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University Solutions Supporting Motherhood During Studies from the Perspective of Female Pedagogy Students

Uczelniane rozwiązania wspierające
macierzyństwo w trakcie studiów z perspektywy
studentek pedagogiki

ABSTRACT

Student motherhood is an increasingly significant phenomenon, given the growing number of women pursuing higher education. This issue requires not only social discussion but also reflection on improving conditions for women who wish to balance the roles of both student and mother. To this end, this study presents research findings on the subject from the perspective of female pedagogy students. The study employed the diagnostic survey method with a questionnaire as a research tool. A total of 199 female pedagogy students from various universities in Poland participated. The analysis focused on students' opinions regarding university-provided solutions supporting student mothers, as well as expectations in this area expressed by the vast majority of respondents. From the perspective of female pedagogy students, universities offer only a limited range of facilities from the

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broad spectrum of possible support measures. The findings of this study can contribute to discussions in the academic community about student motherhood and highlight the need to create and expand support systems for pregnant and student mothers.

ABSTRAKT

Studenckie macierzyństwo to zjawisko przybierające na znaczeniu wraz z powszechnością decyzji kobiet o potrzebie zdobycia wyższego wykształcenia. Zjawisko to wymaga przede wszystkim społecznej dyskusji i refleksji nad polepszaniem warunków dla kobiet chcących jednocześnie pełnić rolę studentki i matki. Stąd też w niniejszym artykule skupiono się na uczelnianych rozwiązaniach wspierających macierzyństwo w trakcie studiów. W tym celu przedstawiono wyniki badań na ten temat, które uwzględniają perspektywę kobiet studiujących pedagogikę. W badaniach posłużono się metodą sondażu diagnostycznego z wykorzystaniem techniki ankiety, a narzędziami badawczym uczyniono kwestionariusze ankiety, które łącznie wypełniły 199 studentki pedagogiki różnych uczelni w Polsce. Analizę materiału badawczego prowadzono pod kątem oferowanych uczelnianych rozwiązań wspierających studenckie macierzyństwo w opinii badanych kobiet i ich oczekiwań w tym zakresie, których posiadanie deklaruje zdecydowana większość z nich. Z perspektywy studentek pedagogiki ich uczelnie zapewniają niewiele udogodnień/ułatwień z długiej listy możliwości. Rezultaty zaprezentowanych badań mogą posłużyć podejmowaniu dyskusji w środowisku akademickim na temat macierzyństwa w trakcie studiów, potrzeby tworzenia i rozwijania rozwiązań wspierających studentki-matki i studentki w ciąży.

Introduction

Motherhood, a subject of analysis by many researchers (including demographers, sociologists, psychologists, and educators), remains a relevant and widely discussed topic in both scientific discourse and social debate. The term *motherhood*, regardless of cultural context, carries a nearly universal meaning, encompassing the *mother-child* dyad (Aksamit 2019). It is generally defined as both the state of being a mother and the process of becoming one (Pryszmont-Ciesielska 2011). Women experience motherhood at various stages of life and under different circumstances—one of which is during their time as

university students. However, comprehensive and reliable statistics on how many students become pregnant or transition into motherhood are lacking, as such data is considered sensitive. Although the average age at which women become mothers (or parents in general) has risen, a significant number of university students today juggle dual roles: student and parent, with mothers making up the majority.

As Sandra Haugas notes, “One group that has become more visible in many countries is student-parents, i.e., students with dependent children to take care of alongside studies. According to EUROSTUDENT, every 10th student in Europe is a parent” (Haugas 2018: 1). This percentage remained relatively stable between the EUROSTUDENT VI and EUROSTUDENT 8 surveys (Hündlová, Šmídová 2024). Some studies suggest that as many as one in five female students either already has a child or is expecting one (Socha 2017; Rogowska 2007). The findings presented in this study confirm this trend and even indicate a higher percentage—nearly one in three female respondents is a mother.

