

**The experiences of single mothers and the existing research trends in South
Africa: A rapid review**

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Declaration

I, Pumza Kose, hereby declare that the research title is a result of my own work, unless otherwise stated. I have provided full acknowledgement of the sources referred to in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university



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PERMISSION TO SUBMIT

I, hereby confirm that the mini dissertation titled, “**The experiences of single mothers and the existing research trends in South Africa: A rapid review**”, was completed by Pumza Kose. I herein grant permission that she may submit the research paper for examination purposes. I further confirm that this mini-dissertation is in partial fulfilment of the prerequisites for the degree *Master of Social Science in Counselling Psychology* at the University of the Free State.



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To the One who made the journey possible- God. Throughout this experience, I have found strength and hope through His grace. I have witnessed and felt the transformative power of being led by Him. I will continue to glorify Your Name. (Hallelujah Mdumiseni by lebo Sekgobela was my daily bread).

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and walking with me every step of the way. Even when things didn't go according to plan and I faced challenges from all directions, you remained steadfast. Your selfless mothering has been a true gift. I love you deeply.

Dedication

I dedicate this mini-dissertation to my mother (Nokuzola Sukwana) and my late father (Sonwabo Kose).

Preface

The mini-dissertation consists of three sections:

- Section A: Literature review and overview of the study
- Section B: Manuscript intended for submission to the Marriage and Family Review-Journal.

The manuscript comprises the research aim, the research questions, the methodology, the results and the conclusion. The technical and referencing style of the dissertation will remain consistent throughout this mini-dissertation. The manuscript will be amended for journal publication after feedback is received from the examiners.

- Section C: This section is the critical reflection of the study, which comprises the limitations and strengths, recommendations and future studies, personal reflection and the conclusion of the study.

Editor Declaration



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CERTIFICATE OF COPY-EDITING

**The experiences of single mothers and the existing
research trends in South Africa: A rapid review**

A mini-dissertation

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Disclaimer

I do my best to ensure that all errors relating to language (grammar, punctuation and spelling) and consistency are resolved. The author is responsible for checking the document and accepting or rejecting the suggestions made through track changes. I am not responsible for any copy-editing issues arising from subsequent amendments to the document by the author.

Abstract

This study sought to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in South Africa. The study employed a qualitative research approach using a rapid review design. The research used the SALSA technique as an elaborative methodological process. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using several databases on the EBSCOhost interface, and the keywords were single parenting* or single mothers*, or lone mothers* and South Africa. Nine articles were included for data analysis using thematic data analysis. Four broad themes emerged from the data: trends in research foci on single motherhood in SA, contextual factors related to single mothering in SA, challenges related to single mothering in SA and the South African research landscape on single mothering. The findings indicated an intersection between social class and race in the understanding of single motherhood in SA. Additionally, the results revealed an interplay between single motherhood and the environment. Notably, the results suggested a shift from a negative to a positive conceptualisation of single motherhood, also highlighting the theoretical insights related to the strengths of single motherhood in SA. Finally, the results identified gaps and opportunities for future studies within the scope of single motherhood in SA.

Keywords: Single parenting, single motherhood, single mothering, single mothers, South Africa

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

JB	Joanna Briggs Institute
SA	South Africa
SALSA	Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis

Section A: Literature Review and Overview of the Study

1.1 Introduction

This section provides a review of relevant and recent literature on the conceptualisation of single motherhood, as well as an overview of mothering-related concepts. This is provided as the study sought insight into the existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits, interventions and future research topics on single motherhood in South Africa (herein SA).

Literature constructs single motherhood as a subtype of motherhood; therefore, understanding the conceptualisation of parenting and mothering was prioritised. In addition, exploring and gaining insight into single motherhood was expected to explore the trajectory of research trends on the topic. The research trends guided the focus on existing theories related to single motherhood. The review process further examined the implications of single motherhood, the impact of contextual factors and the understanding of the unique trajectory of single motherhood in SA. The literature review is presented in the subsections outlined in Figure 1.1.

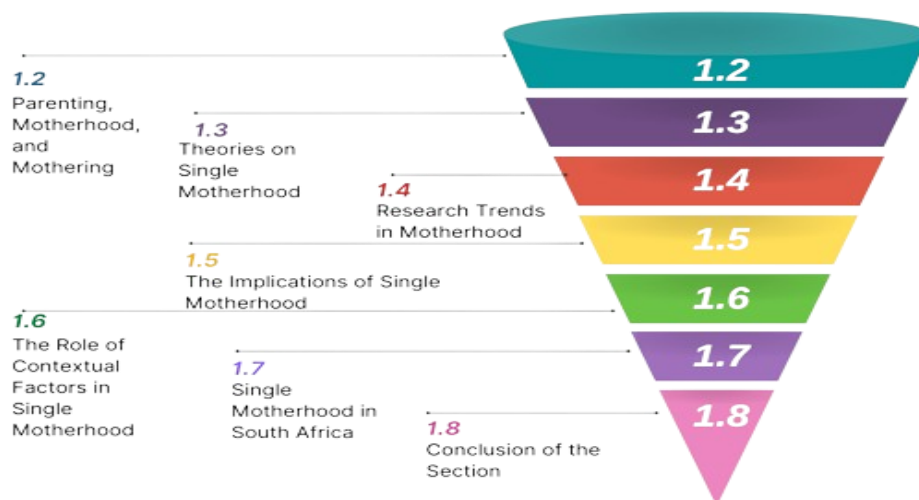


Figure 1.1 Outline of the literature review

1.2 Parenting, Motherhood and Mothering

Parenting is a process of raising a child, which has mostly been based on the relationship between the caregiver and the child (Doinita & Maria, 2015; Hong & Park, 2012); in other words, it is a dynamic *process* rather than a fixed concept. Kotchick and Forehand (2002) defined parenting as a practice influenced by the parent's cultural background, personality, social context and childhood experiences, which impacts the child's adjustment and development. Lee (2023) highlighted that parenting has moved from only focusing on the child to simultaneously focusing on the parent's emotional and behavioural state. This indicates that parenting is more than just attending to the child's needs; it is the overall orientation of the parent's actions and approaches to parenting, implying that parenting is the acquisition of specific skills that assist in effective parenting (Lee, 2023).

Literature illustrates the link between the conceptualisation of parenting and motherhood to the *child's development* (Autret et al., 2023; Sarwar, 2016). Parenting is viewed mainly as a practice that impacts a child's development, and motherhood is a phenomenon that encompasses intrinsic traits that are important for the child's development. Early conceptualisations of motherhood by prominent theorists like Freud (1931), Jung (1936), Erikson (1963) and Bowlby (1978) posed it as an important concept.

Freud approached the view of motherhood as a love object relationship – the mother being the child's first love object and first love experience (Freud, 1931). The object, in this instance, refers to the mother's womb, which is explained as a place of birth, home and safety (Freud, 1931). Jung (1936, p. 99), however, put forward the concept of “collective unconscious” (which is inborn and based on specific behaviours and psyche (instincts) that are similar in every individual) to demonstrate motherhood. Jung (1936) utilised the concept of the collective unconscious to explain archetypes, and one of these archetypes is *the mother* archetype. He referred to the mother archetype in literal (womanhood or motherhood because

of caring for a child or birthing a child) and figurative forms. Laughlin (1968) demonstrated that the collective unconscious of the mother archetype is like a feminine archetype that exerts unconscious qualities that give life, care, nurturance, growth and protection to human life.

Psychoanalytic theorists of child development stress the significant role of the mother in early childhood development (Erikson, 1963; Freud, 1931). According to Erikson (1963), infants learn to trust the environment based on the relationship they have with their mother. Erikson (1963) claimed that mothers instil a sense of trust in their children by responding to their needs. Bowlby (1978) further elucidated the importance of the mother figure by highlighting that the mother figure has a stronger attachment to the infant during the first 12 months. He explicated that the infant's reflexes (sucking, clinging) during this stage bind the mother to the child and serve as a reciprocal dynamic between the two. Jung (1936), however, extended his conceptualisation and viewed motherhood as a collective of qualities that are inborn in every woman regardless of the status of birthing a child. Every woman is a mother, and she plays a significant role in society due to their inborn qualities (Jung, 1936).

Barlow and Chapin (2010) investigated the intersection of *biological and cultural perspectives* in explaining motherhood. For them, motherhood is a biological obligation for every woman. They also acknowledged the cultural components and referred to the responsibility of promoting the child's well-being through nurturing and physical care. In concurrence, Hollway (2016) discussed mothering as a biological process that begins during pregnancy and progresses through postnatal experiences.

Gosselin et al. (2018) approached it differently, viewing motherhood as a significant phenomenon in *the family system*. They posited that "motherhood is an anchor for family life and is grounded in nurturing and protecting children's welfare" (p. 562). Alternatively, Raudasoja et al. (2020) viewed motherhood from a more *holistic developmental perspective*,

with the responsibility of ensuring the functionality of the household and balancing and managing other areas of life.

One form of motherhood, *single motherhood*, has gained more research interest over the decades (Angel & Worobey, 1988; Charlesworth, 1982; Jensen & Sanner, 2021; McAnally et al., 2022). Koops et al. (2021) defined single motherhood as women who do not live with a partner, women who are separated or divorced from their partner or women who lost a partner through death. Like motherhood, single motherhood has been conceptualised and constructed in various ways, including, amongst others, a) voluntarily single motherhood (single mothers by choice) through adoption and or other infertility treatments (García et al., 2020; Jordana-Pröpper, 2013; Trail & Goedeke, 2019), b) lone motherhood with the focus on single mothers as breadwinners (Bravo-Moreno, 2017; Hope et al., 1999) and c) absent father families with no paternal involvement (Jaffee et al., 2001).

According to Barret and Turner (2005), single motherhood can be viewed through the lens of a family structure. Single-mother families encompass a mother with a child or children who are not sharing parental responsibility with a spouse or partner. Considering the concept of family, the White Paper on Families in South Africa differentiates a family from a household (Department of Social Development, 2021). According to the White Paper, a family (which can also be viewed through a single-mother family lens) is a “societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care, or the ties of marriage (civil, customary, or religious), civil union or cohabitation and go beyond a particular physical residence” (Department of Social Development, 2021, p. 191). The White Paper indicates that a female-headed household is where a single female is responsible for meeting the basic needs of the people within the household. Further, it highlights that a household does not always consist of blood relatives but also members who are not related by blood (Department of Social Development, 2021).

In summary, motherhood has been constructed and conceptualised in various ways, from a social identity construct through biological and cultural perspectives (Barlow & Chapin, 2010) to family systems (Gosselin et al., 2018) and instinctual qualities (Jung, 1936). The term mothering seems to be described as the *practice* of motherhood. The portrayed idea of motherhood being a social identity construct may have influenced the construction of single motherhood. Various studies reveal that single mothers experience discrimination and stigmatisation due to their single motherhood identity (Chung & Son, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Although parenting and mothering share commonalities, they cannot be viewed through a universal lens due to the gendered nature of identity construction and the various internal and external factors that influence mothering. These factors include social class, employment status, mental health-related challenges, personality, childhood experiences and supportive structures available.

1.3 Theories on Single Motherhood

Single motherhood has been grounded in several theories. The most prominent are the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a), the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), the life course theory (Elder, 1994), Bourdieu's social theory (1998) and the resilience theory (Masten & Obradović, 2006).

Parenting, motherhood and mothering have mainly been understood from a child's development perspective. Bronfenbrenner (1979b) coined the *ecological systems theory* to explain human development and looked at the child's development through the relational systems lens. He theorised that human development is within complex relationships affected by the environment's interrelated levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). Bronfenbrenner (1986) elucidated that the family is a microsystem, an immediate system that influences human development through processes within the family. These family processes encompass the family's structure, its functioning,

parenting and the child's outcomes (Murray et al., 2001). Furthermore, these family processes are also affected by external systems, implying that changes in the ecological systems will affect the family members' developmental processes. Similarly, Duister's (2021) study explored the contextual influences on family functioning, parenting and child development, focusing on how single mothers navigate the complexities of the family environment through the ecological systems theory lens. They found that the single motherhood status, long working hours, living in a high-crime and impoverished neighbourhood, and unfair resource allocation (e.g., Reconstruction and Development Programme housing and employment opportunities) could influence children's engagement in offending behaviours and affect the experiences of single mothers (Duister, 2021).

The intersectionality theory, coined by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), is based on the intersection of race and sexism, which increases social oppression. It is a feminist theory that investigates social identities influenced by social relations (Shields, 2008). It explains that multiple categories influence women's experiences (Carastathis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989) and challenge how women, social problems and their solutions have been framed over the years (Cho et al., 2013). Through the intersectionality theory lens, single motherhood is examined by considering the intersecting aspects that influence single mothers' experiences (Broussard et al., 2012; Lam et al., 2020). Broussard et al. (2012) and Lam et al. (2020) explored the intersecting complexities of race, gender, ethnicity, social class and other factors that influence single mother's subjective experiences. The intersectionality theory problematises women's gendered experiences by highlighting the importance of their voices in their everyday experiences (Cho et al., 2013).

Malinga (2018) applied the *life course theory* (Elder, 1994) to explore single mothers' experiences and how their early life events impact their current lived experiences. The life course theory focuses on life events, the timing of the events in an individual's life and how

they influence the course of an individual's life, future events and decisions (Heinz et al., 2009). Elder (1994) explained that understanding a person means gaining access to their childhood experiences and historical contexts that have shaped their lives. Apart from exploring life events, Elder (1994) looked at an individual's life trajectory through the social structures that influence the developmental pathways of their life. Through the life course theory lens, Malinga (2018) viewed single motherhood and mothering as predispositions of past experiences influenced by social structures. These past experiences included childhood poverty, neglect and abuse, school drop-out and early unplanned pregnancy (Malinga, 2018).

Bourdieu's social theory could also be used to understand and conceptualise single mothering. This theory is known for the belief that when people share similar interests, qualifications and behaviours, they attain a specific position in society and create a sense of shared identity (Bourdieu, 1998). It explains that social systems have hierarchies sustained by social structures that persist in an oppressive nature and favour the dominant social class. Further, the theory indicates that people are constantly trying to change their social position because they seek to navigate through the social structures that oppress them (Power, 1999). Grant and Geurin's (2019) study was guided by Bourdieu's social theory to investigate how single mothers navigate raising a child while resettling in a new country. The study found that the motherhood identity was classed, which could affect the single mothers' experiences. Due to the single mother's lower social class, they could experience exploitation in the labour market and discrimination in society (Grant & Geurin, 2019).

The resilience theory refers to positive patterns of adaptation despite adverse experiences (Smith et al., 2010). The foundations for resilience are psychological resources (flexible self-concept, autonomy and environmental mastery) and social resources, such as healthy relationships and social support (Smit et al., 2010). According to Masten and Obradović (2006), resilience in the context of a family as a system is the adaptation of the system despite

being threatened by experiences capable of disrupting the system's success. Hitchens and Payne (2017) utilised the resilience theory to understand how single mothers construct their experiences through subjective and structural conditions that shape their lives. Grzankowska et al. (2018) further explored how the resilience theory can be used to understand single mother's job satisfaction. Single mothering can be demanding, particularly for those who are experiencing economic hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017), but through the judgement of risks and positive patterns of adaptation, some single mothers have been seen to be resilient (Rees et al., 2023; Talib et al., 2020).

To summarise, the theoretical lenses utilised to view and guide studies of single motherhood indicate the significance of understanding single mothers' complex experiences and narratives. External systems could affect single mothers, their families and their daily mothering experiences. In addition to examining the external factors influencing single mothers' experiences, single motherhood has also been explored through a strength-based perspective, offering a comprehensive view of single mothers' experiences.

1.4 Research Trends in Motherhood

While there are many trends in motherhood-related research, this subsection highlights the topics most relevant to the current study within the context of SA. These include mothers as breadwinners, delayed motherhood and its course, mothering from afar, mental health-related challenges, social and contextual factors, transgenerational considerations, and research trends on single motherhood specifically.

