
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Societal Condemnation of Single Motherhood in Southwest Nigeria and Its Implications on Home Front Security****Afolabi Tolulope Apetuje¹ ✉ Ibikunle Gbenga² and Adediran Gbolagade³**¹*Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria*²*Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria*³*Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria***Corresponding Author:** Afolabi Tolulope Apetuje, **E-mail:** afolabi.tolulopekolade@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The study investigated the societal condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria and its implications on home front security. Single mothers in the region were frequently stigmatized, marginalized, and denied equal social recognition. This condemnation undermined family stability and contributed to wider security concerns. This research was guided by the need to understand how cultural perceptions, gender roles, and community attitudes shaped the experiences of single mothers and affected household peace in the region. A qualitative research design was adopted, relying on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis. Data were collected from single mothers, community leaders, religious figures, and security practitioners across Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States. Secondary sources from academic literature, policy reports, and media publications were also reviewed to strengthen triangulation. The analysis employed thematic coding, which allowed for the identification of patterns in societal responses to single motherhood and their link to security at the household level. Findings revealed that societal condemnation of single mothers was deeply rooted in cultural expectations of marriage and patriarchal values. Single mothers were often perceived as morally irresponsible and socially deviant, which exposed them to discrimination in education, employment, and community participation. This marginalization reduced their economic opportunities, weakened family cohesion, and created vulnerabilities for children in single-parent households. Moreover, the study established that stigmatization contributed to emotional stress and limited social support networks, which in turn heightened insecurity in the home front. Children from stigmatized homes were more susceptible to neglect, exploitation, and juvenile delinquency. The study further revealed that the lack of inclusive policies, weak enforcement of women's rights, and persistent gender stereotypes intensified the challenges of single motherhood. While community members condemned the practice, they provided little in terms of social or economic support. This neglect contributed indirectly to rising insecurity, as affected families struggled to maintain stability and discipline. The research concluded that societal condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria was not only a gender issue but also a security concern, as it undermined family resilience and community cohesion. It recommended comprehensive public sensitization, economic empowerment for single mothers, inclusive policies protecting women's rights, and stronger collaboration between government, civil society, and traditional institutions. These measures were considered critical for reducing stigmatization, strengthening household security, and fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society.

| KEYWORDS

Single motherhood, Stigmatization, Societal condemnation, Home front security, Southwest Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The family has long been regarded as the basic unit of society and the foundation of social stability. Globally, marriage has been recognized as the most legitimate institution for establishing families, raising children, and transmitting cultural values (Cherlin, 2020). Although contemporary societies increasingly accept diverse forms of family life, the traditional expectation of a two-parent household continues to dominate cultural and religious thinking in many parts of the world (Parsons, 2019).

In Africa, family formation is deeply tied to cultural heritage, kinship, and communal values. Marriage is not only a personal decision but also a collective responsibility that strengthens social cohesion and affirms cultural identity (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). Women are often judged by their marital status, with the highest respect given to those who bear children within marriage. Although urbanization and globalization have introduced more flexible family patterns, marriage remains the most respected pathway to childbearing in African societies (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

In Nigeria, these cultural norms are reinforced by both tradition and religion. Single motherhood is widely condemned and is often associated with immorality, irresponsibility, or family breakdown (Okafor & Duru, 2021). The term single motherhood generally refers to women who raise children without a resident partner or husband, whether by choice, divorce, widowhood, or abandonment. However, society frequently overlooks these differences and applies a uniform negative judgment. This stigma does not only affect mothers but also extends to their children, who may suffer discrimination in schools, workplaces, and communities (Adepoju, 2020).

The concept of stigma refers to negative labeling and social exclusion imposed on individuals who are perceived as deviating from accepted norms. In the context of single motherhood, stigma manifests in gossip, verbal abuse, economic discrimination, and denial of social recognition. Moreover, the condemnation often isolates women from extended family support, which traditionally plays a key role in Nigerian households (Olaniyan, 2019).

In Southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba cultural system places a high value on marriage as a sign of maturity and social responsibility. Within this setting, women who raise children outside marriage are often marginalized, regardless of the circumstances that led to their situation. Although modernization has challenged some traditional norms, the condemnation of single motherhood remains strong and has implications for family well-being and community peace.

The idea of home front security refers to stability, peace, and protection within the family unit. It encompasses the emotional, economic, and social conditions that ensure children are safe, supported, and properly socialized. When single mothers face stigma, the family's resilience is weakened. Their children may experience neglect, reduced self-esteem, or delinquency, all of which create vulnerabilities that affect not only the household but also the larger society. Therefore, the cultural condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria raises important questions about gender, equality, and the security of the family system.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite global progress in recognizing diverse family structures, societal attitudes in Nigeria remain deeply rooted in traditional expectations of marriage and childbearing. In many communities, marriage is regarded as the only acceptable foundation for family formation, while single motherhood is seen as a deviation from cultural and religious norms (Okafor & Duru, 2021). This persistent belief has placed unmarried mothers in vulnerable positions, exposing them to condemnation, discrimination, and exclusion from social and economic opportunities.

Although single motherhood may arise from various circumstances such as divorce, widowhood, abandonment, or even personal choice, society frequently ignores these differences. Single mothers are commonly labeled as irresponsible or morally wayward, regardless of the actual context of their situation (Adepoju, 2020). Moreover,

children raised in such households are often stigmatized as illegitimate, which limits their access to education, social acceptance, and community support (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). These negative perceptions not only marginalize families but also weaken the stability of households.

The situation is very predominant in Southwest Nigeria, where Yoruba cultural values strongly emphasize marriage as the foundation of adulthood and social responsibility (Olaniyan, 2019). Single mothers in this region often encounter double discrimination: first, for defying cultural expectations, and second, for raising children outside the marital framework. This cultural rejection is further reinforced by religious teachings, which frequently portray single motherhood as a moral failure rather than a social reality. As a result, many single mothers are left without adequate community support, and their children grow up facing prejudice and neglect.