Student motherhood is a phenomenon that gains significance alongside the increasing number of women pursuing higher education. However, it first and foremost requires social discussion and reflection on improving conditions for those who wish to balance the roles of both student and mother. Choosing motherhood during studies is facilitated by a shift in attitudes toward children, who are no longer seen as an obstacle to continuing education, as well as by the introduction and development of solutions supporting student-parents. Examples of such solutions can be found in the publication *Uczelnia Przyjazna Rodzicom. Podręcznik dobrych praktyk*. Among them are:

- individual organization of studies;
- dean’s leave and the possibility of completing some coursework while on leave;
- the ability to retain student rights during leave from classes, including the right to access certain forms of financial aid;
- social stipends and financial assistance;
- the right to request exam rescheduling (e.g., in the case of childbirth during an exam session);
- the possibility of extending the deadline for submitting a diploma thesis;

- periodic reductions in tuition fees at non-public universities or fees associated with part-time studies;
- opportunities for online study, online support (information, registration, e-consulting, etc.), and an electronic student service system (e.g., e-dean's office);
- nurseries, daycare centers for toddlers and older children, kindergartens, rooms for parents/guardians with children, designated feeding areas, and play spaces at the university;
- building adaptations (e.g., driveways, ramps, elevators, lowered curbs, ground-level entrances, wide entrance doors, and bathrooms adapted to the needs of young children);
- storage rooms for children's strollers and playgrounds;
- availability of family rooms in student housing, adapted to the needs of families;
- appointing individuals responsible for communication between the university and student-parents (e.g., a representative or spokesperson for student-parents);
- social campaigns and programs supporting student-parents;
- integrating the academic environment with students' families (e.g., trips, picnics, tournaments, workshops, balls, Children's Day celebrations, etc.);
- offering free and individualized pedagogical and psychological assistance provided by the university;
- coaching on work-life balance as a personalized form of family support (Dudka, Picuch 2014).

It is also worth mentioning the proposed solutions developed under the *Rodzice na Uniwersytecie* (Parents at the University) project, carried out at the University of Warsaw. The project identified key issues related to access to information, support during and after pregnancy, childcare assistance, and returning to studies. Regarding access to information, emphasis was placed on the need for universities to regularly update knowledge within their human resources and administration departments. This should be achieved through periodic training on the rights and obligations of student-parents. These updates should be reflected in a handbook—regularly revised and widely accessible, including an online version (e.g., as a dedicated section on the university's main website)—containing information about financial aid and leave options for student-parents.

Additionally, it is necessary to create a catalog of best practices in the treatment of student-parents, ensuring structured, standardized, and implementable principles that apply uniformly across universities. This is particularly important in decision-making processes to prevent outcomes from being influenced by subjective interpretation or individual discretion. A good practice in this regard is the appointment of a university coordinator or spokesperson for student-parents. Returning to studies can also be facilitated by introducing a priority system for selecting class schedules, allowing, for example, time for breastfeeding or spending time with children. One specific recommendation is to grant studying parents of young children early access to course registration in USOS (University Study Services System), unlocking it at least six hours before general enrollment (Wieczorek, Schreiber, Krzesicka 2019).

The recommendations developed by Ewa Krause (2023a) for Polish universities on supporting women in pursuing academic careers and balancing multiple roles—some of which may be directly relevant to student-parenthood, particularly for female students with maternity responsibilities—may also be useful. These recommendations include:

1. Assessing student needs in balancing their academic and parenting roles and implementing and developing solutions based on their expectations.
2. Introducing different support measures tailored to the stage of family development and motherhood.
3. Facilitating the exchange of best practices between universities regarding solutions for integrating parenthood with studies.
4. Creating and expanding childcare facilities on university campuses (e.g., nurseries, children's clubs/daycare centers, pre-school facilities, kindergartens, university daycare centers, and play areas);

A very useful solution is creating spaces within the university where a studying mother or parent can leave their child for a few hours. This requires a properly located room equipped with essential facilities and staffed by competent individuals who can care for students' children. Students from education faculties—particularly those specializing in early childhood care, support, and development—could be involved in running such facilities. This solution

offers at least two key benefits: children of studying parents would receive appropriate care during their absence, and students would gain practical experience within their university.

5. Institutional and architectural solutions that support the daily functioning of parents/guardians of young children at universities (e.g., university rooms for parents/guardians with children, elevators, lowered curbs, ground-level entrances, wide entrance doors, and accessible restrooms).