1.4.1 Mothers as Breadwinners

Mothers as breadwinners is an area that gained more research attention during the 1990s when more mothers entered the workforce (Grbich, 1994; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997).

Maternal employment indicated that existing evidence during the 1960s was mostly centred on societal attitudes towards working mothers, reasons mothers entered the labour force, the

alterations in family relations, and working mothers and childrearing (Siegel & Haas, 1963). The conclusion that mothers are equally equipped to be the breadwinners depicts a deepened conflict between work and mothering (Chesley & Flood, 2017). Chesley and Flood (2017) and Pinho and Gaunt (2021) investigated role-reversed couples where mothers were breadwinners and fathers were the primary carers and the division of childcare and housework management. These studies concluded that house and childcare work was not based on gender-normative family arrangements. Breadwinner mothers did less house and childcare work because of time availability (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021).

Parry and Segalo (2017) examined women as breadwinners in SA from a feminist perspective, emphasising gender inequality. Their study highlighted that women in marriages or cohabitating relationships could still be expected to perform unpaid domestic labour due to their inherited traditional self-sacrifice role.

Latshaw and Hale (2016) explored the time off taken by father carers when mother breadwinners were free from work. The findings indicated that some fathers hand over the house and childcare work when the mother returns from work or is on leave from work. During their time off, they pursue other activities such as taking walks, socialising with friends, checking emails and watching television (Latshaw & Hale, 2016). Supporting this finding, a study in SA indicated that when mothers return home from work, they are likely to continue with childcare and household responsibilities, leaving them with little to no time to themselves (Akinnusi et al., 2018).

1.4.2 Delayed Motherhood and its Course

Delayed motherhood has been a research interest since the 1990s due to the increased number of women choosing to delay motherhood and the risk factors related to late pregnancies (Hansen, 1986; Jansen, 1984). Carolan (2005) demonstrated an association between delayed motherhood and various aspects of adaptation to motherhood. The delayed

motherhood research trend continued to focus more on older mothers' narratives (Shelton & Johnson, 2006) and the implications of mothering during menopause (Dillaway, 2006).

Literature on delayed motherhood and mothering during menopause portrays the idea that age is a contributing factor to how mothers experience motherhood and that mothering can be viewed as a cycle influenced by developmental stages. In conclusion, this means that mothers could be viewed as a social group that shares one common characteristic: motherhood; however, motherhood should be understood from a diverse perspective given the influence of demographics, social class, developmental phases and experiences, to name a few.

1.4.3 Mothering from Afar

Internal and external factors could influence the experiences of mothering. Mothering from afar refers to when a mother leaves her child/children for a relatively long duration in the care of another adult and continues with mothering outside the proximity of the child/children (Plummer, 2023). A study on mothering from afar utilised a feminist methodology to explore how non-custodian mothers navigate motherhood (Bemiller, 2010). The study indicated mixed results, where some mothers experienced feelings of guilt for not conforming to the ideology that motherhood means being in the same proximity with your children, nurturing, selflessness and prioritising the needs of the child/children. On the other hand, some mothers accepted their role as non-custodian mothers due to having supportive networks and other sources that provided fulfilment, such as their occupation (Bemiller, 2010). Mothering from afar has also been analysed through the narratives of non-custodian mothers with intellectual disabilities and their experiences of motherhood (Mayes & Llewellyn, 2012).

Some mothers immigrate to a different country to better their socioeconomic status, leaving their children in their country of origin (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). This reality has altered the organisational arrangements, meanings and priorities of motherhood. A review on transnational mothering indicated a gap between how mothering is constructed and

how mothering from afar has been scripted as negative. The review concluded that the body of knowledge is more focused on bridging the gap by bringing evidence on how mothers create their meanings of mothering and giving rise to creating new stories and reframing mothering (Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2018).

1.4.4 Motherhood and Mental Health-Related Challenges

Literature highlights the association between motherhood and mental health-related challenges (Garland & Meinersmann, 2023; Klausen et al., 2016; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). World Health Organization (2024) revealed that about 20 per cent of mothers in developing countries experience postpartum depression. Research in SA has focused on interventions to reduce peripartum depression (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2023) and provide support for mothers at risk of mental illnesses, substance abuse and physiological illness due to poverty (Suchman et al., 2020).

Silverman et al. (2022) contributed to the discussion on maternal mental health in SA by identifying factors that exacerbate the condition. The authors argued that socioeconomic stressors and preexisting mental disorders prior to motherhood could worsen maternal mental health. Schmied et al. (2013) identified additional factors that could worsen maternal mental health, including low social support, unwanted pregnancy and unhealthy partner relationships. Further, the method of childbirth has been linked to maternal mental health, with complicated deliveries, such as unplanned caesarean and vaginal instrumental, associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety (Dekel et al., 2019; Skov et al., 2022).

Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2017) illustrated how using social media to gain feedback on mothering could influence the development of depressive symptoms in mothers. Suchman et al.'s (2020) study confirmed that evidence-based parenting interventions are beneficial to not only the child's development but also the mother's functioning. The study revealed that

parenting interventions could improve maternal mental health, further improving mothers' perceptions of their relationship with their children.

1.4.5 Motherhood and HIV/AIDS

SA has a high HIV/AIDS prevalence (South African Government, 2024). Given this reality, substantial interest has been given to motherhood and HIV/AIDS as it is among the factors that influence motherhood and mothering experiences. Moshoeshoe and Madiba (2021) focused on mothering experiences after mothers received an HIV/AIDS diagnosis of themselves and that of their children. They found that mothering a child with HIV could be coupled with thoughts of death, self-blame and negative emotions like guilt, excessive worry and anxiety. The study further indicated that time could enable mothers to process and accept their HIV status as part of their reality.

Allen et al. (2014) showed the interplay between psychological functioning, parenting and children's behavioural outcomes of mothers with HIV/AIDS. HIV-positive adolescent mothers could face intersecting challenges, such as the experience of learning about their unplanned pregnancy and HIV status simultaneously and the influence of their HIV status on future fertility decisions (Josephine, 2019). The scope of HIV/AIDS and motherhood can suggest that the meanings and experiences of mothering are complex and vary significantly due to the different social issues experienced by mothers.

1.4.6 Transgenerational Considerations

Mothering has been explored from the standpoints of mothers and from those who are mothered (Spjeldnæs, 2013). Spjeldnæs (2013) found that adolescents understood mothering in terms of guidance, mothers being modelling figures and space of trust. Jacobs and Andrews (2021) investigated the narratives of adolescents raised by single mothers, and East et al. (2017) explored how males who grow up in a single-mother household construct motherhood.

In addition to discussing those mothered, Brown (2017) argued that the experience of being mothered could significantly impact individuals in their roles as mothers. She expounded that how one is mothered could directly affect how one will mother. The study, utilising the intergenerational parenting lens, concluded that mothers employed reflexivity to become aware of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours around mothering. Reflexivity enabled them to enact changes to their mothering, become intentional in their mothering and understand mothering as a subjective experience influenced by various factors (Brown, 2017).

1.4.7 Current Research Trends on Single Motherhood

The first research trend to discuss is *the comparison of single mothers to mothers living with partners*. To gain more perspective on single motherhood, a comparative study evaluated how institutional and cultural contexts could shape the life satisfaction of single mothers and mothers living with partners (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). Both García et al. (2020) and Pollmann-Schult's (2018) studies compared mothers living with partners and single mothers. The studies indicated that single mothers and mothers living with partners could show minimal difference when it comes to experiences, especially when single mothers have supportive family-related structures.

Secondly, a number of studies focusing on *the impact of contextual factors* have been traced. This includes, for example, single motherhood and immigration (Lam et al., 2020), the economic experiences and coping strategies of single mothers living in poverty (Matsai & Raniga, 2021), and the relationship between single motherhood and child mortality (Clark & Hamplová, 2013). Thirdly, *social support and single motherhood* is a trending theme in literature based on SA. Widan and Greef (2019) evaluated aspects of social support that influence the adaptation of single-mother families. They indicated that single mothers could rely on close friends and family for social support, which becomes the source of emotional

support, socialising, and giving and receiving advice. Coert et al. (2021) showed the association between parental efficacy and social support for single adolescent mothers in low socioeconomic communities. The study suggested that when single adolescent mothers have at least one family member with whom they have a strong emotional bond, they could experience positive emotions, enhancing their psychological well-being and, in turn, their parental efficacy (Coert et al., 2021).

Fourthly, more studies are exploring *single motherhood by choice* (Chasson & Taubman–Ben-Ari, 2021; Volgsten & Schmidt, 2019; Werner et al., 2021). Chasson and Taubman–Ben-Ari (2021) and Volgsten and Schmidt (2019) highlighted the theme of financial stability and middle-aged single motherhood by choice. Chasson and Taubman (2021) further indicated that economic stability, middle age and being a single mother by choice could contribute to personal growth. Lastly, a review study highlighted interest in *social support and internal resources contributing to single mothers' well-being* (Taylor & Conger, 2017). The study further reviewed how social support and internal resources positively influence single mothers' parenting and how these indicators could be used to formulate interventions for single mothers to foster social support and strengthen internal resources for single mothers (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

In summary, by only mentioning a few trends, the foci of research in the field can be identified as mothering in relation to global issues (HIV/AIDS, mental health-related issues, poverty, violence and migration). Further, there are trends highlighting single mothers by choice and how their economic stability influences their experiences. There is also a focus on viewing single motherhood from the strength-based perspective to foster interventions for single mothers. The reviewed studies indicated that distinct dynamics influence motherhood, affecting how meanings and realities are constructed and leading to a diverse understanding of motherhood.

1.5 The Implications of Single Motherhood

The implications portrayed in research on single motherhood include the challenges and benefits or rewards of single motherhood. The themes related to the challenges of single motherhood are mostly economic constraints (Flatø et al., 2017), financial implications of social support (Radey & McWey, 2021), difficulties adjusting as an immigrant single mother (Lam et al., 2020), and stress and mental health challenges (Kühn et al., 2023). From a strength-based perspective, the themes include the ability to initiate and utilise coping methods (Grant & Guerin, 2019; Ramos & Tus, 2020), resilience (Grzankowska et al., 2018), single motherhood being liberating (Meler, 2016), single mothers living beyond their circumstances (Jacobs, 2023; Long et al., 2019) and single mothers empowering themselves through education (Geiger, 2023; Taylor & Conger, 2017).

1.5.1 The Complexities of Economic Vulnerabilities and Single Mothering

According to Flatø et al. (2017), female-headed homes are economically more vulnerable due to climate change. The economic vulnerabilities are mostly due to increased food prices, job losses and limited social networks that could boost female-headed families' socioeconomic status (Flatø et al., 2017). The single mothers in Malinga's (2018) study were more susceptible to contracting HIV due to having multiple sexual partners for monetary gain and remaining in relationships with intimate partner violence for food security. Related to the economic vulnerabilities that most single mothers encounter, Radey and McWey's (2021) longitudinal study highlighted a reciprocal expectation of social support. This means that these networks could burden single mothers who cannot meet the reciprocal demands of an informal support network. Ramos and Tus (2020) also demonstrated that single mothers could experience financial difficulties, parental stress and loneliness. The economic challenges faced by single mothers are one of the strongest motivators for single mothers from Africa to immigrate abroad to seek economic stability (Lam et al., 2020). Lam et al.

(2020) also highlighted that single mothers could experience challenges in adapting to Western parenting models, finding good employment and acculturation when settling abroad.

1.5.2 Single Motherhood and Mental Health-Related Challenges

The landscape on the scope of single motherhood in a review study revealed an increased risk of internalising disorders and poverty and the utilisation of mental health services (Neises & Grüneberg, 2005). A review by Rousou et al. (2013) elucidated that single mothers are not necessarily significantly inclined to psychological distress due to their personal attributes. However, their distress could be closely linked to their exposure to stressors like financial difficulties and lack of social support. Literature has highlighted the complex impact of social support on single mothers, showing a direct link to single mothers' mental well-being and mental health challenges (Kato et al., 2021). Kato et al. (2021) found that single mothers who did not live with their parents and lacked support from their parents could be predisposed to severe psychological distress like depression. Single mothers are more prone to engage in excessive smoking and drinking as a form of coping than single mothers who live with and have their parents' support (Kato et al., 2021). Bilszta et al. (2008) contended a significant association between a lack of social support and depressive symptoms in single mothers, especially during the postpartum period. Benuyenah and Tran (2021) further highlighted that the lack of economic and social support for single mothers could negatively impact their mental health. In addition, single motherhood due to separation from a partner indicated a significant connection with depressive symptoms (Kühn et al., 2023).

Single motherhood status has been linked to marginalisation, which could cause psychological distress for single mothers (Chung & Son, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Chung and Son (2022) indicated that single mothers could hide their single-mother status to avoid experiencing direct stigmatisation, which had persistent effects of social isolation, feelings of guilt and low social participation. Marginalisation has been highlighted as a risk factor that

increases the probability of mental health issues (Sturgeon, 2012). According to Berryhill and Durtschi (2016), the high-stress levels experienced by single mothers when raising children in the early childhood phase could be due to work-family conflict, parental involvement and the child's temperaments.

1.5.3. Single Motherhood from a Strength-based Perspective

Meler's (2016) perspective on single motherhood emphasised the shift from a deficit-based to a strength-based view. According to Meler's (2016) study, single mothers from Palestine believed their lives to be more liberal. Single motherhood enabled mothers to have an independent voice and oppose some oppressive traditions imposed on them, their children and how they parent their children.

Grzankowska et al. (2018) depicted single mothers' resilience as a quality and coping strategy similar to mothers living with partners. According to Ramos and Tus (2020), when single mothers face challenges, they use their faith, social support and positive self-talk to cope. In addition, mothers who have immigrated abroad indicated that their motherhood status was a strength that enabled them to resist structures that hindered participation and disempowered them (Grant & Guerin, 2019). Grant and Guerin (2019, p. 590) found that single mothers have "determination, eagerness to learn, hopes and dreams for themselves and their children, and sense of responsibility despite the existence of limited access to capital resources".

Single mothers who lived under the poverty line reported having found methods to cope with their day-to-day experiences (Broussard et al., 2012). These encompassed using their signature strengths, humour, therapy, creative work and spirituality to reform hope and engaging in physical activity and volunteer work (Broussard et al., 2012). In addition, Long et al. (2019) contend that single mothers could utilise their leisure time to journal and listen to music for emotional wellness and improve their hygiene and nutrition for physical wellness.

The low-economic status of many single-mother households could have negative implications for their children's academic, emotional and social development (Jacobs, 2023). However, Jacobs (2023) found that the single mother's use of authoritative parenting styles (responsive, open communication and setting limits) could secure the mother-and-child relationship, which is deemed important to nurture the child's academic development.

Research in a region of SA on the strengths and coping methods of single mothers revealed that single mothers who experienced economic hardships relied on family support, engaged in open economic opportunities and formed social networks to cope with motherhood and other responsibilities (Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014). A study examining single-mother immigrants from Zimbabwe working as domestic workers in SA revealed that, despite facing significant challenges due to limited resources, these mothers developed various coping strategies. They coped through acceptance of their current living situation, crying and listening to music, and exceeding all expectations to provide a better upbringing for their children (Johnson, 2022). Raniga (2022a) also highlighted that single mothers could interpret the means of exceeding all expectations for their children as a coping method because it gives them feelings of accomplishment and success. Strauss (2011) argued that the single mother identity could liberate mothers as they pride themselves on being their family's breadwinner and sole decision-maker. Strauss (2011) further highlighted that the resilience factors in single-mother families include income, higher level of education, positive social support, effective problem-solving communication, spirituality, religion and reframing how problems are viewed.

Geiger (2023) and Lashley (2014) revealed that single mothers who pursued their bachelor studies to alleviate poverty experienced the journey from a strength-based stance. Their academic journey improved their self-confidence, which strengthened their resilience, improved their relationship with their children and increased their optimism for the future

(Geiger, 2023; Lashley, 2014). Single mothers with higher optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem could be less inclined to experience internalising problems and more inclined to have positive mothering experiences (Taylor & Conger, 2017).

