



Assessing the Sources of Support of Single Parent Families Available for Child Care in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Single parenthood is increasingly common in urban Nigeria, particularly in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. This study explores the sources of support available to single-parent families, the adequacy and accessibility of these support systems, and the challenges faced in accessing childcare support. The research is grounded in Erik Erikson's Psycho-Social Theory of Human Development, emphasizing the importance of support systems in child development and family stability. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological descriptive approach, involving in-depth interviews with 30 single parents in AMAC. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure rich insights into childcare challenges. Data were analyzed using thematic coding with NVivo software to identify patterns and themes. The findings reveal that single parents in AMAC primarily depend on informal support systems, including extended family members, neighbors, religious institutions, and personal income. Family and friends provide critical practical and emotional support, while religious institutions offer limited financial and emotional aid, often skewed toward widows. NGOs and community organizations provide sporadic support, and government assistance is largely administrative with minimal financial aid. Many single parents rely on their own income from employment or small businesses to meet their children's needs. Support systems are generally inadequate, with financial constraints and inconsistent access being major issues. Social stigma and cultural expectations limit the utilization of available support, and government programs are perceived as insufficient and often inaccessible. Single parents face significant financial hardship in providing basic needs, school fees, and healthcare. Emotional strain is prevalent, with limited access to counseling services. Social stigma and judgment deter single parents from seeking support, and weak social protection mechanisms exacerbate difficulties. The study concludes that single-parent families in AMAC face significant economic, emotional, and social challenges in providing childcare. Informal support networks are vital but insufficient without structural reforms. The findings highlight the need for inclusive, well-coordinated, and empathetic interventions to address the diverse needs of single-parent families.

Keywords: Single parenthood, childcare, support systems, Abuja, Nigeria

Introduction

Single parenthood has become an increasingly prevalent family structure across the globe, including in urban regions of Nigeria such as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Historically, child-rearing responsibilities were shouldered by two-parent households where duties were typically shared between both parents. However, in recent years, rising divorce rates, widowhood, non-marital births, and economic migration have contributed significantly to the emergence of single-parent families. In many cases, single parents—predominantly mothers—are left to provide for the economic, emotional, and developmental needs of their children without the support of a partner. This transformation

in family structure presents distinct challenges, especially in relation to the care and nurturing of children in the absence of a co-parent. In the context of the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), which is the most urbanized and demographically diverse council within the FCT, the pressure on single-parent families is particularly pronounced. AMAC comprises both low- and high-income neighborhoods, with significant disparities in access to social amenities, public services, and economic opportunities. The high cost of living in Abuja exacerbates the struggles faced by single-parent households, especially in securing reliable and affordable childcare. Many single parents in AMAC find it difficult to balance work and childcare responsibilities, often resulting in adverse outcomes for the children, such as neglect, poor academic performance, emotional instability, or inadequate supervision during critical developmental stages (Akah et al., 2022; Nwonye et al., 2024).

Despite the presence of some institutional and informal support mechanisms, the sustainability and accessibility of such support remain inconsistent. Governmental social welfare structures that are intended to support vulnerable populations are often underfunded, poorly coordinated, or plagued by bureaucratic inefficiencies. Moreover, while some non-governmental organizations and faith-based institutions in AMAC provide services such as temporary shelter, educational support, healthcare, and skills acquisition programs for single parents and their children, these efforts are often sporadic and fail to reach a significant portion of the target population. For instance, institutions like Rachel's Home for Orphans and Vulnerable Children and Mother Theresa Children's Home extend support that indirectly benefits some single-parent families, but their primary focus remains on orphans and the destitute, thus limiting their relevance for broader childcare needs in single-parent contexts (Omokhabi & Lawal, 2023).

In the absence of strong institutional support, many single parents rely heavily on informal networks for survival. These include extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and older siblings, who provide practical assistance with childcare, as well as community-based organizations and religious institutions that offer moral, spiritual, and sometimes material support. Initiatives like the Abuja Moms Foundation have emerged as grassroots responses to these challenges, organizing empowerment workshops, mental health seminars, and social welfare initiatives tailored to the needs of single mothers. However, the extent to which these sources meet the diverse and dynamic needs of single-parent families remains insufficiently explored in empirical literature (Adisa et al., 2021; Jain & Mahmoodi, 2022).