Being a student involves not only learning but also managing various administrative formalities at the university. Offices such as student service centers, dean's offices, and other important departments often operate with limited working days and hours. This often leads to long queues. To address this issue, it would be beneficial to introduce signage indicating priority access for students with children or pregnant students at university offices and service points. Such measures would reinforce the recognition that student-parents are an integral part of academic life and that their presence at the university is both acknowledged and expected.

6. Special/additional financial support for single parents and for children of students who require special assistance or have special educational needs.
7. Possibility of a flexible schedule and class duration depending on the stage of family development/maternity, including:
 - a. guaranteeing class times adapted to the working hours of childcare institutions;
 - b. the option to attend (some) classes remotely;
 - c. in exceptional situations, the possibility of participating in classes with a child at the university.
8. Support for returning to studies after a parental absence, including programs designed to facilitate reintegration.
9. Appointment of a university coordinator for student-parents and/or a spokesperson for student-parents' rights.
10. Implementation of an effective information policy, ensuring full and easily accessible details about student-parents' rights and available support. Ideally, such information should be proactively provided by university authorities.
11. Promotion of equality and anti-discrimination policies, affirmative actions, and positive discrimination initiatives by

university authorities to support female students, including mothers.

12. Campaigns encouraging male involvement in parenthood, including various “soft” promotional activities in the academic community to demonstrate that parenting and household responsibilities are shared by both sexes.
13. Creating an atmosphere of understanding toward pregnant students and those with parental responsibilities, promoting openness, empathy, and kindness.

The latter recommendation is closely tied to the implementation of the above-mentioned measures and is among the most anticipated by women in the academic community (Krause 2023a). Research findings (see: Krause 2019a, 2019b) indicate that the most crucial factor for studying mothers or young parents, in general, is a supportive environment—including within the university itself.

In order to properly design activities that support student motherhood, it is necessary to continuously assess students’ opinions, needs, and expectations in this area. In this context, research interest was directed toward young women studying pedagogy for several reasons: (1) Women consistently constitute the majority of Polish students (see, e.g., GUS 2022, 2023, 2024)—between 2019 and 2022, women accounted for about 63–64% of Polish university graduates (RAD-on 2022a). (2) Pedagogical faculties have the highest percentage of female students—in 2022, almost two-thirds of social sciences students were women, among whom a vast majority (93%) studied pedagogy (RAD-on 2022b). (3) Pedagogy is a branch of social sciences that focuses on education (upbringing and teaching) and activities that support human development at various stages of life. A crucial aspect of this is supporting individuals in fulfilling developmental tasks, one of which is motherhood.

The aim of this article is to present (selected) results of preliminary, pilot research on university solutions that support motherhood during studies from the perspective of women studying pedagogy. Their expectations in this regard are also significant. Janusz Reykowski distinguishes two types of expectations: receptive and functional. The first refers to anticipating or desiring certain (satisfactory) events or opportunities—that is, what an individual expects to receive from their environment. The second is related to an individual’s active

pursuit of fulfilling their desires (see Taradejna 2011). In this study, expectations are considered in the first sense. However, before presenting the research outcomes, the author will outline the study's methodological foundations and provide a profile of the respondents.

Methodological information and characteristics of the studied group

The aim of the research was to understand the perspectives of female pedagogy students on university support systems for motherhood during their studies. The research questions were: *What do female pedagogy students know about the solutions supporting motherhood at their universities, including the types of facilities offered? What expectations do they have regarding these solutions, both currently and in the event of becoming student-mothers?* These questions reflect the diagnostic-exploratory nature of the research. Therefore, research hypotheses were not formulated, as they were not deemed necessary.

The study employed the diagnostic survey method, using a survey technique. The research tools consisted of two separate questionnaires (from two studies), which were completed by a total of 199 female pedagogy students. Both questionnaires had a similar structure and contained closed and semi-open questions (with an option for detailed specification under "other") as well as open-ended questions referring to the identified research problems. The research was conducted at various universities in Poland offering pedagogy programs, making it nationwide in scope. It was carried out online as part of a master's seminar (Survey 1, conducted in 2021) by Anna Podgórska¹ (2021) and a bachelor's seminar (Survey 2, conducted in 2022) by Agata Radecka² (2022). The surveys were created using Google Forms and distributed through Internet forums of public and non-public universities, as well as their social media networks. Below are the characteristics of the studied group from these two surveys.³

1 A graduate of pedagogy (full-time second-degree studies) at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz.

2 A graduate of pedagogy (part-time first-degree studies) at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz.

3 The same characteristics of the studied group were also presented in another article by the author of this article: (see: Krause 2023b).

