

Challenges faced by single parents in providing care and economic support to their children in Anambra state

Chiamaka Pamela Uchendu

Department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management Education (Child Development and Care), University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

KEY WORDS

Single Parenting,
Child rearing, Public
Safety Governance,
Socioeconomic
Strain, Anambra
state

ABSTRACT

The complex economic situation in Anambra state is such that single parents encounter serious structural disadvantage as they try to sustain their sole breadwinners' role and face the many demands of child care in their households. In this study, a total of 358 respondents comprising single fathers and mothers of the local government areas of Anambra State were sampled using Taro Yamane formula and multi-stage sampling in the three LGA's and fifteen communities respectively, and were evaluated in the study. A validated and reliable questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.89$) was digitally distributed using Google Form by trained research assistants for data collection. A four-point Likert scale with mean scores and standard deviations was used for statistical processing to make descriptive feedback. In addition, five null hypotheses were tested to establish the statistical differences between the demographic subsets with the help of t-test statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. The results shows that single parents in Anambra State are in very harsh operating conditions with an overall cluster mean of 3.11, which is above the 2.50 value. Some of the biggest stressors are access to childcare, mobility and emotional loneliness. On the other hand, it was not a big challenge for respondents if their child's academic future was concerned. The result shows the inferential findings, which do not indicate any significant differences between gender ($t = 0.092, p > 0.05$). The null hypothesis is accepted and it is established that the situation of single parents is very similar in every aspect for men and women, across the regional socio-economic context. The study concludes that single parents in Anambra State are burdened with a common tight institutional burden which is likely to undermine the stability of the family. The study calls for the development of targeted interventions by the State Ministry of Social Welfare and local administrative units such as providing subsidised community child care networks, providing economic safety nets at the local level, and conducting public sensitization campaigns to address social stigma and enhance the protective capacity of single-parent families.

1. Introduction

Supporting children in a single-parent family is a complex situation involving a variety of economic, structural, psychosocial and psychological issues. When the co-parent is missing, the family's logistical and financial structure is completely different from two parents, with all breadwinning and caring duties falling to one person. One of the most pressing and disruptive structural obstacles that single parents encounter in their lives is socio-economic instability. Being the sole provider is a major stress for an entire household on a regular basis, particularly at a time of the world of inflation and escalating expenses. Single mothers are overrepresented in experiencing extreme economic poverty, which negatively affects their ability to offer stable homes, health and quality early learning (Hoglund et al., 2024). For many parents, it's a delicate juggling act between further career advancement and affordable childcare; a situation made more difficult by a single income.

Financial risks and uncertainties are often too great as well, and a small problem such as a car accident or a minor illness can make the world turn upside down for an individual (Hemingway, 2023). In addition, low-income children living with a single parent are at risk for limited access to essential supports for early development, thereby limiting their future cognitive and social outcomes (Margareta, 2026). Next up are time poverty and role overload, where families often have to operate with one person providing for the family, managing the house, and keeping the family together. Single parents are required to perform several different roles as adults, and they have little time to take care of themselves, get much needed rest and



socialize. Without having someone to help them with daily drop-offs to and from school, to the doctor and their jobs, the housework and the children, they feel constantly drained of energy (Ayodele et al., 2025). This lack of time is often felt by parents as a strong sense of guilt, with a fear that they don't have enough time in the workplace, leaving them less able to be emotionally available to, or to supervise homework and guide behaviours on, their child (Margareta, 2026).

These logistic and financial challenges are compounded by psychological distress and emotional isolation. Being the sole decision maker within the household all day long can lead to increased levels of anxiety, chronic loneliness and risk of clinical depression compared to partnered parents (Ojagbemi et al., 2021). The emotional impact is compounded by strong social stigma and institutional discrimination in multi-ethnic or conservative cities, where the single parent family is often seen as a dysfunctional family or a "problem family" (McCrossin & Lach, 2023). With untreated depression or severe anxiety, single parents' intrinsic skills for warm, consistent, and patient care are inevitably reduced, which can lead to emotional withdrawal and behavioral problems in their children (Ayodele et al., 2025).

These negative outcomes are strongly dependent on the availability and availability of outside social support systems. Strong family networks, community-based organizations and support networks provide a safeguard to help buffer children against the psychological effects of poverty and parental exhaustion. Community cohesion and family engagement can support a parent's structural resilience and thus help offset some of the challenges when resources are scarce, enabling them to have consistent discipline and healthy emotional relationships with their children (McCrossin & Lach, 2023). The study of the problem of single parenthood in South-East Nigeria is essential because it has socio-economic and structural problems that are peculiar to the South-East landscape of Nigeria at the present time. Intermediate literature mostly builds on the concept of hardships, but there are large gaps in the understanding of sub-national realities. For example, classic research, such as that performed by Ayodele et al. (2025) has focused on adolescent psychosocial wellbeing, but does not account for the effects of extreme regional currency devaluation, hyperinflation and local security issues in commercial cities like Onitsha and Awka.