The implications for home front security are profound. Stigmatization erodes family resilience and reduces mothers' capacity to provide stable, secure environments for their children. In many cases, the absence of community support increases economic hardship, which can translate into poor living conditions, lack of education, and vulnerability to exploitation. Children from stigmatized households are more likely to experience emotional distress and, in some cases, resort to delinquent behavior, thereby creating wider insecurity within the community (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

Although government policies on women's rights and child protection exist, enforcement remains weak, and cultural resistance to single motherhood persists. Moreover, public discourse rarely addresses the security dimension of the issue, focusing instead on its moral and cultural aspects. This gap in attention has left single mothers and their children trapped in cycles of exclusion, poverty, and insecurity. Unless societal condemnation is addressed alongside structural reforms, the challenges posed to home front security in Southwest Nigeria will continue to deepen.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the societal condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria and its implications on home front security. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. Explore the cultural and religious foundations of societal attitudes towards single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria.
- ii. Analyze the forms and consequences of stigmatization experienced by single mothers and their children.
- iii. Assess the ways in which societal condemnation influences family stability and home front security.
- iv. Identify strategies that can reduce stigmatization and strengthen the resilience of single-mother households.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it establishes the direct connection between societal condemnation of single motherhood and the stability of the home front in Southwest Nigeria. It contributes to knowledge by showing how stigmatization weakens family resilience, creates vulnerabilities for children, and translates into broader insecurity within households. The work is also valuable because it elevates the discourse on single motherhood from a purely cultural or moral issue to a pressing security concern. Furthermore, it strengthens academic understanding by presenting single motherhood as both a social and security matter, while also offering practical guidance for reducing stigmatization and building safer family environments. Through these contributions, the study provides insights that are not only relevant for scholarship but also useful for community leaders, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to protect family stability and promote peace at the grassroots level.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the societal condemnation of single motherhood and its implications for home front security in Southwest Nigeria. It covered the six states of the region, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, where cultural and religious values strongly shape family norms. The study examined how single mothers and their

children experienced stigma, how such stigmatization weakened family stability, and how these processes contributed to insecurity at the household level. Although single motherhood occurs across Nigeria, the study limited its scope to the Southwest to provide a more detailed analysis of Yoruba cultural expectations and their impact on women raising children outside marriage. The research did not attempt to address every dimension of gender and family life in Nigeria but instead concentrated on the intersection of cultural condemnation, single motherhood, and household security within this regional context (Olaniyan, 2019; Okafor & Duru, 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Single Motherhood

Single motherhood is commonly described as a family structure in which a woman takes full or primary responsibility for raising her child or children without the presence of a husband or permanent male partner. The circumstances leading to this condition vary and may include divorce, separation, widowhood, abandonment, or deliberate personal choice (Amato, 2021). Although single-parent households have increasingly become recognized across the world, single motherhood in particular continues to attract public scrutiny, especially in societies where marriage is culturally upheld as the most legitimate framework for family formation (Okafor & Duru, 2021).

The perception of single motherhood often depends on cultural values and social expectations. In many Western societies, single mothers are now more accepted because of shifting family norms, women's empowerment, and state-supported welfare programs (McLanahan & Percheski, 2019). However, in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, the situation remains different. Motherhood outside wedlock is often considered a deviation from established cultural standards, and women who fall into this category face condemnation, labeling, and stigmatization (Adepoju, 2020). This is largely because womanhood is closely tied to marriage, and cultural recognition is often denied to women who bear children outside this institution.

Moreover, single motherhood is not a uniform experience, as the challenges faced by women differ based on their circumstances. Widows who become single mothers through the loss of a spouse often receive sympathy, although they may still face economic struggles and limited community support. In contrast, unmarried women who become mothers are usually judged more harshly, with their situation linked to irresponsibility or immorality (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). Therefore, even within single motherhood, social attitudes are layered and unequal.

The consequences of these perceptions are significant. Many single mothers in Nigeria encounter economic hardship because stigma limits their access to decent employment and social support networks (Olaniyan, 2019). Children raised in such families are also affected, as they may be denied equal opportunities in education and community participation. This exclusion reinforces cycles of poverty and marginalization, making single-mother households more vulnerable to insecurity. Although some single mothers develop resilience and build strong family bonds, societal condemnation often overshadows their efforts, leaving them with fewer resources to ensure family stability.

In the context of Southwest Nigeria, single motherhood is shaped by the intersection of cultural, religious, and economic factors. The Yoruba culture places a high value on marriage as an indicator of maturity and social responsibility, which makes unmarried mothers particularly vulnerable to community disapproval. Religious teachings, both Christian and Islamic, further reinforce these cultural expectations by associating childbearing outside marriage with moral failure (Okafor & Duru, 2021). As a result, single mothers are frequently left to navigate their circumstances with minimal institutional or communal support.

Therefore, single motherhood in Nigeria, and especially in the Southwest, cannot be understood solely as a family condition but must be examined as a complex social reality shaped by culture, religion, and gender inequality. While global perspectives increasingly frame single mothers as a diverse and legitimate family type, Nigerian society continues to view them through the lens of stigma and condemnation. This contradiction creates profound

challenges for both mothers and their children, with far-reaching implications for family stability and home front security.

2.2 Stigma and Societal Condemnation

Stigma has been described as a social process in which individuals are negatively labeled, stereotyped, and excluded because they are perceived to deviate from cultural or social norms (Goffman, 1963). It is often expressed through disapproval, discrimination, and unequal treatment that reduce the social standing of those affected. In the case of single motherhood, stigma is not only directed at women themselves but also extends to their children, who are often regarded as illegitimate or less deserving of equal opportunities (Okafor & Duru, 2021). This dynamic transforms single motherhood from a private family condition into a public issue that affects social inclusion and family security.

Societal condemnation of single motherhood is particularly strong in communities where marriage is highly valued as the only legitimate foundation for childbearing and parenting. In Nigeria, single mothers are frequently portrayed as careless, irresponsible, or morally deviant, regardless of the circumstances that led to their situation (Adepoju, 2020). This condemnation is reinforced by cultural expectations that define a woman's identity primarily in terms of her marital status and conformity to community norms. As a result, single mothers are often denied access to vital support networks, including extended family support, community assistance, and opportunities in employment.

Although stigma is rooted in cultural values, religion also plays a major role in sustaining societal condemnation. In both Christian and Islamic communities across Southwest Nigeria, single motherhood is commonly interpreted as a moral failure, associated with sin or disobedience to divine instructions on marriage and family life (Olaniyan, 2019). Religious leaders often reinforce these perceptions through teachings that stress marriage as a sacred duty and condemn childbearing outside wedlock. Therefore, women who become single mothers, particularly those who never married, are often subjected to harsher judgment than widows or divorced women, whose circumstances may attract some sympathy (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021).

The consequences of stigma and condemnation are wide-ranging. At the personal level, many single mothers experience psychological distress due to rejection, gossip, and public ridicule. At the social level, they face barriers to accessing education, employment, and financial resources. Moreover, children raised in stigmatized households often internalize feelings of inferiority and exclusion, which may affect their educational outcomes, self-esteem, and long-term development (Amato, 2021). These challenges weaken the resilience of single-mother households and increase their vulnerability to economic hardship and insecurity.

