

Investigating the Unique Difficulties Single Mothers by Choice Face in Parenting without a Partner

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Abstract: *This study examined the advantages and difficulties experienced by twenty single mothers who make the decision to remain single (SMC) using a qualitative phenomenological method. The difficulties that single mothers encounter have been researched; they will be included in this study along with the advantages that SMC see in this kind of family structure. The research method was semi-structured, in-depth, non-directive interviews. The findings demonstrated that the difficulties encountered by SMCs are similar to those faced by women who become single mothers for other causes. Due to contradictory societal attitudes and the fact that they are the only ones responsible for their child or children, they endure emotional stress. SMCs simultaneously emphasized their independence in making choices and their capacity to maintain harmony in their homes and prevent any disputes with their spouses. The study's findings show that the women's challenges do not become any simpler just because they decide to become single mothers. SMCs are nonetheless able to recognize the advantages of this family structure because to it.*

Keywords: Financial challenges, Emotional support, Stigma and societal judgments

I. INTRODUCTION

This study distinguishes between women who chose to become single mothers and those who became single mothers as a consequence of outside circumstances. The rewards and difficulties that single mothers who choose to be single mothers encounter are the main topics of this study. Modern society has undergone rapid transformations, leading to the rise of different types of homes outside the nuclear family. The following categories are added: same-sex partnerships with or without children; pre-marital or non-marriage cohabiting families; single-person or single-parent households; and purposefully childless couples (Adams, 2010). A substantial rise in divorce rates in the late 20th century led to a more flexible family structure that frequently changes over a child's life cycle (Adams, 2010). (Sahu 2016; Zito 2015). Due to solo parenting, dating, and partnered lives, many born-to-married parents divorce and change families. Numerous children of single, unmarried mothers marry later in life (Zito, 2015). Single-parent families in the West have increased sharply since the mid-1980s. In 2018, 28% of US households were headed by one person, twice as many as in 1960. While women lead most single-parent homes, father-headed families are climbing to 17% (United States Census Bureau, 2018a).

The number of single-parent households in Israel, the study's site, is the lowest in the OECD but rising (Single households in Israel, 2017). Single parents headed 11% of households in 2017, 87% of whom were women and divorced. In recent decades, more single women have headed homes. Unmarried women made up 20% and widows 15.5% (Single Families in Israel, 2017). From 15% in the mid-1990s to 25% in the second part of the 2010s, single parents have increased considerably (Oren, 2018). These rising numbers indicate a major shift in family composition and the need for greater study into this group's cultural beliefs. Single parenting may come from parental separation, divorce, or death, though the latter is rarer. Living without a spouse may also be a life choice. Most single parents in the US are widowed, separated, or divorced mothers. Many of them are vulnerable to economic troubles, stress, and depression due to financial concerns. Single mothers are more likely to be poor and food insecure than married mothers

and earn less. They typically lack cash for their children's and their own education and health insurance (Taylor & Conger, 2017; US Census Bureau, 2018b). Single-parent children have fewer social, emotional, material, and physical resources—often to the point of exhaustion—and more psychiatric issues than two-parent children. Thwala, Ntinda, & Mabuza (2014); Sahu (2016); Pujar (2018); O'Connor, Golding, 1998).

Research Question and Rationale

SMCs' problems and advantages must be understood because to the rising number of single individuals and the practically universal desire to have children. According to my literature assessment, most studies on this issue focused on single mothers' problems rather than SMCs specifically. This study found that SMCs are special in that they choose to become moms. This research will also examine the advantages of being a single mother, a neglected area. This novel study identifies a subgroup of unmarried parents by choice and examines their lifestyle perks and cons. The study draws on a wider study on several aspects of single parenting by choice and references past research on all single parents, regardless of situation. Golombok (2016), Jadva (2009), Mannis (1999), Oren (2018), Weinraub (2002).

Method

In this study, qualitative phenomenology is used. Phenomenological investigations discern phenomena by means of participant experience of the occurrences inside the examined context (Lester, 1999). The current study set out to get a thorough understanding of the advantages and difficulties experienced by SMCs. While there have been many studies on single mothers in the literature, this study is unique in that it attempts to distinguish between the difficulties experienced by single mothers and SMCs according to their particular situations. It was also meant to draw attention to the advantages that SCMs found in being single mothers. Since this particular group has never been the subject of research before, the researcher specifically designed the interview questions for this study. The questions were:

Based on your experience, what are the difficulties of being a single mother?

Based on your experience, what are the advantages of being a single mother?

We collected each participant's narrative of her experience via in-depth, non-directive, semi-structured interviews. In this kind of interview, interviewees may go into more depth and provide examples to support their answers, giving a thorough description of their experiences, emotions, and opinions. Additionally, it provides the researcher with a thorough grasp of the experiences of the respondents, in this instance SMCs, with regard to the drawbacks and advantages of their family structure. In addition to the main interview questions, the participants also received follow-up questions based on their answers. For example, while discussing financial concerns, participants were asked to provide examples, describe their coping mechanisms, and enumerate the people in their support system.

