

A Mother's Woes: Implications of Gender-based Oppression on Single Motherhood

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Abstract. The gender-based oppression single mothers face, affecting their psychosocial well-being, is often overlooked, especially in the Philippines. This study investigates gender-based oppression, such as misogyny and sexism in workplaces and the personal lives of single mothers, and how these correlate and affect their motherhood. Three single mothers, selected through purposive sampling, were interviewed using semi-structured and open-ended questions. This study applied the feminist theory of Mary Wollstonecraft to understand the struggles of women based on gender extensively. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were coded and analyzed thematically, generating four recurring themes. Results revealed that misogyny and sexism are both rooted in patriarchy, exposing single mothers to the internalization of gender-based oppression, affecting how they view themselves. Prevailing stereotypes and gender roles ingrained into the sociocultural framework of the Philippines increased society's expectations toward single mothers because of gender. Results showed that despite challenges, the rise of feminist and women's rights groups and movements increased recognition of women in the workforce, as single mothers expressed the lack of discrimination in their workplaces. The difficulties single mothers experienced only emboldened them and promoted women's empowerment among themselves and others. Overall, the study found that single mothers are still struggling due to gender-based oppression, highlighting the need for greater support for single mothers. Misogyny and sexism exist due to patriarchy, establishing harmful roles for women. Thus, this study significantly contributes to discussions of gender discrimination and how to foster safe places for all genders, specifically single mothers in the Philippines.

Keywords: Single motherhood; Gender-based oppression; Sexism; Misogyny; Feminist theory.

1.0 Introduction

Being a single mother stems from various circumstances: choice, separation, and the absence of paternal figures within parenthood (Golombok et al., 2020; Ali & Soomar, 2019). It is rarely by choice that women choose to be single mothers as the intersectional challenges of single motherhood, from socio-economic to political and from one's workplace to personal life, are prominent and prevailing (Kim & Kim, 2020). Women's maternal roles are deeply influenced by gender-based oppression as they experience misogyny and sexism (Lindsey, 2020). Further, even when men's roles are entirely excluded, the atrocities of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity impacted how single mothers are perceived and treated today.

Parenting positions do not evolve outside of culture and ideology. Through complex power dynamics, the role of mothers is socially formed in the context of male dominance, as combated by the feminist view (Grosz, 2020), which has led women to become 'mothers' defined as favorable to men. Conservatism dominates the Philippines as Filipinos are generally governed by views like how sexism and misogyny are rooted in most religious traditions

and other cultural aspects (Bain, 2020; Pantaleon & Arguelles, 2020). Filipino people's religious convictions and philosophies largely reinforce their cultural ways (Macaranas, 2021). Filipinos, up to this day, still view a woman's job as restricted to domestic labor and that it all depends on the man to have financial gain, according to the 2021 International Social Survey Program (Buchhave & Belgith, 2022; Verniers & Vala, 2018). Any religious tradition that considers childbearing and homemaking to be women's responsibilities opposes societal efforts to secure female participation in all areas of society (Nason-Clark, 2020).

Misogynistic inclinations are not strange to civilization; instead, they saturate all levels of our lives. They are verbally heard and visually present in our nation's political, economic, social, cultural, and religious spheres (Nzeyo, 2019; Savigny, 2020). Society uses morality or principles of right vs. wrong in determining the suitability of single women as mothers (Scerri, 2020). However, given that they often raise most of the children, why are men as fathers not subject to the same scrutiny? This is due to the continuing exploitation by the patriarchy of the apparent "natural" bias of "women as carers" (Scerri, 2020). Sexism stems deep in our society; it is seen at all levels of our lives. They are seen in books read by children that include traditional gender stereotypes (ex., Boys are strong while girls are weak) (Leaper & Brown, 2018); when young girls who have yet to reach adolescence get sexualized and objectified (Muir, 2021); when women who enroll in male-dominated fields face gender-based discrimination (Blondé et al., 2022); as well as when women who enter male-dominated fields face sexual harassment (Rubin et al., 2019).