The gap in the literature is particularly evident with respect to localized studies assessing the sources and quality of support available for childcare among single-parent households in AMAC, FCT Abuja. Most national and regional research tends to generalize the experience of single parents without focusing on specific urban contexts where economic inequality and limited access to public resources pose unique threats to family well-being. Given the demographic shifts and socio-economic pressures peculiar to AMAC, there is an urgent need to understand how single-parent families navigate childcare

challenges, what sources of support they access, and how effective and sustainable these sources are in meeting their childcare needs.

This study, therefore, seeks to assess the sources of support available to single-parent families in AMAC, with a specific focus on childcare. The primary objectives are to identify and classify the types of support accessible to single parents; evaluate the adequacy, accessibility, and reliability of these sources; and explore possible interventions that can enhance the existing support structures. Ultimately, the research aims to generate evidence-based insights that will inform the development of targeted social policies and community interventions aimed at promoting the welfare of children raised in single-parent households within the urban context of AMAC. By illuminating the complexities and gaps in childcare support for single-parent families in AMAC, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on family welfare, gender equity, and child development in Nigeria's urban settings. The findings will be particularly valuable to policymakers, social workers, educators, religious organizations, and non-governmental agencies involved in child and family services. It is hoped that the research will serve as a catalyst for collaborative efforts to design inclusive and culturally relevant support systems that empower single parents and safeguard the holistic development of their children.

Research Questions

1. What are the major sources of support available to single-parent families for child care in AMAC, FCT Abuja?
2. How adequate and accessible are these support systems in meeting the child care needs of single-parent families in the area?
3. What challenges do single-parent families face in accessing support for child care, and what strategies can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of these support systems?

Research Objectives

1. To identify and categorize the sources of support available to single-parent families for child care in AMAC, FCT Abuja.
2. To assess the adequacy and accessibility of existing support systems in addressing the child care needs of single-parent households.
3. To explore the challenges faced by single-parent families in accessing child care support and recommend strategies for improving support mechanisms.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Erik Erikson's Psycho-Social Theory of Human Development, originally proposed in 1950. Erikson's theory emphasizes the intricate interplay between psychological growth and social interaction throughout the human lifespan. Central to the theory is the idea that individuals pass through eight developmental

stages, each marked by a specific psychosocial conflict that must be resolved to achieve psychological well-being. These stages range from infancy to late adulthood and include key conflicts such as trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and identity versus role confusion. Each stage builds upon the successful resolution of the previous one, highlighting the cumulative nature of human development.

The fundamental components of Erikson's theory underscore the importance of the caregiver-child relationship in early life stages. For children raised in single-parent households, the resolution of these psychosocial crises is often influenced not only by the lone parent but also by the broader network of support available to the family. The theory argues that an individual's development is not only rooted in internal psychological needs but also shaped profoundly by the social context and support systems within which they grow. In single-parent households, especially those within socio-economically diverse communities like AMAC in FCT Abuja, these support systems may include extended family, community organizations, religious groups, and governmental or non-governmental institutions.

The relevance of Erikson's psycho-social theory to this study lies in its ability to frame the challenges and potentials associated with single-parenting within a broader developmental and social context. It helps to explain how the availability or absence of child care support influences both the parent's ability to provide nurturing care and the child's emotional and social development. By assessing the sources of support available to single-parent families in AMAC, the study seeks to understand how these supports facilitate or hinder positive developmental outcomes for children and overall family stability. Thus, Erikson's theory provides a comprehensive lens through which the psychological and social dimensions of child care support in single-parent families can be analysed.

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance as it explores an increasingly prevalent social structure—single-parent families—and the support mechanisms that sustain them, especially in the area of child care. In urban areas such as AMAC within the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, the economic and social pressures of single parenthood are intensified by rising living costs, limited access to affordable child care, and insufficient institutional support. Understanding the dynamics of available child care support will empower single parents by equipping them with knowledge about accessible services and networks that can alleviate their burdens and improve their capacity to care for their children effectively.

