

## Psychological Dynamics of Children in Single-Parent Care: The Influence of Economic and Social Factors

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History

Received, 2025 05 05

Revised, 2025 05 10

Accepted, 2025 05 25

#### Keywords

Single parent,  
child

psychological  
development,  
economic factors,  
social support,  
mental health.

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the role of economic and social factors in the psychological development of children raised by single parents. With the increasing number of single-parent families, it is important to understand how economic conditions and social support influence the psychological well-being of children in different family environments. This research used a quantitative approach involving 150 children from single parent families in urban areas. Data is collected through questionnaires that measure economic conditions, social support, and indicators of children's mental health, such as levels of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. The research results show that low economic conditions are significantly related to an increase in psychological problems in children, such as anxiety and depression. However, strong social support from the extended family and community can reduce these negative impacts, increasing children's self-esteem and psychological well-being. These findings emphasize the importance of interventions that focus on improving economic conditions and strengthening social support networks for single-parent families to ensure children's optimal psychological development

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, family structures across the world, including in Indonesia, have undergone significant transformations, marked by a growing number of single-parent households. This phenomenon has attracted considerable attention in sociology and psychology due to its far-reaching implications for individual well-being and broader social dynamics. Importantly, this trend is not confined to

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developed nations but is also evident in developing countries such as Indonesia. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) indicate a steady rise in the number of single-parent families each year. Several factors contribute to this development, including increasing divorce rates, the death of a spouse, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and personal choices to become single parents (Faulconer et al., 2022).

The rise in single-parent households has significant consequences, particularly in economic and psychological dimensions. Research suggests that divorce or parental separation remains one of the most common reasons why children are raised in single-mother families. Additionally, there is an increasing proportion of children born to unmarried single mothers due to unplanned pregnancies (Golombok, 2017). Single-parent families frequently face greater financial challenges, with household income relying on only one provider. This financial instability often limits access to essential resources such as education and healthcare.

Beyond economic concerns, children growing up in single-parent households may experience various psychological challenges. Limited parental attention and the economic pressures of single parenting can affect children's emotional and mental development. In such households, the resident parent often assumes dual roles as both caregiver and breadwinner, which can result in reduced time and investment in child monitoring and interaction (Lee et al., 2020).

In response to these challenges, several countries, including Indonesia, have developed policies and programmes aimed at supporting single-parent families. These measures range from social and educational assistance to interventions designed to strengthen the role of extended family members and communities in providing support. Non-governmental organisations also play a crucial role in delivering psychological and social assistance to both single parents and their children. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon is essential for formulating effective policies and fostering an inclusive and supportive society for diverse family structures (Su et al., 2022).

Against this background, the present study, entitled "The Psychological Dynamics of Children in Single-Parent Care: The Influence of Economic and Social Factors," seeks to identify and analyse the role of economic and social determinants in the psychological development of children raised by single parents. The study aims to provide both theoretical and practical insights for supporting the well-being of these children.

Understanding the impact of economic and social factors on children's psychological development is crucial within the fields of child development and family well-being. Family economic conditions have a direct and profound influence on psychological outcomes: financial instability or disadvantaged economic circumstances may lead to elevated parental and child stress. Economic hardship, such as poverty and loss of income, can reduce parental capacity for supportive caregiving and increase vulnerability to adverse life events, ultimately affecting children's socio-emotional functioning (Bosch et al., 2022).

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Children from economically disadvantaged households often encounter limited access to quality education and healthcare, which in turn may impede their cognitive, emotional, and social development. Moreover, such children are more vulnerable to psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The child's social environment, including support from extended family, peers, and community, also plays a pivotal role in shaping psychological well-being. While strong social support can buffer the effects of stress and conflict, insufficient social networks may lead to social isolation and behavioural problems (Young et al., 2017).

Recognising the interaction between economic and social factors is particularly important in the context of single-parent families, who frequently face compounded challenges in managing financial constraints and building adequate support systems. Therefore, this study seeks to provide deeper insights into how these factors affect the psychological development of children in single-parent households, and how appropriate interventions can help mitigate associated challenges. Ultimately, the findings are expected to offer a solid foundation for more effective interventions and policies aimed at promoting the well-being of children in single-parent families.