In addition, stigma contributes to cycles of poverty and marginalization. Single mothers who are denied opportunities for decent employment often struggle to provide basic needs for their children. This economic strain can lead to neglect, juvenile delinquency, or exposure to exploitation. Therefore, the condemnation of single motherhood, while intended to preserve cultural values, paradoxically undermines the very stability and security of households and communities (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

2.3 Home Front Security

Home front security refers to the stability, peace, and protection that households provide for their members. It involves the capacity of families to meet economic needs, ensure emotional well-being, and provide discipline and socialization for children (Parsons, 2019). The household is often considered the first line of defense against insecurity because it shapes the values, behavior, and resilience of its members. When families are stable and supportive, children are more likely to grow into responsible adults who contribute positively to society. However, when families are destabilized by poverty, exclusion, or stigmatization, the home becomes vulnerable to insecurity that can spill over into the community (Amato, 2021).

Although the concept of security is often discussed in terms of states and communities, household stability plays an equally critical role. Scholars have argued that insecurity within the family, such as neglect, domestic violence, or the absence of parental care, is often the foundation of larger social problems, including crime, violence, and political instability (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022). In this sense, home front security is not just a private matter but a public concern, since the breakdown of family stability undermines social cohesion.

In the context of single motherhood, home front security faces particular challenges. Societal condemnation of unmarried mothers often reduces their access to community support, leaving them with limited resources to provide for their children. Economic hardship becomes more severe when single mothers are denied decent employment or when they are excluded from financial opportunities because of their social status (Okafor & Duru, 2021). Moreover, stigmatization affects children directly, as they may experience bullying in schools or discrimination in social interactions. These conditions weaken the protective role of the household and increase the likelihood of insecurity at the family level.

Furthermore, home front security depends not only on material resources but also on psychological stability. Stigmatization creates emotional stress for single mothers, which may affect their ability to provide consistent care and discipline for their children. In many cases, children growing up under social condemnation are more vulnerable to delinquency, neglect, or exploitation (Adepoju, 2020). Therefore, the societal rejection of single motherhood indirectly contributes to insecurity by undermining the very foundation of family resilience.

In Southwest Nigeria, where cultural and religious norms strongly define acceptable family structures, the condemnation of single motherhood presents a serious threat to home front security. Although the intention of society is to uphold moral and cultural values, the effect of stigmatization is the erosion of household stability, which weakens children's development and exposes families to insecurity. This highlights the importance of addressing the link between social exclusion, gender inequality, and family stability in order to strengthen peace and security from the household level upward.

2.4 Theoretical Review

2.4.1 Labeling Theory

Labeling Theory, developed by Howard Becker in 1963, explains how individuals or groups become identified as deviant once society attaches negative labels to their behavior or status. The theory stresses that deviance is not inherent in an action but is socially constructed through reactions and judgments (Becker, 2018). In this sense, people do not simply become outsiders because of what they do, but because society defines and treats them as such. Although originally applied to crime and deviance, Labeling Theory has since been widely used to understand stigma, social exclusion, and discrimination.

At its core, the theory highlights the process of stereotyping and stigmatization. Once a label is applied, it tends to shape public perception, influence opportunities, and affect the self-identity of the person labeled. For example, a woman who becomes a mother outside marriage is quickly categorized as irresponsible or morally wayward, regardless of her personal circumstances. This label then becomes a lens through which she is judged by family, community, and institutions (Okafor & Duru, 2021). Moreover, the negative label often extends beyond the woman to her children, who may be branded as illegitimate or socially inferior, leading to their exclusion from equal opportunities in education and social interaction (Adepoju, 2020).

Labeling Theory also stresses the consequences of being labeled. Once individuals are defined as deviant, they may face systematic exclusion from mainstream opportunities, such as employment, political participation, and access to resources. This process can create a cycle of disadvantage, where those labeled are pushed further into poverty, isolation, or insecurity (Paternoster & Bachman, 2019). For single mothers in Southwest Nigeria, such labeling not only diminishes their dignity but also limits their ability to provide stable environments for their children. In many

cases, the stigmatization they experience erodes family resilience and contributes to household insecurity (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

The relevance of Labeling Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how societal condemnation of single motherhood operates. It provides a framework for understanding why unmarried mothers are treated as outsiders and why their children often carry the burden of negative social judgment. Moreover, the theory reveals how stigma creates structural barriers that weaken household stability and, by extension, home front security. Therefore, Labeling Theory is particularly useful in linking cultural condemnation to the insecurity that arises when families are denied the social acceptance and support they need.

2.4.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory emerged as a framework for analyzing the structures of patriarchy and gender inequality that shape women's experiences in society. It argues that social, cultural, and political systems have historically privileged men while limiting women's opportunities, autonomy, and social recognition (Tong, 2018). Feminism, therefore, challenges these unequal structures and seeks to promote gender justice by questioning the norms and practices that sustain discrimination against women.

One of the key contributions of Feminist Theory is its emphasis on how culture and social institutions reinforce unequal gender roles. Women are often defined in relation to their marital and reproductive status, which reduces their identity to family obligations rather than individual achievements. In many societies, including Nigeria, marriage is considered the ultimate validation of womanhood, while motherhood outside marriage is condemned as a moral failure (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2020). Although men may also become single parents, cultural expectations do not place the same burden of stigma on them, which highlights the gendered nature of societal condemnation.

Moreover, Feminist Theory stresses that women's subordination is maintained not only by cultural values but also by economic and political structures. Single mothers are frequently marginalized in the labor market and denied opportunities for upward mobility because they do not conform to dominant family ideals (Adepoju, 2020). This economic exclusion compounds their vulnerability and makes it more difficult to provide secure environments for their children. Therefore, the stigmatization of single mothers in Southwest Nigeria is not just a matter of individual prejudice but part of broader structural inequalities that Feminist Theory helps to expose.

The theory also draws attention to the intersectionality of women's experiences. Factors such as class, religion, and marital history influence how single mothers are treated. For instance, widows may attract some sympathy, while never-married mothers often face harsher judgment. Intersectionality explains why not all single mothers experience stigma in the same way, even though cultural norms collectively place them in a disadvantaged position (Crenshaw, 1991; Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

The relevance of Feminist Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how patriarchal structures and cultural norms sustain the condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria. It highlights the gendered expectations that tie women's identity to marriage and expose them to stigma when they deviate from this standard. Moreover, it clarifies how systemic discrimination undermines women's capacity to maintain home front security, since exclusion from economic and social opportunities reduces their resilience. Therefore, Feminist Theory provides a critical lens for understanding the societal forces that marginalize single mothers and destabilize family life.

2.4.3 Social Disorganization Theory

Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Shaw and McKay in 1942, explains how the breakdown of social institutions, such as the family, school, and community, increases the risk of insecurity, delinquency, and social instability. The theory argues that when traditional structures that regulate behavior weaken, individuals are more likely to engage in deviant activities and communities become less able to maintain order (Shaw & McKay, 1942;

Kubrin & Wo, 2019). Although it was originally applied to urban crime, the theory has been widely adapted to explain how weak family structures contribute to insecurity at the household level.