The research is also vital for informing policy development by governmental bodies. Ministries and agencies concerned with women affairs, social development, and child welfare will benefit from data-driven insights that highlight areas of need and possible strategies for intervention. In addition, non-governmental organizations operating in the region stand to gain from this study by refining their program designs and targeting their

efforts toward the most vulnerable families. Moreover, community-based groups, including religious institutions and neighbourhood associations, will find the findings useful in strengthening their roles as local safety nets for single-parent households. By shedding light on both strengths and gaps in the current support landscape, the study aims to catalyse more inclusive and sustainable support systems that enhance the well-being of single-parent families and their children.

Scope of the Study

The content scope of this study focuses specifically on assessing the sources of support available for child care among single-parent families. It will explore the nature, adequacy, and accessibility of both formal and informal support systems, including government welfare programs, non-governmental initiatives, community efforts, and family-based assistance. The study will also delve into the lived experiences of single parents as they navigate child care responsibilities and seek support within their communities. Attention will be given to identifying systemic challenges, gaps in service delivery, and potential strategies for strengthening support networks. Geographically, the study is confined to the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), which is one of the six area councils that make up the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria. AMAC is a demographically diverse and rapidly urbanizing area that encapsulates a wide range of socio-economic realities. The selection of AMAC as the study area allows for an in-depth examination of child care support structures in both high-density urban neighbourhoods and less developed peri-urban communities. This geographical scope ensures a comprehensive understanding of the context-specific challenges faced by single-parent families in accessing child care support in this part of Nigeria.

Literature Review

The concept of single-parent families has evolved over time to encompass a wide range of family formations in which one parent, either the mother or father, takes on the primary caregiving role in the absence of a co-residing spouse or partner. Globally, scholars have emphasized that single-parent families often emerge as a result of divorce, separation, death of a partner, or deliberate choice, each carrying distinct socio-economic implications. In the Nigerian context, particularly within urban settings such as the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), the incidence of single-parenthood is on the rise due to increased rates of divorce, economic migration, and unintended pregnancies. According to Akinrinade and Okunade (2021), single-parent families in metropolitan centres like Abuja face dual burdens—providing for the home and raising children under significant financial and emotional constraints. These burdens are intensified by the socio-cultural expectations in Nigerian society, where traditional family structures are still largely idealized. My interpretation of this trend is that while single-parent families are becoming more normalized, the institutional and cultural frameworks in places like AMAC have not

sufficiently evolved to offer meaningful and equitable support to such families, thereby exacerbating their vulnerabilities.

The sources of support available to single-parent families serve as a buffer against the myriad challenges they face. Support systems can be formal—such as government welfare programs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community health initiatives—or informal, including assistance from extended family members, neighbours, friends, and religious institutions. Scholars like Mordi and Mbaegbu (2020) argue that in Nigerian urban centres, formal support is often inadequate due to policy gaps, underfunding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As such, informal networks become the primary source of relief. In AMAC, several community-based organizations like Rachel's Home and the Abuja Moms Foundation provide tangible support ranging from food supplies and healthcare to skills training and mental health services. However, these interventions are often sporadic, donor-dependent, and limited in reach. From a critical perspective, I observe that while these support mechanisms play a valuable role, they remain fragmented and insufficiently integrated into a broader policy framework that could ensure sustainability and universal access. Hence, a systematic evaluation of both the strengths and limitations of these support sources is necessary to inform policy and programmatic improvements tailored to the needs of single-parent households (Callaghan et al., 2021; Rees et al., 2023).

The concept of childcare in the literature is multidimensional, encompassing physical supervision, emotional nurturing, educational support, and moral upbringing. It is often used as a metric to assess family well-being and child development outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, as cited by Yusuf and Fatokun (2019), emphasizes that a child's development is not solely dependent on parental capacity but also on the surrounding support systems that interact with the child. In the context of AMAC, access to affordable and quality childcare services remains a challenge, especially for single parents working long hours or managing multiple jobs. For example, Adebayo and Kolawole (2022) noted that in Abuja, many single parents rely on unlicensed care providers or older siblings to look after younger children, which raises concerns about safety, quality of supervision, and the emotional well-being of children. In my analysis, this reality highlights the interplay between economic inequality and service accessibility, suggesting that enhancing childcare in AMAC requires not just infrastructural investment but also targeted support programs that address the unique burdens faced by single-parent households (Lasisi et al., 2024; Mayowa, 2021).