Single parents, particularly mothers, have more household responsibilities following a separation as they receive the custody of the child most of the time, they earn less money, which makes them more susceptible to falling victim to poverty (Harkness et al., 2020; Leopold, 2018; Munoz Boudet et al., 2018). The approach to lessen the financial burden, expanding work hours, can make it harder for single mothers to retain the kind of role they desire to provide (Thielemans & Mortelmans, 2019).

To better understand how gender-based oppression impacts single mothers psychosocially throughout their parenthood, the Feminist theory of Mary Wollstonecraft was used as a theoretical underpinning of this comprehensive study. The fundamental objective of feminist theory is to examine the societal framework in a manner that brings to light the factors that foster discrimination, marginalization, and unfairness. By doing so, it advocates for the pursuit of fairness and impartiality. (Crossman, 2021). This theoretical framework focuses on understanding how gender-based oppression and inequality impact women's lives and experiences, examining the social, cultural, and economic factors contributing to their marginalization and disadvantage. Through feminist theory, researchers identified specific ways in which single mothers are affected by gender-based oppression, such as discrimination in the workplace and limited access to resources and support systems. Furthermore, feminist theory suggests solutions to these issues, such as advocating for policy changes that address gender-based inequality and supporting community-based organizations that offer resources and services to single mothers.

Given this, the study aims to illuminate how gender-based oppression against single mothers occurs in the workplace and one's personal life. This psychosocial study focuses on fleshing out the experience of single mothers with gender-based oppression, especially elucidating the characterization of sexism and misogyny as pervasive to the role of being a mother. Moreover, this study is a significant contribution to the field of gender studies as it gives an in-depth analysis of how gender correlates to the challenges and societal issues a person faces throughout their parenthood. In doing so, this research helps pave the way for more policies and interventions regarding the security of the social welfare of single mothers worldwide, particularly in the Philippines, where there is an increasing need to address the contentious issues involving gender oppression.

1.1 The Current State of Filipino Single Mother

Motherhood is incredibly difficult, especially for single mothers as they have conflicts and societal pressure to endure (Kohl, 2021). Premarital sex, separation or annulment, widowhood, and women choosing to raise their child alone increase the population percentile of Filipino single moms. Single-parent households are now more common than conjugal families consisting of two parents and children (APA, 2019). The demographic of a single woman raising a child is not limited to middle-aged women since college students also become victims of

unplanned pregnancies (Sicam et al., 2021). Likewise, young girls aged 15 to 17 are targets of early parenthood, particularly in low-income countries.

Single moms experience gender-based oppression due to the socially constructed, established gender roles deeply entrenched in the Philippine sociocultural framework (Bain, 2020). Single women are expected to handle everything alone, such as financial management, jobs, and child care (Suminar et al., 2018). Filipino women, compared to men, are often disadvantaged because the gender-based oppression they face makes necessities like social protection and a formal high-paying job inaccessible. Since single mothers are more committed to parenthood, their careers are unaffected by allocation cuts and unemployment (Pedrosa, 2020). As such, single-parent households, especially those of single mothers' average income is only half a two-parent household, which leads to an increased poverty rate and work hours spent earning money (Bahk, 2019). Moreover, nationwide prejudice in the Philippines makes a single mother's child more susceptible to scrutiny and stigma politically, sociologically, and psychologically (Ramos & Tus, 2020).

1.2 Implications of Gender-based Oppression in the Workplace

Benevolent sexism devalues a woman's worth by comparing her to a man (Cassidy & Krendl, 2019), legitimizing inequalities and hostile sexism that halt gender equality. It also stifles women's career advancement by veiled bigotry, prioritizing male benefactors, limiting women's employment opportunities, and gender injustice (Glick & Raberg, 2018). Hostile sexism and misogyny involve aggressive attitudes toward women (Hammond et al., 2018), such as unwanted verbal conduct, unwanted physical conduct, unwanted attention, unwanted advances, and other issues that range from sexist microaggressions to full-on sexual assault in the workforce (Cox & Jewitt, 2022).