The central idea of the theory is that stability within families and communities is essential for maintaining social order. Families are expected to provide care, discipline, and supervision that guide children toward acceptable behavior. However, when families are disrupted by poverty, conflict, or social exclusion, their ability to perform these functions declines. In such situations, children may experience neglect, poor supervision, and exposure to negative influences, which increases the likelihood of insecurity and delinquency (Sampson, 2017). Therefore, strong family systems are crucial for ensuring peace and stability at both the household and community levels.

In relation to single motherhood, Social Disorganization Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how stigmatization and exclusion weaken household stability. When single mothers are condemned and denied access to community support, their capacity to maintain order within the home is compromised. Economic challenges become more pronounced when mothers struggle to secure decent employment, while emotional strain grows as they face constant social rejection (Okafor & Duru, 2021). Moreover, children raised in such conditions often internalize feelings of neglect and inferiority, which may manifest in low academic performance, emotional distress, or delinquent behavior (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022). These outcomes not only destabilize the family but also contribute to broader insecurity within the community.

Although Social Disorganization Theory has been criticized for focusing heavily on structural factors and less on individual resilience, it remains highly relevant to this study. It helps to explain why households led by single mothers in Southwest Nigeria face particular vulnerabilities when they are condemned by society. The theory suggests that stigmatization not only affects individual dignity but also undermines the stability of the home front by eroding family resilience and weakening social support systems. Therefore, Social Disorganization Theory is vital for linking societal condemnation of single motherhood to insecurity within families and, by extension, the wider community.

2.5 Empirical Review

Globally, research on single motherhood has expanded in recent decades, reflecting changes in family structures and social values. Studies in Europe and North America show that single-parent families have become increasingly common due to divorce, delayed marriage, and women's growing independence (Amato, 2021). Although this trend has led to greater acceptance of diverse family forms, stigma against single mothers continues to persist in many societies. In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, single mothers are still often stereotyped as economically dependent and less capable of providing stable homes for their children, despite evidence that many successfully manage family responsibilities (McLanahan & Percheski, 2019).

Research also highlights the economic implications of single motherhood. In most Western contexts, single mothers are disproportionately represented among low-income households because of wage gaps, limited access to childcare, and employment discrimination (Harknett & Hartnett, 2020). Economic insecurity directly affects home front security, as financial hardship restricts the ability to provide adequate housing, education, and healthcare for children. Moreover, single mothers who face economic strain often report higher levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, which can undermine the quality of parenting and family cohesion (Cooper & Stewart, 2021).

Beyond economic challenges, studies emphasize the psychological and social consequences of stigma. Even in societies where family diversity is legally recognized, single mothers may still face subtle forms of discrimination, such as social exclusion, negative stereotypes, or reduced institutional support (Bakker & Karsten, 2022). These experiences weaken social ties and increase vulnerability to insecurity, as households become more isolated from community support systems. Children raised in stigmatized households may also internalize feelings of inferiority, which can affect their self-esteem and academic performance (Ridge, 2019).

Although much of the literature in developed countries recognizes state interventions, such as welfare programs, as buffers for single mothers, findings suggest that these policies have not fully eliminated disparities. For example, studies in Scandinavian countries, where social welfare is extensive, reveal that single mothers still report higher risks of poverty and social isolation compared to two-parent households (Nelson, 2020). This demonstrates that institutional support, while crucial, does not fully erase cultural perceptions that continue to stigmatize single mothers.

The global evidence also shows a strong link between single motherhood and household security. When stigma and exclusion persist, households face increased vulnerability to instability, poverty, and weakened resilience. Therefore, even in advanced economies with stronger social policies, the condemnation of single motherhood remains a barrier to family stability. These findings are relevant to this study because they reveal that stigma is not unique to developing countries but a global phenomenon that shapes the lived experiences of single mothers and has lasting consequences for household security.

Research across Africa shows that single motherhood is widely stigmatized due to the continent's strong attachment to traditional family structures and cultural norms. In many African societies, marriage is regarded as a marker of maturity and social responsibility, while motherhood outside marriage is perceived as a violation of cultural and religious expectations (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). This perception has made single mothers some of the most marginalized groups, as they are often denied dignity, social support, and equal opportunities. Although modernization and urbanization have introduced new family patterns, traditional norms continue to exert a strong influence over how women are judged and treated.

Studies from East Africa highlight the economic challenges faced by single mothers. In Kenya and Tanzania, single mothers are frequently excluded from land ownership and inheritance rights, which limits their access to resources and financial independence (Mutua, 2019). This exclusion reduces their ability to provide secure environments for their children and increases household vulnerability to poverty and insecurity. Moreover, stigma often prevents single mothers from benefiting from community-based support systems, leaving them isolated and economically disadvantaged.

In Southern Africa, research emphasizes the dual impact of poverty and HIV/AIDS on single motherhood. In South Africa, many women become single mothers as a result of the HIV epidemic, widowhood, or absent fathers. However, instead of receiving support, they often face stigma that associates them with promiscuity or irresponsibility (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). Such stigmatization not only deepens emotional stress but also undermines home front security by weakening social networks that could otherwise provide assistance. Children of single mothers in these settings frequently experience discrimination, which affects their education and social integration.

West African studies reveal a similar pattern. In Ghana, single mothers are often portrayed as failing to live up to social ideals of womanhood, which ties female respectability to marriage (Ardayfio-Schandorf & Amissah, 2020). Moreover, children born outside wedlock may face institutionalized discrimination, such as denial of inheritance rights or exclusion from cultural rites. In Nigeria, single mothers frequently struggle with poverty, workplace discrimination, and community exclusion, which combine to erode household resilience (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2020). These findings underline that stigma is not only cultural but also institutional, affecting both mothers and their children.

Although some African countries have made progress in gender equality policies, societal attitudes toward single mothers remain largely negative. Research shows that legal reforms alone cannot erase deeply entrenched cultural and religious values that condemn motherhood outside marriage (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022). Therefore, stigma continues to undermine household stability by denying single mothers access to resources, support, and recognition.

Overall, African studies demonstrate that single motherhood is often framed as a moral and cultural problem rather than a social reality that requires inclusive solutions. The stigmatization of single mothers across the continent has direct implications for home front security, as it creates cycles of poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability. These insights are critical to this study, as they show that the condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria reflects broader African patterns where cultural norms and gender inequality continue to shape women's experiences and household stability.

In Nigeria, single motherhood remains one of the most stigmatized social conditions due to the strong cultural and religious emphasis on marriage as the only acceptable foundation for family life. Studies consistently reveal that women who raise children outside wedlock are often labeled as irresponsible, immoral, or failures in upholding cultural values (Olaniyan, 2019). This stigma affects not only the mothers but also their children, who are sometimes denied equal opportunities in education, community participation, and inheritance rights. Although modernization has introduced diverse family patterns, societal condemnation of single motherhood has remained deeply entrenched.