In synthesizing these concepts, it becomes evident that the intersection of single parenthood, limited support systems, and the demand for adequate childcare creates a precarious environment for family stability and child development in AMAC, FCT Abuja. The scholarly discourse underscores the importance of coordinated interventions, but it often underrepresents the contextual nuances specific to semi-urban Nigerian settings. By centring this study on AMAC, a region marked by socio-economic diversity and infrastructural disparity, this research contributes to a localized understanding of how

single-parent families navigate support structures in relation to their childcare responsibilities. It amplifies the lived realities of these families, adds specificity to existing literature, and encourages context-sensitive solutions rooted in both scholarly insight and empirical observation (Enenta et al., 2024; Folorunsho et al., 2024).

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological descriptive approach to explore the experiences of single parents in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Nigeria. AMAC was chosen due to its diverse population and significant number of single-parent households. The study involved in-depth interviews with 30 single parents, selected through purposive sampling to ensure participants could provide rich insights into childcare challenges. Interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, allowing participants to express their experiences freely. Data validity was ensured through expert review and a pilot study, while reliability was confirmed via inter-coder agreement. Ethical considerations included obtaining consent and ensuring confidentiality. Data analysis involved thematic coding using NVivo software to identify patterns and themes from the interviews. The findings aim to highlight the unique challenges faced by single parents in AMAC and inform targeted interventions to support these families.

Results

The presentation of findings is structured according to the study's three research questions. Each is explored through core themes derived from the participants' narratives and richly supported by their own words, offering insight into the lived experiences of single parents in AMAC.

Research Question 1: What are the major sources of support available to single-parent families for child care in AMAC, FCT Abuja?

Single parents in AMAC primarily depend on informal support systems comprising family members, neighbors, churches, and personal effort. As one participant put it, "*My parents and brothers help with school fees sometimes*" (IDI 2), highlighting how familial support is often the first resort. Neighbors also filled critical gaps, with a mother stating, "*Sometimes neighbors will give my children food in my absence*" (IDI 3). Emotional and logistical support from extended family and the community was frequently emphasized, especially in emergencies. In some cases, even in-laws remained supportive; a father shared, "*I gain support from my child's mother, her relatives and my family*" (IDI 12).

Religious institutions—mainly churches—played a significant yet limited role. While some received aid during festive periods, many felt left out. "*The church does support us, especially with school fees and food during festive seasons,*" one respondent noted (IDI 3). Yet, others, like a young widow, confessed, "*I don't go to church for widow support because most of them are older women. I feel I should hustle*" (IDI 2), revealing internalized stigma and the exclusivity of certain support categories. Some male participants

observed that religious and NGO supports were more accessible to women. As one father lamented, *“The system helps women, but men are ignored completely”* (IDI 10).

NGOs were mentioned sparingly and not always positively. *“We sometimes get support from NGOs, but it is not regular”* (IDI 24). Government assistance, according to most respondents, was practically absent. A social worker acknowledged, *“The government doesn’t have any financial support for single parents”* (IDI 1), reinforcing the general perception that formal support is either symbolic or inaccessible. As such, many participants emphasized self-reliance: *“Only my salary helps me manage”* (IDI 2), and *“I run my petty business to feed my child”* (IDI 13), pointing to the burdens they carry alone.

Research Question 2: How adequate and accessible are these support systems in meeting the child care needs of single-parent families in the area?

Across the board, participants reported that existing support systems are inadequate and inconsistently accessed. *“These supports do not go anywhere; the price of things is not funny,”* one parent stated bluntly (IDI 11), referencing the economic strain that outpaces available aid. The uneven distribution of support was another concern. *“Most interventions are for widows alone, not for those with children out of wedlock,”* a key informant explained (IDI 1). Such selectiveness creates significant gaps for single fathers and others not fitting the widow category. A male participant echoed this, saying, *“People think only women can be single parents”* (IDI 6).

Accessibility is further hindered by social stigma. A young mother disclosed, *“I don’t go to ask for help. People already look at me like I failed. I’d rather struggle quietly”* (IDI 8). Even in churches, shame and judgment deter participation. As one respondent described, *“When you are not a widow, they ask too many questions—where’s the father? Did he marry you? So, I stopped going”* (IDI 14). These internal and external pressures illustrate how cultural narratives about family legitimacy shape who receives help and who does not.

