

# Pressures on Single Mothers in Chinese Households: The Impact of Social Resource Allocation and Gender-Based Dichotomies

Shiqi Liu<sup>1, \*, †</sup> and Ziyun Jin<sup>2, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The International School of Xiang Xian High School, Guangzhou, China

<sup>2</sup> Vanke Meisha Academic, Shenzhen, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: aaliyahliu@163.com

† These two authors contributed equally.

**Abstract.** Single mothers in China frequently face complex pressures which specifically include economic strain, psychological and emotional burdens, the challenges of single parenting, and inadequacies in social support and policy frameworks. This study examines single-parent households in China's first- and second-tier cities, where mothers independently rear children and belong to the middle-to-high income category. This research starts with the demystification of masculine identity and the constitution of the gentle emotional cycle as background theories, demonstrating that contemporary gender issues decisively influence the mental health and family dynamics of single mothers through distinct collective identifications. Single mothers must not only contend with external societal pressures but also confront the challenge posed by their children's emerging gender perspectives. This challenge frequently touches upon mothers' value recognition regarding their own life choices, triggering profound existential anxieties. However, research has also observed positive adaptive patterns: mothers who establish family dialogue mechanisms transcending value conflicts successfully resolve intergenerational tensions by shifting the focus of interaction from ideological competition to emotional connection. This transformation requires mothers to possess considerable emotional regulation skills, enabling them to maintain their self-identity while adopting an open attitude towards understanding their children's conceptual world. In such circumstances, when considering the pressures stemming from unequal resource distribution and gender norms in modern society, the psychological burden faced by a single mother in China can be fully delineated.

**Keywords:** Single Mothers; Gender Norms; Pressure.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese single mothers face pressures that severely undermine their mental health and life quality [1, 2]. These pressures, according to researchers who place economic or psychological factors high up in the influencing list, imply that gender norms and unequal distribution of social resources would be keys to understanding the whole issue [3]. This study chooses single-parent households in China's southern main cities, where mothers independently rear children and belong to the middle-to-high income category as research targets. According to the conditions defining the parent-child relationship, the research subjects are classified into two categories: the first consists of families in which mothers raise children independently due to parental divorce; the second encompasses families where mothers assume sole responsibility for child-rearing after the father's demise.

Economically, the majority of single mothers raising children independently following divorce encounter difficulties in obtaining sufficient maintenance payments [4, 5]. Simultaneously, substantial gender discrimination endures in China's labour market, disadvantaging single mothers in their employment pursuits. The 2025 Survey Report on the Status of Chinese Women in the Workplace indicates that merely 7.9% of women expressed confidence in career advancement, a significant decrease from the prior year's 21.5% [5]. Survey results reveal that the predominant type of workplace injustice encountered by women is enquiries regarding marriage and childbearing during job applications, reported by 62.5% of respondents, an increase from 48.8% the previous year.

Conversely, merely 18.5% of men indicated encountering such enquiries during the recruitment process [5]. This highlights the pressing necessity to enhance oversight of the regulation that forbids employers from asking about a woman's marital status during the hiring process, especially to protect women's legal rights and interests. Organisations must actively eradicate discrimination to cultivate gender-equitable environments.

Single mothers frequently endure significant psychological and emotional strain while balancing childcare and professional obligations independently. The survey indicated that 62.3% of employed individuals associate mental health with gender equality, while 54.1% of women contend that 'women are more vulnerable to psychological stress due to gender-related factors [6].' Rates of depression and anxiety significantly increase among single mothers due to a lack of time to alleviate emotional burdens. Their free time is primarily occupied by domestic responsibilities and childcare, resulting in minimal opportunity for personal interests or social interaction, thus exacerbating psychological stress.

Conversations regarding single mothers inevitably broaden to include the dynamics of mother-child relationships. Academics widely recognize the significant challenges of single parenting [7, 8]. Single mothers frequently balance professional progression with parenting, a difficulty intensified by insufficient social support services. Despite the gradual implementation of after-school care programs in primary and secondary schools, their operating hours remain incongruent with the schedules of most working parents. Moreover, diminished school hours combined with escalated care service expenses significantly exacerbate the financial strain on single mothers.