The first study involved 150 female pedagogy students, of whom more than one-fifth (21.3%—32 women) were mothers. The vast majority (78.7%—118 women) had not yet undertaken motherhood. Most respondents (60.7%—91 women) were aged 20–24, while almost one-fourth (24%—36 women) were 25–29 years old. The remaining participants fell into the following age groups: 30–34 (6%—9 women), 35–39 (4.7%—7 women), under 20 (3.3%—5 women), and 40+ (1.3%—2 women). The vast majority (84.7%—127 women) were enrolled at a public university, while the remaining (15.3%—23 women) attended a non-public university. The majority of respondents studied full-time (64.7%—97 women), while over one-third were part-time students (35.3%—53 women). More than half of the respondents (58.7%—88) women were professionally active. The majority lived in cities (71.3%—107 women), while over one-fourth (28.7%—43 women) lived in rural areas.

The second study involved 49 women, including 31 student-mothers (63.3% of the total female respondents in this study), i.e., more than one-third (36.7%—18 women) were childless. This is likely due to the fact that nearly three-fourths of respondents (73.5%—36 women) were enrolled in part-time studies, while a smaller group (26.5%—13 women) studied full-time. The vast majority (79.6%—39 women) attended a public university, while one-fifth (20.4%—10 women) attended a non-public university. More than one-third (36.8%—18 students) were aged 23–24, while others were 21–22 (18.4%—9 students) and 25–26 (14.3%—7 students). Smaller numbers fell into the 31–32 (8.1%—4 students), 35–36 (6.1%—3 students), and 29–30 (6.1%—3 students) age ranges. The majority (69.5%) were between the ages of 21 and 26. More than half (59.2%—29 students) reported being professionally active. Most respondents (61.2%—30 women) lived in cities, while the remaining (38.8%—19 women) lived in rural areas.

Overall, both groups were similar in terms of the characteristics analyzed. However, two key differences should be noted:

1. Mode of study—in the first study, full-time students predominated, whereas in the second study, part-time students were the majority.
2. Motherhood—in the first study, most women were childless, whereas in the second study, the majority were mothers.

The following section presents selected research findings from studies conducted by Podgórska (Survey 1) and Radecka (Survey 2), which were carried out as part of diploma theses supervised by the author of this article. The obtained results underwent statistical analysis. To characterize the study group and summarize responses to the survey questions, percentages and descriptive statistics (expressed as averages) were used.

Research Results⁴

The findings on whether female pedagogy students are aware of the solutions supporting student motherhood offered by their universities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Awareness of university-provided solutions supporting student motherhood among surveyed female students

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	% of answers	number of answers	% of answers
definitely yes (I know many)	5	3.3	4	8.2
rather yes (I know some)	78	52	27	55.1
I rather don't know any	39	26	6	12.2
I definitely don't know any	21	14	2	4.1
It's difficult/hard to say	7	4.7	10	20.4

Source: Own study based on Podgórska 2021 (Survey 1) and Radecka 2022 (Survey 2).

Analyzing the results of the first survey, it can be noted that more than half of the female respondents (52%) stated that they were somewhat familiar with university solutions supporting student motherhood, while only a small percentage (3.3%) were certain they knew many of them. Overall, a majority (55.3%) responded positively. However, a significant proportion (40%) admitted to having no knowledge of available facilities for pregnant students and student-mothers, with one in seven respondents stating they were completely unaware of them.

⁴ The results of both studies are discussed separately for comparison purposes.

The second survey results similarly showed that most women confirmed awareness of such solutions (63.3%), including more than half (55.1%) who believed they had some knowledge. A key difference between the two studies was the extent of uncertainty—one in five respondents from the second survey reported a lack of knowledge or difficulty in assessing their awareness of university facilities for student-mothers. In total, across both studies, 57.3% of female pedagogy students (114 women) declared knowledge of the support solutions offered by their universities, while the remaining 42.7% (85 women) either reported being unaware or were unsure. A significant proportion of respondents were thus unaware of the support available for student-mothers and pregnant students. This highlights the need for an information campaign on the assistance already provided by universities. More than a quarter of respondents from both surveys (25.6%—51 women) did not know what specific opportunities exist for students who are also parents (see Table 2).