Gender-based oppression in the workforce involves sexism in interactions and institutional sexism (when policies, attitudes, procedures, and laws enforce sexism). A woman's identity negatively affects them within workplaces since institutional sexism remains pervasive in institutions (Dutta, 2019). Women encounter institutionalized bigotry as they face harassment, underpayment, harsh judgments, and lack of promotions because of their gender (Barnes & Adams, 2022; Blau & Kahn, 2020; Lu et al., 2020). Gender privilege disparities often lead to lower self-esteem in women. Another study indicates that this injustice is normalized because women are programmed to obey rules and believe that the standard they are put through is ideal (EIGE, 2020). In addition, sexists and misogynists overuse the presumption that a woman's career threatens the traditional structure of a typical family to justify their intolerance against employed women. This normalizes and legitimizes sexist ideals to be displayed in the workplace (Verniers & Vala, 2018).

1.3 Implications of Gender-based Oppression in Motherhood

Women, especially single mothers, need significant adjustments in their daily lives as they approach motherhood (Forbes et al., 2020). Childbirth drives women into an unfamiliar life that requires them to restructure their roles, tasks, daily activities, and familial dynamics (Siegel & Calogero, 2019). Further, the intensive mothering demands impose unreasonable parenting standards and hindrances to women's growth and mental health (Prikhidko & Swank, 2018). It is overwhelming that parenting standards have grown drastically while support services have evaporated leading to mothers blaming themselves for the fault of a flawed system and reality distortions (Siegel & Calogero, 2019) since sexism remains prevailing in today's society and affects the ways of parenting and socialization despite many efforts to abolish the sexist system (Barni et al., 2022). People may unknowingly be benevolent sexist because the term is so nuanced, and it favors feminine tropes, which is why it is advocated by all (Mastari et al., 2019). Mothers' benevolent sexism manifests as projecting conservatism or self-protective values, such as avoiding conflict and preserving tradition as an act of security. Consequently, mothers' benevolent sexist views are often rooted in their conservatism and the yearning to protect women by reinforcing outdated gender roles (Barni et al., 2022).

Mothers' gatekeeping views and behaviors positively link with hostile sexist attitudes (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2019). Hostile sexism distorts the perception of mothers toward parenting because they perceive fathers as incapable of nurturing and raising a child and other domestic responsibilities. Further, a hierarchical power structure is illuminated by negative perceptions of gender that imply relationships between genders as a fight for dominance (Gaunt et al., 2018). A patriarchal parenting style that encourages protective attitudes from men

toward women can expose children to benevolent sexism (Rached et al., 2021). Mothers with benevolent sexism value their responsibilities within parenthood and are reluctant to share them. It has also been shown that maternal gatekeeping is linked to increased maternal involvement in childcare and decreased paternal involvement (Gaunt et al., 2018). Furthermore, sexism is proven to have increased a mother's anxiety levels, which she unknowingly applies to her parenthood (Feigt, 2018).

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This psychosocial research ought to deeply analyze single mothers' personal experiences with gender-based oppression. Given such, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is the most suitable research design for this study. This research design is grounded in multiple ideologies, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographics. The fundamental principles of this design are analyzing people's subjective lived experiences and how they interpret and project these experiences into their personal and social lives (Love, 2020; Smith & Nizza, 2022). This study thoroughly uses IPA in analyzing how single mothers view gender-based oppression as an obstacle to their motherhood and overall personal lives.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was carried out in San Jose City, Province of Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, Philippines. This study's research area included the participants' residences and public areas such as barangay halls. It is located north of Cabanatuan City and located northeast of the Science City of Muñoz. The city occupies 185.99 square kilometers (71.81 square miles), or 3.23 percent of Nueva Ecija.