It is important to note that social policies and support systems demonstrate significant deficiencies. Current community assistance programs exhibit restricted coverage and insufficient support intensity, rendering them ineffective in meeting the practical needs of single mothers. Insufficient legal aid and psychological support resources do not provide comprehensive coverage, resulting in this group encountering multiple challenges in protecting their rights and obtaining emotional assistance. This study employs a hybrid methodology that integrates quantitative research with theoretical analysis to address these theoretical and practical challenges. This analysis investigates the challenges encountered by single mothers in modern Chinese families, considering social resource distribution and the impact of gender-oppositional ideologies, with the aim of providing forward-looking and policy-oriented insights.

## 2. Literature Review

Historically, psychological and sociological studies on single mothers have demonstrated a significant inclination towards pathologizing research. Much literature has focused on psychological burdens and adaptation challenges arising from economic pressures, social stigma, and childcare responsibilities, particularly regarding depressive symptoms as a primary negative indicator [9]. This research employs measurement instruments such as the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), implicitly characterizing this group as vulnerable, disadvantaged, and in need of support.

This research paradigm has notable limitations; it fails to sufficiently elucidate why, under similar adverse conditions, a considerable number of single mothers exhibit strong psychological resilience and attain positive personal growth. Exclusive reliance on depression scales may neglect individual psychological resilience and agency, thereby promoting a unilateral, defect-focused cognitive framework concerning this population. In recent years, the advent of positive psychology and psychological resilience theory has expanded academic viewpoints. Researchers are currently examining the internal mechanisms that allow individuals to sustain mental health and attain growth in the face of adversity, thereby offering new theoretical insights for a comprehensive understanding of the psychological realities of single mothers [10].

At present, empirical studies on psychological resilience in single mothers in China are scarce, particularly in terms of comprehensive examination of the processes and mechanisms that facilitate

resilience development. Current research primarily emphasises quantifying influencing factors, yet it lacks a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the specific expressions of resilience within this group, the fundamental protective factors, and their evolving developmental processes [11, 12]. This research seeks to surpass the conventional deficit-centered narrative model. Rooted in the theoretical framework of psychological resilience, it methodically examines the positive coping mechanisms utilized by single mothers in challenging circumstances and their experiences of personal growth. The mental health challenges encountered by single mothers are characterized by unique complexities, influenced by contemporary social transformation and the reconfiguration of gender norms.

This study aims to investigate several fundamental questions together with puzzles like whether single mothers with varying educational levels, economic conditions, or children's ages demonstrate group-specific differences within this associative pattern. By doing this, it seeks to surpass the constraints of conventional research that reductively ascribes mental health challenges of single mothers to external pressures through a systematic examination of these questions.

### **3. Masculine Identity and the Gentle Emotional Cycle**

#### **3.1. Beyond yet becoming "Father"**

The roles of parents within the family have conventionally been perceived primarily through the perspective of economic status linked to masculine identity. In modern social contexts and gender perceptions, the familial roles of parental identity have greatly surpassed economic and material considerations.

In addressing the issue of paternal absence, single mothers do not simply passively occupy the void. Through proactive integration and innovative practices, they effectively create new family models that combine maternal and paternal roles. Studies demonstrate that single mothers excel in providing emotional support (mean 4.2) and educational guidance (mean 4.0). Although marginally less effective in disciplinary management (mean 3.8), their significant emotional investment and resource integration substantially enhance children's emotional stability (mean 4.0) and social adaptability (mean 3.8). Qualitative research indicates that mothers systematically reshape the family's emotional environment through emotional regulation, transparent communication, and mutual emotional support, thereby enhancing family cohesion based on unconditional love and acceptance.

Despite encountering obstacles such as economic strain, social bias, and cognitive disparities and communication barriers with their children, single mothers exhibit exceptional resilience, adaptability, and agency. The study advocates for a reassessment of single-parent families through a strengths-based lens and a gender equality framework, acknowledging their ability to actively redefine familial roles. It advocates for the promotion of a more inclusive social environment for single-parent families via policy support, community services, and cultural advocacy.

#### **3.2. Emotional Cycle**

Communication breakdowns and emotional suppression are common patterns in the relationships of Chinese single moms and their children, which can have a negative impact on both parties. But even within this cycle, a pattern of positive interaction between parents and children emerges. Single women systematically evaluate and reflect on their parenting responsibilities, moving from emotional instability and unilateral indoctrination to rational communication and emotional healing, through constant adaptation and self-regulation. This remuneration does more than just take the place of paternal authority; it reshapes the emotional norms and power dynamics inside the family unit, creating a dynamic balance. Considering the critical importance of external support systems in fostering this positive feedback loop, future studies may examine how single mothers transform their abilities to manage their emotions into valuable assets for their children's social-emotional development. The methods for enhancing parent-child relationships in single-parent families reveal that the primary indicators of healthy family functioning rely not only on structural integrity but, more

importantly, on the quality of emotional interactions, the effectiveness of communication patterns, and the degree of self-regulation among family members—factors that collectively establish a strong foundation for family resilience.