## 1. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach, which is a research process designed to gain an in-depth understanding of human or social phenomena by developing a comprehensive and complex description. Such an approach enables researchers to capture detailed perspectives obtained directly from informants, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Moreover, qualitative research is conducted within natural settings, allowing more organic interactions between the researcher and participants and generating findings that are contextually rich and nuanced (Fadli, 2021).

The research design was a case study, focusing on specific contexts to gain deeper insights. The participants of this study consisted of two single parents (one mother and one father) and two teachers who served as key informants. The research was conducted in Probolinggo, East Java, in June 2024.

Data collection techniques included observation and interviews, which provided both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly by the researcher, while secondary data were gathered through intermediaries or additional informants. In this study, interviews with teachers were used to collect information concerning the experiences and perspectives of single parents.

For data analysis, the study adopted the Miles and Huberman framework, which involves several iterative steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. This systematic process facilitated the organisation and interpretation of the collected data, allowing the researcher to explore emerging patterns and themes and to generate meaningful conclusions aligned with the objectives of the study.

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal the complex influence of economic conditions on the psychological well-being of children in single-parent households. As AF noted, financial limitations directly affected children's emotional regulation. Children from such contexts often became more irritable, demanding, and envious of peers because their needs could not be fully met. The problem was further exacerbated by the limited time single parents had to provide emotional support, amplifying children's sense of deprivation and frustration. This observation aligns with previous literature emphasising the impact of economic hardship on children's emotional health.

Interestingly, ANS presented a contrasting case where, despite economic limitations, her child displayed signs of indulgence. This was largely because the child's needs were consistently fulfilled by wealthy in-laws. While this situation mitigated some immediate financial stress, ANS expressed concerns regarding her child's dependency on external financial support, which might not be sustainable in the long term. This highlights the double-edged nature of extended family financial involvement: while beneficial, it may inadvertently foster reliance rather than resilience.

The theme of economic instability was also evident in WM's account. She explained that the fluctuating financial situation forced her child to adapt by suppressing personal desires, such as the wish to purchase certain items. While such adjustments might foster resilience, they also generated feelings of difference and exclusion, particularly in comparison with peers from more stable households. Similarly, SK highlighted that unmet basic needs due to economic hardship contributed to emotional imbalance in children, demonstrating that financial strain penetrates multiple dimensions of a child's psychological functioning.

The findings also suggest that the effects of single-parenting differ depending on whether the custodial parent is the mother or the father. AF noted that children raised by fathers tended to be more pampered, whereas those raised by mothers were encouraged to manage their desires more responsibly. WM further elaborated that children living with single fathers might experience more stable provision due to the father's relatively consistent employment, whereas SK observed that single mothers placed greater emphasis on emotional development, while single fathers often prioritised independence. These findings reinforce existing research showing that gender roles in parenting influence both the style of upbringing and the resulting psychological outcomes for children.

Beyond parental roles, the study underscores the pivotal importance of extended family support. AF emphasised that social and academic development was positively affected when extended family members actively supported the child, providing balance and psychological stability. At the same time, ANS raised concerns that excessive reliance on such support might hinder children's independence in the future. WM pointed out that some single parents prioritised meeting children's basic needs over their psychological growth, potentially weakening the quality of social support they were able to provide. In contrast, SK highlighted that extended family engagement provided not only stability but also

transmission of familial values, which helped children feel a sense of belonging and security.