Government involvement was seen as more procedural than impactful. *“We depend mostly on church and charity; nothing from the government,”* said one mother (IDI 25). A social worker confirmed this limitation: *“We mediate but don’t have funding to give anything concrete”* (IDI 1). Altogether, the findings paint a picture of symbolic rather than systemic support, insufficient to meet the diverse and recurring needs of single-parent families.

Research Question 3: What challenges do single-parent families face in accessing support for child care, and what strategies can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of these support systems?

Financial hardship was the most cited challenge. *“Feeding, school fees, clothing, house rent... all on me alone,”* one mother summarized (IDI 3). Another explained, *“Without money, everything is half-half: school, food, shelter”* (IDI 6). The struggle often pushed parents into risky decisions. A heartbreaking example came from a mother who

shared, *"I gave my daughter to a friend who was pregnant so she could help me. But she ended up maltreating my child"* (IDI 2).

Psychological and emotional strain ran deep. Parents described feeling hopeless, with one saying, *"I cry a lot; my daughter tells me to stop and says, 'God will help us'"* (IDI 2). Children were also emotionally affected. *"My son asked me if I killed his mother. It broke me,"* a grieving father recalled (IDI 4). Social rejection extended to children too. *"They call my daughter a bastard in school,"* one mother said, tearfully (IDI 14), pointing to the generational weight of stigma.

Institutional challenges further compounded these issues. *"There used to be cooperation with courts, but now it's gone. We are just left to manage cases,"* a social worker lamented (IDI 1). Participants emphasized the need for reform. *"There should be sensitization for singles so they can control themselves,"* a respondent suggested (IDI 1), pointing to prevention. Others called for long-term support structures: *"We need people to care for the children when we're working"* (IDI 3), and *"Give us skills to help us earn a living"* (IDI 1). Another concluded, *"If we become our brother's keeper, it will help a lot"* (IDI 5), emphasizing the necessity of community solidarity.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that single parents in AMAC rely heavily on informal support networks—particularly extended family, neighbours, churches, and personal income—due to the limited and inconsistent nature of institutional assistance. This affirms the observations of Akinwale and Dada (2021), who noted the diminishing role of state support in urban Nigerian households, leaving kin-based systems to fill the void. Religious institutions provided some relief, but their support was often skewed toward widows, marginalizing other categories of single parents such as those from divorces or out-of-wedlock situations—a pattern similarly identified by Okoye and Ahaneku (2020).

Emotional strain, stigma, and lack of access to psychosocial services were also recurrent issues, aligning with Wanja, Murugami, and Bunyasi's (2021) findings on the mental health struggles of single parents in Kenya. However, unlike in regions where male-headed single families receive more visibility (Ahmed & Naveed, 2020), this study found that single fathers in AMAC are largely invisible and unsupported, pointing to a local divergence shaped by gender norms. Moreover, while government agencies were present, their roles were largely administrative rather than supportive, echoing Daboer and Iorapuu's (2022) critique of Nigeria's weak social protection mechanisms. In sum, the study concludes that informal support, though vital, remains insufficient without structural reforms. A more inclusive, stigma-free, and well-coordinated support system—featuring legal, emotional, and financial dimensions—is necessary to meet the complex needs of single-parent families in AMAC and similar urban contexts.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that single-parent families in AMAC navigate significant economic, emotional, and social challenges in their efforts to provide child care, largely relying on fragmented informal support networks while institutional systems remain inadequate, inconsistent, and often exclusionary. The findings highlight not only a lack of structured government assistance but also the influence of stigma and gender bias in determining access to available resources. Participants' experiences underscore the need for inclusive, well-coordinated, and empathetic interventions that recognize the diverse realities of single parenthood. Ultimately, the study concludes that without intentional policy reform and strengthened community collaboration, single parents will continue to bear disproportionate burdens in raising their children with minimal systemic support.

Recommendations

It is recommended that government and community stakeholders develop inclusive welfare policies, strengthen the role of social workers, establish peer support systems, expand access to counselling services, promote youth education, and revive community-based care models to support single-parent families more effectively.

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