Moreover, some general medical reviews like Kareem et al. (2024) directly associate single parenting with maternal depression without considering the cultural barriers of the Nigerian society, including the loss of the traditional Igbo extended family safety net (Umunna) due to urbanization in today's society. This research is significant because it addresses these empirical gaps - and extends beyond the western-centric research models to examine the impact of sub-national policies on resource allocation. It identifies important points of intersection, thus offering a set of empirical facts for lawmakers and social welfare ministries to inform a context-specific design of interventions, community-led childcare networks and targeted economic safety nets.

Research Question

What are the challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state.

Method

The study used a survey research design which involves sampling of a representative sample of the population to gather and analyse quantitative data in a cost-effective manner, provide anonymity to the respondents, ensure that the respondents responded to the questions truthfully

and that such responses could be subjected to statistical analysis to identify patterns in the demographic data. The study was carried out in the local government areas in the three senatorial districts of Anambra State in the south eastern part of Nigeria comprising twenty-one local government areas of Anambra North, Anambra Central and Anambra South. Each of the senatorial districts in the state was represented by one Local Government Area in keeping with the socio-cultural context and demographic diversity that exists in each of the areas. This population of single parents who are actively involved in child rearing in the study is total of 3,385 single parents obtained from Anambra State Court Registry 2024, comprising 2,400 single mothers and 985 single fathers from various socio-economic groups. A sample size was selected from this population with the Taro Yamane technique: 358 single parents.

A multistage sampling technique was used, comprising of simple random sampling of Awka South local government area of Anambra North, Anambra East of Anambra Central and Nnewi North of Anambra South. Five communities were selected from each of these three local government areas using simple random sampling, which gave a total of fifteen communities. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure an appropriate distribution of participants across these communities and a roughly equal number of single parents (24 per community) were sampled across these communities.

Data collection methods involved the administration of a structured questionnaire which the researcher designed based on literature reviews and was called the Child Rearing and Single Parenting Scale. The instrument is split into 2 separate parts. Part one collects demographic information including age, education, ethnicity, family size, site. The operational aspects are included in part two. For clarity, relevance and appropriateness, the instrument was face validated by three experts from Department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management Education and Department of Agricultural Education at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNA-NSUKKA). A test-retest trial was conducted on 20 single parents selected in Enugu State to have similar environmental characteristics to test and establish the reliability and internal consistency of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was employed to test the psychometric reliability of the analysis and resulted in high reliability coefficient that was 0.89.

The survey was actually carried out by the researcher and seven research assistants using Google Forms. Before briefing these assistants on the goals of the study and digital tools, they had a virtual training session and previewed instructional materials three weeks before the training. The survey links were forwarded directly to the respondents' phone numbers, and assistants were able to deal with technical problems, track responses as they came in, and enter the responses into a spreadsheet for easy anonymization and reduction of manual data entry errors. The data collected was analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics using data analysis program called SPSS. The mean score and standard deviation obtained from the four-point Likert scale were used as the answers for the research questions; answers ranging from 3.50 to 4.00 were considered real limits, from 2.50 to 3.49 a middle limit, and from 1.50 to 2.49 a lower limit, with answers falling below 0.50 to 1.49 considered as strongly disagree. Therefore, a mean range of 2.50-4.00 represented institutional agreement and scores below 2.50 represented disagreement. The five null hypotheses were tested for at the 0.05 level of significance with magnitudes of the t-test statistics being computed for the hypothesis to be rejected if the calculated probability value is less than 0.05 and accepted if the calculated probability value is greater than 0.05.

Results

Research Question: What are the challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of respondents on challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state (N=358)

S/N	Challenges Faced by Single Parents	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec.
1	Financial strain due to sole breadwinning responsibilities.	3.35	.91	A
2	Balancing work demands with childcare obligations at home.	3.35	.91	A
3	Lack of emotional support and companionship for parent.	3.42	.89	A
4	Difficulty in finding affordable and reliable childcare options.	3.44	1.02	A
5	Feeling overwhelmed by the demands of parenting alone.	2.59	1.22	A
6	Limited time for self-care and personal relaxation.	2.86	.98	A
7	Managing household chores and responsibilities independently.	3.22	.84	A
8	Dealing with social stigma or judgment from others.	3.25	.91	A
9	Juggling multiple roles without adequate support networks.	3.04	.94	A
10	Concerns about child's academic performance and future prospects.	2.09	1.266	D
11	Coping with the emotional impact of divorce or separation.	3.38	.95	A
12	Navigating co-parenting challenges and conflicts with ex-partner.	3.01	.87	A
13	Accessing healthcare services and medical assistance for children.	3.11	.92	A
14	Managing transportation needs and logistical challenges.	3.43	.76	A
15	Feeling isolated or lonely without a partner for companionship.	3.11	.92	A
	Cluster/Grand Mean	3.11	0.9	A