Research Procedure and Ethical Consideration

Before the study, the academic institution's Ethics Committee approved it. The snowball method was employed to contact participants. To examine their experiences in this family arrangement, single mothers who had never married were contacted on social media. Those that agreed to interview contacted more candidates. A woman who agreed to participate was contacted by the researcher. Between January and October 2018, the researcher interviewed graduate students who worked as research associates under her supervision. Most interviews were conducted at participants' residences. Participants were given an informed consent form with study aims, audio recording authorization, and a notice that they might leave the interview at any time. They were informed that this study may be disseminated and that pseudonyms would protect their anonymity. Sound recordings of each 45-70 minute interview were used to construct intelligent verbatim transcripts (Hennink & Weber, 2013). We deleted fillers and repetitions while preserving participants' voices and meanings.

Data Analysis

We first read each interview through to the finish to obtain a general sense of the content. To find distinct themes for each issue, a thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was conducted in compliance with the interview framework. To prove theme reliability, the two investigators individually began searching for direct, visible, systematic, and repeated material. They were able to identify and designate themes that they both agreed upon by comparing their results.

Emotional stress

Almost all of the participants mentioned experiencing emotional stress. As the only guardians of their offspring, single parents needed to be on guard at all times since they were unable to confide in a partner about their fears, doubts, joys,

or experiences in life. The mothers were confident in themselves, but they were worried about how their family arrangement will affect their child's development and mental health. When their kids asked them who their father was, they had to answer them properly. Numerous participants reported persistent issues in maintaining their house independently and coping with financial concerns. As single mothers, their choices for work and money were limited. They found it difficult to handle the numerous essential obligations without a natural partner to split them between them. As a result, they spoke of feeling anxious and alone.

Limited personal freedom

Being completely responsible meant requiring a lot of help, relying on the kindness of friends and family, or having to pay for help. Most of the attendees discussed how crucial it is to plan out every step and consider every aspect in advance. They tended to eschew things they considered non-essential, such as hobbies, socializing with friends, or just relaxing, and to seek support from friends, family, or professionals only when it was really necessary.

II. DISCUSSION

Research explored SMC problems and advantages. This study divides single women who decided to be mothers from those who fell into it. To understand them, semi-structured, open interviews with leading questions were employed. Participants faced emotional stress from single responsibility, worry for their child's development, financial troubles, the need to decrease their own demands, loneliness, and a need for a lot of help from their support network. They highlighted cultural ambivalence despite society's acceptance of diverse families. Other studies showed stigma, chastisement, and neglect. Single mothers, whether by choice or circumstance, exhibit greater stress levels than married mothers, perhaps due to worries about their child's future without a father. As previously stated, the present research participants struggled to explain the fatherless status to their children and safeguard them from teacher and peer insults. Despite their own category, SMCs face many of the same issues as other single mothers. Despite these hurdles, lone parents identified advantages. Lack of a man in their child's life concerned them, yet they saw it as a source of fewer arguments, a calmer home, and making all child-related decisions without discussion. Other SMC researchers found that these mothers prioritize exclusivity in decision-making, which may be connected to competence, initiative, and self-image. These parents prioritized parenting over men. This tendency to not compromise on a spouse may imply confidence in parenting alone. These mothers worry about their children's psychosocial development without a male figure, but SMC youngsters aren't at danger. According to parenting and child outcomes studies, solo motherhood does not affect children's mental health. While two-parent homes are less likely to raise children in poverty (Kramer et al., 2016), single parenting may assist children cope. This is especially true when solo parenting represents an alternative to long-term parental conflict. In Israel, where family life is fundamental to culture and Jewish tradition, Jewish women may perceive the advantages differently. Many single parents feel more accepted than unmarried childless women, therefore the global change in women's standing may help. Many women feel society condemns their family structure, so this comfort is unsettling.

III. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research contributes to the corpus of information regarding single moms by choice's challenges and benefits, but it has limitations. Given the delicate nature of this topic, it is likely that not all respondents fully expressed their genuine views throughout the semi-structured interview. One participant was 70 years old, therefore her replies may differ from the rest of the sample owing to generational gaps. Second, the interviews were done in north Israel, thus generalizations should be made with care. Further research should incorporate demographic data (e.g., kid gender, urban/rural life) and be undertaken in various regions, perhaps yielding different findings. Third, while these women choose to be single moms, their circumstances and their children's may vary if they had a boyfriend. Future study should compare single moms (separated, divorced, and widowed) to SMCs to better understand their differences. However, their honest voices in this study suggest that this is a crucial step in researching the increasing problem of single parenthood by choice.

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