2.3 Research Participants

This study has a target subject, so the sampling technique of amassing interviewees is purposive. Three single mothers are compelled through the approval of pivotal informants within urban and semi-urban areas within the province of Nueva Ecija. Selection criteria are as follows: (1) unmarried women above the age of 18, (2) having at least one child, (3) having some experience with being a single mom. Table 1 shows the profile of all research subjects.

Table 1. Profile of participants

Participant	Age	No. of Children	Occupation
P1	42	2	Barangay Counselor
P2	48	4	Business Woman
P3	24	2	House Keeper

2.4 Research Instrument

The interview questions were formulated by the researchers and then approved for implementation. It contained 10 questions aimed to delve into the personal experiences of single mothers regarding gender-based oppression, such as Misogyny and Sexism in their workplace and personal lives. Moreover, the research questions covered the challenges single mothers face throughout their motherhood. The participation was completely voluntary, and all the participants were given time to read through the interview questions and their rights to refuse.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

In-person interviews took place at the respondents' respective residences. Participants were prepared by scanning an informational missive containing the objectives and methods of the analysis to be conducted. Participants have ample time to review their study-related privileges during the interview. All interviewees have the right to uphold their privacy and confidentiality, refuse and stop participating at any time, inquire about the methods and purposes of audio recording and transcription, and know whom to contact with any questions or concerns. Each interview ranged from 1 to 2 hours (Matsuzaka et al., 2019). The researchers ensure the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of information and findings through the implementation of data cross-checking and triangulation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study is approved by the Central Luzon State University's Ethics Review Committee with the review code 2023-156 indicating that all the risks and concerns regarding this research have been considered, minimized, and eliminated. As part of the ethical considerations of this study, the following are observed:

Informed Consent and Data Privacy Clause and Consent

The modified consent form provides participants with all the information they need to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part in the study. Both the Data Privacy Clause and the Consent are presented at the outset of the survey.

Voluntary Participation

In accordance with what is stated on the consent form, participants have the freedom to join or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Participation in this survey is voluntary for those who are asked.

Confidentiality and Data Privacy Clause and Consent

Since the participants remain anonymous, the researchers cannot identify them. The researchers privately asked individuals for their participation in the study. Experts don't give out any of their findings to the public. To prevent individuals from being identified inside the data scientists collect, they mask their identities. Both the Data Privacy Clause and the Consent are presented at the outset of the survey.

Results Communication

Both plagiarism and research misconduct are not present in the study. The study adheres to all ethical standards and guidelines. The results shall be represented truthfully by the researchers.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Four recurring themes were derived.

3.1 Theme 1: Gender-based Oppression Grounded on Patriarchy

Subjects expressed the gender-based oppression they received from their surroundings. Patriarchy is a prevailing system surrounding contemporary issues, such as gender-based oppression. One of the subjects mentioned that their husband's restrictive behavior caused their split, and separating from the husband brought them liberation.

"...yes, it was easy, I suppose, yeah, it was easy. Hehe, it is because uhm– I am happier as a single mother since I previously had multiple limitations; I was not allowed to go outside our home, but now I can do everything I want to do..."

Divorce had positive consequences. Women felt calmer after conflicts in their households ended- they felt a sense of liberation and freedom (González Granados et al., 2022). The subject's response implied that male presence restricts women because of machismo, an aggressive masculine ego. Patriarchy builds on structural violence against women in the form of gender-based oppression that often limits and excludes women (Onwutuebe, 2019; Grosz, 2020; Khan et al., 2022).

"...yes, everything I did was restricted back then. When we were together, everything was restricted. Yes, it was strict; I needed to–I could not even go outside back then. If I do go out, I had to head back within 2 hours... it had to–even the–even the time when I had to cook–the schedule of my household chores, all of that was controlled by him..."

Moreover, subjects exhibited internalized misogyny due to constant exposure to a patriarchal environment (Cherry & Wilcox, 2020). This exposure has made subjects think that having a male presence is more effective in raising respectable children. Their responses implied that people, children in particular, are more likely to follow male domination as opposed to women, which is a form of discrimination.