In conclusion, the degree of challenges experienced by single mothers is directly linked to contextual factors. Further, social support, positive views of experiences, internal sources and empowerment through academia contribute to single mothers' resilience.

1.6 The Role of Contextual Factors in Single Motherhood

This section offers contextual factors from the standpoint of single motherhood, including the economic constraints experienced by single mothers and the complexities of the sociohistorical context and single motherhood.

1.6.1 Economic Constraints and Single Motherhood

The economic difficulties experienced by many single mothers influence their reliance on their parents for financial assistance, parenting their children, and emotional and psychological support (Folorunsho & Tanga, 2021). According to Maharaj and Dunn (2022), unemployment is a concern for most single mothers due to low educational attainment and the inability to afford childcare so they can work. Contrastingly, employed single mothers may experience difficulty fulfilling their parental roles due to limited time with their children (Ramos & Tus, 2020). The employment vs unemployment debate indicates that most single mothers rely on unpaid social support (friends, family and religious communities) to cope and adapt (Widan & Greef, 2019). In addition, single mothers who earn above-average minimal wages and retain a higher socioeconomic status need to rely more on paid support to maintain a comfortable life for themselves and their children (Raniga et al., 2019). Single mothers' socioeconomic status influences the provision of basic needs for their children and the lifestyle they will lead (Ahiaku & Ajani, 2022).

1.6.2 Sociohistorical Context and Single Motherhood

Childhood experiences and sociocultural factors are predisposing factors to some experiences that single mothers encounter (Malinga, 2018). Koops et al. (2021) contended a link between low parental socioeconomic status and the likelihood of their children experiencing their first conception as single mothers. Single motherhood could be considered a social norm in communities of low socioeconomic status, making their children more inclined to be single mothers. Malinga (2018) substantiated this by indicating that poverty during childhood is one of the predisposing factors to single motherhood. Hitchens and Payne (2017) also stated that the childhood experiences of single mothers could influence how they interpret motherhood and relationships with men. In addition to the low socioeconomic status of most single mothers, the institutional, cultural and policy contexts could impact single mother's life satisfaction (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). Pollmann-Schult (2018, p. 2078) put forward that "generous family benefits, extensive childcare provision, and high levels of gender equality are associated with smaller disparities in life satisfaction between single mothers and other women". In summary, intergenerational influences and political reform may influence and affect how the realities of single motherhood are constructed.

1.7 Single Motherhood in South Africa

The statistical release of Census 2022 indicated that more than 49,6 per cent of households were headed by women. Further, 50,2 per cent of households relied on social grants as their primary income (Statistics South Africa, 2022a).

1.7.1 Research Foci of Single Motherhood in South Africa

Single motherhood in SA can be traced back to the Apartheid era when men migrated to urbanised areas for employment while women were left behind in rural areas to care for the children (Moore, 2013). Research on single motherhood in SA has been based on, amongst other foci, unemployment (Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014), the link between lower social class and

single motherhood (Raniga, 2022a), single motherhood not through birth (Mtshali, 2015) and the involuntary status of single motherhood (Wright et al., 2013). Other studies include the correlation between literacy level and single motherhood (Raniga et al., 2019), the challenges of single motherhood (De Wet-Billings, 2022; Mudau et al., 2018), labelling and stigmatisation (Walker et al., 2017), coping and resilience (Johnson, 2022; Strauss, 2011), the positive impact of social support (Coert et al., 2021; Widan & Greef, 2019) and limited scope on intervention (Matjeke & Van Dyk, 2019).

Research on single motherhood in SA is broad. The reviewed studies show a mixed trajectory on the scope of single motherhood. This includes the influence of contextual factors, diverse definitions of single motherhood, challenges, positive aspects and the need for more interventions. Consequently, the primary objective of this study was to rapidly review the experiences of single mothers and the existing research trends in SA.

1.7.2 Single Motherhood Prevalence in South Africa

Research has shown that social and economic challenges may disproportionately affect single mothers, particularly in SA. The contributing factors include high divorce rates, separation from a partner, high male mortality, late marriage and partner abandonment, which tend to increase the prevalence of single motherhood (Adesokan & Makura, 2020; Wright et al., 2013). In 2017, Statistics South Africa reported that 71,3 per cent of female-headed households were supported by child social support grants (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Provinces where social grants were more prevalent than salaries included the Eastern Cape (62,9 per cent), Mpumalanga (62,4 per cent), Limpopo (62,2 per cent), the Free State (61,3 per cent) and North West (53,4 per cent) (Statistics South Africa, 2022a). Statistics South Africa (2022a) further revealed that female-headed households were more likely to benefit from state-subsidised housing as they are part of the vulnerable group.

According to Statistics South Africa (2022b), almost half of the households in SA are female-headed, and these households are more common in provinces with large rural areas, such as KwaZulu-Natal (53,1 per cent) and the Eastern Cape (51,9 per cent). Statistics South Africa (2023) reveals that there have not been significant changes in the demographic composition of households in SA, with female-headed households maintaining a substantial presence at (42,3 per cent).

It is important to note that female-headed households do not automatically equate to single motherhood. According to the definition in the White paper on families in SA, a female-headed household is characterised as a single female responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of individuals within the household (Department of Social Development, 2021). Arguably, Statistics South Africa (2023) shows that there is a substantial proportion of children residing with only their mothers (45,5 per cent). Further, the concept of single motherhood in SA encompasses a situation where grandmothers assume the role of a primary caregiver (Msthal, 2015) due to the high unemployment rate and the high rate of orphans, which was 11,6 per cent in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). In summary, these statistics signal one of the distinct factors in SA that may infer the research foci of single motherhood. This recognition emphasized the need to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA to generate more comprehensive interpretations and conclusions. This review aims to add to the area of single motherhood by evaluating the extent to which the South African contextual factors have shaped the research findings, theoretical frameworks, and interpretations within the studies analysed in this review.

1.8 Literature Review Conclusion

This literature review introduced the conceptualisations of parenting, motherhood, mothering and single motherhood from historical and diverse perspectives. It reviewed existing knowledge relevant to the current study, covering the theoretical frameworks,

research trends, and both deficit and strength-based perspectives on single motherhood. Additionally, the literature search examined the role of contextual factors and provided insights into single motherhood within the context of SA.

The following section details how the problem in the current study was identified by describing the context of single motherhood and the gap this study sought to address. Based on the problem statement, a specific aim and research questions were developed, guiding the literature search and research methodology. A qualitative rapid review approach, employing the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis) technique as a method of data collection and thematic analysis, was selected as the appropriate methodological procedure. The section concludes with the principles that guided the methodological approach.

1.9 The Problem Statement

Single motherhood is a global phenomenon with diverse implications. Literature reveals a significant shift in family structures to, amongst others, female-headed homes (Jensen & Sanner, 2021; McAnally et al., 2022). In SA, where the family structures are often fluid and non-traditional (Department of Social Development, 2021), single mothers face unique challenges shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. According to Statistics South Africa (2023), approximately 45, 5 per cent of children live in a single-mother household.

While there is a growing body of research on single motherhood in SA, there is a need for a nuanced understanding of single motherhood in SA. The reviewed literature has shown how intersecting factors, such as employment, social class, childhood experiences, region, developmental outcomes of a child and educational background, influence single motherhood and mothering. Various research angles and approaches for single motherhood encompass the deficits and strength-based perspective, the diverse construction of single motherhood and single mothering, and the theories used to conceptualise single motherhood.

A comprehensive review of literature is needed to provide an empirical snapshot of the current research foci of single motherhood in SA. Therefore, this research sought to review the existing trends, challenges, needs, benefits, interventions and future research topics related to single motherhood in SA literature.

1.10 Research Aim and Research Questions

This study aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA.

1.10.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the study's aim:

1. What are the existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions regarding single motherhood in SA, as indicated in published literature between 2015 and 2023?
2. Based on the findings of research question 1, what future research topics can be suggested to fill the possible gaps in the literature on the scope of single motherhood in SA?

1.11 Methodology

1.11.1 Introduction

This study utilised a qualitative research approach in the form of a rapid review design (Booth et al., 2021). This design was chosen as it best fit the research aim of reviewing existing literature on single motherhood in SA.

1.11.2 Research Design

There are different forms of reviews, including rapid reviews, scoping reviews and systematic reviews. According to Khangura et al. (2012, p. 1), a rapid review is a “streamlined approach to synthesize evidence”. Furthermore, a qualitative rapid review is a process of reviewing qualitative studies (Sutton et al., 2019). According to Booth et al. (2021), a rapid review identifies and synthesises existing literature on a specific topic. A

systematic review is a rigorous method that requires a comprehensive search and synthesis of evidence to address a structured question (Wollscheid & Tripney, 2021). The primary objective of systematic reviews is to synthesize clear and reliable conclusions regarding available evidence on a specific topic (Sutton et al., 2019). A fundamental principle of this approach is to prevent knowledge misrepresentation by employing a structured and transparent methodology. While systemic reviews are known for their methodological rigor, coherence, and transparency, the process often requires extensive resources and is time-intensive (Sutton et al., 2019).

A scoping review, another form of a review, is a method that aims to present an overview of a body of literature on a broad topic without synthesising the evidence of various studies (Brien et al., 2010). According to Munn et al. (2018), scoping reviews provide insight into the types of evidence available to inform practice within a field and highlight the methodologies employed in the research. The primary objective of scoping reviews is to identify and comprehensively map existing evidence.

According to Sutton et al. (2019), the efficiency of rapid reviews has increased over time, with its value being a pragmatic approach utilised to synthesise findings on a specific topic of interest. The advantage of a rapid review design is that it is a rigorous method for searching, assessing and synthesising literature to produce results (Sutton et al., 2019). It is essential to highlight that a rapid review is a “limited examination of quality and risk of bias, and the omission of literature such as unpublished pilot studies, difficult-to-obtain material and/ or foreign language studies” (Varker et al., 2015, p. 1199). Therefore, a rapid review design was selected for this study due to the limited literature search and retrieval of literature. The review guided the search for empirical evidence on single motherhood, including only readily accessible peer-reviewed literature published in English between 2015-2023. The search was further limited to studies conducted within the geographical context of SA, with the potential

for findings to be transferable to similar contexts. This review was employed to address the research questions, generate interpretations and conclusions on single motherhood and emphasize the need for further research in this area.

The retrieved data was appraised, synthesised and analysed. This process guided the current study in identifying relevant studies that answer the research questions based on the existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits, interventions and future research topics regarding single motherhood.

1.11.3 Method of Data Collection

The SALSA technique was utilised to expand and elaborate the study's methodological process (Booth et al., 2021). The literature search was conducted through databases (Academic Search Ultimate, Africa-Wide information, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, E-Journals, Humanities Sources Ultimate, Sociology Source Ultimate and CINAHL with Full Text), after which the studies were appraised for relevance and rigour. This was followed by extracting the main findings of the studies, and the data collection method concluded with a thematic analysis of the studies to answer the research questions.

Step One: Search

The researcher met with a librarian on the 12th of April, 2023 to brainstorm appropriate keywords for the search based on the study's aim, identify the most appropriate electronic databases to find data and formulate inclusion and exclusion criteria to confine the search. Given the large body of knowledge on single motherhood, the search keywords were formulated to restrict the search. Firstly, the keywords included parentheses such as asterisks to define the search (Dobbins, 2017). The keywords were single parenting* or single mothers* or lone mothers* and South Africa. Secondly, the EBSCOhost interface was utilised, which includes the above-mentioned databases. Lastly, the inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in English, qualitative studies with single mothers in SA as participants

and studies published from 2015 to 2023. The exclusion criteria were dissertations, theses, research reports, quantitative and mixed methods studies, chapters from textbooks and qualitative studies that do not exclusively include single mothers in SA as participants, and studies published before 2015.

The researcher, the research supervisor and the librarian participated in the search to ensure its rigour. Google Scholar was utilised as a database for hand-searching relevant articles to add and supplement the search. Dobbins (2017) and Varker et al. (2015) contend that a thorough search strategy ensures a comprehensive search for recent and relevant literature and more accurate findings. Dobbins (2017) highlights the importance of documenting the search. The researcher employed the strategy of using file folders on the desktop to manage the search. When the search process was exhausted, the researcher continued to appraise the studies.

Step Two: Appraisal

The appraisal process means screening and assessing the quality of an article and whether it should be included or excluded in the data analysis (du Toit & de Kerk, 2022; Varker et al., 2015). To assess eligibility, the researcher reviewed the title, abstract, research methodology and participant's characteristics. When an article was unclear, the research supervisor became a second reviewer. Varker et al. (2015, p. 1201) refer to "inter-rater reliability", where a second reviewer reviews articles to determine any discrepancies and whether an article should be included.

"Critical appraisal is the process of assessing the quality of study methods to determine if findings are trustworthy and meaningful" (Dobbins, 2017, p. 17). Using desktop file folders, 152 articles were identified using the search keywords. Further, 50 articles were deemed relevant to answering the research questions, and nine articles were included in the study for thematic analysis. The researcher engaged the Joanna Briggs Institute (herein JBI) Critical

Appraisal checklist for qualitative research (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017) (Appendix B).

The checklist focuses on the study's methodology, results, discussion and conclusion section to assess its trustworthiness and rigour. Using this checklist, nine studies were deemed trustworthy to be included in the study, and they were synthesised and analysed.

Step Three: Synthesis

According to Dobbins (2017, p. 18), the goal of synthesising “is to conclude what is known about the practice question in the literature”. From the conclusion based on the appraised articles, the articles that were included were synthesised using data extraction. This extraction encompassed the relevant details of the articles (author and date), aims/objectives, research methods (research approach and design, sampling method and data collection method), participants' characteristics, primary findings and conclusions (Varker et al., 2015).

Step Four: Data Analysis

The conclusion of the critical appraisal and synthesis process meant the data collection process was complete. From there, data analysis proceeded. Thematic data analysis was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), thematic data analysis follows a six-step process, which entails “[f]amiliarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report”. In step one, the researcher read literature on single motherhood. From the reviewed literature on single motherhood and the defined research questions, a coding register was developed. The researcher then actively engaged with the participant articles by reading and rereading them. Interesting ideas were noted and examined for connections between the data and the reviewed literature (Braun et al., 2019).

Braun and Clarke (2006) follow a coding stage in step two. During this stage, the researcher used the ATLAS.ti scientific software for data analysis and identified codes by looking at the key features and ideas depicted in the data to answer the research questions.

The researcher looked at each article's findings and arguments and assigned labels to the text (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Furthermore, codes that were similar in meaning were merged into one code.

Searching for themes in step three meant the researcher evaluated the patterns, connections and shared meaning across the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher looked for closely related codes and grouped them into what the ATLAS.ti refers to as Code Groups. From these groups, the researcher further looked into the connections between the Code Groups and merged specific themes. Upon conclusion of the discussion with the research supervisor, the researcher revisited stages 2 and 3 as Braun et al. (2019) highlighted that thematic analysis is not linear. The researcher reverted to the literature review, research questions and the code register to generate new codes. The number of generated codes was 482. Further, the researcher categorised the generated codes into 22 Code Groups (Appendix C). This process was guided by the amount of evidence to build an argument based on the concepts that answered the research questions (Braun et al., 2019). After the initial themes were developed from the 22 Code Groups, the researcher looked at the patterns and connections of the initial themes and grouped them under preliminary themes, which narrated a coherent story of the data about the research questions (Braun et al., 2019).

Five preliminary themes were developed. The researcher and the research supervisor reviewed these preliminary themes and subthemes using thematic mapping (visually looking at the preliminary themes and subthemes) (Braun et al., 2019). During the discussion, one broad theme was identified as needing strong evidence to be a broad theme and was merged under another theme as a sub-theme. Therefore, four preliminary themes were constructed.

