination of strategies was used as can be seen in this comment from one respondent: *I worked out when I had to do each activity and what time suited me to study around each. I wrote it onto a white board. I got my family involved too. I wrote down each of their schedules and we had a family meeting on what we had to do to work together and achieve some harmony*. Many students identified utilising their down time effectively with comments like: *I used my RDOs and Sundays for study days making sure I tackled assignments as early as possible*; and G*etting up early - 5am or so, getting in an hour in before getting the kids ready for school. Sometimes I stayed up quite late finishing tasks, as I find I need to get in a 'flow' and with kids (and hubby) it's hard to get a big chunk of time all at once. Watching some lectures while doing the washing up or laundry folding, bed making. Multi-tasking*. Studying after children were in bed at night was another common theme with comments like: *I study at night when the kids are in bed and have become a real night owl*; and *In the evenings when my children went to bed I would complete the majority of my studies then which meant many late nights.*

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## Changes

When asked if the students had seen any changes in themselves since completing the enabling course, the majority said they had seen positive changes in themselves while the minority stated that they had not seen any changes. The size of the words in the word cloud in Figure 12 graphically highlights the assorted themes that emerged, the larger the font, the more often the theme occurred.



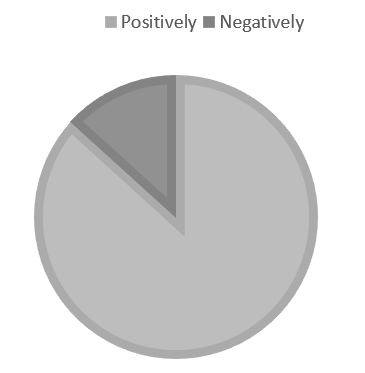
*Figure 12.* Changes in self – keyword word cloud

An increase in confidence was a core theme with comments such as: *I'm a much stronger person in that I dedicate all my time and energy into my studies and I feel much more motivated to succeed in this program than what I have in previous study experiences. I have more drive and I actually have a genuine interest in my studies. I'm more confident in myself and my abilities and my study is something that gives me another label... I'm not just a mum anymore I'm a person who wants to build a career for myself.* Whilst another mother shared, *After completing STEPS, it became apparent to me that being part of a program (even on an external basis) gave me confidence. I loved that I was involved in a journey of self-development. I have also been more confident to map a future career rather than settle in a job because that's what I've always done.*

Organisation was another theme that arose when looking at changes the mothers could see in themselves: *I am a lot more organised, and incredibly happy. Having goals and a mission in life other than being a mother is a great feeling. Bettering oneself is a huge self-esteem booster, especially knowing this is going to benefit myself and my family in the long run.* Many students found unexpected bonuses such as a drive to succeed that they had not felt before engaging with the enabling program: *My self-confidence has been boosted immensely. STEPS also woke a drive and determination I did not have before. It also allowed me to chase my dream and achieve my goals!* An expansion of their view of themselves and the world around them was another change: *Self-confidence has increased … My world view is so much larger and my conversations are more interesting. I know that I am a positive role model to my child and my passion for study has passed down to her*. Many mothers noted that they initially felt that study (and the time taken up by it) was selfish and took away from their time with their children and families. However, many women said that these beliefs changed as they found that their studies helped to improve both their own and their children’s education: *I am growing as a person. I feel that I am becoming more confident in myself and no longer see studying as being selfish, but as a way to improve our lives*.

## Impact

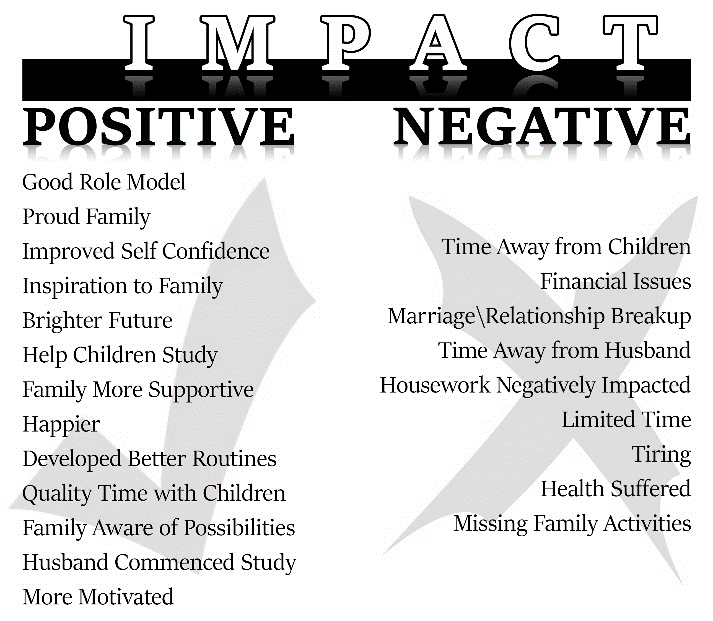
Upon being asked whether studying has had a positive or negative impact on themselves or their families, a majority of respondents answered that the study had positively affected them. The extent of positive responses can be seen in Figure 13.