"... it is because of the thing we call disciplinary action. When it comes to the father, disciplinary action is there so that children will become obedient; because you are a father, you need to commit to your words since you are the father in your family..."

In patriarchal societies, males are seen as superior, and the gender expectations from the gender roles significantly impact individuals. Both the direct and indirect enforcement of these roles put men and women in a predicament, leaving them to struggle with how they could not conform to these expectations (Rudden, 2022; Guy-Evans, 2023).

Results implied that the internal and external misogyny received during their marriage had impacted the single mothers mentally and in their interpersonal relationships with others.

3.2 Theme 2: Social Justice - Modernization Leads to Progressiveness

Society changes as time progresses, and while some things remain constant, some things progress, such as workplace equality. Subjects expressed the lack of workplace oppression throughout their employment, and some even found it empowering. A single mother stated:

"...actually, in our local government unit, I am the only counselor who is a woman. So, for me, I am flattered..."

Subjects' responses implied how most workplaces in the Philippines had dismantled misogynist and sexist views regarding employment. All subjects interviewed have stated fairness and equality in their workplaces. Moreover, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Report proved that the Philippines is one of the top nations in effectively handling gender inequality (Gita-Carlos, 2022).

Additionally, subjects had a favorable view of working women, especially mothers. Results showed that society has progressed to a point where there is only minimal workplace oppression. This is due to all the rising feminist groups and women's rights movements that pioneered equality regardless of gender (d'Eaubonne, 2022; ACLU, 2022; Barker & Jurasz, 2019).

3.3 Theme 3: Double Burden - Increased Societal Pressure on Women

Subjects expressed their difficulties in managing their household alone. Single parenting has pushed them to bear the burden and responsibilities of both a father and mother regarding financial support, raising children, and governing the whole house (Collins, 2019). The interview shed light on the harrowing experiences of single mothers in terms of loneliness and pressure.

A single mother mentioned:

"...for us women, the pressure is that we are already single, we need to provide, and we need to act as both a mother and father for our children. Besides that, we are the ones responsible for raising and enhancing our children—so that they can grow up as proper members of society; aside from that, we are the ones responsible for funding their education..."

The increased societal pressure on women is grounded in the ingrained gender-based oppression, particularly in Filipino families. Filipino culture has been deeply influenced by traditionalist perspectives, which require single mothers to take all the burden of childcare (Bain, 2020; Suminar et al., 2018). Filipino families are influenced by a paternalistic culture promoting sexist stereotypes that view women as housekeepers and men as providers. A 2022 OXFAM survey confirmed that women are still pressured to do domestic labor, while men are expected to carry financial responsibilities.

Results implied that subjects' main challenge lies with being alone to carry all responsibilities. Moreover, gender-based oppression has only increased pressure and expectations on women, which led to a rise in problems in single motherhood (Harkness et al., 2020; Leopold, 2018; Munoz Boudet et al., 2018). The increased pressure also affects single mothers psychologically, leading to problems such as anxiety and depression (Liang et al., 2019; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Subjects implied that the thought of managing everything alone was overwhelming and led them to have self-deprecating thoughts.

"...when I was in my room, I saw the four corners of my room. It was at that moment that I realized that I was alone, I was by myself, there was no one beside me in my bed... it cannot be avoided... sometimes we tend to pity ourselves, no?"

The study of Garcia et al. (2021) showed similar findings, indicating that their partners' absence rendered single mothers emotionally turbulent. Results confirmed the psychosocial struggles single mothers face with increased societal pressure.

3.4 Theme 4: Women Empowerment - Feminism Among Mothers

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of gender equality and involves empowering women to take control of their lives, make their own decisions, and have access to resources and opportunities. Single mothers who independently raise their children are women who have faced particular challenges and benefit significantly from women's empowerment and feminism.