To ensure the rigour of the data analysis process, the researcher read through the extracts under all the codes to check whether the code's names were meaningful, if the codes belonged under a certain sub-theme and that each broad theme answered the research

questions. According to Clarke et al. (2015), naming and defining themes and subthemes to formulate comprehensive themes and subthemes that align with this study's aim and research questions is a critical process. This continuous process entailed frequent consultations between the researcher and the research supervisor to conclude on the themes and subthemes. The final themes are (1) trends in research foci on single motherhood in SA, (2) contextual factors related to single mothering in SA, (3) challenges related to single mothering in SA, and (4) the South African research landscape on single mothering.

1.12 Ethical Considerations

The researcher applied for ethical clearance to conduct the study through the University of the Free State's Research Information Management System. The General/Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance on the 27th of September, 2023, with clearance number UFS-HSD2023/1073. This study used existing literature for data collection and did not involve human participants, thereby posing minimal risk of possible harm. In 2022, the researcher completed the Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation online course. The researcher followed Wager and Wiffen's (2011) ethical principles for conducting a rapid review and took care to adhere to the APA 7th edition referencing style and avoid plagiarism.

1.13 Trustworthiness

To ensure the study's trustworthiness and rigour, the researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2013) suggest various techniques to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of a qualitative study. These include triangulation, peer review, external audits, member checking, noting researcher bias and prolonged engagement, among others.

Credibility

Curtin and Fossey (2007) state various ways to ensure a study's credibility, including investigator triangulation. The researcher, research supervisor and librarian participated in the data search. Ensuring the search was exhausted meant prolonged engagement with literature on single motherhood and immersion in the literature (Haq et al., 2023). The data was checked to ensure it met the inclusion criteria. The researcher further used the JBI (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017) to ensure the quality of the chosen articles. The research supervisor guided the data analysis process, which involved developing a code register, analysing the first two studies together, and frequently discussing the codes and themes, including ongoing consultation for naming, defining and reporting themes.

Transferability

In qualitative research, the aim is not for the study's replicability to ensure its rigour but for the applicability of patterns and descriptions of one context to another context (Haq et al., 2023). The participant articles included a data set representing the larger population of single mothers in SA, which portrayed the circumstances of some single mothers in various studies (Haq et al., 2023). The study's limitations were highlighted to ensure transferability.

Dependability

Dependability is ensured by documenting how findings were obtained, which involves detailed documentation of the research methodology (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher used the SALSA approach (Booth et al., 2021) as the data collection method. To further optimise dependability and reliance of the process, ATLAS.ti scientific data analysis software was used, and the thematic data analysis process was fully documented.

Confirmability

Since research supervision implies peer debriefing (Guba, 1981), frequent consultation and feedback from the research supervisor served as a scrutiny of the expert's analysis and

feedback. Because the research was under supervision, this expanded the rigour of how the findings were presented and the researcher's interpretation of the data through reflexivity (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Qualitative methodology is grounded on subjectivity rather than objectivity; therefore, research is subject to researcher bias (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Morrow (2005) argues that to manage the goal of the research's subjectivity, the researcher should make their assumptions and biases overt through reflexivity. Reflexivity on my positionality, how this may have influenced the research process, and monitoring the influence of my values and passion in the research process was done. To further ensure confirmability, two participant articles were analysed jointly with the research supervisor to mitigate the researcher's potential biases. Frequent consultation with the research supervisor also ensured the accuracy of data analysis, and there was an ongoing review of the presentation of the data to maintain precision.

1.14 Conclusion

In this chapter, the literature review for this study was presented, showing the conceptualisation of parenting, motherhood and mothering. In so doing, literature was reviewed on the existing knowledge based on this study's focus area. The literature review was based on the most prominent theories that guide studies on single motherhood, various research trends in motherhood-related studies, the challenges and benefits of single motherhood, contextual factors that influence single motherhood, and single motherhood in the South African context.

The chapter further discussed the study's research methodology. The research methodology of this study was qualitative research, which was deemed suitable for the research aim and questions. The section detailed the qualitative rapid research design, which was a rigorous method to search and present final findings. The SALSA method for data collection and analysis was documented, including the study's ethical considerations.

1.15 References

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Section B: Manuscript

The section contains the manuscript intended for submission to the Marriage and Family Review-Journal. Please see **Appendix D** for the journal's guidelines to authors.

Authors: Kose, P and Nel, L

Abstract

This study aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in South Africa. The investigation involved a qualitative research approach in the form of a rapid review design. Data collection primarily utilised the SALSA technique to expand and elaborate the study's methodological process. The literature search was conducted using several databases on the EBSCOhost interface, and the keywords were single parenting* or single mothers* or lone mothers* and South Africa. Four broad themes emerged: the trends in research focused on single motherhood in South Africa (SA), contextual factors related to single mothering in SA, challenges related to single mothering in SA, and the South African research landscape on single mothering. The finding indicated an intersectional perspective on single motherhood, highlighting the interplay between environment and single motherhood, a positive re-conceptualisation of single motherhood, theoretical insights into the strengths of single mothers, and the gaps and opportunities for future research within the scope of single motherhood in SA.

Keywords: single motherhood, single mothering, single mother, South Africa

1

¹ This manuscript is intended for submission to the Marriage and Family Review-Journal. However, it is currently not formatted in accordance with the journal's submission guidelines.

2.1. Introduction

Literature emphasises the complex relationship between parenting, motherhood and child development (Autret et al., 2023; Sarwar, 2016). Parenting is primarily seen as a practice that impacts child development, while motherhood encompasses intrinsic traits vital for the child's development. Single motherhood as a form of motherhood has emerged as a significant research interest over the decades (Angel & Worobey, 1988; Charlesworth, 1982; Jensen & Sanner, 2021; McAnally et al., 2022). Koops et al. (2021) defined single motherhood as the state of women living independently of a partner due to separation, divorce or bereavement. Like motherhood, single motherhood has been conceptualised and constructed in various ways, including, amongst others, a) voluntarily single motherhood (single mothers by choice) through adoption and or other infertility treatments available (García et al., 2020; Jordana-Pröpper, 2013; Trail & Goedeke, 2019), b) lone motherhood with the focus of single mothers as breadwinners (Bravo-Moreno, 2017; Hope et al., 1999) and c) absent father families with no paternal involvement (Jaffee et al., 2001).

Barret and Turner (2005) viewed single motherhood through the lens of a family structure, defining it as a mother raising a child/children without a partner. Research trends include comparisons of single mothers to mothers living with partners and examining how institutional and cultural contexts affect life satisfaction (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). García et al. (2020) and Pollmann-Schult (2018) compared mothers living with partners and single mothers, while others investigated contextual factors impacting single mothers, such as immigration (Lam et al., 2020), economic challenges (Matsai & Raniga, 2021) and child mortality (Clark & Hamplová, 2013).

Social support, a trending theme in studies based in SA, influences the adaptation of single-mother families (Widan & Greef, 2019). Taylor and Conger (2017) further highlighted that social support and internal resources could enhance single mothers' well-being and their

parenting style, informing potential interventions. While single motherhood presents challenges, including economic vulnerability linked to climate change (Flatø et al., 2017) and increased health risk (Malinga, 2018), it can also foster resilience and coping strategies (Grzankowska et al., 2018; Johnson, 2022). Therefore, Meler (2016) advocated shifting the perspectives toward a strength-based view of single motherhood.

Raniga and Ngcobo (2014) showed that single mothers often rely on family support and social networks to navigate their challenges. Despite adversities, many single mothers exhibit resilience through positive coping mechanisms like faith and community support (Ramos & Tus, 2020). Single mother's personal attributes could mitigate psychological distress, emphasising the importance of social support in maintaining mental health (Kato et al., 2021; Rousou et al., 2013).

Single motherhood status has been linked to marginalisation, which could cause psychological distress for single mothers (Chung & Son, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Chung and Son (2022) indicated that single mothers concealed their single-mother status to avoid experiencing direct stigmatisation, which had persistent effects of social isolation, feelings of guilt and low social participation.

Studies indicated that social and economic challenges may disproportionately affect single mothers, particularly in SA, where factors like high divorce rates, separation from a partner, high male mortality, late marriage and partner abandonment contribute to the prevalence of single motherhood (Adesokan & Makura, 2020; Wright et al., 2013). Data from 2022 showed that nearly half of the households in SA are female-headed, with significant proportions relying on government support grants (Statistics South Africa; 2022a). Further, Statistics South Africa (2022b) indicated that female-headed households were more common in provinces with large rural areas, such as KwaZulu-Natal (53,1 per cent) and the Eastern Cape (51,9 per cent). Statistics South Africa (2023) reveals that there have not been significant

changes in the demographic composition of households in SA, with female-headed households maintaining a substantial presence at (42,3 per cent).

It is important to note that the presence of female-headed households does not automatically equate to single motherhood. According to the definition in the White paper on families in SA, a female-headed household is characterised as a single female responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of individuals within the household (Department of Social Development, 2021). Arguably, Statistics South Africa (2023) shows that there is a substantial proportion of children residing with only their mothers (45,5 per cent). Furthermore, the concept of single motherhood in SA encompasses situations where grandmothers assume the role of a primary caregiver (Msthal, 2015) due to the high unemployment rate and the high rate of orphans, which was 11,6 per cent in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

The South African demographic emphasises the need for a review of single motherhood literature. Literature has shown how intersecting factors, such as employment, social class, childhood experiences, region, developmental outcomes of a child and educational background, influence single motherhood and mothering. There are also various angles and approaches in research on single motherhood, which encompasses the deficits and strength-based perspective, the diverse construction of single motherhood and single mothering, and theories used to conceptualise single motherhood. Therefore, a comprehensive review of literature is needed to provide an empirical snapshot of the current research foci of single motherhood in SA. This research sought to review the existing trends, challenges, needs, benefits, interventions and future research topics in literature on single motherhood in SA. This study aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA. The following research questions were devised: What are the existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions regarding single motherhood in SA, as indicated in

published literature between 2015 and 2023? Based on the findings of research question 1, what future research topics can be suggested to fill the possible gaps in the literature on the scope of single motherhood in SA?

2.2.Methodology

2.2.1. *Research Design*

The current study utilised a qualitative research approach in the form of a rapid review design (Booth et al., 2021) as it best fit the research aim of reviewing existing literature on single motherhood in SA. According to Booth et al. (2021), a rapid review identifies and synthesises existing literature on a specific topic. The advantage of a rapid review design is that it is a rigorous method for searching, assessing and synthesising literature to produce results (Sutton et al., 2019). Also, a rapid review is a brief evaluation of quality, increasing the risk of potential bias, which may exclude certain literature, including unpublished pilot studies, hard-to-obtain material, and/ or foreign language studies (Varker et al., 2015, p. 1199).

A rapid review design was selected for this study due to the limited literature search and retrieval of literature. The review guided the search for empirical evidence on single motherhood, including only readily accessible peer-reviewed literature published in English between 2015-2023. The search was further limited to studies conducted within the geographical context of SA, with the potential for findings to be transferable to similar contexts. This review was employed to address the research questions, generate interpretations and conclusions on single motherhood and emphasize the need for future research in this area.

2.2.2. *Data Collection*

The SALSA technique was utilised to expand and elaborate the study's methodological process (Booth et al., 2021). A search was conducted using the EBSCOhost interface, which

includes the databases Academic Search Ultimate, Africa-Wide information, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, E-Journals, Humanities Sources Ultimate, Sociology Source Ultimate and CINAHL with Full Text. Google Scholar was utilised for hand-searching relevant articles to add and supplement the search. Given the large body of knowledge on single motherhood, search keywords were formulated to restrict the search. The keywords, which included parentheses like asterisks to define the search (Dobbins, 2017), were single parenting* or single mothers* or lone mothers* and South Africa. The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in English, qualitative studies with single mothers in SA as participants and studies published from 2015 to 2023. The exclusion criteria encompassed dissertations, theses, research reports, quantitative and mixed methods studies, chapters from textbooks, qualitative studies that do not exclusively include single mothers in SA as participants and studies published before 2015.

The appraisal process means screening and assessing the quality of an article and whether it should be included or excluded in the data analysis (du Toit & de Kerk, 2022; Varker et al., 2015). Each article's eligibility was assessed by reviewing the title, abstract, research methodology and the sample participants' characteristics. The process of "inter-rater reliability" (Varker et al., 2015, p. 1201) was utilised. A second reviewer reviewed potential articles to determine any discrepancies and whether they should be included.

One hundred and fifty-two articles were identified using the search keywords, of which 50 were deemed relevant, and nine were included for thematic analysis. The researchers engaged the Joanna Briggs Institute (herein JBI) Critical Appraisal checklist for qualitative research (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017). Critical appraisal involves evaluating the quality of the research methods to ascertain if the findings are trustworthy (Dobbins, 2017, p. 17). The checklist focuses on the study's methodology, results, discussion and conclusion to assess its

trustworthiness and rigour. Using this checklist, nine studies deemed trustworthy to be included in the study were further synthesised and analysed.

According to Dobbins (2017, p. 18), synthesising “conclude[s] what is known about the practice question in the literature”. The nine articles were synthesised using data extraction. This extraction, provided in Table 2.1, encompassed the relevant details of the articles (author and date), aims/objectives, research methods (research approach and design, sampling method and data collection method), participants’ characteristics, primary findings and conclusions (Varker et al., 2015).

Table 2.1 Data extraction table

Author and Date	Aims/Objectives	Methods	Characteristics of Participants	Main Findings	Conclusions
Article (A) 1 Koketso et al., 2019	“To explore the perspectives of single mothers on the socio-emotional and economic influence of ‘absent fathers’ in child’s life at a rural community.” (p. 2)	Qualitative approach Multiple case study design Purposive sampling Semi-structured interviews	Single mothers Bona fide members of a rural community Residing in a rural community	Father absenteeism hurts the child’s life. Children often experience a sense of loneliness and feelings of stress. Single mothers are confronted with insufficient funds, unemployment and poverty.	The father’s absence does more harm to the family. How fatherhood is defined determines whether or not the father will be involved. Various factors influence fatherhood; therefore, the concept and importance of fatherhood should be redefined.
A2 Majola et al., 2023	“To provide insights into childcare and migration among low-income mothers who have moved from a rural to an urban area.” (p. 95)	Qualitative approach In-depth face-to-face interviews Purposive sampling	Single, separated, divorced or widowed mothers. Age range from 27 to 50 years old Migrated with young children from a rural area to an urban township Employed	The mothers had migrated to an urban township to find employment and improve their livelihoods. The mothers faced the challenge of securing affordable, conducive and safe childcare facilities. The mothers experienced difficulties with balancing mothering and employment. The mothers decided to migrate with their children for better living arrangements and service delivery- even though they experienced worry about not having extended family for support.	There is an association between mothers entering the labour market and childcare facilities. Low-cost childcare facilities for migrant mothers should be provided so that mothers can secure employment and improve their livelihood. Supporting mothers who migrate is paramount for societal development. Migration secures employment, improves the family's living conditions and provides autonomy and decision-making, which has inward rewards such as improved self-confidence.
A3 Mkhize & Msomi, 2016	“To establish how mothers constructed their careers and coped with the dual responsibility as single mothers and wage earners.” (p. 326)	Qualitative approach. Narrative inquiry framework Purposive and snowball sampling Interview schedule	African single mothers Never been married Employed in informal or formal work. Aged 26 - 52 years. Each participant had between one to four children.	Single mothers' construction of the meaning of work and career was influenced by their profession. The mothers faced challenges of insufficient funds, simultaneously playing the role of mother and father, balancing multiple roles, and having insufficient family time due to long working hours.	Theories of career and work need to be viewed differently when dealing with working South African single mothers. The career and work needs of African single mothers are affected by systemic issues and residual effects of the Apartheid regime. There is a need for educational and work programmes that will assist single mothers so that they can participate meaningfully in their social life.

