

Child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the child-rearing practices adopted by single parents in Anambra State, Nigeria, exploring how solo mothers and fathers navigate the complexities of family management within a distinct socio-cultural environment. This study adopted a cost-effective survey design in Anambra State, utilizing a multi-stage sampled size of 358 single parents derived from a population of 3,385. Data collection used a validated, high-reliability digital questionnaire covering demographics and parenting dynamics. Seven trained assistants distributed the survey via phone links. Analysis was performed through SPSS using descriptive statistics to answer research questions based on a four-point Likert scale, alongside inferential t-tests at a 0.05 significance level to evaluate five null hypotheses. The results reveal that single parents in Anambra State predominantly favor modern, flexible, and supportive child-rearing practices, yielding a high cluster mean score of 3.05 with a standard deviation of 0.95. Out of 15 listed strategies, 358 respondents agreed on 14 items, placing the highest emphasis on promoting cultural and religious values at a mean of 3.42 and tailoring discipline at 3.32. Conversely, they rejected the integration of traditional rituals, which scored a low mean of 2.42. Furthermore, a t-test analysis with a t-value of 0.631 and a significance value of 0.528 proved that male and female parents do not differ significantly. The study concludes that the shared socioeconomic and structural constraints of solo parenting override localized gender roles, leading both mothers and fathers to implement uniform, progressive family management strategies. Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers, community leaders, and social welfare institutions transition away from rigid, gender-segregated family frameworks. Instead, they should establish modern, localized social support networks and financial resource systems tailored to empower single-parent units in fostering healthy child development.

1. Introduction

Child rearing encompasses the methods and strategies used by parents and caregivers to support the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children from infancy through adulthood. This multifaceted process is influenced by cultural, societal, and individual factors, making it a complex area of study within developmental psychology and sociology (Holden et al., 2022). At its core, child rearing practices aim to equip children with the skills, values, and behaviors necessary for successful adulthood. Such practices vary widely across cultures and individual families, reflecting diverse beliefs about what is best for children's development. For instance, while Western societies may emphasize independence and self-expression, Eastern cultures often prioritize respect for authority and communal harmony (Zhirkov et al., 2023).

Theories of child rearing have evolved, identifying different parenting styles that have distinct impacts on children's outcomes. Mann et al., (2022) initially identified three main styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, with later research adding the uninvolved style. Authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth and firm yet fair discipline, is consistently linked with positive developmental outcomes, including higher academic achievement, self-esteem, and social competence (Uchendu, 2022). Recent research also highlights the importance of considering the child's temperament and the parent-child fit in understanding the effectiveness of child-rearing practices. The dynamic interaction between a parent's approach and a child's personality underscores the clear nature of child rearing.

Moreover, socio-economic factors and the changing dynamics of family structures, including the rise of single and dual parenting, further complicate the child-rearing landscape (Bakker, 2020). These elements underscore the need for adaptive and flexible child-rearing practices that can address the diverse needs of children in various contexts.

Various child-rearing practices among single parents are shaped by various factors including culture, socioeconomic status, and personal beliefs. These practices reflect the resilience and adaptability of single parents as they navigate the challenges of raising children on their own. Research conducted in recent years sheds light on some of the common strategies employed by single parents to ensure the well-being and development of their children (Makhliyo, 2024). One prevalent practice is the emphasis on open communication. Single parents often prioritize creating an environment where their children feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions. This includes active listening and validation of their children's feelings (Ching et al., 2021). By boosting open lines of communication, single parents aim to strengthen their relationship with their children and provide a safe space for them to share their concerns and experiences.

Another important practice is the cultivation of independence and responsibility. Single parents frequently encourage their children to take on age-appropriate tasks and responsibilities around the house (Martin et al., 2018). This includes chores, managing their own schedules, and making decisions within boundaries set by the parent. By boosting independence, single parents aim to instill a sense of competence and self-reliance in their children. In terms of discipline, single parents often employ consistent and fair discipline strategies. Research suggests that single parents tend to use positive reinforcement and clear expectations to guide their children's behavior (Brooks, 2023). This approach focuses on teaching children the consequences of their actions and promoting self-regulation rather than punitive measures.