The pedagogy students were therefore asked to indicate the types of facilities supporting motherhood during studies that are available at their universities. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Types of solutions supporting student motherhood offered by the universities of the surveyed female students

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	% of answers	number of answers	% of answers
dean's leave	100	66.7	23	46.9
individual organization of studies	93	62	26	53.1
financial and material assistance (social scholarship, aid)	58	38.7	12	24.5
ability to postpone exam deadlines	40	26.7	22	44.9
the possibility of extending the deadlines for submitting a diploma thesis	30	23.3	17	34.7
ramps for baby strollers and elevators at the university	26	17.3	–	–
family rooms in student housing/dormitories	22	14.7	1	2.0
a designated room for parents/guardians with young children at the university	16	10.7	1	2.0
the option of flexible study, including online learning	15	10	8	16.3

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	% of answers	number of answers	% of answers
e-dean's office/e-student services	12	8	10	20.4
psychological support	12	8	7	14.3
university nursery/daycare center	7	4.7	–	–
university preschool/kindergarten facility	6	4	–	–
a designated space for baby strollers at the university	6	4	–	–
priority signs at the university	3	2	1	2.0
I don't know	38	25.3	13	26.5

Source: Own study based on Podgórska 2021 (Survey 1) and Radecka 2022 (Survey 2). Respondents could select more than one answer.

In the first survey, the most frequently indicated responses among female students were the availability of dean's leave (66.7%) and the option for an individual organization of studies (IOS) (62%). A significant portion also mentioned the possibility of obtaining financial and material assistance (38.7%). More than one-fourth cited the option to postpone exam deadlines (26.7%) and a similar percentage selected the ability to extend the deadline for submitting a thesis (23.3%). A relatively small percentage (17.3%) confirmed that their universities provided basic facilities such as ramps for baby strollers or elevators. The results of the second study indicate that such architectural solutions are often lacking.

Institutional support appears to be available only in certain universities attended by individual respondents, or in some cases, not at all (as suggested by the second survey results). The responses from the second survey also confirmed that the most common forms of support remained the same, though at slightly lower percentages. More than half of the respondents indicated IOS (53.1%), and almost half reported the availability of dean's leave (46.9%). Compared to the first survey, a greater percentage of respondents in the second survey confirmed access to extended exam deadlines (44.9%), extended thesis submission deadlines (34.7%), and online student services (e-dean's office/e-student service office) (20.4%). Some responses varied between the two surveys in terms of percentages—detailed data are presented in Table 2.

According to female pedagogy students, the most commonly offered university support services are dean's leave (selected by 61.8%—123 women across both surveys) and individual organization of studies (IOS) (59.8%—119 women). These are followed by financial and material assistance (35.2%—70 women) and the possibility of postponing exam dates (33.2%—66 women). However, the least frequently available forms of support include priority signs at the university (2%—4 women), designated spaces for baby strollers (3%—6 women), university-affiliated preschools/kindergartens (3%—6 women), and nurseries/daycare centers (3.5%—7 women). According to the surveyed students, universities provide only a small selection of the many possible solutions that could support student parents. It is unfortunate that such basic facilities as dedicated rooms for students with children and building adaptations for baby strollers are relatively rare in the universities surveyed, let alone more extensive support systems. The research results also shed light on a significant issue: the lack of designated spaces on university campuses where students could leave their children during classes.

Before implementing new solutions, universities should first assess which options are most desirable and useful to students—those that are both in high demand and practical for student-parents to utilize. To explore this, female pedagogy students were asked whether they had expectations regarding solutions supporting student motherhood and, if so, what those expectations were. The data on this subject is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Expectations for solutions supporting student motherhood among surveyed female students

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	number of answers	% of answers	number of answers	% of answers
definitely yes	33	22	11	22.4
rather yes	75	50	21	42.9
rather not	20	13.3	7	14.3
definitely not	5	3.4	—	—
difficult to say	17	11.3	10	20.4

Source: Own study based on Podgórska 2021 (Survey 1) and Radecka 2022 (Survey 2).