				The mothers expressed the need for emotional, psychological and socioeconomic support. Some of the mothers received support from neighbours and family members.	
A4 Newlin, 2017	“To explain perceptions upheld by community members of Queenstown about the behaviour of children raised by single mothers. Propose suggestions that could be adopted by the community and the government to help such households to raise responsible children.” (p. 170)	Qualitative approach Phenomenological design Purposive sampling Face-to-face interviews and narratives.	Single motherhood by choice, through the death of a spouse, divorce or separation, partner abandonment, unintentional pregnancy	Single mothers experienced negative perceptions about themselves and their children. The mothers experienced name-calling. Some mothers experienced negative feelings and a degree of feeling liberated about their single motherhood status The mothers highlighted that they must be treated equally and require the child social grant to be reviewed.	Children raised by single mothers are considered problematic and a threat to social order. The concept of single mother-headed homes is not readily accepted by society. Understanding factors leading to single motherhood can aid in appropriate supportive measures for them. The government and society should assist single mothers on how to raise their children.
A5 Raniga & Mthembu, 2017	“Explore the factors that contribute to resilience in single mothers. Gain an insight into the impact of social ties in their daily lives. Explore how established networks beyond their immediate community enhance family resilience. Explore suggestions for transformative action.” (p. 280)	Qualitative approach Descriptive study Purposive sampling Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups	Single mothers Heads of their households Have dependent children Depend on social grants as the primary source of income	The single mothers had positive attitudes, a sense of hope, locus of control, and the ability to use relationships and support structures. The mothers made means to rise above harsh economic conditions by seeking part-time jobs or engaging in economic activities. Informal social support networks were significant structures for the mothers.	Single mothers are optimistic and motivated to break out of poverty. Family problems cannot be resolved by the government; however, they require resilience and willingness from the family.
A6 Raniga, 2022b	“To provide a safe platform for women to share their personal life experiences while raising their political consciousness about the correlates of poverty, gender relations, and economic experiences.” (p. 7)	Qualitative approach Feminist design Snowball sampling Two in-depth interviews	Single mothers with children Heading their homes Been in informal employment for a minimum of two years	Single mothers must work long hours and adhere to mothering and household duties. Childcare duties hindered socioeconomic development. Difficulties in balancing entrepreneurial activities and mothering.	Single mothers working in the informal sector is expected due to high unemployment and gender inequality. Working in the second economy is a survivalist activity that is dependent on resources and connections in society. Policymakers need to alter systems to reduce gender inequality.

				Income from informal work is insufficient to sustain monthly expenses due to irregular incomes. Systemic issues influence single mothers' economic and career development. The single mothers strived to overcome the confines of the second economy.	Policies should be established to assist single mothers in sustaining their livelihood through self-employment.
A7 van der Riet et al., 2020	"To illustrate the experiences of student mothers living with, and away from, their children." (p. 726)	Qualitative approach Exploratory design Purposive, convenient and snowball sampling Focus groups and individual interviews	Unmarried student mothers Single mothers Postgraduate and undergraduate students Some mothers lived in student accommodation and others lived with their children	The student and mother discourse indicated that student mothers experienced challenges juggling school, mothering and parenting from afar. Mothers who did not live with their children coped better with their studies. Motherhood was justified as a motivator for academic achievement. These mothers experienced internalised guilt for not being responsive to all their children's needs. The mothers had internalised the belief that they deserve punitive measures for being mothers while still in university. The internalised stigma hindered the mothers' ability to voice out their challenges and seek support.	Being a mother while in university comes with internalised beliefs of failure in being a good daughter. These mothers suppress their needs and do not seek help because of their internalised guilt and shame. There is a need for inclusive measures to promote the retention of student mothers and the completion of their studies.
A8 van Schalkwyk, 2021	"To explore the experiences of mothers who are suffering from substance problems, heads of their families, and residing in a Western Cape high-risk community in South Africa." (p. 281)	Qualitative approach Phenomenological design and descriptive design World café method and in-depth interviews Purposive sampling	Single mothers Heading their homes Mothers with substance problems South African citizens Residing in Delft or their children schooling in a school in Delft Mothers who could converse in English or Afrikaans	Single mothers' past and traumatic experiences increased their susceptibility to substance abuse. The mothers' substance abuse problems impacted their mothering and their children. The mothers attended workshops to better their health and parenting. Mothers provided information support to their children about safety. Some mothers received support from their neighbours and their children's school personnel.	The mothers suffered from both hostile environments and substance problems. Mothers' familial situations predispose them to their mothering, which may be a generational cycle in the family. Although mothers struggled with substance abuse problems, they had positive characteristics that contributed to the family. There is a need to develop and evaluate a wellness programme for mothers living in high-risk communities.

				Mothers had to deal with the challenges of living in a high-risk community and ensuring the safety of their children.	
A9 Mbanjwa & Harvey, 2023	“Explore the lived experiences of single mothers raising a child with a disability in South Africa.” (p. 1)	Qualitative approach Exploratory interpretive design Purposive sampling In-depth online interviews	Single mothers raising a child/ren with disability between the ages of 7 and 18 years	Single mothers experienced raising a child with a disability as extremely expensive. Single mothers experienced financial constraints. The mother’s relationships with the fathers of the children dissolved after being confronted with the knowledge of the child’s disability. Some mothers received support from family members, while others were rejected by their families. The mothers conceptualised their motherhood differently. The level of acceptance of the children’s disability varied as some mothers still struggled with accepting their child’s disability. The same mothers demonstrated resilience.	Single mothers experienced multi-level strain from raising a child with a disability. There is a need for psychosocial support within the community for these mothers. Understanding the needs of single mothers may establish support that will equip them with the knowledge to accommodate themselves and their children better.

2.2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), thematic data analysis follows six steps, which entail “[f]amiliarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report”. In step one, the researchers read literature on single motherhood. Using the ATLAS.ti scientific software for data analysis, 482 codes were generated. Further, the codes were categorised into 22 Code Groups.

Five preliminary themes were developed. After discussions between the researchers, four broad themes were constructed. According to Clarke et al. (2015), naming and defining themes and subthemes to formulate comprehensive themes and subthemes that align with the study’s aim and research questions is a critical process. Therefore, the final broad themes were: (1) trends in research foci on single motherhood in SA, (2) contextual factors related to single mothering in SA, (3) challenges related to single mothering in SA and (4) the South African research landscape on single mothering.

2.2.4. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this study included seeking permission to conduct the study by applying for ethical clearance. The General/Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Free State granted ethical clearance on the 27th of September, 2023, with clearance number UFS-HSD2023/1073. This study used existing literature for data collection and did not involve human participants, thereby posing minimal risk of possible harm. This study was also guided by Wager and Wiffen’s (2011) ethical principles for conducting a rapid review, ensuring adherence to ethical standards throughout this research. In addition, this study maintained compliance with the APA 7th edition citation guidelines and avoided plagiarism.

2.2.5. Trustworthiness

To ensure the study's trustworthiness and rigour, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were adhered to. The investigator triangulation process was utilised to ensure credibility (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). There was a prolonged engagement with literature on single motherhood and immersion in the literature (Haq et al., 2023). The included data was checked through frequent consultations and discussions between the researchers and using the JBI checklist (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017) to ensure it met the inclusion criteria.

To ensure transferability, the participant articles included a data set representing the larger population of single mothers in SA, which portrayed the circumstances of some single mothers in various studies (Haq et al., 2023). Further, dependability was ensured by documenting the research methodology process (Ahmed, 2024). The SALSA approach was utilised as the data collection method, which was rigorously, logically and well-documented. The ATLAS.ti scientific data analysis software and the thematic data analysis process were documented to ensure the result's dependability.

Frequent discussions between the researchers served as a scrutiny of the expert's analysis and feedback (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). Qualitative methodology is grounded on subjectivity rather than objectivity; therefore, research is subject to researcher bias. Morrow (2005) argues that to manage the goal of the subjectivity of the research, the researcher should make their assumptions and biases overt through reflexivity.

2.3. Results

This section is arranged according to the presentation of the broad themes and subthemes. Each theme (as it relates to a research question) is visually illustrated and supported using direct quotations from the participating articles. The study's research questions were: What are the existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions regarding single

motherhood in SA, as indicated in published literature between 2015 and 2023? Based on the findings of research question 1, what future research topics can be suggested to fill the possible gaps in the literature on the scope of single motherhood in SA?

2.3.1. *The Broad Themes and Subthemes*



Figure 2.1 Four broad themes identified from literature on single motherhood in South Africa (SA)

Subthemes were allocated to each of the broad themes illustrated in Figure 2.1:

Theme 1: Trends in Research Foci on Single Motherhood in SA

- Father Absence
- Stigma and Discrimination
- Characteristics of Single Mothers
- Social Support
- Employment and Motherhood

Theme 2: Contextual Factors Related to Single Mothering in SA

- Systemic Issues
- Sociohistorical Context

Theme 3: Challenges Related to Single Mothering in SA

- Economic Challenges
- Educational Facilities
- Interpersonal Issues

- Internalised Negative Emotions
- Fundamental Reform Needed

Theme 4: The South African Research Landscape on Single Mothering

- The Conceptualisation of Single Motherhood
- Methodological Processes
- Research Gaps and Opportunities

2.3.1.1. Theme One: Trends in Research Foci on Single Motherhood in SA



Figure 2.2 Theme one and subthemes

The data analysis suggested a deductive argument that provided the most likely associations with single motherhood. Generally, the studies on single mothers are mostly interrelated with the dynamics of low-income households and communities, poverty, race, social support, historical systemic influences and structural issues. The process of reviewing the research available, as part of the screening for this study, showed that research on single motherhood in SA tends to focus on the implications of father absence, stigma and discrimination, the characteristics of single mothers, support systems, family adaptation processes and the complexities of work. Furthermore, career and professional development

remain a popular research focus (Figure 2.2). The screening process also yielded a shift from merely focusing on the difficulties and challenges to a focus on single mothers' strengths and resilience.

The most prominent of these topics are presented in the following sections.

2.3.1.1.1. Father Absence

The synthesised data indicates that single motherhood research is closely associated with the negative impact and perception of absent fathers. Mostly, it refers to absent fatherhood as a negative contributor to family structures and increasing stigmatisation and discrimination against single mothers. According to A1 (p. 1), *“the absence of father in child’s life is a challenge in South Africa which is often related to family dysfunction and leads to other social problems”*. The synthesised data also indicated the importance and relevance of the father’s role. Studies highlight the potential negative outcomes for children and the burden this places on the mother. A3 (p. 336) explained that *“the absence of a father figure in the household posed a challenge; this proved more so in the raising of male children, who needed a male role model. In African families, the children take their identity (surname) from the father’s side.”* Furthermore, the financial impact of absent fathers received regular attention. According to A6 (p. 11) *“All the participants in this study were single mothers and were taking care of school-going children with no financial contribution from the biological fathers.”* Similarly, A1 (p. 1) demonstrated that *“the absence of the father leaves a gap in meeting the basic needs of the children as their single mothers’ struggle to put food on the table on their own and at times as they are having no one to help them, they are not able to meet all the family needs”*.

2.3.1.1.2. Stigma and Discrimination

Referring to articles A4, A6, A7 and A9, stigmatisation, discrimination and marginalisation remain a popular lens through which single motherhood studies are conducted. The target of these negative attitudes is usually because of age, pregnancy outside marriage, absent father households and the child's functioning ability. Studies using this lens showed the lack of acceptance and social cohesion of single-mother families, mainly due to negative public perceptions. In terms of age and pregnancy, there is a notion of young motherhood warranting societal punishment through stigma and discrimination. A4 (p. 725) highlighted that *"the visibility of (an illegitimate) pregnancy makes the transgression public and sets up the conditions for shame, an internalised reaction to the stigma"*.

Some studies implied that the stigmatisation of single motherhood is due to the intersection of single motherhood and other factors like having a child with a disability. In A7 (p. 5), it is stated that *"mothers of children with a disability can experience courtesy stigma; their status in society is primarily defined through their children's disability"*. On some occasions, stigmatisation translated to discrimination like name-calling and possible marginalisation. South African studies show that single motherhood (as a social identity) has not fully been accepted by society. A4 (p. 178) argue that

"Such perceptions stemmed from the fact that the society had not really accepted the single mothers who are seen as rebelling against the social norm of that a family should have a male adult for it to be complete. The study has reached the conclusion that despite having a widespread increase across the globe in the number of single mothers heading families, it is still difficult for society to accept them."

2.3.1.1.3. Characteristics of Single Mothers

Another popular focus of South African research includes single mothers' characteristics that enable them to cope. Here, we have mostly seen the mothers' sense of acceptance of their status and optimism for the future as coping mechanisms. Single mothers' positivity about their future was shown in A5 (p. 283), with the authors stating that *"a highlight of this study was that single mothers had shown a sense of optimism, hope, and faith in their future despite their daily hardships"*.

Studies highlighting single motherhood as a strength showed that their desire and motivation to improve themselves and their families were clear. A8 (p. 298) put it like this: *"It seems that motherhood and the desire for effective mothering could hold a key to the strengthening of these households."*

These characteristics illustrate the importance of single mothers' ability to help themselves rather than their overreliance on external interventions. A5 (p. 283) contended that,

"[T]he empirical evidence shows that the complexity of family problems, which is elusive given the multicultural, multiracial, fluid, and changing nature of contemporary society, cannot effectively be solved by the state, political organisations, and civil society organisations alone, but require the resilience, strengths and willingness of the families themselves to succeed."

2.3.1.1.4. Social Support

Our searches revealed social support as a factor that strongly correlates with the functioning of single-motherhood families. Social support encompasses emotional support, childcare assistance, social cohesion, the collectivist value of ubuntu, and psychosocial support targeting the health, social, psychological, physical and spiritual domains. According to A9, social cohesiveness through social networks helped single mothers cope with their

daily struggles: *“Single mothers engage in support groups. They speak favourably of the effects of these interactions, stating that it is crucial to have a space where they can be honest about their everyday struggles”* (p. 7).

The collectivist value of ubuntu seems to play a significant role in providing childcare support. From our analysed data, most single mothers relied on their families, neighbours and community members for support. A5 (p. 282) stated that *“a culture of collective sharing and mutual trust provided an important safety net for many of the single mothers who had many competing lives, such as childrearing”*. In concurrence, the data also postulated the need for psychosocial support within proximity. A9 (p. 9) argued that *“there is a significant need for psychosocial support interventions to be offered to these mothers that may be accessed in local communities”*.

2.3.1.1.5. Employment and Motherhood

The analysed data suggested an intersectionality lens, mostly of conflict with single motherhood, career development and economic growth. A2 and A3 postulated the complexities of balancing career and mothering responsibilities. A2 (p. 105) asserted that *“often, single mothers have to juggle work and childcare to improve their situation and provide the best possible care for their children”*. A6 and A5 alluded to single mothers making various means to improve their socioeconomic status and the living conditions of their children, such as migrating to an urban township, finding supplementary work and starting a business. For example, A5 (p. 282) indicated that *“some of the women spoke about implementing their own small livelihood activities”*. A1, A6 and A9 illustrated the conflict between childcare assistance and career development. Single mothering is mostly viewed as a hindering factor for single mother’s economic growth and career development. A3 (p. 332) argued that *“being single parents, the mothers had to balance multiple roles and*

responsibilities; this included making career compromises in order to devote more time to their children”.

2.3.1.2. Theme Two: Contextual Factors Related to Single Mothering in SA



Figure 2.3 Theme two and subthemes

Most of the studies demonstrated that single motherhood should be understood in close relation to contextual factors (Figure 2.3). SA’s systemic issues and sociohistorical factors are not only public matters but also influencing factors in the experiences of single mothers. Studies A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8 and A9 all considered the influence of contextual factors in the discussion of their findings.

