

RISE 2022 Conference Proposal

Title: Empowering Mothers to Pursue their Educational Dreams: Considering the Challenges Faced by Mothers Going Back to College

Abstract: Women going back to college after having children face unique barriers and struggle through different roles as they work toward a better future for themselves and their children. Societal expectations, systemic barriers, and economic instability in addition to time and energy constraints can make the college experience more difficult for women in these situations. The college experience is especially stressful for single mothers, who are shouldering the responsibility of raising their children alone with limited financial resources. This presentation will consider this underserved population in educational systems, as well as create awareness and discuss the importance of advocacy for women who are in college or graduate school while balancing the role of motherhood.

Session Type: Virtual Presentation; 50 minutes

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Description: Mothers in college face specific challenges and barriers which may prevent them from completing their degrees. Due to their multiple responsibilities and roles, mothers going to school often deal with competing identities, societal constraints, and oppressive feelings of guilt vis-à-vis the demands of raising their children. Further exacerbating the pressures these women face, mothers experiencing poverty must balance financial responsibility with structured parenting all the while attending to the demands of academic schedules alongside a fellow student body which does not have to face the same pressures and constraints. In light of the recent overturn of *Roe vs. Wade*, many women are concerned how state legislation will affect their dreams and desires for higher education, while also having to balance competing roles of motherhood. This creates a greater need for conversation as to how colleges and universities can support mothers in need. Mental health professionals and educators are ethically obligated to advocate for disenfranchised and underserved populations, such as women with children who are experiencing poverty and who are in college. As advocates we have the opportunity to empower mothers in college and to constructively shape educational systems so that mothers experiencing poverty in college can receive the assistance and interventions they need to succeed. The learning objectives for this presentation will enable participants to identify the counseling, advocacy, and multicultural competencies related to poverty. The presentation will specifically consider women with children who are experiencing poverty and going back to college. Furthermore, the presentation will underscore the importance of advocating for underserved and disenfranchised client systems, and will consider societal dynamics of domination, power, and privilege.

Presenter Bio: Jennifer Roberts-Carian is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in New Mexico with experience in trauma-informed, relational-cultural therapy. Jennifer has extensive knowledge of interpersonal trauma and the profound impact it has on survivors. In her counseling, Jennifer seeks to empower clients to live courageously while also providing a safe, trusting, and nonjudgmental therapeutic relationship for clients to explore their feelings, behaviors, and social identities. Jennifer's clinical expertise includes working with individuals struggling with a variety of issues to include depression, anxiety, PTSD, personality disorders, substance use disorders, suicidality, self-harming behaviors, and relationship conflicts. Jennifer is currently working on her PhD in Counselor Education at Texas Tech University, where her research interests include rural mental health, rural domestic violence, and ethical care in rural community mental health.

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