Empirical studies show that Nigerian single mothers often experience economic exclusion. Okafor and Duru (2021) found that single mothers in urban areas encounter workplace discrimination, where employers stereotype them as unreliable or less committed because of their household responsibilities. In rural communities, land ownership and access to credit facilities are often restricted for women without male partners, which increases their dependence and economic vulnerability (Adepoju, 2020). These conditions reduce the ability of single mothers to provide stable home environments, thereby undermining household security.

Moreover, research highlights the role of religion in sustaining negative perceptions of single motherhood. In both Christian and Islamic communities, childbearing outside marriage is often condemned as sinful, which reinforces cultural rejection of unmarried mothers (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). This condemnation sometimes leads to exclusion from religious spaces and community support networks that are vital for family survival. In addition, children born outside of wedlock are frequently stigmatized in religious settings, where they may be denied participation in rites or ceremonies.

The psychological effects of stigmatization are also significant. Studies report that many Nigerian single mothers experience emotional stress, depression, and social isolation as a result of community rejection and constant labeling (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2020). This emotional burden reduces their ability to provide consistent care for their children, which weakens family resilience and security. Moreover, children of single mothers often suffer from low self-esteem and academic challenges because of bullying or discrimination in schools. These findings underline the direct link between societal condemnation and instability within the household.

Although there are government policies aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting children, their enforcement remains weak. Research indicates that cultural values and religious beliefs often override formal laws, which means that single mothers continue to face social exclusion despite legal protections (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022). Therefore, the Nigerian evidence shows that stigma against single motherhood is not only a cultural issue but also a structural one, as institutions sometimes reinforce the same biases that marginalize single-mother households.

In summary, Nigerian studies demonstrate that single motherhood is widely condemned and stigmatized, with consequences that extend to economic well-being, psychological stability, and family security. These findings are important to this study because they show how societal condemnation in Nigeria, reinforced by culture, religion, and institutional practices, undermines household resilience and creates vulnerabilities that threaten home front security.

Empirical studies from Southwest Nigeria reveal the depth of societal condemnation of single motherhood and its effects on household security. The Yoruba cultural context strongly emphasizes marriage as the basis of adulthood and respectability. Women who bear children outside wedlock are often regarded as failures in fulfilling cultural expectations, and this perception makes them vulnerable to stigma and exclusion (Olaniyan, 2019). Moreover, such women are denied communal support, which traditionally plays an important role in sustaining families in Yoruba society.

Research shows that the stigmatization of single mothers in the region is both cultural and religious. Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe (2022) note that religious institutions in Lagos and Oyo States often reinforce negative perceptions by framing single motherhood as a moral weakness. This condemnation isolates women from networks that could provide psychological or material assistance, leaving them with fewer resources to sustain household security. In addition, children of single mothers face discrimination in schools and peer groups, where they are sometimes labeled as "illegitimate," which undermines their confidence and sense of belonging.

Economic exclusion is another recurring theme in Southwest-focused studies. Single mothers often report difficulties in accessing stable employment or financial support due to stereotypes that portray them as unreliable or morally unfit (Adepoju, 2020). In cases where extended families provide limited help, single mothers become solely responsible for household survival. This pressure increases the risk of poverty, which in turn reduces the ability to provide stable housing, education, and healthcare for children. Therefore, economic strain directly undermines the security of the home front.

Psychological challenges also feature prominently in Southwest Nigerian studies. Many single mothers experience depression and emotional exhaustion because of persistent condemnation and lack of communal support (Okafor & Duru, 2021). These challenges weaken their resilience and reduce their ability to maintain stable home environments. Furthermore, some studies indicate that children raised in stigmatized households are more vulnerable to dropping out of school, engaging in risky behavior, or experiencing low self-esteem (Olaniyan, 2019). These outcomes reinforce the link between societal condemnation and insecurity within families.

Although modernization and urbanization in cities like Lagos and Ibadan have introduced more flexible family practices, cultural attitudes remain largely negative. The persistence of stigma highlights the strength of traditional and religious norms in shaping perceptions of family life in the region. Importantly, Southwest Nigerian studies consistently show that condemnation of single motherhood is not only a moral or cultural issue but also a security concern. By weakening household stability, reducing resilience, and isolating vulnerable families, societal condemnation creates insecurities that extend beyond the home into the community.

2.6 Research Gap

Existing studies on single motherhood in Nigeria have shown that women who raise children outside marriage face stigma, discrimination, and economic challenges that limit their social acceptance and opportunities (Adepoju, 2020; Okafor & Duru, 2021). Research has also highlighted the emotional and psychological burdens that mothers and their children carry as a result of societal rejection (Olaniyan, 2019). Although these studies provide important insights, they often concentrate on the cultural and economic dimensions of single motherhood while neglecting its direct implications for household security.

Moreover, most research treats single motherhood primarily as a moral or social problem without connecting stigma to the weakening of family resilience and household stability (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2021). Studies in Yoruba communities have examined cultural attitudes toward unmarried mothers, but they rarely analyze how condemnation erodes the ability of families to provide protection and cohesion, which are central to home front security (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022). This leaves a gap in understanding the link between social exclusion and household insecurity.

In addition, the literature seldom distinguishes between the different categories of single mothers, such as widows, divorced women, and never-married mothers, even though their experiences of stigma vary. By overlooking these differences, previous studies provide only a partial understanding of how condemnation shapes vulnerability.

Therefore, what remains missing is a study that explicitly examines how societal condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria undermines home front security. This research addresses that gap by connecting stigma to family stability, showing that condemnation is not only a cultural or moral issue but also a security concern with direct consequences for households and communities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design because it was best suited for examining the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of respondents on the societal condemnation of single motherhood and its implications for home front security. The design was appropriate since it enabled the researcher to obtain information from a large population without manipulating variables. Moreover, the survey design was chosen because it allowed for the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches, ensuring that the research captured both statistical patterns and the deeper meanings behind participants' experiences.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of single mothers residing in the six states of Southwest Nigeria, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, along with community members whose perceptions shaped societal attitudes toward single motherhood. The inclusion of both single mothers and community members ensured a holistic perspective by combining the lived realities of those affected with the viewpoints of the wider society.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total sample size of 378 respondents was drawn for the study, consisting of 360 participants who completed questionnaires and 18 participants who took part in interviews. The quantitative sample was considered large enough to provide statistical reliability, while the qualitative sample was adequate for generating rich, detailed insights. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, states were stratified to capture both urban and rural areas. In the second stage, communities were randomly selected within each state. Finally, purposive sampling was applied to identify single mothers and community members with relevant experiences. This combination of probability and purposive techniques ensured both representativeness and depth.