2.3.1.2.1. Systemic Issues

Systemic factors, such as unemployment, poverty and poor service delivery, were highlighted in various studies. According to A5 (p. 334), “*the single mothers were confronted with systemic issues, such as under-employment, poverty, and economic marginalisation*”. SA’s high unemployment rates increase single mothers’ vulnerability. Most single mothers sought employment to meet the basic needs of the family. A3 (p. 334) put forward that “*single mothers from working-class backgrounds seek employment in order to survive*”. In

conjunction, poor service delivery heightens the already-defined difficulties these mothers and their families experience. For example, some mothers must travel long distances or migrate with their children to other parts of the country to access basic services. A2 (p. 101) put forward that *“many mothers were keen to relocate with their children to an urban area so that they could easily access healthcare facilities such as the local clinic and other basic amenities, including water and electricity”*.

2.3.1.2.2. Sociohistorical Context

We traced some residual effects of SA’s Apartheid regime in our synthesised data. These include living in impoverished or low-economic communities, experiencing social problems, and encountering career and economic marginalisation. For example, A5 (p. 279) gave more context to their study, which resembles most of the low-economic communities in SA; *“Since its origin, this peri-urban community has displayed characteristics similar to other informal settlements across South Africa and has actively prohibited major economic development.”* Given the low economic development in these communities, this hinders, amongst other things, single mothers’ career development. A3 (p. 337) revealed that *“the career and work needs of this group are affected by many structural factors, and the legacy of apartheid lingers on in contemporary South Africa”*. Several single mothers living in these communities are not only confronted with poverty but also exposed to community ills, such as crime, drugs and violence. A8 (p. 291) asserted that *“[a]part from the daily challenges associated with poverty and being responsible for the needs of their children, participants expressed the terror of the accumulating of traumatic events”*.

2.3.1.3. Theme Three: Challenges Related to Single Mothering in SA



Figure 2.4 Theme three and subthemes

Most of the participant articles focused on, include or refer to the challenges faced by single mothers (Figure 2.4). These challenges are influenced by, amongst other factors, the age and/or the functioning ability of the child. The most prominent challenges are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1.3.1. *Economic Challenges*

The economic challenges faced by most single mothers have been highlighted in the earlier subthemes. Economic challenges in insufficient social grants resulted in some mothers being unable to meet the basic needs of the household. According to A 9 (p. 4), “*many single mothers are forced to rely on government grants and other forms of financial aid that are scarce and insufficient to cover their children’s basic needs*”.

The ripple effect of economic constraints may impact children to the extent of engaging in criminal activities. A1 (p. 8) stated that due to the “*lack of employed single mothers and absent fathers, children are more likely to engage in criminal activities in order to attain*

things that they cannot get from their fathers". A3 and A6 recommended that the economic challenges faced by most single mothers need to be addressed through interventions. A3 (p. 335) stated that *"this should involve a collaborative exploration of avenues for economic and educational support for single mothers from a low socio-economic background"*.

2.3.1.3.2. Educational Facilities

Educational facilities remain a challenge, especially for single mothers with young children or those with a special needs child. These challenges relate to finding conducive and affordable childcare facilities, which typically have limited space. A9 (p. 4) stated that *"participants worry about how challenging it is to find suitable and inexpensive education and childcare options"*. A2 (p. 104) indicated that *"the mothers had very little autonomy over their decisions as there were limited care facilities available, and those which they did prefer were financially out of their reach"*. Given this reality, a recommendation for more childcare facilities for children from low-income families has been highlighted. A6 (p. 15) argued that *"childcare facilities should be set up to support women who work in the informal economy"*.

2.3.1.3.3. Interpersonal Issues

Of our chosen studies, two specifically highlight single mothers' relational issues with their children and their children's fathers. A4 argued that the mother's parenting style and approach to discipline impact the mother-and-child relationship. A4 (p. 177) illustrated that *"generally, single mothers have a bitter-sweet relationship with their children depending on the age of the children and how firm the mother is"*. Another interpersonal complexity may be the troubled relationship with the child's father. A8 (p. 290) revealed that *"participants' spoke about their problems of the present concerning the broken and bad relations with the father(s) of their children"*.

2.3.1.3.4. Internalised Negative Emotions

A single motherhood status can easily be internalised, negatively affecting cognitive processes. These include emotions due to separation from the child's father, beliefs of not meeting the standards of mothering and destructive self-beliefs. Anger and disappointment were mentioned because of dissolved relationships. A8 (p. 289) indicated that *"the non-verbal language of participants showed their deep disappointment and anger that the fathers of their children did not commit to long-term relationships and marriage with them"*. Another shared emotion is guilt about not meeting basic needs and not being emotionally responsive to their child's needs. A7 (p. 733) related that,

"Carrying the weight of their situation, the emotional burden of shame and guilt, and the emotional demands of absence and failure at being a good mother become invisible. This guilt was exacerbated by feeling that they were continually failing their children through abandoning them."

Furthermore, the negative emotions that some single mothers experienced were internally translated into destructive self-perceptions. A5 (p. 281) asserted that *"in this study, even though the women were heads of their households, they perceived themselves as the poorest group in the community"*.

2.3.1.3.5. Fundamental Reform Needed

In addressing the challenges associated with single motherhood, the analysed data highlighted the need for fundamental reforms. The necessity for reform emphasises a significant gap in existing structures and systems, revealing that the challenges faced by single mothers remain inadequately addressed. Studies A3, A4 and A5 referred to the need for collaborations and partnerships with government, communities, practitioners and businesses when considering the needs of single mothers. Our data highlighted, for example, the need

for societal acceptance and equal treatment of single-mother families as a subtype of family construction. Some of the studies recommended addressing poverty and social inequalities, initiating skill development training, and advocating to break the cycle of poverty among single mothers. According to A4 (p. 282),

“The importance of investing in skills development is crucial in this respect, not only in terms of improving their economic status, but also for establishing networks to assist single mothers to advocate for necessary resources and support to sustain their livelihood activities and lift them out of the cycle of poverty.”

Studies A4 and A6 further argued that it is not effective to only suggest collaborations but rather policy reforms for economic development and growth, the review and refinement of child social grants and addressing social injustices. A6 (p. 14) asserted that *“it is therefore imperative for policymakers and practitioners to engage in mobilising action for change to national and international economic policies”*. In addition, our data indicated a need for the reconceptualisation of fatherhood and single motherhood to alter public perceptions. For example, A1 (p. 9) stated that *“the concept of fatherhood has to be redefined in order to try and change society’s perspectives on fatherhood and the importance of fatherhood to be given enough consideration”*.

2.3.1.4. Theme Four: The South African Research Landscape on Single Mothering

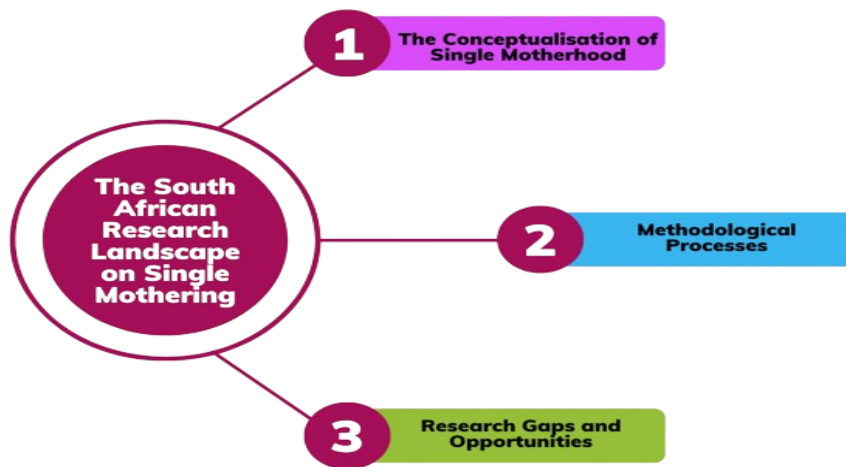


Figure 2.5 Theme four and subthemes

This theme encompasses the most used conceptualisation of single motherhood, the popular methodologies, as well as the research gaps in considering SA studies on this topic (Figure 2.5). The data demonstrated different views on single motherhood used in conceptualising it, varying and prominent methodologies in conducting single mothering studies and the under-explored research areas. These are presented in the following subthemes.

2.3.1.4.1. The Conceptualisation of Single Motherhood

Single motherhood can be conceptualised in many ways, for example, voluntary motherhood (García et al., 2020), lone motherhood (Bravo-Moreno, 2017) or absent father families (Jaffee et al., 2001). Single motherhood has further been viewed from the lenses of father abandonment, dual parents, sole role-players, absent father families and female-headed homes. A9 (p. 4) explained that some single mothers were living with the fathers of their children; however, after giving birth to the child, the father abandoned the family: “*Eleven participants became single mothers after giving birth to their children.*” In addition, A8 illustrated the dual parental roles of single mothers, having to be a father and mother

simultaneously. A8 (p. 293) presented that *“participants view the role of the mother as a single parent in terms of a ‘mother and a father’ since she is responsible for providing for the children’s basic needs”*.

A5 viewed single mothers as female-headed households and implicitly defined these mothers as sole role players responsible for shouldering the needs and demands of the entire family. A5 (p. 279) stated that,

“In the present study, the female-headed household is conceptualised as a single-parent family headed by a woman who is in charge of coordinating the material, economic, social and physical resources needed for the maintenance, growth and development of all members residing in the household.”

Studies A1, A6, A7, A8 and A9 were guided by various lenses and theories of exploring single motherhood, such as student and mother discourse, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, African feminism, multiple-level strain theory and feminist theory. Studies A5 and A8, however, theorised single motherhood from a strength-based perspective. A8 was guided by a positive psychology lens, which illustrated that positive psychology does not mean the absence of difficulty but how single mothers thrive even when they are faced with multiple challenges. A8 (p. 283) contended that the *“theoretical framework of positive psychology allowed the exploring of mothers’ personal and parental challenges as well as strengths as multi-challenged families within a particular context”*.

2.3.1.4.2. Methodological Processes

This sub-theme focuses on the most used research designs, sampling methods, demographics, and data collection and analysis that guided the participating studies. Although a non-generalised sample size was utilised, there was a slight numerical indication of more use of the phenomenological, descriptive and exploratory designs in our selected studies.

According to A4 (p. 172), “[i]n phenomenology, an appearance is anything of which one is conscious, and anything that appears to consciousness is deemed a legitimate area for philosophical investigation and thus is researchable”. A trend of using snowball and purposive sampling to select participants was evident, as six out of the nine studies utilised both sampling methods. From screening the articles, it also appeared that KwaZulu-Natal was a popular location for data collection. Most of the single-mother participants were Black and from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

All the studies utilised interviews to collect data. Of the nine studies, six also used data triangulation. As we know and acknowledged in A8, the utilisation of two methods of data collection increases the credibility of research by addressing research questions from various angles. For example, A8 (p. 285) used “[t]wo different kinds of research data collection methods... to address the research question at different levels within the same project”. Furthermore, our data also indicated the use of various forms of data analysis methods, including descriptive and interpretive data analysis (Elliot & Timulak, 2005), Marlow’s data analysis framework (Marlow, 2011) and voice-centred rational data analysis (Gilligan, 1982). Five of the nine studies used thematic analysis. A1 (p. 5) argued that the thematic data analysis method is flexible when dealing with rich data: “*This study used Thematic analysis because of its ability to provide flexible, rich, and detailed data out of the complex account of data.*”

2.3.1.4.3. Research Gaps and Opportunities

Our studies largely indicate the need for larger samples to reach the generalisation of results. The analysed data further revealed the need for more research on the topic of fatherhood, as literature theorised that the lack of father involvement was detrimental. For example, A3 (p. 336) asserted that “*systematically controlled research on the impact of*

various forms of fatherhood and the ways in which father involvement may affect the work and career prospects of single African mothers from low and middle-income backgrounds”.

More research on the positive aspects and intervention programmes centred around single mothers’ wellness of warrants urgent focus. A7 (p. 733) suggested that *“future research could also focus on the factors which facilitate effective coping”*. Furthermore, studies A3, A4, A5 and A7 proposed the need for more research on mixed racial profiles, mixed method studies and comparative designs. For example, A5 (p. 283) suggested *“further qualitative research should be conducted with a mixed-race profile to explore the family strengths and resilience of single mothers across different provinces in South Africa”*. Areas of further research within this field included topics like career and social class, student mothers, experiences of single mothers with children with disability, African mothers specifically and childcare arrangements.

This section presented the analysed data from the participant articles, including visual representations of the main and subthemes. The analysis addressed the research questions, thereby laying the ground for the following section, which explores the implications and relevance of the findings in the broader context of single motherhood, emphasising how these findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Additionally, the section will summarise the study’s limitations, strengths and conclusions.

2.4. Discussions of Findings

This study aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA, focusing on the research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions as reported in publications from 2015 to 2023. Based on the findings, the study sought to suggest future research topics to address potential gaps in literature regarding the scope of single motherhood in SA. Four main themes were developed from the analysed data: (1) trends in

research foci on single motherhood in SA, (2) contextual factors related to single mothering in SA, (3) challenges related to single mothering in SA and (4) the South African research landscape on single mothering.

Research on single motherhood and mothering based in SA is extensive, covering the conceptualisation of single motherhood and various methodological processes and identifying gaps and opportunities in the scope of single motherhood. The research landscape of the participant articles was heavily influenced by their context, with participants mostly from poor communities, had low socioeconomic status, were Black and were from KwaZulu-Natal. This intersectional perspective highlights how social class and race shaped the understanding of single motherhood in SA (Cho et al., 2013). Flowing from the identified themes and subthemes, the discussion of what we found is best discussed through the following arguments:

- The Interplay of the Ecological System and Single Motherhood/Mothering
- A Shift from Negative to Positive Conceptualisation of Single Motherhood
- Theoretical Perspectives and Insights Related to the Strength of Single Motherhood
- Identified Gaps and Opportunities
- Limitations of the Study
- Conclusion of the Study.

2.4.1. The Interplay of the Ecological System and Single Motherhood/Mothering

The current study analysed nine participant articles and suggested that single motherhood in SA reflects a significant interplay between single motherhood and the environment. The data supported Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasises that human development is influenced by various levels of systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1986) argued that a

family, including single-mother families, is a microsystem that influences human development through family processes, such as functioning, parenting and child outcomes. According to Murray et al. (2001), these family processes are also affected by external systems: the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

2.4.1.1. Microsystem

The data suggested that the absence of the father not only negatively affects the family dynamic but also impacts the child's upbringing and development. This impact is compounded by the financial strain resulting from the father's absence. McLanahan et al. (2013) found that a father's absence negatively impacts child development, particularly through the loss of financial support, potentially leading to criminal activities. However, TenEyck et al. (2023) found that while a father's absence does not directly relate to criminal behaviour in youth, its effects could become apparent in adulthood due to the cumulative disadvantages the child experiences. TenEyck et al.'s (2023) finding is contended by the current study due to SA's high unemployment rate of 33,5 per cent (Statistics South Africa, 2024) and limited seasonal employment opportunities. According to the study's subtheme of economic challenges, children engage in criminal behaviour as a means to meet their material needs, which were not adequately met by their household's available resources.

The interpersonal issues between the father and mother, as well as between the mother and children, have been suggested to significantly influence mothering. The limitation of the analysed data was the focus on single mothering primarily through the lens of father absence, which may negatively impact single mothering and child relationships. The interaction between parental and child characteristics also plays a crucial role in shaping parenting behaviour (Achtergarde et al., 2015; Hong & Park, 2015).

2.4.1.2. Mesosystem

The absence of the father may place a financial burden on the mother, reducing the time the mother could spend on mothering and affecting the mother-child relationship. Milkie et al. (2015) argued that the amount of time a mother spends with her child/children has a limited impact on their development, except in adolescent delinquent behaviour. However, Duister (2021) found that while single-mother employment helped meet the basic needs, it also resulted in less supervision of children, potentially leading to delinquent and criminal behaviour. This is influenced by factors beyond the microsystem, including neighbourhood conditions, which could significantly impact child behaviour (Frosch et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016). The family's characteristics and functioning play a crucial role in mediating these behavioural outcomes (Kim & Glassgow, 2018).