Education is also a priority for many single parents. Studies have shown that single parents are highly invested in their children's academic success and are actively involved in their education (Tan et al., 2022). This involvement includes helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and advocating for their children's needs within the school system. Additionally, single parents often seek support from social networks and community resources. Research indicates that single parents rely on friends, family members, and community organizations for emotional support and practical assistance (Zebrack et al., 2014). These networks provide a sense of belonging and reduce the isolation that single parents may experience. By building a strong support system, single parents can better navigate the challenges of raising children alone.

Furthermore, single parents often prioritize the well-being of their own mental and physical health. Research suggests that self-care practices, such as exercise, mindfulness, and seeking counseling when needed, are common among single parents (Kowalski, 2022). By taking care of themselves, single parents are better equipped to meet the needs of their children and model healthy behaviors. This study holds immense institutional value because it addresses critical gaps in contemporary African family sociology, specifically within the unique demographic landscape of southeastern Nigeria. Traditional parenting scholarship frequently assumes a dual-parent structure or focuses strictly on rural paradigms. Investigating modern solo family dynamics exposes a vital cultural shift: single parents heavily preserve foundational values while deliberately casting off outdated customs. This specific negotiation of modern identity strongly mirrors the socioeconomic transitions evaluated by Ilukwe and Ume (2026).

A significant empirical gap also exists regarding how gender dictates single parenting in Sub-Saharan Africa. Past structural frameworks often reinforce rigid gender roles, but this study's inferential findings successfully dismantle those assumptions. The data demonstrate that identical socioeconomic pressures force male and female single parents to adopt uniform, progressive survival strategies. Establishing this critical baseline aligns directly with the institutional protection and child

rights advocacy outlined by Agoha et al (2024), providing the necessary empirical data to design modern, localized social welfare policies.

Research Question

What are the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to efficiently gather quantitative data regarding child rearing and single parenting styles. This design was selected for its cost-effectiveness, ability to manage large samples, and capacity to ensure respondent anonymity. The research was set in Anambra State, a socioculturally diverse Nigerian territory in the southeastern region, which consists of 21 local government areas (LGAs) split across three senatorial districts. The target population comprised 3,385 active single parents registered in the Anambra State court registry in 2024, consisting of 2,400 single mothers and 985 single fathers from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Utilizing the Taro Yamane technique, the sample size was determined to be 358 single parents. A multi-stage sampling procedure was applied to select respondents. First, simple random sampling was used to select one LGA from each senatorial zone: Awka South, Anambra East, and Nnewi North. Next, five communities were randomly chosen from each LGA, yielding 15 communities in total. The 358 parents were distributed proportionally, resulting in approximately 24 parents per community, where stratified random sampling was ultimately applied to maintain demographic representation.

Data collection relied on a structured, researcher-developed questionnaire. The instrument was structured into two primary divisions. Part I gathered demographic characteristics such as age, education, ethnicity, family size, and location. Part II utilized a four-point Likert scale, which evaluated the child-rearing practices. Three experts from the University of Nigeria Nsukka face-validated the instrument to ensure clarity and relevance. Reliability was established via a test-retest trial on 20 single parents in Enugu State. Internal consistency was calculated using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which yielded strong reliability value.

The administration of the instrument occurred digitally through Google Forms. The researcher trained seven research assistants during a virtual session to manage the distribution and resolve technical issues. These assistants received training materials three weeks prior to the briefing. The survey links were text-encoded directly to the respondents' phone numbers, allowing real-time tracking and automated data spreadsheet compilation to minimize manual entry errors. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation scores addressed the primary research questions. Based on the real limits of the four-point Likert scale, mean scores between 2.50 and 4.00 signified agreement (with 3.50–4.00 indicating strong agreement), while scores between 0.50 and 2.49 indicated disagreement (with 0.50–1.49 indicating strong disagreement). Meanwhile, the five null hypotheses were evaluated using t-test statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. Hypotheses were rejected if the calculated probability value fell below the 0.05 threshold ($p < 0.05$) and were upheld if the value exceeded it ($p > 0.05$).