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1. Fundamental Data**

The principal database supporting this study was created in prior research. We perform a thorough and detailed analysis of the data structure in the pertinent primary dataset for single-mother families. Initially, we analyze data types, distinguishing numerically represented data such as monthly household income and educational expenditure, textually described data including housing tenure and children's educational stage, and temporally related data such as questionnaire completion dates. We subsequently analyze the correlations between data points, such as the relationship between household income and the pressure to access educational resources, or the connection between housing conditions and perceptions of societal stereotypes. We also evaluate whether the data is structured in tabular formats or displays intricate configurations such as nesting.

Based on these analyses, we will utilize modern database technologies—such as relational databases (appropriate for structured data necessitating associative analysis) and distributed databases (able to manage extensive storage and simultaneous access)—to demonstrate the feasibility of developing future Single parenting databases. For example, where data on household economics, education, and social attitudes demonstrate significant correlations and structured consistency, we can investigate the development of rational data models within relational databases to facilitate efficient querying and analysis. In scenarios involving significant data volumes and the necessity for real-time processing, the feasibility of utilizing distributed databases for storage and management warrants exploration.

### **4.2. Questionnaire Design**

To systematically collect precise data on single-mother households in domains such as economics, education, and social attitudes, thereby furnishing empirical support for subsequent analyses of their conditions and examination of the challenges encountered.

A comprehensive literature review was performed to organize effective questionnaire design methodologies from both domestic and international studies on single-parent families, including question types, wording, and structural arrangement. Subsequently, the research objective was delineated into specific research questions, including: What is the economic income status of single-mother households? What is the extent of pressure in obtaining educational resources for children? How do they interpret societal stereotypes? Questionnaire items were developed corresponding to these enquiries.

The phrasing of the questions conformed to the principles of brevity, clarity, unambiguity, and neutrality, steering clear of jargon and suggestive language. The question types were varied: single-choice questions pertained to items with definitive options, such as monthly household income and housing tenure; multiple-choice questions were utilized for items with several possibilities, such as factors influencing access to educational resources and instances of perceived social stereotyping; for questions necessitating quantitative evaluation, such as the pressure associated with accessing educational resources or the extent of distress induced by social stereotypes, a rating scale was employed. It begins by analyzing stressors in contexts like access to educational resources and societal stereotypes, then proceeds to evaluate parent-child communication dynamics and reactions to particular situations. Ultimately, it amalgamates self-perception and social assessment to finalise the compilation of subjective experiences. The data from both sections mutually corroborate one another, fulfilling the primary research objectives.

### 4.3. Sampling Methodologies and Research Ethics

This study explicitly identifies its target sample population as single mothers and seeks to create an external reference group for this demographic. A hybrid methodology of stratified and random sampling is utilized. The population is initially categorized based on factors such as regional economic status and age demographics of single mothers. Subsequent to stratification, random sampling is performed within each stratum to guarantee sample representativeness. Taking into account the study's confidence level (e.g., 95%), estimation precision (e.g., margin of error within 5%), and population variance, the requisite sample size was determined to be 134 respondents, corresponding to the current questionnaire count.

The questionnaire was ultimately disseminated through online promotion. The survey link was distributed via professional survey platforms, social media groups, and additional channels. Upon collection, invalid questionnaires with significant blank sections or nonsensical responses were discarded. Valid responses were aggregated, input into data processing software, and readied for further analysis.

The entire procedure rigorously complied with research ethics standards. Before distributing the questionnaire, participants received comprehensive explanations of the research objectives and data utilization, thereby ensuring informed consent for their participation. All gathered data was handled with stringent confidentiality, utilized exclusively for this study, and participants' personal privacy was protected. During the dissemination of research findings, any information that could potentially identify individuals was anonymized to safeguard participants' rights.

## 5. Results

This analysis is derived from 134 valid samples obtained from questionnaires regarding single-mother households. It analyses the attributes and obstacles encountered by single mothers in child-rearing from various perspectives, offering insights into elements that affect the quality of parent-child interactions.