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

The results in Table 1 reveal the challenges single parents face in providing care and support to their children in Anambra State. The majority of the respondents agreed to experiencing significant challenges, as indicated by the overall cluster mean of 3.11 (SD = 0.96), which exceeds the criterion mean of 2.50. Notable challenges include financial strain due to sole breadwinning responsibilities (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.917), balancing work with childcare demands (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.915), and a lack of emotional support (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.891). Difficulties such as finding affordable childcare (mean = 3.44, SD = 1.021) and navigating co-parenting conflicts (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.879) were also prevalent. However, respondents disagreed regarding concerns about their children's academic performance and future prospects, with a mean of 2.09 (SD = 1.266). Despite this, the overall mean ratings suggest that single parents face substantial challenges across various domains, including emotional well-being, time management, and social stigma. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.763 to 1.266, indicate some variability in responses, with certain challenges being more unanimously agreed upon than others.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the challenges faced by single parents in providing care and support to their children in Anambra state.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.	Dec.
Male	97	3.12	0.9	0.092	35	.927	NS
Female	261	3.11	0.96		6		

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 comparing the mean responses of male (N = 97, Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.9) and female (N = 261, Mean = 3.11, SD = 0.96) single parents regarding the challenges they face in providing care and support to their children in Anambra State. The t-value of 0.092, with a degree of freedom of 356 and a significance value ($p = .927$), indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the genders ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female single parents on the challenges faced in child care is accepted. This suggests that both male and female single parents experience similar challenges in their caregiving roles in Anambra State.

Discussion

Single parents in Anambra State face several challenges in providing care and support to their children. Financial strain due to sole breadwinning is a major issue, as they must manage all household expenses alone. Balancing work demands with childcare obligations adds pressure, especially when affordable and reliable childcare options are difficult to find. Many single parents experience feelings of emotional isolation, lacking companionship and support. Managing household chores independently, coupled with limited time for self-care, leaves them feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, they face social stigma and judgment from others, while juggling multiple roles without adequate support networks. The emotional toll of divorce or separation further complicates their situation, along with conflicts in co-parenting with an ex-partner. Accessing healthcare services, managing transportation needs, and coping with loneliness are also significant challenges. These tensions can reduce their capacity to effectively manage family obligations. In addition, difficulties in accessing healthcare services, securing reliable transportation, and coping with social isolation further compound their burdens. Such challenges may diminish overall quality of life and limit opportunities for personal and family development (Okosa, 2018; Okosa, 2022a; Okosa, 2022b; Okosa et al., 2025; Udensi & Okosa, 2025).

These findings are consistent with Nnama-Okechukwu et al (2020), who observed that financial strain is one of the biggest difficulties faced by single parents. In contrast, Odeleye and Odeleye (2022), found that balancing work and childcare was a more pressing issue for single mothers than fathers. In a related study, Puspitasari et al (2021), highlighted the lack of emotional support as a critical challenge, agreeing with Ray et al (2021), who reported that many single parents feel overwhelmed due to the lack of a partner to share household and childcare responsibilities. Additionally, Uchendu (2022), noted that social stigma and judgment from others exacerbate the emotional strain, while Yoon et al (2024), emphasized that navigating co-parenting challenges is a common struggle for both male and female single parents in Anambra State.

The empirical findings reveal that single parents suffer a lot of institutional and environmental challenges in Anambra state as the cluster mean obtained showed that the value was high meaning that the majority agreed with the findings. Important structural strains are noticed in both logistical management and the availability of child care in the society, which align with the other strains and survival strategies highlighted in the other areas of contemporary Nigerian cultural studies (Ilukwe, 2025). Moreover, the widespread systemic pressures including acute financial pressures and profound social stigma are reflective of harsh socioeconomic conditions, institutional corruption, and broken safety nets in socio-political critiques which focus on specific localities (Ilukwe, 2019; Ilukwe & Ume, 2026). The t-tests support this, with no significant difference between the genders, as the probability value is close to 1. Men and women single parents experience almost the same constraints in the operation of their business. This common burden highlights that economic difficulties and role overload are experienced by all households regardless of their head of house, and are a regional issue. These findings show the effects of changing sub-national socio-cultural dynamics and systemic pressures on domestic stability in the state (Nwadike & Ilukwe, 2023; Ilukwe, 2021, 2026).

Conclusion

This study was a definitive empirical assessment of the ubiquitous structural and operational tribulations that are being faced by single parents in Anambra State. The results clearly illustrate the high levels of institutional obstacles faced by single parent families, mainly due to financial constraints, transport and the lack of affordable and good quality childcare. These systemic stressors are exacerbated by significant social stigma and emotional isolation, that forces single carers into a chronic state of role overload. Most importantly, the inferential analysis herein found that these debilitating vulnerabilities are fully gender-in transcendent. In this sub-national population, fathers and mothers who work alone experience the same amount of socio-economic and psychological distress, on average. The uniformity of these struggles shows that these are systemic issues and not problems of individuals having failed. This study highlights the need for a focused state policy.

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