3.4 Research Instruments

The study employed two instruments: a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire generated quantitative data on the forms of stigma, economic challenges, and household insecurity faced by single mothers. It was distributed to 360 respondents, with 60 drawn from each state. The interview guide provided qualitative insights and was administered to 18 participants, three from each state, consisting of single mothers and community leaders. The combination of instruments ensured both breadth and depth in data collection.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review by specialists in sociology, gender studies, and peace studies, who evaluated them for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. A pilot study was also conducted among a small group of respondents outside the main sample, leading to refinement of ambiguous items. Reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the test-retest method, which yielded consistent results, while the interview guide was refined through repeated trials to ensure clarity and dependability of responses.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through field visits across the six states. The researcher, assisted by trained field workers, administered the questionnaires directly to respondents to ensure a high response rate. The interviews

were conducted face-to-face, recorded with the consent of participants, and complemented by field notes. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of responses. This approach strengthened trust between the researcher and participants and enhanced the quality of the data collected.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, as well as inferential statistics to test the relationship between societal condemnation and household insecurity. Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. Recurring patterns were identified and grouped into themes such as economic exclusion, cultural stigma, psychological effects, and impacts on children. The combination of statistical and thematic analyses provided a triangulated understanding of the issue, which enhanced the credibility and robustness of the findings.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of respondents provided context for understanding their experiences of stigma and household insecurity. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the 360 single mothers surveyed across the six states of Southwest Nigeria.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 25 years	42	11.7
	25–40 years	216	60.0
	Above 40 years	102	28.3
Marital Status	Never Married	180	50.0
	Divorced/Separated	108	30.0
	Widowed	72	20.0
Education	Primary	54	15.0
	Secondary	162	45.0
	Tertiary	144	40.0
Occupation	Trading/Artisan	174	48.3
	Teaching	72	20.0
	Formal Employment	54	15.0
	Unemployed	60	16.7
Household Type	Female-headed only	258	71.7
	Extended household	102	28.3

(Field Survey, 2023)

The data revealed that the majority of respondents (60 percent) were between 25 and 40 years, representing women in their most active reproductive and economic years. Only 11.7 percent were below 25 years, largely unmarried mothers, while 28.3 percent were above 40 years, mostly widows and divorced women. This distribution shows that single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria is not confined to a particular age bracket but is more pronounced among women who are economically active (Amato, 2021).

With regard to marital history, 50 percent of respondents were never married, 30 percent were divorced or separated, while 20 percent were widowed. This variation was important because never-married mothers faced the harshest condemnation, often being labeled as irresponsible, while widows received some sympathy from their communities. Divorced mothers experienced stigma that fell between these extremes (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2022).

Educational background revealed that 45 percent had secondary education, 40 percent had tertiary qualifications, and 15 percent had only primary education. Respondents with higher education were more aware of their rights and often resisted negative stereotypes, although education alone did not eliminate stigma. Those with lower education faced greater economic vulnerability, which compounded their household challenges (Amato, 2021).

Occupationally, trading and artisan work dominated (48.3 percent), followed by teaching (20 percent), formal employment (15 percent), and unemployment (16.7 percent). The dominance of informal economic activities highlighted the struggles of single mothers who rely on unstable income sources. Respondents in formal jobs reported discrimination from employers who questioned their reliability due to their family status.

Finally, household composition revealed that 71.7 percent lived in female-headed homes with no external support, while only 28.3 percent lived in extended households. Although Yoruba culture traditionally emphasizes communal support, many respondents reported exclusion from such networks, which increased their household burdens and weakened family resilience.

Overall, the socio-demographic results indicated that single mothers in Southwest Nigeria are diverse in age, marital history, education, and occupation, but they share the common challenge of stigma, economic exclusion, and inadequate support systems. These characteristics shaped the extent of their household insecurity, confirming that societal condemnation interacts with structural conditions to create vulnerability.

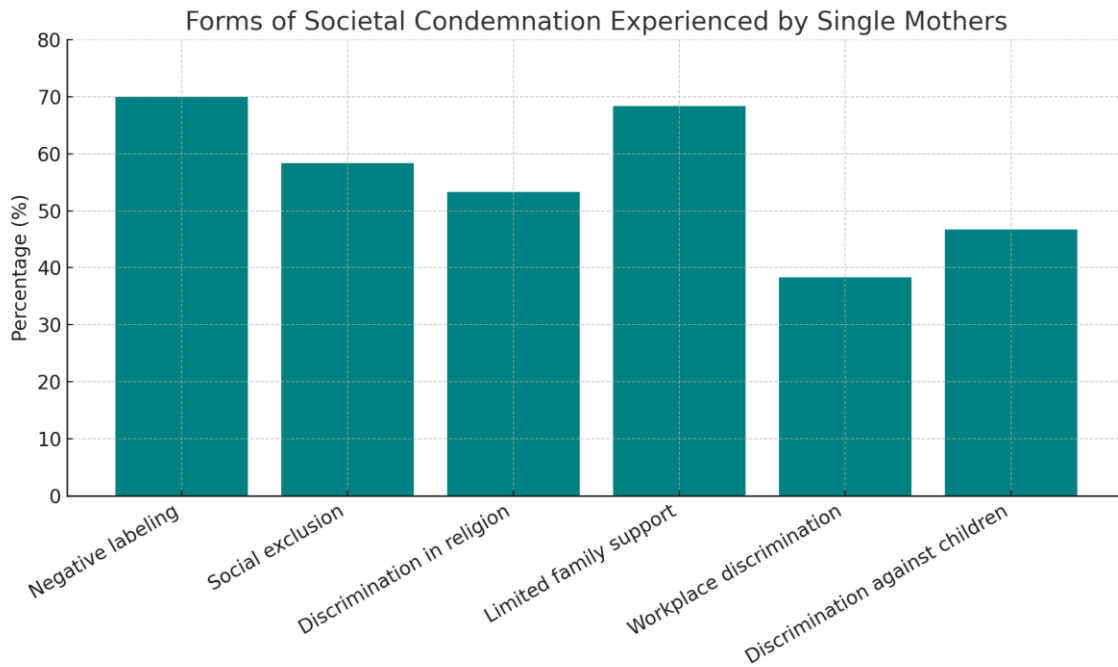
4.2 Forms of Societal Condemnation Experienced by Single Mothers

The study sought to identify the common forms of societal condemnation that single mothers face in Southwest Nigeria. Findings from the questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Forms of Societal Condemnation Experienced by Respondents (n = 360)

Form of Condemnation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Negative labeling and name-calling	252	70.0
Social exclusion from community events	210	58.3
Discrimination in religious spaces	192	53.3
Limited family support	246	68.3
Workplace discrimination	138	38.3
Discrimination against children	168	46.7

Figure 1: Forms of Societal Condemnation Experienced by Single Mothers (Field Survey, 2023)



The results revealed that negative labeling and name-calling was the most widespread form of condemnation, reported by 70 percent of respondents. Single mothers described being called derogatory names such as “irresponsible” or “failed women,” which reinforced social stigma and damaged their self-esteem. Limited family support was the second most reported form of condemnation (68.3 percent), showing that extended families, who traditionally provide communal assistance in Yoruba culture, often withheld support from single mothers.