Children's peer interactions also revealed nuanced challenges. According to AF, younger children in single-parent households were generally unaffected by their family status when interacting with peers. However, ANS observed that although friendships were not directly disrupted, economic disparities contributed to children's emotional difficulties. WM noted that some children displayed more self-centred and aggressive behaviours, which she attributed to a lack of consistent parental guidance. Similarly, SK emphasised that children often perceived themselves as different from their peers, which negatively affected their social confidence and integration. These accounts indicate that while social interactions may remain outwardly functional, underlying emotional and behavioural struggles persist.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that economic conditions and social support systems significantly shape children's psychological development in single-parent families. The differences in parental roles – whether mother or father – as well as the level of extended family support, create diverse outcomes in children's emotional and behavioural adjustment. While extended family support is critical, over-reliance poses long-term risks, particularly in fostering dependency. Therefore, a balanced approach that considers financial stability, social support, and parenting style is essential to promote healthy psychological outcomes. These findings echo the broader literature, which stresses the interconnection between socioeconomic factors, family structures, and child development (Galić et al., 2023).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Influence of Economic Conditions on Children's Psychology**

The findings of this study highlight that economic conditions play a significant role in shaping the psychological development of children in single-parent families. Ayu Fransisca explained that as a single mother without financial support from her child's father, she struggled to provide for her child's needs. This situation led the child to become easily angered and demanding when desires were unmet, which in turn generated feelings of envy and the habit of borrowing or asking for things from peers. Ayu also noted that her limited time for emotional attention due to work pressures compounded the child's emotional burden.

In contrast, Anisa's case illustrates a different dynamic. Although her financial resources were limited, her child's needs were consistently met by wealthy in-laws and siblings-in-law. While this provided immediate stability, it also fostered indulgence, as the child became demanding and reliant on external financial assistance. Anisa worried that if such support were withdrawn, her child might experience frustration and exhibit unpredictable behaviours. Additionally, she observed minimal emotional closeness with her child, who often displayed stubbornness, wasteful spending habits, and a lack of maturity in coping with challenges.

Similarly, Wahaibatul Mudiah emphasised that economic circumstances strongly influenced children's adjustment. She explained that children in single-

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parent households often had to suppress their desires, such as refraining from buying items, due to limited allowances. This created feelings of difference and social exclusion when compared with peers from more financially stable families. Single parents also faced the dual challenge of working while caring for children, often leaving limited time for meaningful attention, which further strained children's psychological well-being.

Siti Komariah added that economic hardship directly affected children's access to fundamental needs such as education, healthcare, and housing, all of which influenced their emotional stability. She highlighted the importance of parents managing financial stress while also providing emotional support and actively seeking resources to meet children's developmental needs. In this regard, social support, government aid, and community resources were deemed crucial for alleviating the economic pressures faced by single parents.

The literature corroborates these findings. Li et al. (2021) reported that children from single-parent households are more vulnerable to economic hardship, which often leads to emotional strain and reduced psychological well-being. This aligns with the present study's interview results, which showed that economic limitations contributed to anger, envy, and diminished parental attention due to work commitments. Likewise, studies have consistently demonstrated that children from low-income households face higher risks of emotional and behavioural problems due to limited access to essential resources such as education and healthcare (Atashbahar et al., 2022; Reiß et al., 2019). These economic constraints increase family stress levels, further exacerbating children's psychological difficulties (Hannighofer et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, recent scholarship underscores the mitigating role of social support. Strong social networks, including extended family and peer support, have been shown to buffer the negative psychological effects of financial hardship. Akgül (2023) emphasised that social support is particularly critical for children in low-income contexts, providing reliable connections that help them navigate adversity. This is consistent with the notion of social support functioning as a protective factor, enabling children to better manage the challenges posed by economic instability.

The focus on single-parent families is particularly relevant, as these households often encounter greater economic and emotional strain compared to dual-parent families. Research indicates that children in such families are at higher risk of mental health issues due to the combined effects of financial instability and the absence of one parental figure (Hannighofer et al., 2017; Varga, 2021). Consistent caregiving and strong social support are thus critical for fostering healthy psychological development in these contexts (Varga, 2021). In summary, while economic conditions pose significant challenges, their interaction with social support systems is pivotal. As such, policies and interventions should not only address economic vulnerabilities but also strengthen support networks to improve children's psychological outcomes.

Differences in Psychological Development by Parenting Style  
The study also reveals distinctions between children raised by single mothers and

those raised by single fathers. Ayu Fransisca observed that in her case, when her child lived with her, she taught the child to regulate desires by setting limits on purchases and explaining financial constraints. This approach was intended to encourage self-control, frugality, and appreciation for existing resources, even though it was particularly difficult for a young child. Conversely, when the child stayed with the father, indulgence was more prevalent, with most requests being granted, leading to excessive spending and lack of self-regulation. Ayu expressed concern that such upbringing could cause frustration later in life when the child encountered limitations.