The majority of pedagogy students expressed having expectations regarding university support for balancing student and motherhood roles—this applies to 72% of respondents in the first survey (including half who indicated they “rather” have such expectations) and 65.3% in the second survey (including 42.9% who “rather” have them). A small percentage of respondents reported having no such expectations—16.7% in the first survey (including 3.4% who definitively do not have them) and 14.3% in the second survey. The remaining respondents found it difficult to determine their stance. In total, 70.3%—140 female pedagogy students from both surveys—answered “yes” to having expectations.

The students were also asked to rank specific solutions (see Table 4) on a scale⁵ from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated that a given solution was not relevant to them, and 5 indicated that it was very important in the context of their expectations regarding university support for student motherhood.

Table 4. Expectations of the surveyed female students regarding university solutions supporting student motherhood

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	average	rank	average	rank
consent to individual organization of studies	4.22	I	3.83	V
understanding and support from academic teachers and other university staff	4.19	II	4.04	II
possibility of extending the deadline for submitting a diploma thesis	3.98	III	3.61	XI
possibility of rescheduling examinations	3.91	IV	4.02	III
option to study online	3.86	V	3.51	XII
ramps for baby strollers and elevators at the university	3.74	VI	3.82	VI–VII
possibility of psychological support	3.29	VII	3.67	IX
a designated room for baby strollers at the university	3.14	VIII	3.45	XV
a room for mothers/parents/carers with children at the university	3.09	IX	3.49	XIII
financial support	3.01	X	3.73	VIII

⁵ Scale: 1–5, where 5 means “definitely yes,” 4 means “rather yes,” 3 means “difficult to say,” 2 means “rather not,” and 1 means “definitely not.”

Answer	Survey 1 (N=150)		Survey 2 (N=49)	
	average	rank	average	rank
priority signs for pregnant students and carers with young children	2.97	XI	3.47	XIV
university pre-school/kindergarten facility	2.87	XII	3.16	XVI
university nursery/daycare center	2.85	XIII	4.53	I
possibility of taking dean's leave	no data		3.96	IV
possibility of using an e-dean's office	no data		3.82	VI
possibility of using family rooms in student housing/dormitory	no data		3.65	X

Source: Own study based on Podgórska 2021 (Survey 1) and Radecka 2022 (Survey 2).

The results of both surveys vary, likely due to differences in the characteristics of the respondents, such as their mode of study and whether they are mothers. In the first survey, the majority of respondents were full-time students who were mostly childless. Their highest expectation was for their university to allow an individual organization of studies (average: 4.22). In the second survey, where part-time students, mostly mothers, dominated, the most important expectation was access to a university nursery/daycare center (average: 4.53). However, this solution was the least expected by respondents in the first survey (average: 2.85).

Both groups ranked their second-highest expectation as the need for student motherhood to be understood and supported by lecturers, academic staff, and university personnel (average: 4.19 and 4.04, respectively). For respondents in the first survey, other highly ranked expectations included the possibility of extending the deadline for submitting a diploma thesis (average: 3.98), rescheduling exams during the session (average: 3.91), studying online (average: 3.86), and adapting university buildings by adding ramps for strollers and elevators (average: 3.74). Expectations that were rated around an average of 3—indicating some uncertainty among respondents—included access to pedagogical and psychological support (3.29), designated spaces for baby strollers at the university (3.14), family rooms for mothers/parents/guardians with children (3.09), financial support (3.01), priority signs for pregnant students and caregivers with young

children (2.97), university pre-school/kindergarten facilities (2.87), and a university nursery/daycare center (2.85).

For respondents in the second survey, additional highly ranked expectations included the possibility of extending exam dates (4.02), taking dean's leave (3.96), individual organization of studies (3.83), access to an e-dean's office (3.82), ramps and elevators for baby strollers at the university (3.65), financial support (3.73), psychological and pedagogical support (3.67), family rooms at student housing (3.82), extending the deadline for thesis completion (3.61), and studying online (3.51). Lower-ranked but still relevant expectations included access to a mother-and-child room at the university (3.49), priority signs for pregnant students and student-mothers (3.47), designated spaces for baby strollers (3.45), and university kindergarten facilities (3.16).

The results from both studies confirm that female pedagogy students have clear expectations regarding support for student motherhood. All proposed solutions were rated at an average of nearly 3 or higher, which indicates that none were considered irrelevant. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide additional suggestions regarding university support for student mothers, but no further proposals were submitted.