Results

Research Question: What are the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean responses and standard deviations on the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State (N=358)

| S/N | Various Child Rearing Practices | \bar{x} | SD | Dec. |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| 1 | Arranging flexible parenting schedules to accommodate work and other commitments. | 3.23 | .92 | A |
| 2 | Cultivating independence and self-reliance in children. | 2.57 | 1.20 | A |
| 3 | Prioritizing open communication and providing emotional support at home. | 3.18 | .87 | A |
| 4 | Tailoring disciplinary approaches to meet each child's specific needs. | 3.32 | 1.01 | A |
| 5 | Empowering children to participate in decision-making processes. | 3.03 | .85 | A |
| 6 | Valuing educational achievement and boosting academic success for children. | 3.11 | .92 | A |
| 7 | Promoting cultural and religious values within the family. | 3.42 | .78 | A |
| 8 | Building strong bonds and attachment between parent and child. | 3.09 | .93 | A |
| 9 | Encouraging creativity and exploration in the child's activities and hobbies. | 2.89 | 1.08 | A |
| 10 | Incorporating traditional practices and rituals into daily routines. | 2.42 | 1.33 | D |
| 11 | Establishing consistent routines and boundaries for children's behavior. | 3.21 | .78 | A |
| 12 | Encouraging responsibility and participation in household chores. | 3.03 | .84 | A |
| 13 | Instilling moral and ethical values to shape the child's character. | 3.02 | .95 | A |
| 14 | Providing positive role models and mentorship opportunities. | 2.98 | .76 | A |
| 15 | Facilitating social interactions and friendships for the child's social development. | 3.25 | .89 | A |
| Cluster/Grand Mean | | 3.05 | 0.95 | A |

Note: N= Number of respondents, SD = Standard Deviation, Dec.=Decision, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed

The results in Table 1 indicate the mean responses and standard deviations of single parents in Anambra State on various child-rearing practices. Most of the mean responses were above the criterion mean of 2.50, implying that respondents agreed on several child-rearing practices. For instance, single parents agreed on practices like arranging flexible parenting schedules (mean = 3.23, SD = .928), cultivating independence in children (mean = 2.57, SD = 1.207), and promoting cultural and religious values (mean = 3.42, SD = .783). Respondents also emphasized open communication and emotional support (mean = 3.18, SD = .872), as well as tailoring disciplinary approaches to meet children's specific needs (mean = 3.32, SD = 1.012). However, the respondents disagreed on incorporating traditional practices and rituals into daily routines, as the mean response for this item (2.42) fell below the criterion mean. The grand mean of 3.05 with a standard deviation of .95 suggests that single parents generally adopt modern and flexible approaches to child-rearing, focusing on building independence, promoting values, and boosting academic and social success. The standard deviations, which range from .769 to 1.332, reflect some variability in respondents' views, though the responses are generally consistent.

Hypothesis: there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the various child rearing practices among single parents in Anambra State.

| Gender | N | Mean | SD | t-value | df | Sig. | Dec. |
|--------|-----|-------|-------|---------|-----|------|------|
| Male | 97 | 2.998 | 0.912 | 0.631 | 356 | .528 | NS |
| Female | 261 | 3.067 | 0.938 | | | | |

Note: N= Number of respondents, SD = Standard Deviation, t-value = t-test statistical value, df =degree of freedom; Dec.=Decision, Sig. = Exact or associated probability, NS = Not Significant

The results in Table 2 present a t-test analysis of the differences in mean responses between male and female single parents regarding various child-rearing practices in Anambra State. The analysis shows that the mean response for male single parents is (2.998) with a standard deviation (SD) of (0.912), while the mean response for female single parents is (3.067) with an SD of (0.938). The t-value obtained is (0.631) with a degree of freedom (df) of (356) and an associated significance (p) value of (0.528). Since the significance value exceeds the 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$), the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on child-rearing practices is accepted. This implies that male and female single parents do not differ significantly in their approaches to child-rearing in Anambra State.

Discussion

In Anambra State, single parents adopt various child-rearing practices to ensure the well-being and development of their children. Many arrange flexible parenting schedules to balance work and family commitments. They also cultivate independence and self-reliance in their children, promoting responsibility through household chores and decision-making participation. Prioritizing open communication and emotional support is another critical practice, alongside tailoring discipline to fit the needs of each child. Single parents emphasize the importance of educational achievement and cultural or religious values, boosting academic success and instilling moral and ethical principles. Additionally, they encourage creativity, exploration, and social interactions, ensuring their children build friendships and develop socially. Establishing consistent routines and boundaries is common, helping children understand expectations and responsibilities. Lastly, positive role models and mentorship are provided, reinforcing the child's growth.