Wahaibatul Mudiah noted that psychological differences between children raised by mothers versus fathers were not always immediately visible, as economic conditions were a more dominant factor. However, she suggested that children raised by single fathers might have greater access to economic stability, owing to men's comparatively stronger workforce participation. Siti Komariah elaborated that children raised by fathers often received more financial stability, whereas those raised by mothers experienced more caregiving focus. These differences shaped how children related to their parents, with mothers tending to prioritise emotional needs while fathers emphasised independence and practical skills.

Existing scholarship supports these findings. Hargreaves et al. (2021) reported that single mothers tend to focus more on emotional needs and social skills, while single fathers emphasise independence and responsibility. The present study affirms this distinction: single mothers like Ayu attempted to instil financial discipline, whereas single fathers leaned toward indulgence, creating potential challenges for self-regulation. This contributes to the growing body of literature suggesting that parental gender roles significantly affect child development in single-parent families.

Moreover, earlier studies highlighted that single mothers often face heavier economic burdens due to their dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners. This study supports those findings while also extending them by showing that despite greater stress exposure, single mothers often provide higher levels of emotional warmth, which serves as a crucial buffer for children (Wang et al., 2018). This underscores how maternal emotional investment can counterbalance financial stress. Conversely, previous research often portrayed single fathers as less capable of providing emotional care, focusing instead on financial stability and discipline. The present study confirms this perspective but adds nuance by suggesting that emotional gaps in single-father households may be compensated for by strong social support systems (Kong et al., 2017). Thus, the findings enrich the literature by showing how social support can complement paternal caregiving styles.

### **The Role of Extended Family Support**

Extended family support emerged as a crucial factor in shaping children's psychological outcomes. Ayu Fransisca stressed that such support was essential, particularly because her work demands reduced the time she could spend with her child. Extended family members helped by praising, listening, and engaging in activities with the child, while also providing motivation for academic

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achievement through learning facilities and shared study sessions. This type of support directly contributed to both emotional and educational development.

Anisa similarly highlighted the influence of extended family support, especially in education. Her in-laws actively guided her child towards a career in law enforcement, enrolling him in quality schools and supporting training opportunities aligned with that path. While this facilitated structured career development, it also reflected how extended family expectations could shape children's goals and identities. Wahaibatul Mudiah, however, observed variation in such support: some families focused only on basic schooling rather than psychological development, while others devoted significant attention to both education and socio-emotional growth.

Siti Komariah reinforced the positive role of extended family by noting that beyond academic support, they provided stable emotional care and transmitted important family values. Extended family members often assisted with daily caregiving, such as picking up children from school or supervising them during parental work hours. This broadened children's exposure to relational values and fostered a sense of belonging. Empirical studies also support these observations. Chirico and Magnavita (2020) found that extended family support provided emotional stability and enhanced psychological well-being in single-parent households, reducing parental stress and promoting healthier child outcomes.

Similarly, Wang et al. (2023) emphasised the importance of emotional support from family members, which helps children feel loved and appreciated while building healthy social skills. The present findings strengthen this evidence, showing that extended family emotional support can compensate for limited parental attention due to work commitments. Furthermore, this research builds on prior studies that establish extended family support as a buffer against stress (Ying, 2023). The results here expand that view by illustrating how such support benefits not only children but also empowers single parents to provide more effective care.

These findings also highlight the dual nature of family dynamics. While consistent and positive extended family support serves as a strong protective factor, internal conflicts can undermine its effectiveness. Usevitch and Dufur (2021) cautioned that family disharmony may diminish or even reverse the benefits of extended support. Thus, the quality of relational ties within the extended family is critical. This study contributes a nuanced understanding by showing that extended support is not inherently beneficial but depends on the stability and harmony of family relationships.