Discussion of results

The results of research conducted among the same group of female pedagogy students (see Krause 2023b) indicate that student motherhood is generally perceived positively at their universities. Respondents noted a prevailing favorable attitude among lecturers, academic staff, and fellow students toward both pregnant and mothering students. Despite this, more respondents believe that balancing the roles of both student and mother is difficult rather than easy. The most frequently cited reason for becoming a mother while studying was unplanned pregnancy. This further underscores the need for institutional support—making university assistance vital in this context.

A study conducted by Ewa Krause and Oliwia Herba (2020)⁶ revealed that the majority of surveyed academic youth (61%) reported being unaware of any university-provided support measures for student parents. As the authors point out, these results may reflect two issues: on the one hand, students' low awareness of available support options—leading to their failure to recognize them—and on the other hand, the actual absence or scarcity of institutional support for student parents in universities across the country (Krause, Herba 2020).

The findings presented in this study, however, are more optimistic, as the proportions have shifted: 57.3% of the surveyed female pedagogy students reported being aware of at least some support measures. Nonetheless, a significant number still do not know what solutions exist at their universities, which indicates that the problem of limited awareness persists. By contrast, in the study conducted by Krause and Herba, only 38% of students reported awareness of these options at their universities. The results also show a higher recognition of specific support measures, such as dean's leave (61.8%) and an Individual Study Organization (IOS) (59.8%). Similarly, financial support from the university was acknowledged by a comparable percentage of respondents (35.2% in this study vs. 32% in Krause and Herba's research).

The results of the presented research revealed that the majority of female pedagogy students (70.3%) report having expectations in terms of solutions that support motherhood during their studies. In contrast, studies conducted by Krause and Herba showed that the highest percentage of surveyed academic youth—almost half (44%)—had no clear expectations related to support for student-parents. This suggests that female pedagogy students express a greater need for this type of support. The project entitled: *How Could the University Support Students Having Children During Their Studies and Promote Parenthood? The Student Opinion Survey (Jak Uczelnia mogłaby wspierać studentów mających dzieci podczas studiów i promować rodzicielstwo? Badanie opinii studentów)*,⁷ explored students' opinions

6 This survey was conducted in 2019 among 100 students (aged 19 to 27) from various universities in Poland, using the diagnostic survey method. The vast majority of respondents were women (80%).

7 This research was carried out under the leadership of Emilia Paprzycka by a research team consisting of Martyna Kowalska, Piotr Klimaszewski, Maciej

regarding institutional solutions from universities that could encourage decisions about parenthood during studies. The responses, ranked by frequency, were distributed as follows:

- special dean's leave during which scholarships could be obtained and an individual course of education could be pursued (54.5%);
- nurseries and kindergartens located near or on university premises (42.4%);
- cheaper meals for mothers with children (40.9%);
- a place for preparing/heating children's meals, e.g., in canteens or other designated areas (37.9%);
- elevators and ramps for strollers at the university (34.8%);
- centers for children with babysitters caring for them during the parent's classes (34.8%);
- changing tables in toilets (31.8%);
- guaranteed free places in nurseries (30.3%);
- priority access in deaneries and student service points for young parents and pregnant women (30.3%);
- children's play areas in university buildings, where parents can leave their child in the care of friends while handling formalities (27.3%);
- a specially designated room for mothers or fathers with children (24.2%);
- common rooms for children at the university (22.7%) (Paprzycka 2014).

According to a study presented by Krause and Herba (2020), the most important solution is for the academic community to take an individual approach and consider the specific situations of studying parents (average⁸: 4.18). Nearly as important is receiving permission for an individual organization of studies (4.11) and obtaining material support from the university (4.06). Expectations toward universities regarding solutions that support combining and reconciling studies

Kowalski, and Jakub Iwański. It was conducted in 2014 using a quantitative strategy with a survey method and an online questionnaire. The analysis included responses from 66 students, the vast majority of whom (74.2%) were women.

8 Scale 1–5, where 1 means that the action/solution is not important and 5 means that it is very important.

with motherhood have also been examined individually by Krause.⁹ Student-mothers surveyed by the female author mainly point to the creation of childcare facilities at the university, such as a nursery; financial assistance; and an individual organization of studies that guarantees the possibility of not attending all classes (Krause 2019b).