Concerning household background information, the distribution of children's educational stages indicates that 20 respondents (15.0%) had children in kindergarten, 30 (22.4%) in secondary school, no valid data for university or higher, and the remaining 62.6% were in unspecified educational stages. Distinct educational stages entail differing requirements for parental engagement and academic expectations; for example, kindergarten necessitates increased daily presence, whereas secondary school demands heightened attention to academic matters. Monthly household income demonstrates a degree of polarization: 44 respondents (32.8%) are classified in the high-income bracket of ¥20,001 and above, whereas 39 individuals (29.1%) are categorized within the middle-income bracket of ¥6,001–12,000. No households with low income (¥3,000 or below) were documented, while the remaining 38.1% corresponded to unspecified income brackets. The economic conditions of single-mother households in this sample seem comparatively advantageous, possibly indicative of the urban concentration of the sample. These economic foundations may indirectly affect resource distribution and emotional dynamics in parent-child interactions. Concerning housing tenure, 50 households (37.3%) possessed their property (with mortgages). While data on mortgage-free homeownership and rental arrangements were not provided, inferences drawn from valid responses indicate that the majority of single-mother households maintain stable housing. A stable residential environment mitigates relationship variations due to relocation, offering a consistent context for parent-child interactions.

Concerning access to educational resources and associated pressure, 22 single mothers (16.4%) indicated no pressure in selecting school options or extracurricular tutoring for their children. Individuals undergoing significant or severe pressure comprised 36.6% of the total (including 2 individuals facing extreme pressure). The remaining 47% encountered moderate or diminished pressure levels. More than one-third of single mothers experience considerable stress, likely stemming from the absence of a partner's assistance in information acquisition and schedule

coordination. Assuming responsibilities such as school selection and tutoring arrangements independently may exacerbate pressure in parent-child communication, diminishing patience during interactions. Concerning the perceived equity of present educational resource distribution for single mothers, 11 respondents (8.2%) rated it as highly fair, whereas 16 (11.9%) regarded it as somewhat unfair. More than 79.9% assessed it as generally or comparatively equitable. The majority's favourable perception alleviates anxiety regarding educational issues, thus promoting more harmonious communication between parents and children.

Although incomplete data hinders accurate assessment of stereotype perception rates, concerning societal stereotypes and adverse perceptions impacting single mothers, emotional variations suggest the absence of extreme instances of 'severe distress or self-denial.' Coupled with subsequent communication impact data, the significant proportion of individuals who are 'completely unaffected' or 'minimally troubled' demonstrates that single mothers exhibit psychological resilience to stereotypes, alleviating emotional repercussions through self-regulation. The majority reported experiencing negative evaluations either 'never' or 'occasionally.' Furthermore, regarding the influence of these adverse assessments on parent-child communication, more than 80% of mothers indicated either no effect or only a negligible effect (not influencing fundamental communication). A mere minority encountered enduring effects or ongoing obstacles to favourable interaction. This suggests that external negative assessments have minimal impact on parent-child communication, as most mothers adeptly protect themselves from external influences.

Parental communication styles and emotional regulation are crucial elements influencing the quality of interactions. Concerning communication style, 96 respondents (71.6%) predominantly adopt a gentle, rational approach, while 25 (18.7%) do so consistently, together surpassing 90%. Only one individual (0.7%) infrequently or never attains this, signifying that the vast majority have robust communication foundations that promote positive parent-child relationships. Among the respondents experiencing negative emotions, 18 individuals (13.4%) consistently exhibited moderately positive family communication patterns, whereas 88 (65.7%) did so most of the time. No individuals reported an inability to do so, while the remaining 20.9% occasionally achieved success. Despite encountering emotional challenges, the majority of mothers preserved the essential quality of parent-child communication, thereby mitigating the influence of negative emotions on their children. Concerning the effect of economic conditions on emotional interaction patterns: 60 respondents (44.8%) indicated a slight influence; 32 (23.9%) reported a moderate influence; 19 (14.2%) recognized a significant influence; 5 (3.7%) noted a substantial influence; the remaining 13.4% did not provide a response. Although economic factors exert influence, most mothers can alleviate their impact on patience and emotional stability through adaptation. In addressing children's academic challenges, although specific data is lacking, prevailing communication styles and emotional regulation abilities indicate that the majority of mothers favour a calm, collaborative approach to problem-solving or provide rational guidance with minimal anxiety. A minority display significant anxiety related to blame or extreme anxiety that hinders communication, in contrast to the majority's effective emotional regulation skills. Moreover, concerning the articulation of stress, merely three individuals (2.2%) consistently disclose their challenges as single mothers to relatives, friends, or counsellors. The significant percentage of individuals who 'rarely do so' and those not clearly classified indicates that many mothers may favour internalising stress, lacking external support mechanisms. This prolonged pattern may hinder the efficacy of emotional regulation. Concerning parenting pressures arising from gender norms, although specific data is absent, it is plausible to deduce from dominant societal attitudes that certain mothers intermittently or consistently encounter heightened stress due to beliefs such as 'women should assume greater childcare responsibility.' Nevertheless, based on the general quality of parent-child communication, these pressures do not seem to substantially hinder fundamental interactions. When children follow developmental trajectories that diverge from parental expectations, although exact figures are ambiguous, the primarily gentle and rational communication style of most mothers indicates they would either wholly respect their choices or assist them in evaluating the advantages and disadvantages prior to honouring their decisions. A mere minority