*Figure 13.* Positive and negative impact of enabling study on family

Many students mentioned that due to engaging in study they felt they had been a positive role model to their children and families and even went so far as to say that they felt that they were an inspiration to their families: *My kids have seen that a mother can do anything she sets her mind to and should follow her dreams; “A confident woman / partner/ mother is always a positive.* Many had an improved self-confidence and felt that their families were now proud of them: *My family are immensely proud of me and my achievements. I have shown them that goals are achievable and hard work goes a long way;* and *“My son and I doing 'homework' together was a positive impact. S*everal students mentioned that their family were more supportive and had stepped up to help with housework throughout their studies: *Juggling study and family was hard but a supportive partner made a huge difference.* Being able to help their children with their schooling was another positive impact: *Positive for me in that I can help with maths, science and english homework and know what they are talking about.*

A number of women responded with a mixture of both positive and negative comments (Figure 14):



*Figure 14.* Positive versus negative impact on family

For instance, from a mostly positive perspective: *I am able to support my family more financially. I am also a role model to all as I was the first in my family to graduate from uni. Negative: I did lose a lot of family time with my family that I can never regain*; and *My children see how hard I work to achieve my goals and I think it is positive that I model that behaviour; however, the time it takes to do so also can be a negative*; and *My daughter had less time with me, but the time I had spent with her became much higher quality (sharing emotions, learning new things, comforting, going on spontaneous road trips together).*

Conversely, a small number of students (11%) shared in relation to the more negative impact that they felt study had on their lives. These negative impacts ranged from financial issues through to relationships breaking up. One student noted the lack of time affecting housework while another mentioned a negative effect on her health. Feelings of guilt were a common negative impact, with many mothers feeling guilty about the time study has taken away from their children: *My children, although supportive of my studies, find they don't spend enough time with me which can create a lot of guilt on my behalf therefore I question myself to whether or not I should be furthering my career or applying that time into my family*. Nonetheless, these feelings of guilt were regularly over-ridden with a comment noting a sense of pride in their achievements: *It's been a bit of a juggling act, and initially I felt guilty for taking my time away from the family and investing in myself, but as I developed good routines and things fell into place, it was the best thing I could have chosen to do.* Comments like: *My results and studying has had a wonderfully positive effect on my children and husband who are extremely proud of me. After the first semester my husband commenced study as well. The negatives are that my children have missed out on all school holidays and fun due to my uni being on when they are on school holidays. This has really been stressful and made me extremely guilty*.

Many mothers acknowledged, however, that support from their families had increased through their families witnessing of the positive change within themselves: *My increase in determination has led to great academic results, in turn these have convinced my family that I am capable and they have increased their support for me at university*.

# Discussion

Mothers entering enabling education deal with many challenges and have competing commitments that have the potential to derail their hopes and dreams of being able to changing their pre-study situation. Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) remark that these women tackle more challenges and endure stressors that the more traditional students do not come across. Mothers entering enabling education are unable to eliminate these competing commitments, and for many, this has been their only existence for many years. Although the challenges can be stressful, and some students find them overwhelming (and withdraw from study as a consequence) many thrive under the pressure and push past the obstacles to become stronger more self-confident individuals.

The time management involved in balancing study, work, children and a relationship was the most common theme to emerge in both the challenges mother’s face and commitments that compete with their studies. Reay (2003, p. 10) commented that mothers can be seen “to be eschewing various aspects of ‘a normal biography’– social life, financial security and family relationships – in an attempt to respond to the demands of ‘reflexive modernisation’ and individualisation.” She notes that mothers were caught up in a constant balancing act between wanting to study, meeting domestic responsibilities, needing to earn money and fitting in voluntary work commitments. This was evident within this research where the results showed that mothers were constantly juggling and multi-tasking in order to balance life commitments and continue studying. What is evident is that mothers are unable to ‘drop’ most of their personal commitments to undertake study. These women are adding another role into their already full schedules and, to succeed, they have to find the internal drive to persist and develop the micro and macro skills of time management. As Reay (2003, p. 9) found:

The idea of a student lifestyle, with its combination of independence, dependence, leisure and academic work, was totally alien to these mature women entrants. Being a student for them meant something entirely different from the conceptions and experiences of younger students. In particular, any sort of social life was invariably sacrificed.