However, the most important form of support for student-mothers is the ability to follow an individual organization of studies (see Krause 2019b). Studying mothers agree that without this permission, they would not be able to manage both motherhood and academic responsibilities simultaneously. The *Act of 20 July 2018 Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce* (Dz.U. 2018, item 1668, no. 1668) already regulates this by stating that pregnant students and student-parents have the right to study according to an individual organization of studies until completion and to take leave within one year from the child's birth, granted upon request by the studying parent (Dz.U. 2018, item 1668, article 85, points 2, 3, 4).

Thus, IOS appears to be a necessary condition for combining student and parental roles, but it is certainly not sufficient support from the university (Krause 2019b). Research shows that what student-parents particularly value is the kindness and openness of lecturers, university teachers, university authorities, and administrative staff (see: Krause 2019a; Krause, Herba 2020; Bojarska 2014). This is also confirmed by the results of this study, as female pedagogy students expressed similar expectations—considering no solution insignificant.

Conclusions

To summarize the results of this study, it should be noted that the greatest inconvenience for studying mothers, and thus for potential parent-students, is the limited availability of supportive solutions and the persistent lack of awareness on this issue. Universities need to implement an appropriate information policy. A significant number of female respondents are unaware of the solutions available at

9 In the academic year 2017/2018, the author conducted a qualitative study of 10 student-mothers who were in the “study age” (between 19 and 27 years old) and enrolled in full-time studies.

their universities. It is not uncommon for various forms of assistance to be offered, yet students remain uninformed or are not encouraged to take advantage of them. Therefore, it would be advisable to promote such initiatives. Raising awareness among female students about their rights, privileges, and available facilities in higher education institutions would also be highly beneficial.

However, there is undoubtedly a real shortage of necessary support from universities to enable a satisfactory balance between the roles of student and mother. Universities still offer only a small fraction of the solutions needed to support motherhood during studies. Another pressing issue is the absence of designated childcare facilities or spaces on university campuses where students could leave their children during classes. This lack of infrastructure for student-parents, as well as for pregnant students, indicates that they are not recognized as an integral part of academic life, and their presence on campus is not fully accommodated. Additionally, architectural barriers, such as the need to adapt buildings to accommodate students with strollers, remain a concern.

One of the limitations of this study, which prevents the results from being fully representative, is the non-probabilistic selection of the sample—the survey included only female pedagogy students. Therefore, in the author's opinion, these findings should be treated as preliminary (pilot) research, which may serve as a basis for further studies and a starting point for discussions on university solutions supporting student motherhood in Poland. The introduction of such measures could enhance the attractiveness of universities and contribute to increasing enrollment among students who are typically in early adulthood.¹⁰ At this life stage, individuals begin to take on new social roles, one of which is parenthood. A lack of sufficient support for student mothers may lead some young women to postpone their reproductive decisions.

The issues raised are particularly important in the context of pedagogical studies, which are overwhelmingly dominated by women. According to data from GUS (2023), the number of employed pedagogues, as well as graduates and students of pedagogy, is decreasing,

10 See: theories/concepts on the implementation of developmental tasks in early adulthood by Robert J. Havighurst, Erik Erikson, and Daniel Levinson.

and some universities are closing general pedagogical faculties. In 2023, pedagogy and special pedagogy were among the least frequently chosen fields of study (OPERON 2024). During the 2022/23 academic year, students in pedagogical faculties accounted for only 5.9% of the total student population in Poland (GUS 2023). As a result, Poland is currently facing—and will continue to face—significant shortages of pedagogical staff.

Perhaps the solutions presented in this text could be one factor in encouraging more students to pursue pedagogy. The findings of this study may serve as a guide or point of reference for universities in Poland that seek to improve the conditions for students planning parenthood (although unplanned parenthood remains the most common cause of motherhood during studies—see: Krause, Herba 2020; Krause 2023b) or already experiencing it. However, as previously emphasized, it is important to encourage social discussions about student mothers (or student parents in general), conduct regular research on student parenthood, and develop solutions that support young people in fulfilling one of the natural developmental tasks—starting a family. Addressing the discourse on student motherhood and the importance of supporting it in academia is both necessary and beneficial, and the presented findings can contribute to this ongoing conversation.

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