

Mummy's school: An interpretive description of the experiences of mothers as university students

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This study examines the experience of students who are also mothers studying at a regional university campus in Western Australia. This campus has a disproportionate population of mature age women, many of whom are likely to be mothers; however, the actual number of students who are mothers is not known as this demographic is not currently collected by universities. As students who are mothers fit into multiple risk categories, they are at a significantly greater risk of attrition than their school leaver counterparts (White, 2008). Interviews explored the students' experiences, difficulties and interactions with existing support systems; an important initial step for universities and policy makers to make informed decisions which meet their specific needs. Shared difficulties have been identified in the initial data analysis including childcare, study space in the home, financial difficulties, suitability of tutorial times and practicum experiences, being similar to the findings of current international studies (White, 2008; Mainwright & Marandet, 2010; Synnott, 2010; Pare, 2009). Themes have emerged from the initial data analysis from interviews with students who had successfully completed their first year of higher education. These themes to potentially promote success include student expectations of the university experience upon entry, the importance of organisation and planning early in their university experience, and students' ability to engage support from within and outside the institution.