Social exclusion from community events was reported by 58.3 percent of respondents. Many single mothers noted that they were deliberately ignored during cultural gatherings, weddings, or communal decision-making, reinforcing feelings of isolation. Discrimination in religious spaces was also prevalent (53.3 percent), with respondents recounting how religious leaders and congregations treated them as morally weak (Mkwanzzi, 2020). This form of condemnation was particularly harmful because religion plays a central role in the lives of many Nigerians.

Workplace discrimination was noted by 38.3 percent of respondents, reflecting challenges in the formal labor market. Employers reportedly questioned the reliability and moral integrity of single mothers, which limited their chances of career advancement. Furthermore, discrimination against children of single mothers was reported by 46.7 percent, as children were sometimes labeled as “illegitimate” by peers or denied equal treatment in schools (Okafor & Duru, 2021).

Qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into these experiences. One unmarried mother in Osun State stated, “When I go to community meetings, they do not give me a chance to speak. They say I have no husband, so I cannot advise on family matters.” Similarly, a widow in Lagos added, “Even in church, they pray for married women but look at us like we have failed. It makes me feel rejected.” These accounts highlighted that condemnation was not only external but also internalized, leading to emotional distress and reduced resilience.

Overall, the findings showed that societal condemnation of single mothers in Southwest Nigeria is multifaceted, cutting across family, community, religious, and workplace domains. Moreover, the exclusion of children demonstrated that stigma does not end with the mother but extends to the household, further weakening family security.

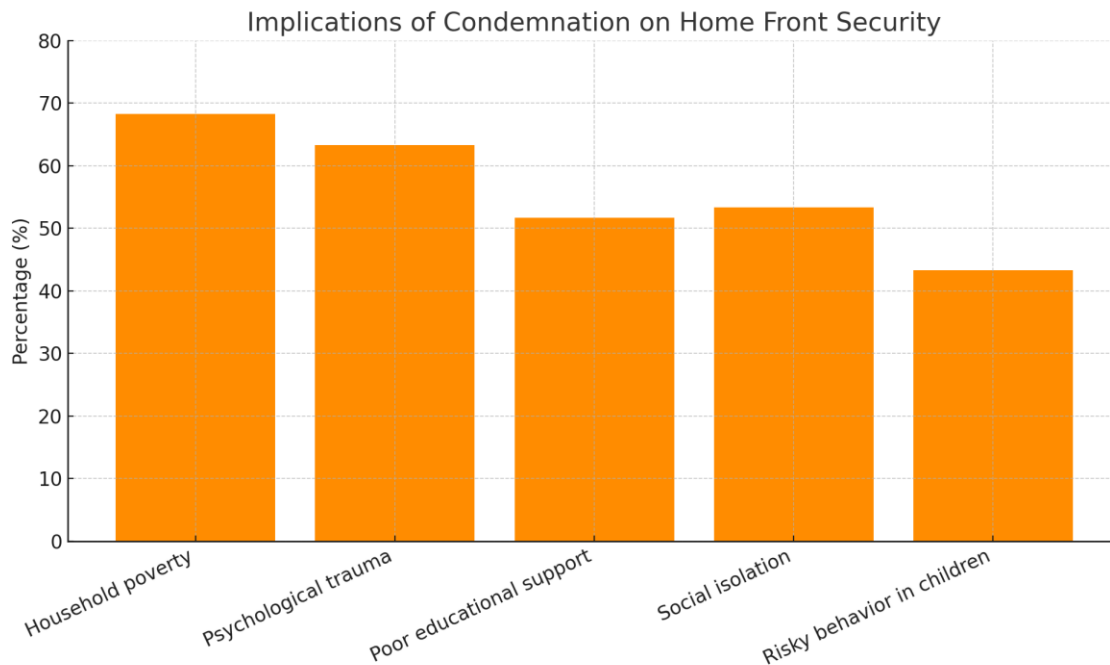
4.3 Implications of Condemnation on Home Front Security

The study revealed that societal condemnation of single mothers has far-reaching consequences for household stability and security. Table 3 presents the major implications as reported by respondents.

Table 3: Implications of Condemnation on Home Front Security (n = 360)

Implications on Home Front Security	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased household poverty	246	68.3
Emotional stress and psychological trauma	228	63.3
Poor educational support for children	186	51.7
Social isolation of the household	192	53.3
Exposure of children to risky behavior	156	43.3

Figure 2: Implications of Condemnation on Home Front Security (Field Survey, 2023)



The results showed that increased household poverty was the most common implication of societal condemnation, reported by 68.3 percent of respondents. Many single mothers explained that a lack of family and community support forced them to rely solely on unstable sources of income. This economic exclusion reduced their ability to provide food, education, and healthcare for their children, thereby undermining household security (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). These findings align with Adepoju (2020), who noted that stigma against single mothers in Nigeria often translates into economic vulnerability.

Emotional stress and psychological trauma were also widely reported (63.3 percent). Single mothers recounted feelings of rejection, shame, and depression resulting from persistent condemnation. One divorced respondent in Oyo State said, *“Everywhere I go, they look at me as if I failed. Sometimes I cry at night because I feel my children are suffering because of me.”* This reflects the psychological burden highlighted by Okafor and Duru (2021), who argued that stigma is internalized and weakens women’s resilience.

Poor educational support for children was reported by 51.7 percent of respondents. Mothers explained that limited income and community discrimination often meant that their children lacked access to quality education or faced bullying in schools. An unmarried mother in Ondo State shared: *“My son came back from school crying because other*

children called him a bastard. It broke me because I knew it was not his fault.” This confirms earlier studies that documented intergenerational effects of stigma on children (Olaniyan, 2019).

Social isolation of the household (53.3 percent) further weakened family security. Many respondents noted that exclusion from communal activities denied them access to traditional support networks, leaving their households vulnerable in times of crisis. Moreover, 43.3 percent reported that children from such stigmatized homes were more prone to risky behaviors, such as truancy, early sexual activity, or association with delinquent peers. This reflects Isiugo-Abanihe’s (2021) observation that households facing cultural rejection often struggle to instill discipline and security.