Initially, the idea of raising children alone was daunting. However, one of the subjects conveyed that single parenting has allowed them to have a stronger resolve, leading to personal growth.

"...when I became single, I became braver. My strength became stronger. I was all the more strengthened because of the obstacles that I faced in my life...I need to raise the women's flags-our flags."

As a single mother, a woman may face unique obstacles and responsibilities that can impact her personal growth and development (Richard et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2020;). Despite these challenges, many single mothers can experience significant personal growth and development as they navigate the ups and downs of parenting alone. Ultimately, personal growth in single mothers is a complex and dynamic process that can vary greatly depending on the individual's experiences and circumstances (Stainton et al., 2018).

Further, another single mother expressed that being single did not negatively affect them. They have instead experienced the advantages that come with the role. Furthermore, being single has given them more flexibility as they can make their own choices without considering anyone else's opinions and compromise with a partner.

"... there is none- there is no disadvantage if anything, it is more of an advantage..."

Being a single mother can free up additional options for parenting approaches. Single women can decide how to raise their kids without having to make concessions to a spouse. Additionally, they can create a unique parenting approach that fits the requirements and ideals of their own family (Callaghan et al., 2021).

Results implied that while being a single parent may come with its challenges, it also has advantages. These include a strong bond with one's child, a sense of independence and self-sufficiency, more flexibility in parenting style and personal choices, and opportunities for personal growth and development (Bowie, 2019). With the right mindset and support, single mothers can thrive and provide their children with a loving and nurturing home.

4.0 Conclusion

Gender-based oppression still happens and is still affecting women, particularly single mothers. Based on the study's findings, it is concluded that most single mothers face problems due to societal expectations and gender roles, which are rooted in gender-based oppression. Moreover, the illuminated experiences showed that single mothers find the thought of being alone as discriminatory because of internalized misogyny that pushes them to think they need a male presence to raise their children more effectively.

Additionally, results implied that Misogyny and Sexism correlate in a way that they are both due to the ingrained ideals of patriarchy in society. These ideals are why single mothers have struggled with stigma and problems up until now. Gender-based oppression has affected how single mothers perceive themselves and their capabilities to raise their children. Despite that, these struggles became an opportunity for single mothers to promote women's empowerment and show that women are as capable as men. It is concluded that subjects took their motherhood as a means of personal growth and development.

Gender-based oppression is a multifaceted concept that can be experienced differently by varying people. This study's results and related literature illuminated the harrowing yet empowering experiences of single mothers concerning gender-based oppression. In light of this study, the researchers recommend going more in-depth,

focusing on one main topic, choosing the data analysis method carefully, and employing measures to ensure data validity and reliability.

The study only covered the surface of what gender-based oppression is by illuminating the lived experiences of single mothers. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers expand on the issues covered by gender-based oppression of all women rather than only single mothers. Similarly, the study focused on two main ideas: single motherhood and gender-based oppression, which needed clarification in distinguishing the main topic of the study. Hence, future researchers should focus on one main topic to expand on profoundly and avoid difficulties in consistency. Moreover, the data analysis used was thematic analysis, which created mild inconsistencies in generating themes. Future researchers are recommended to carefully choose their data analysis method to avoid similar problems from arising. Lastly, the study only interviewed three participants, which can lead to issues with data credibility, but measures were taken to ensure validity, such as data cross-checking and triangulation. Therefore, future researchers are recommended to employ rigorous data validation.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Conceptualization of the Study – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia, JRDRBardelosa, JRDMateo

Literature Review – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia

Research Design – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac

Development of Guide Questions – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, JRDMateo, JRDRBardelosa

Gathering of Data – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia, JRDRBardelosa, JRDMateo

Data Interpretation – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia,

Writing and Editing – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia, JRDRBardelosa

Formatting – JAVillarama, CSMunsayac, AJAZulueta, IYIGarcia

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors affirm that there is no conflict of interest.

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