The research initially set out to investigate the competing issues that mothers face upon embarking on further study in order to discover how they can best be supported through their studies. Balancing children and study was the foremost theme that arose from the research, therefore intentional timetabling to schedule classes around school hours may allow mothers to attend whilst children are at school. In addition, the introduction of on-campus childcare facilities, organised around class schedules for mothers with young children, along with after-school care facilities, would give mothers study time outside of class.

What is evident within the essence of the findings was a sense that, in order for these mothers to succeed, there needed to be sacrifice and that resulted in less time being devoted to their families. What was not mentioned in the findings was self-sacrifice. Maybe this is due to the fact that they have made the decision to devote themselves to study and therefore, there is an internal comprehension that they are sacrificing their own personal time. Reay (2003) found that where aspects of a person’s social life is forfeited, time poverty becomes an issue and in the process many students lack time to care for themselves. This finding showed up in some of the negative health issues noted in the impacts above and references the way in which a mother’s maternal instinct can lead her to sacrifice self over family. However, the results show that changes in self-image noted by many of the mothers reflect transformational changes that are likely to have lasting impacts on their sense of self. Many mothers commented on increased self-confidence, a feeling of pride in themselves and a familial sense of pride in their achievements because their children evidenced their mothers’ struggles to persist in their studies, through the devotion of time and persistence. One comment in particular reflects this: *It felt fantastic that I am actually capable to do intellectual work. I came from background where I was bullied and where my self-esteem was constantly undermined most of my life. But I got a lot of support and respect from lecturers and fellow students. I saw that here they appreciate you for the work you do, for the personality you have, for the goals you have. Here my past, my body image, and stereotypes about my nationality don't matter. What I do and how I treat people around me is what matters. Totally different level from ordinary.*

The impact of success for the individuals and their families was noted as having far reaching consequences, which may not be evident externally, but is seen and felt as the individual’s self-efficacy is developed. One woman reflected: *They have definitely been a challenging few years. My kids think I'm amazing and smart, which makes me proud and hopefully shows them that they can do whatever they set their mind to. In the long run it will impact my family in a great way. My husband won't have to work long hours to support our family. I can bring in a modest income as well.*These mothers become role models for their children and those witnessing their change. In turn, their children’s perception of education may be enhanced and could be the pivotal point in them appreciating the value of education. With the mother’s skill level improving, this also has positive benefits on her family as she is able to support her children academically. On being asked if the changes they saw in themselves from engaging in study were positive or negative one mother responded by saying: *Yes it has been highly effective. I am the first to go to uni, my family believes I can do it. My eldest daughter wants to grow up to go to uni, which I encourage. I love being a positive role model to my sisters and daughters.* In this study, the mothers noted their motivation to study for their family. Additionally, in order to deal with the guilt and feelings of selfishness, these students reflected that it was their responsibility, as good parents, to enhance their own knowledge through study so that they could help their children academically. Many mothers saw their own education being passed on to their children and themselves as an inspiration and role model.

# Conclusion

Mothers face many challenges upon undertaking enabling studies, including those involving balancing children, family, work and time obligations, and issues related to health, finances, low self-confidence, housework and technology. These women also face numerous competing commitments such as children, work, household duties and the needs of their partners. While these issues could seem insurmountable, the act of engaging in enabling studies has instead had a transformative effect on many of these women and their families. While a number of the mothers discontinued study due to these same challenges, many developed a number of strategies to balance their study and external commitments such as time management skills, a better study routine, utilising their downtime effectively, engaging their support network, accessing lecturer support as they needed it and improved self-care. They also noted many changes in themselves and their families as an outcome of the enabling study including: improved self-confidence, greater knowledge, better time management, improved organisation, a more positive attitude and more motivation.Many participants believed they were paving the way to a better future for both themselves and their families. They felt that their family was now proud of them and many gained a sense of pride from their accomplishments within the enabling course. While universities could reduce some of these challenges with the addition of on-campus childcare and after school care along with classes scheduled during school hours, the overarching triumph that came out of the research was that many of these women felt that their success had been an inspiration to their families.

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