Taken together, these findings show that condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria is not simply a moral or cultural matter but a direct threat to household security. Poverty, psychological distress, social isolation, and intergenerational stigma converge to create fragile homes. Moreover, the extension of condemnation to children reveals that stigma undermines not only the dignity of single mothers but also the future stability of their families and communities.

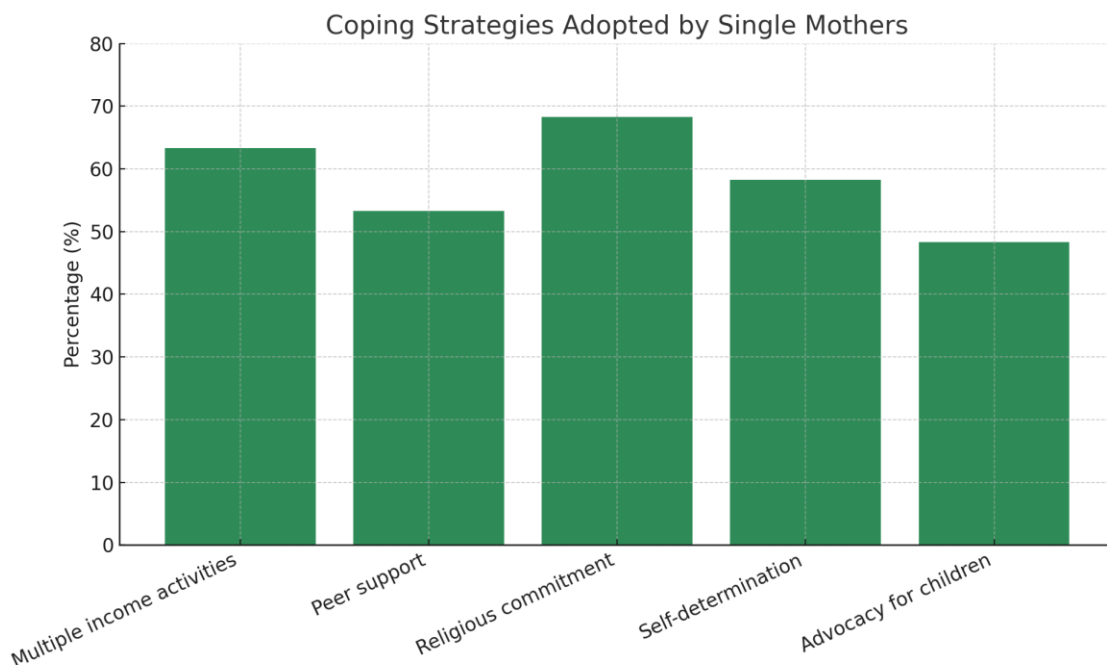
4.4 Coping Strategies Adopted by Single Mothers

The study also investigated the coping strategies that single mothers in Southwest Nigeria adopt to survive societal condemnation and sustain their households. Table 4 presents the major strategies identified from the survey.

Table 4: Coping Strategies Adopted by Single Mothers (n = 360)

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Engaging in multiple income activities	228	63.3
Seeking support from peers and friends	192	53.3
Strengthening religious commitment	246	68.3
Relying on personal resilience/self-determination	210	58.3
Advocacy for children’s welfare	174	48.3

Figure 3: Coping Strategies Adopted by Single Mothers (Field Survey, 2023)



The findings showed that strengthening religious commitment was the most common coping strategy, reported by 68.3 percent of respondents. Many single mothers explained that attending religious gatherings, prayer, and spiritual devotion gave them strength to endure stigma and offered a sense of belonging where wider society had excluded them. One widow in Lagos said, *"I go to church almost daily because it is the only place where I find comfort. Even when some members judge me, my faith gives me hope."* This echoes Olaniyan (2019), who found that religion often serves as both a source of condemnation and resilience for single mothers.

Another key coping mechanism was engaging in multiple income activities (63.3 percent). Single mothers often combined petty trading, artisan work, and part-time jobs to meet household needs. This economic strategy was necessary to survive in the absence of family or spousal support (Chigbu, 2019). Furthermore, Adepoju (2020) similarly observed that economic diversification is a survival response for vulnerable women in patriarchal societies. Relying on personal resilience and self-determination was reported by 58.3 percent of respondents, highlighting inner strength as a crucial resource. Respondents described pushing themselves to remain focused for the sake of their children despite societal rejection. A never-married mother in Ekiti stated, *"People may insult me, but I tell myself I must succeed because my children depend on me. Their future is my motivation."*

Seeking support from peers and friends (53.3 percent) also featured prominently. Many respondents noted that solidarity with fellow single mothers or trusted friends provided emotional relief and, at times, material assistance. Peer networks created informal support systems in the absence of traditional family structures.

Finally, advocacy for children's welfare (48.3 percent) was another coping strategy. Respondents explained that they defended their children against discrimination in schools and communities. This protective behavior reflected the resilience of single mothers in safeguarding household dignity and stability, despite condemnation.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that single mothers employ a mixture of religious, economic, emotional, and social strategies to cope with stigma. Although these strategies help them manage condemnation, they also highlight the structural gaps in societal support (Chigbu, 2019). Therefore, coping strategies serve more as survival mechanisms than permanent solutions, underscoring the urgent need for social reforms.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the societal condemnation of single motherhood in Southwest Nigeria and its implications for home front security. The findings revealed that single mothers experience widespread stigma in the form of negative labeling, social exclusion, and discrimination in religious, community, and workplace settings. Such condemnation undermines household security by increasing poverty, creating emotional distress, isolating families, and exposing children to discrimination and risky behavior. Although single mothers adopt coping strategies such as strengthening religious commitment, engaging in multiple income activities, and relying on personal resilience, these strategies function mainly as survival mechanisms rather than lasting solutions. Therefore, societal condemnation is not only a cultural or moral concern but also a security issue that affects family stability and community cohesion.

5.2 Recommendations

- i. **Policy intervention:** Government should design inclusive social policies that provide economic support and access to education, healthcare, and housing for single mothers, thereby reducing the vulnerabilities that result from stigma.
- ii. **Community sensitization:** Traditional and religious leaders should engage in awareness campaigns to discourage negative labeling and promote acceptance, ensuring that cultural and faith-based institutions become sources of support rather than condemnation.

- iii. **Economic empowerment:** Single mothers should be given priority in skill acquisition and small business support programs to strengthen household income and reduce reliance on unstable informal work.
- iv. **Child protection measures:** Schools and community structures should enforce policies against discrimination of children from single-mother households, ensuring equal opportunities for educational and social development.
- v. **Peer support networks:** Civil society organizations should facilitate platforms for single mothers to build solidarity, share coping strategies, and advocate for their rights within communities.
- vi. **Further research:** Scholars should conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impacts of stigma on children of single mothers and the security of households, which will provide deeper insights for sustainable interventions.

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