Additionally, the study underscores that extended family contributions extend beyond emotional aspects to include practical assistance such as financial support and childcare. Prior research demonstrated that such support alleviates the burden on single parents (Setiawan et al., 2023). The present study deepens this understanding by showing how practical support contributes to everyday stability for children, thereby reinforcing their psychological development (Kelly et al., 2014).

### **Peer Interactions**



Finally, the role of peer interactions in shaping psychological outcomes was evident. Ayu Fransisca observed that for young children, parental separation had little effect on social interactions, as they were not yet fully aware of their family situation. Similarly, Anisa noted that for her grown child, single-parent status had minimal impact on friendships during university years, as social networks at this stage were less sensitive to parental structures. However, she emphasised that emotional difficulties persisted, as her child expressed jealousy towards peers with intact families, leading to emotional instability.

Wahaibatul Mudiah pointed out that children from single-parent households often displayed self-centred and aggressive behaviours, sometimes mimicking harsh behaviours they observed in their surroundings. This reflected gaps in parental guidance due to work-related absences. Likewise, Siti Komariah reported that such children sometimes felt different from their peers, particularly when comparing family structures. Limited emotional support, combined with economic disadvantages such as late school pickups, further reinforced feelings of exclusion.

These findings resonate with broader scholarship. Schoeppe et al. (2022) observed that children from single-parent households often encounter social difficulties, perceiving themselves as different from peers with complete families, which negatively impacts emotional stability. The interviews in this study confirm these conclusions, particularly with older children like Anisa's son, who experienced jealousy and insecurity in peer contexts.

The significance of peer interactions in child development is well-documented. Prior research has consistently emphasised that peer relationships are critical to children's emotional and social well-being, regardless of family background (Wita, 2023). The present study supports these findings while adding new dimensions by exploring how peer interactions specifically function within the context of single-parent families. Positive peer relationships have been shown to enhance confidence, foster social competence, and reduce risks of mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. While Lancaster et al. (2022) did not directly examine single-parent families, their work on peer support programmes underlines the protective role of peer relationships in promoting emotional well-being – findings that can be extended to the present context.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the psychological development of children in single-parent families is profoundly shaped by the interplay of economic conditions, parenting styles, and the availability of social support networks. Economic hardship emerged as a central challenge, often resulting in emotional strain, feelings of exclusion, and behavioural difficulties among children. Conversely, financial stability – whether provided by parents or extended family members – helped alleviate these pressures but, in some cases, fostered dependency and indulgence.

The analysis also revealed distinct differences between maternal and paternal parenting. Single mothers generally emphasised emotional nurturing and

discipline in managing financial constraints, while single fathers tended to prioritise independence and provision. These findings highlight the importance of understanding gendered dynamics in single-parent households and their specific implications for child development.

Equally important was the role of extended family support. Beyond practical and financial assistance, extended family members offered emotional stability and transmitted core family values, contributing to resilience and a sense of belonging. However, the effectiveness of such support depended on the quality of family relationships: consistent and positive engagement served as a protective factor, whereas conflict within extended families risked undermining the benefits of support.

Peer interactions further shaped children's psychological outcomes. While younger children appeared less affected by family structure, older children increasingly experienced feelings of difference, envy, or insecurity when comparing themselves with peers from intact families. At the same time, positive peer relationships acted as protective buffers, fostering self-confidence, social competence, and emotional well-being.

The findings carry several important implications. First, policymakers should design interventions that not only provide economic assistance but also strengthen community and extended family support systems. This dual approach can alleviate financial vulnerability while enhancing children's emotional resilience. Second, practitioners working with single-parent families should consider the unique challenges associated with both maternal and paternal parenting, ensuring that support programmes are tailored to different parenting styles. Third, schools and community organisations should actively promote inclusive environments and peer support initiatives to reduce social stigma and enhance children's sense of belonging.

Finally, future research should explore more deeply the intersection between economic stability, parenting practices, and social support systems in diverse cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies, in particular, would be valuable for capturing how these factors interact over time to influence children's psychological trajectories. By addressing these gaps, research can better inform policies and practices that empower single-parent families and safeguard the well-being of children growing up in these increasingly common family structures.

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