The limited time the mother spends with her child/children could be coined as an employment and mothering dilemma. The employment and motherhood subtheme highlighted that the multiple roles and responsibilities that single mothers have to balance often include mothers having to make a career compromise to devote more time to their children. The employment and mothering dilemma appears to affect both low-income and working-class mothers, who are often left with the decision to work to provide for their children, which may impact their mothering role. Roman (2017) and Ramos and Tus (2020) highlighted how the demands of paid work detract from mothering. Orellana et al. (2021) found that work-family conflict can reduce the resources available for the parent-child relationship, while economic pressure from not working can also negatively impact child development by failing to meet basic needs.

Single motherhood in low-income and working-class families could impede career and economic development. The analysed data indicated a correlation between single

motherhood, social support and childcare availability with economic and career advancement. Brady (2016) and Brady and Perales (2016) found that a mix of informal and formal childcare enhances single mothers' employment prospects. Social support, accessible childcare and educational facilities are crucial for the emotional, psychological and financial well-being of single-mother families (Deepak & Annalakshmi, 2021; Widan & Greef, 2019). Freeman (2017, p. 684-685) proposed that "incorporating and nurturing the bond between mothers and their children could significantly enhance the effectiveness of programs and policies".

2.4.1.3. Exosystem

The data indicated that many single mothers come from low-economic neighbourhoods characterised by poor economic development, inadequate service delivery and prevalent social issues like crime, drugs and violence. These factors suggest a significant impact on single mothers' mothering. Malinga (2018) emphasises that understanding the lived experiences of single mothers requires considering their systemic background. The contextual challenges faced by single mothers highlight the complexity of their experiences and their overrepresentation in low socioeconomic status. Economic improvement for single mothers should be viewed not just from an individualistic standpoint but also as a social group struggling due to systemic constraints. Similarly, a study conducted in Malaysia found that barriers, such as limited educational attainment, low socioeconomic status, lack of neighbourhood mobility and restricted work choices, could contribute to the vulnerability of single mothers and their families, as they lack protection from unforeseen circumstances (Nor, 2022).

2.4.1.4. Macrosystem

In the broader context of SA, where high unemployment rates, poverty, low economic development and high levels of corruption prevail, single mothers from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods face double jeopardy. Most single mothers' economic challenges are not just private matters but are matters deeply intertwined with SA's broader economic issues, historical laws and inequalities, and cultural dominance. This complex interplay is likely to make it significantly harder for single mothers to achieve economic growth, exacerbating their struggles beyond the challenges of mothering alone.

Despite single motherhood being a long-standing phenomenon in SA, where historically mothers shouldered mothering alone while fathers worked, the data indicated that single motherhood is implicitly and explicitly stigmatised and discriminated against. This finding is supported by Chung & Son (2022), Trail and Goedeke (2019) and Zhang (2023). This stigmatisation could influence societal support and the reform of policies for single mothers and their socioeconomic well-being (Amroussia et al., 2017). Young (1989) termed discrimination against a social group as cultural imperialism, where marginalised groups face social injustice due to not conforming to dominant family norms. Bourdieu (1998) added that social class may further complicate the experiences of marginalised social groups, suggesting that single motherhood is a predisposition to stigmatisation and discrimination (Grant & Geurin, 2019). In addition, while emerging adult women were more accepting of single motherhood, they still tended to prefer traditional family structures (Wilder et al., 2023).

2.4.2. *A Shift from Negative to Positive Conceptualisation of Single Motherhood*

While the data often highlighted the challenges and negative experiences of single motherhood, there was recognition of its positive aspects in the context of SA. Examining single motherhood from a positive perspective is highlighted by Long et al. (2019) and Taylor

and Conger (2017). Single mothers face challenges but also demonstrate resilience and the ability to thrive despite these challenges (Kang et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2016). The narrative has often framed single mothers as needing to be rescued, overlooking their contributions and strengths. Emphasising single mothers' resources and potential could lead to better support and enhance their success and that of their families. The characteristics of the single mothers' subtheme highlighted that complex family dynamics and problems could not be effectively resolved by the system alone. Instead, family issues require the family's resilience, strength and active involvement to achieve success.

The data suggested that single mothers are deeply motivated to escape poverty for the well-being of themselves and their children. The strong bond between mother and children serves as a powerful strength that drives their determination to improve their situation (Freeman, 2017). A positive conceptualisation of single motherhood could broaden understanding and guide societies, practitioners, government and policy reformers in addressing the needs of single mothers and their families by incorporating their strengths. Rees et al. (2023) argued that recognising single mothers' existing resources and viewing challenges as collaborative influences could improve single mothers' socioeconomic well-being through more inclusive policies and interventions.

2.4.3. Theoretical Perspectives and Insights Related to the Strength of Single Motherhood

Single motherhood has often been conceptualised as a role where mothers bear the full responsibility of the family, encompassing both external caregiving duties and intrinsic qualities. Theories from the school of psychology framed motherhood as a source of home and safety (Freud, 1931), life-giving, nurturing and protective (Laughlin, 1968), with inborn qualities that are vital for family and societal roles (Jung, 1936). Findings in this current study support this view, highlighting that single motherhood is a strength that is an anchor within the family. This could indicate that the qualities of single mothers help them to cope

effectively and foster resilience within their families. Findings may also indicate that single mothers have intrinsic qualities that, while they may not always be fully aware of, can be enhanced to improve their daily experiences and those of their children. Febriani and Salleh (2024) demonstrate that a matrilineal structure can offer significant social security within the family. Despite numerous challenges, single mothers leverage their inner resilience to navigate the complexities of mothering, employment and ensuring their children's well-being (Febriani & Salleh, 2024).

2.4.4. Identified Gaps and Opportunities

Four studies conducted and published internationally were sampled based on single motherhood, all from recent issues and journals with an impact factor over two. Lee et al. (2024), Kim et al. (2023) and Liang et al. (2019) focused on mental health issues and single motherhood, and Herbst-Debby (2022) focused on policy discourse and single motherhood.

The studies by Lee et al. (2024), Kim et al. (2023) and Liang et al. (2019) related to mental health and single motherhood were all conducted in different countries, indicating a global concern. In contrast, the landscape of single motherhood in SA has not qualitatively examined the trajectory of single motherhood and mental health-related issues as a subject. However, the mental health issue was related to the internalised negative emotions subtheme from the analysed data. This gap emphasises the need for increased attention on mental health within the context of single motherhood, particularly in SA.

All the sampled studies relating to mental health (Lee et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2019) employed a quantitative research approach, while the current study utilised a qualitative approach. This highlights a gap in incorporating mixed methods, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of single motherhood and mental health in SA. In addition, the studies utilised large samples, enhancing generalisability, with Lee et al.

(2024) offering a longitudinal perspective. This highlights a gap in the current study, which did not include quantitative studies. However, the qualitative approach utilised in this study provided an in-depth review of single motherhood studies, contributing significant insights despite the absence of generalisability.

One of the sample studies examined the implicitly stigmatised social construction of single motherhood and its influence on policies and government financial support across three countries, using discourses and policy documents (Herbts-Debby, 2022). The current study and Herbts-Debby (2022) are both desktop studies; however, this highlights the need for empirical research into how policies can be refined to enhance single mothers' socioeconomic well-being. Analysing the effectiveness and implementation of SA's current policies and interventions through the experiences of single mothers could provide valuable insight into how these policies and interventions might be improved to better support single mothers' needs.

While comparative studies such as those by Herbts-Debby (2022), which explored discourses and policies across countries, and Liang et al. (2019), which compared the mental health of single mothers with those who have partners, the current study's analysed data emphasised the need for comparative studies. Lee et al. (2024), Liang et al. (2019) and Herbts-Debby (2022) included various contexts that were not based on a specific race, socioeconomic status or a particular location. In contrast, the participant articles in the current study were mostly focused on single mothers from KwaZulu-Natal, which may not reflect a broader demographic in the scope of single motherhood in SA. Additionally, while the studies mentioned did not address racial and socioeconomic factors, the participant articles predominantly included Black single mothers and single mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds, highlighting a limitation in the racial and socioeconomic diversity in the scope of single motherhood in SA. This lack of mixed racial profiling in the participant articles in

the current study emphasises the need for a more diverse sample to better represent the varied experiences of single mothers across different racial and geographic contexts.

2.4.5 Limitations of the Study

The current study included only nine articles, which does not generalise findings about single motherhood in SA broadly. However, the analysed data of the participant articles offered valuable qualitative insights into the scope of single motherhood in SA. To better understand the full scope of single motherhood, a larger number of participant articles would have been needed for a more in-depth exploration and understanding. The small sample size of the participant articles did not inhibit the insight required to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA, as the study did not intend to produce generalisable findings.

This study deliberately excluded dissertations, theses, research reports, quantitative and mixed methods studies, chapters from textbooks, qualitative studies that did not exclusively include SA single mothers as participants, and studies published before 2015. This resulted in a narrow literature coverage of the scope of single motherhood in SA, limiting the focus to some relevant studies and perspectives. The current study, however, aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA, based on existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions on literature published between 2015 and 2023 to suggest research topics to fill the gap in the literature on the scope of single motherhood in SA.

To ensure the quality of the included articles, the JBI Critical Appraisal checklist for qualitative research was used (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017). This helped maintain the trustworthiness despite the small number of participant articles. The frequent consultations between the researchers ensured the accuracy of data analysis and ongoing review of the presentation of data.

2.4.6 Conclusion of the Study

This research was not grounded in a specific theoretical framework, which allowed more flexible data analysis. This facilitated a nuanced understanding of the scope of single motherhood in SA, which may have been overlooked if the research was confined to a particular theory. This further contributed to drawing robust conclusions from the analysed data.

The data showed the father-absence interconnection. Firstly, the absence of fathers could have a ripple effect, influencing multiple aspects of single motherhood. It intertwines with financial instability, social stigma, child development and the time constraints single mothers face. Secondly, single motherhood has been portrayed as a social identity linked to stigma, which impacts how single mothers are treated in society.

The economic and career growth of single mothers highlighted that single mothers may face significant barriers to career and economic advancement. These barriers cannot be fully understood without considering the practicalities of single mothering and the broader systemic issues and sociohistorical factors. Therefore, there is a need for fundamental reforms in economic support, social acceptance and supportive structures for single mothers.

Recognising single motherhood as a discriminated social group is important. Therefore, researchers, practitioners, policy reformers and interventions should aim to address this discrimination and improve the experiences of single mothers. The strength-based approach could be incorporated into improving single mothers' experiences. Firstly, effective policies and interventions should not only address the challenges but also incorporate the strengths and resources of single mothers. Secondly, support structures should be holistic, providing emotional, psychological, spiritual and financial support rather than just focusing on the practical needs of single mothers.

In summary, understanding single motherhood in SA requires recognising the intersectionality of systemic issues, economic challenges and the strengths of single motherhood. Comprehensive reforms and future research should aim to promote the overall well-being of mothers and their children.

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Section C: Critical Reflection of the Study

3.1. Limitations and Strengths of the Study

The current study included only nine articles, which does not generalise findings about single motherhood in SA broadly. However, the analysed data from the participant articles offer valuable qualitative insights into the scope of single motherhood in SA. The study did not include dissertations, theses, research reports, quantitative and mixed methods studies, chapters from textbooks, qualitative studies that did not exclusively include SA single mothers as participants and studies published before 2015. This resulted in a narrow literature coverage of the scope of single motherhood in SA, limiting the focus to some relevant studies and perspectives. The current study, however, aimed to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA based on existing research trends, challenges, needs, benefits and interventions published between 2015 and 2023 to suggest research topics to fill the gap in the literature on the scope of single motherhood in SA.

To better understand the full scope of single motherhood, a larger number of participant articles would have been needed for a more in-depth exploration and understanding. The small sample size of the participant articles did not inhibit the insight required to rapidly review existing literature on single motherhood in SA, as the study did not intend to produce generalisable findings.

To ensure the quality of the included articles, the JBI Critical Appraisal checklist for qualitative research was used (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017). This helped maintain the study's trustworthiness despite the small number of participant articles. As the primary researcher, I acknowledge the potential bias of my personal values and experiences that may have influenced the data collection, data analysis and data presentation process. Frequent consultations between myself and the research supervisor ensured the accuracy of the data analysis and ongoing review of the presentation of data.

3.2. Recommendations and Future Studies

The current study revealed the significant challenges that some single mothers face, including economic instability, challenges with economic growth and career advancement and complexities of support services. The study highlighted the pressing need for fundamental reforms in policies and support systems. This need for reform emphasises the inadequacies of current measures to address the needs and challenges of single mothers that are not addressed by the existing frameworks. Therefore, comprehensive reforms may be paramount to support and address the needs of single mothers.

By combining the deficit and strength-based lens on single motherhood, researchers, policy reformers and practitioners could gain a more nuanced understanding of single motherhood in SA. While external systems can create significant challenges for single mothers, incorporating their strengths and resilience could lead to more effective policies and supportive systems that enhance the well-being of single mothers and their children.

We reiterate the limited number of participant articles in this study. Firstly, we recommend conducting a more extensive review on single motherhood in SA to capture more studies and perspectives. Secondly, a mental health focus within the context of single motherhood using various research designs (empirical qualitative, mixed methods, comparative and quantitative) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mental health challenges and needs is recommended. Thirdly, we recommend exploring the relationship between single motherhood and economic instability through empirical research on policy discourse to inform more effective policy interventions. Lastly, diverse profiling by examining single motherhood across different racial, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive understanding of single motherhood in SA and draw more robust conclusions is needed.

3.3. Personal Reflection

My perspective on family construction and dynamics was shaped by being raised in a two-parent household. As a single mother (not by choice), doing this research involved exploring and understanding my experiences of single motherhood. My experiences required me to relearn and navigate the unique complexities of single motherhood, including diverse family construction, dynamics and functionality. This process was also influenced by my personal and economic background. My research approach was informed by my philosophical stance and identity as a single mother living in SA, but there was a joint effort between myself and my research supervisor to balance these influences with methodological rigour. Therefore, to maintain objectivity, I made a conscious effort to separate my experiences from the analysed data. I approached the data collection, analysis and presentation with an unbiased perspective.

The data revealed a distinction between the concept of single motherhood and single mothering. Single motherhood seems to be understood from the status of being a sole parent and the societal response to it. On the other hand, single mothering is the practical and emotional complexities of parenting alone, including the mother-child relationship, financial implications and support levels. Understanding these distinctions helped me present the scope of single motherhood in a more nuanced and objective manner. In addition, regular consultations with my research supervisor helped me maintain the study's objectivity and rigour. The ongoing review process was crucial to ensure my personal biases did not skew the data presentation. This reflexive account emphasises the importance of self-awareness and methodological rigour in research because my personal experiences intersected closely with the research topic.

3.4. Conclusion

This research was not grounded in a specific theoretical framework, which allowed more flexible data analysis. This facilitated a nuanced understanding of the scope of single motherhood in SA, which may have been overlooked if the research was confined to a particular theory. This further contributed to drawing robust conclusions from the analysed data.

The data showed the father-absence interconnection. Firstly, the absence of fathers could have a ripple effect, influencing multiple aspects of single motherhood. It intertwines with financial instability, social stigma, child development and the time constraints single mothers face. Secondly, single motherhood has been portrayed as a social identity linked to stigma, which impacts how single mothers are treated in society.

The economic and career growth of single mothers highlighted that single mothers face significant barriers to career and economic advancement. These barriers cannot be fully understood without considering the practicalities of single mothering and the broader systemic issues and sociohistorical factors. Therefore, there is a need for fundamental reforms in economic support, social acceptance and supportive structures for single mothers.

Recognising single motherhood as a discriminated social group is important. Therefore, researchers, practitioners, policy reformers and interventions should aim to address this discrimination and improve the experiences of single mothers. The strength-based approach can be incorporated into improving single mothers' experiences. Firstly, effective policies and interventions should not only address the challenges but also incorporate single mothers' strengths and resources. Secondly, support structures should be holistic, providing emotional, psychological, spiritual and financial support rather than just focusing on single mothers' practical needs.