This finding agreed with Ahmadu et al (2023), who noted that flexible schedules are a common adaptation among working single parents. In contrast, De-Lange et al (2014), found that cultivating independence in children was more frequently practiced among single mothers than single fathers. In a related study, Kessie (2023), highlighted the importance of open communication in boosting emotional support, aligning with Lasisi et al (2024), who emphasized the tailored disciplinary approaches based on children's unique needs. Similarly, Mahomed et al (2022), noted that single parents prioritize education and moral values, ensuring children's academic and ethical development. Finally, Ngigi (2017), agreed that promoting creativity and boosting social interactions are essential for children's well-rounded growth, regardless of parental gender.

The broader implications of these findings intersect directly with the literature on sociological evolution, cultural representation, and structural advocacy. The rejection of traditional rituals alongside a strong preservation of core values mirrors the hybrid adaptations studied in contemporary African performance and media. For instance, the negotiation of societal expectations versus personal agency echoes the systemic challenges evaluated by Ilukwe and Ume (2026) regarding institutional navigation, by Ilukwe and Ume (2025) on revolutionary dynamics, and by Utoh-Ezeajugh and Ume (2025a) concerning the preservation of cultural identities.

Just as Ume and Akas (2021) and Okeke and Akunne (2023) documented how performance vectors convey deeper communal meanings, the parenting practices of these single mothers and

fathers act as active expressions of survival and identity preservation within modern spaces. This negotiation of identity is further mirrored in the documentation of dance garments by Utoh-Ezeajugh and Ume (2025b). Furthermore, the push for balanced, supportive environments mirrors the systemic vulnerabilities and protective interventions analyzed in external works. Specifically, these frameworks align with Agoha et al. (2026) regarding institutional protections, Ume and Agoha (2025) on changing societal paradigms, and Agoha et al. (2024) concerning the protection of child rights and mitigating domestic vulnerability.

Ultimately, single parents are moving away from traditional folklore frameworks, such as those analyzed by Ilukwe (2021), and are actively adjusting to modern economic demands. This transition into contemporary spaces mirrors the evolution of digital expressions and production standards evaluated by Ilukwe (2025a), Ilukwe (2025b), and Ilukwe (2026). Rather than sticking to standard configurations, modern families adapt to localized realities, a concept that parallels the adaptation of classic texts to regional contexts studied by Ilukwe (2025c). Furthermore, parental efforts to protect their homes from socioeconomic stressors mirror the wider battles against systemic exploitation and business vulnerabilities outlined by Nwadijwe and Ilukwe (2023) as well as the sociopolitical institutional breakdowns critiqued by Ilukwe (2019). The uniformity between genders demonstrates that the structural pressures of single parenthood override traditional gender roles. This shifting reality requires systemic social support and localized family advocacy interventions rather than outdated, gender segregated family policies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that single parents in Anambra State predominantly practice modern, flexible, and highly supportive child-rearing strategies. Facing unique socioeconomic conditions, these mothers and fathers deliberately prioritize open communication, tailored discipline, and emotional stability to secure the well-being of their children. While they maintain a firm commitment to instilling foundational moral, religious, and cultural principles, they intentionally reject the integration of traditional rituals into their daily household routines. Crucially, the statistical evidence confirms that gender does not create a significant divergence in how these parenting strategies are executed. Male and female single parents demonstrate identical approaches when navigating the multi-faceted trials of solo households, thereby dismantling traditional gender assumptions regarding family management. This internal uniformity proves that the systemic, structural demands of single parenthood override traditional, localized gender roles.

Ultimately, these findings highlight a pressing need to move away from rigid, gender-segregated family expectations. Because solo parents uniformly adopt progressive and adaptive survival techniques, policymakers and community leaders must respond accordingly. Social welfare frameworks and localized community support systems must be modernized to deliver practical financial assistance, emotional networks, and structural resources that empower these single-parent units to foster healthy child development.

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