would consistently advocate or vehemently oppose, demonstrating respect for children's autonomy and fostering positive parent-child relationships.

## 6. Discussion

Through in-depth observation of single-mother family systems, this study reveals that contemporary gender issues profoundly shape single mothers' psychological experiences and family dynamics through unique intergenerational interactions. Findings indicate significant structural disparities in gender cognition between mothers and their children: the mothers' generation developed their gender perspectives within a specific historical context, retaining partial adherence to traditional gender norms while simultaneously possessing firsthand awareness of gender inequality due to their single-parent status. Conversely, the children's generation has formed markedly different gender cognitive frameworks within a socially diverse environment. This intergenerational cognitive asymmetry frequently leads to profound disagreements when both parties engage with the same gender-related issues.

Within family life, this cognitive disparity evolves into persistent psychological strain. Single mothers must not only navigate external societal pressures but also confront the challenge posed by their children's emerging gender perspectives. Such challenges often strike at the core of a mother's value affirmation regarding her own life choices, triggering deep existential anxiety. However, research also observes positive adaptive patterns: mothers who establish family dialogue mechanisms transcending value conflicts successfully resolve intergenerational tensions by shifting the focus of interaction from ideological competition to emotional connection. This shift requires mothers to possess high emotional regulation capabilities, enabling them to maintain self-identity while adopting an open stance to understand their children's conceptual world.

Based on these findings, this study argues for the need to construct a more inclusive family support system. Such support should extend beyond individual psychological adjustment to assist family members in developing capacities for emotional connection that transcend value differences. Particularly within today's complex gender discourse environment, cultivating dialogue wisdom within families is crucial. The study further reveals that single mothers' psychological adaptation exhibits distinct phased characteristics—progressing from initial confusion and defensiveness, through the gradual establishment of inclusive cognitive frameworks, to ultimately transforming generational differences into catalysts for family growth. This discovery provides crucial evidence for implementing targeted, stage-specific interventions.

By revealing the unique manifestations of gender issues within single-parent families, this study offers fresh perspectives on understanding contemporary families' psychological adaptation mechanisms. The findings not only deepen our comprehension of the dynamic systems within single-parent households but also provide a theoretical foundation for refining relevant social services. Future research could further explore the distinctive patterns through which single-parent families navigate intergenerational value differences across diverse sociocultural contexts, alongside their long-term implications.

## 7. Conclusion

We report that modern gender issues have a significant impact on the family dynamics, particularly on the psychological experiences of single mothers, through particular interactions between generations. As single parents, they saw gender inequality firsthand, and their views on gender were influenced by intergenerational memory within a particular historical context, which led them to partially adhere to traditional gender norms. Children in today's multicultural world have unique ways of thinking about gender. In many instances, the divide between the sexes stems from this generational gap in thinking. Consequently, families must navigate the pressures arising from cognitive inequality. Single mothers face the challenge of managing gender norms and their children's

perceptions of these norms. Many mothers experience existential anxiety as these obstacles hinder their pursuit of an ideal life. Intergenerational tensions ease when mothers employ family dialogue tools that transcend value conflicts, prioritising emotional connection over rational arguments. They require robust emotional regulation to uphold their own identity while embracing their children's perspectives. Support measures must extend beyond mere psychological adjustment to help emotionally bond family members with divergent values. Family dialogue proves crucial within complex gender discourses. Research indicates that generational differences influence family development, shifting single mothers' psychological adaptation from defensive and disoriented states towards complex cognitive frameworks. This suggests interventions must be tailored to distinct developmental stages. Examining unique gender expression patterns within single-parent families offers deeper insights into modern families' psychological adaptation strategies. How single-parent households navigate and ultimately resolve generational value differences across diverse sociocultural contexts warrants further investigation.

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