In summary, understanding single motherhood in SA requires recognising the intersectionality of systemic issues, economic challenges and the strengths of single motherhood. Comprehensive reforms and future research should aim to promote the overall well-being of mothers and their children.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval GHREC Feedback



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

22-Sep-2023

Dear Ms Pumza Kose

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

The experiences of single mothers and the existing research trends in South Africa: A rapid review

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2023/1073

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Adri
Du
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Appendix B: Joanna Briggs Institute Critical Appraisal Checklist



JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Koge Date 13 January 2024

Author van Schalkwyk Year 2021 Record Number 1

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☒	☐	☐	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☒	☐	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

The study met the inclusion criteria. Additionally,
the findings and methodology showed
rigor.

JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza kose Date 13 January 2024

Author Mbanjwa, S & Harvey, C Year 2023 Record Number 2

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☒	☐	☐	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☒	☐	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

The study meets the inclusion criteria. Additionally the methodological process and findings of the study depicts rigor.



JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 13 January 2024

Author van der Riet et al. Year 2020 Record Number 3

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☒	☐	☐	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☒	☐	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (including reason for exclusion)

The methodology and findings of the study
depict rigor

**JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research**Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 14 January 2024Author Raniga T Year 2022 Record Number 4

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☒	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☒	☐	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

A clearer theoretical ground of the research
would have been beneficial.

JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 15 January 2024

Author Raniga, T & Mthembu, M Year 2017 Record Number 5

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☒	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☐	☐	☒	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

Apart from the unclear theoretical grounding of the authors and the influence of the researchers on the research, the study showed high standard of rigor



JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 16 January 2024

Author Majola, T et al Year 2023 Record Number 6

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☒	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☒	☐	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (including reason for exclusion)

The study depicted a good standard of rigor



JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 18 January 2024

Author Newlin, M Year 2017 Record Number 7

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☒	☐	☐	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☐	☒	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☐	☒	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

Although there was no indication in the text
ethical body, the study depicted rigor

JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza Kose Date 18 January 2024

Author Mkhize, N & Msomi, R Year 2016 Record Number 8

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☒	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☐	☒	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☒	☐	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

The methodology and findings of the study
depict a good standard of rigor



JBICritical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer Pumza KOSP Date 20 January 2021

Author Koketso, M, F et al. Year 2019 Record Number 9

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☒	☐	☐	☐
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☒	☐	☐	☐
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☒	☐	☐	☐
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☒	☐	☐	☐
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☒	☐	☐	☐
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	☐	☒	☐	☐
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☒	☐	☐	☐
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☐	☒	☐	☐
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☒	☐	☐	☐

Overall appraisal: Include ☒ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

Appendix C: Code Group

A			B		C
1	Document Group		Code		Modified by
	conceptualisation of single motherhood		abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood single motherhood changes in meaning of motherhood changes in meaning of motherhood when you have a disabled child conceptualisation of single mother as dual parental roles conceptualisation of single motherhood conceptualisation of single motherhood fathers of the children left the mothers; conceptualisation of single motherhood influence of context on meaning of single motherhood single motherhood after diagnosis of the child's disability		Pumza Kose
2	Sampling		advertising and snowballing sampling purposive and convenience sampling purposive sampling snowballing sampling		Pumza Kose
3	intrapersonal issues		anger and disappointment due to the abandonment from the children's father anxiety due to financial challenges bitterness, anger, and resentment after being left by the child's father due to child's disability Characterised as irresponsible for being pregnant emotional distress emotional distress of being away from the child		Pumza Kose

B2	⌵	⌵	⌵	fx	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	⌵
	A			B		C
1	Document Group			Code	Modified by	
				emotional distress		
				emotional distress of being way from the child		
				emotional stain of living away from child		
				fear about the unknown when it comes to child's disability		
				fear of anticipated negative behaviour of the child after circumcision		
				fear of child being the victim of abuse if not migrating with them		
				feelings of abandonment after the child's father left		
				feelings of isolation in raising a disabled child		
				feelings of remorse due to implications of substance use		
				feelings of shame due to young motherhood		
				guilt and shame affects academics and seeking support		
				guilt for failing mother for not upholding virginity		
				guilt for not keeping virginal daughter image		
				guilty for being pregnant and away from their children		
				hiding motherhood status due to shame		
				internalised defectiveness prevent them seeking for support		
				internalised defectiveness/shame		
				Internalised the status of their child's disability as their own		
				internalised undeservingness of student counselling support		
				internalising deservingness of stigma		
				meeting and not meeting the standards of being a good mother		
				mothers acquired identity of disabled due to child's disability		
				negative emotions		
				negative impact on mother due to child's removal		
4	the deepened conflict between work and motherhood			negative implication of not meeting the standards of the good motherhood		
				balancing childcare and employment	Pumza Kose	
				balancing motherhood and employment		
				benefits of work and child care in one vicinity		
				better economic status is a motivation for migration		
Code Group Manager Info +						
Ready Accessibility: Good to go						

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood		
	A	B	C
1	Document Group	Code	Modified by
		better educated mother found work to be satisfactory business activities not supported career as financial independence career is conceptualised as earning a living for survival challenge of balancing demands of a disabled child and employment challenges long working hours challenges of balancing motherhood and other responsibility challenges of finding childcare challenges of unemployment and mothering challenges to stabilise their business childcare influences migration and employment children neglect due to long working hours choosing a childcare close to their work was beneficial complexity of child care and no support from family and migration compromising career to provide more time to children conclusion of childcare facilities and interlink of mother employment entrepreneurship to supplement social grant house and childcare work limit search for employment initial worry about migrating with child insufficient parental time with children more for non professional mothers lack of childcare support impacted career growth mental debate between caring for the child or financially supporting the child migration for better opportunities minimal childcare support burdens mothers and affects employment negative impact of inability to balance motherhood and work on children placement facility of child in order to maintain employment began using substance after relational issues with their mothers being parented by a single mother	
5	Early life events		Pumza Kose

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Code Group Manager

Info

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B2

abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood

A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
	better educated mother found work to be satisfactory business activities not supported career as financial independence career is conceptualised as earning a living for survival challenge of balancing demands of a disabled child and employment challenges long working hours challenges of balancing motherhood and other responsibility challenges of finding childcare challenges of unemployment and mothering challenges to stabilise their business childcare influences migration and employment children neglect due to long working hours choosing a childcare close to their work was beneficial complexity of child care and no support from family and migration compromising career to provide more time to children conclusion of childcare facilities and interlink of mother employment entrepreneurship to supplement social grant house and childcare work limit search for employment initial worry about migrating with child insufficient parental time with children more for non professional mothers lack of childcare support impacted career growth mental debate between caring for the child or financially supporting the child migration for better opportunities minimal childcare support burdens mothers and affects employment negative impact of inability to balance motherhood and work on children placement facility of child in order to maintain employment	
5 Early life events	began using substance after relational issues with their mothers being parented by a single mother	Pumza Kose

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Code Group Manager

Info

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B2 : X ✓ fx abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood		
Document Group	Code	Modified by
	need for psychosocial support for mothers with disabled children people in the community as supportive networks rely on family for support school as supportive network which offer academic success to their children social networks contributed to family resilience social networks helped with coping with stress social networks provided a zest to succeed in life social support as a contributing factor to family resilience social support plays a role in mother balancing motherhood and other responsibilities socio-cultural values assisted in positive family adaptation support from neighbours as a form of ubuntu support from their children's school support of the neighbour the spirit of ubuntu contributed to family resilience	
7		
use of theories	Brofenbrenner theory was used to understand environmental factors of Delft guided by anti-oppressive framework in family resilience multi-level strain as a theory derived from single mothers with a disabled child experiences postive psychology theory to understand challenges and strengths postmodern paradigm provides understanding of career development of African single mothers the use of feminist theory to understand the gendered experience of single mothers	Pumza Kose

B2 : X ✓ fx abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood		
Document Group	Code	Modified by
	the use of feminist theory to understand the gendered experience of single mothers the use of resilience theory use of African feminism theory	
8		
economic challenges	challenge of providing food due to lack of financial support challenges of relying on financial aids discontuation of treatment due to high costs economic constraints influenced childcare options financial challenges financial challenges of raising a child with disability financial challenges precipitated migration financial challenges to the point of loaning money financial constraints in household can lead children into criminal activities to attain things financial difficulties in meeting basic needs impact of low economic status/ economic challenge indebted insufficient social child grant lack of finances to meet basic needs need for business training and marketing skills need for economic and educational support for career development need for online business interaction social grants supplements income unable to meet basic needs	Pumza Kose

B2

abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood

A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
	unable to meet basic needs unaffordability of paid support	
9		
educational facilities	challenges of finding suitable education centers challenges of limited space in good childcare facilities difficulty of securing good childcare facility dissatisfaction with childcare facilities for children economic status influenced decision for childcare facilities need for childcare support to increase pursuit of employment need for free/cheap childcare facilities negotiations of finding childcare centres unconducive childcare facilities	Pumza Kose
10		
Interpersonal issues	challenges with their children child and mother conflicts child-mother relational deficits	Pumza Kose

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Info

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100%

B2

abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood

A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
	unable to meet basic needs unaffordability of paid support	
9		
educational facilities	challenges of finding suitable education centers challenges of limited space in good childcare facilities difficulty of securing good childcare facility dissatisfaction with childcare facilities for children economic status influenced decision for childcare facilities need for childcare support to increase pursuit of employment need for free/cheap childcare facilities negotiations of finding childcare centres unconducive childcare facilities	Pumza Kose
10		
Interpersonal issues	challenges with their children child and mother conflicts child-mother relational deficits	Pumza Kose

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B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
	women work in second economy due to political agendas/contextual factor women's economic marginalisation as an interest women's work and the residual effects of apartheid/ contextual factor	
12 Data analysis	descriptive-interpretive data analysis was utilised Maslow data analysis framework student-parent discourse to analyse student-parent lens in understanding student mothers thematic data analysis voice-centred relational data analysis	Pumza Kose
13 Data collection	field notes as data collection focus group as data collection individual interviews for data collection interviews and focus groups as data collection interviews and observation as data collection narrative approach for data collection narrative framework as data collection open-ended questions for data collection two qualitative data collection: interviews and Wold Cafe method	Pumza Kose
14		

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
mentioned research gaps	career development has been conceptualised from eurocentric orientation Gap gap in career counselling theories Gap in family strengthening standpoint gap in reasons for absence of fathers gap in single mothers from low socio-economic status in issues of workplace gap in small sample gap in studies that explore the dynamics of african mothers, migration and childcare gap of bias sample selection gap of mothers experiences in raising children with disability gaps gaps in student mother research larger sample to understand impact of father absence mixed method on single mothers career experiences more research on father involvement on their children more research on meaning of work from low socioeconomic single mothers more research to understand father involvement and single mothers career path need for research on community based projects offered by DSD participatory action research to develop wellness programs research gap in career experiences of african working class woman research gap in taking social class into consideration in research in single mothers	Pumza Kose

B2

abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood

Document Group	Code	Modified by
research focus	aim to create advocacy debate on children raised in absent father homes focus interest historical impact on African mothers/contextual factor interest in african single mothers work and career experiences interest in challenges that are caused by absence of father interest in family resilience in low incomes interest in mothers migrating for economic reasons interest in professional and non-professional single mothers interest in redefining African women in the context of migration interest in women and their contribution to economy interest is on family resilience of low income communities interest is the experiences of single mother with children with disability interest of migration and childcare of low-income interest: single mothers inclusion in advocacy and transformative economic actions interests is on the strenghts of single mothers with substance abuse in Delft interet in the role of childcare in migration of single mothers location qualitative feminist methodology qualitative study to explore single mothers perspectives on impact of absent fathers on children's life qualitative study to explore single mothers sufferinf from substance abuse in Cape Town qualitative study to substantiate quantitative findings on mothers and migration qualitative study to understand family resilience qualitative study to understanding parenting according to proximity race is interest factor trend	Pumza Kose

Code Group Manager

Info

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Ready Accessibility: Good to go

100%

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
Document Group	Code	Modified by
internal resources	acceptance of disability adapted resources to survive desire for better parenting desire to attend workshops on substance use eagerness to better socio economic status family resilience and strengths are important to success internal resources contributed to family resources mixed outcomes of being in a unjust society mother's love for her children as a strength motherhood as a strength motherhood as motivation to achieve motherhood as personal growth motherhood was viewed as a mentor mothers role to ensure safety motivated and enthusiasm to live positive lives motivation to break poverty motivation to overcome what hinders their economic participation participation in programmes to better themselves and family plan to overcome substance use plans to attend rehab plans to join support groups plans to participate in the economic spaces positive about the future positive changes since acceptance of child's disability Positive emotions resilience of mother with disabled child	Pumza Kose

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
interventions	intervention on fatherhood need for intervention in career development need for intervention to include student mothers in university suggestive intervention plans	Pumza Kose
18 lack of support	challenges of student mothers are heightened by lack of support lack of social support challenges the mothers in balancing work and motherhood lack of support yields difficulties lack of university support limited social support minimal financial support from family minimal financial support from father no support from children's father no support from family non-involvement from the father	Pumza Kose
19 Needs	address issues around circumcision gap in economic issues gap in knowledge about the child's diagnosis by mothers Health care practitioners need to provide unconditional positive regard home healthcare and respite is a need for mothers with disabled children need for acceptance of diverse family structure need for alteration in the conceptualisation of fatherhood need for alteration on the view of work by practitioners need for assistive measures to raise children need for collaboration of stakeholders for family resilience	Pumza Kose

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code	Modified by
	need for collaboration of stakeholders for family resilience need for educational and work programs to assist single mothers Need for equal treatment need for formulation and enactment of policies need for intervention need for knowledge on the construction of single motherhood need for literacy and numeracy programmes for mothers need for policy reform to include single mothers that are self-employment and how to lucratisse business need for policy reforms to reduce power imbalances need for policy reforms to support women's participation in economy need for psychoeducation from health care workers to mothers need for reconceptualisation of career counselling need for review of grant need for skills development need for social workers to advocate for change to women's economic need for women empowerment need to address gender injustice in economy by policy makers need to design interventions for student motherhood need to mobilise women entrepreneurship need to strengthen the association between first and second economy	
20 implication of father absence	challenges with children are due to absence of father children experience stress due to father absenteeism children long for benefits of having a father children with absent father's interact differently children's loneliness due to father absenteeism children's maladaptive ways of dealing with absence of father economic constraints due to absence of father in homes	Pumza Kose

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code economic constraints due to absence of father in homes economic implication of absent fathers is worse in low economic rural areas emotional agony of boys due to lack of father as a role model emotional distress of children due to absent father experiencing poverty due to absence of father father involvement alleviates poverty male children need father's as their role model negative public perception on children raised by single mothers due to father absence no financial contribution from father no support from the fathers of the child/ren rural areas father are still seen as breadwinners the financial struggle of father absence	Modified by
21 Discrimination	experience of stigmatisation for young mother experiencing feelings of loneliness and marginalisation due to low economic status lack of acceptance of single motherhood in society misperceptions of their being	Pumza Kose

B2	abandoned by child's father due to unacceptance of child's disability/conceptualisation of single motherhood	
A	B	C
1 Document Group	Code misperceptions of their being mothers is marginalised by family for having a disabled child Name calling negative impact of stigmatisation negative perceptions from society prejudice and marginalisation for having a disabled child Punishment for pregnancy reparation for young pregnancy to escape stigmatisation single motherhood viewed as disruption to social order society is unaccepting of single mothers stigma due to having a child with disability unequal treatment young pregnancy warrants stigma	Modified by
22 Systemic issues in SA	agency to better themselves is hindered by socioeconomic class benefits of access to medical care after migration challenges of poor services delivery Consequences of lack of information support on diagnosis due to health system covid-19 deepening the issues of women poverty/contextual factors difficulty of accessing resources discouraging waiting list for treatment effect of poverty	Pumza Kose

Appendix D: Marriage and Family Review- Journal Instructions to Authors

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