

# Solo Mother's Challenges and Coping Strategies: A Phenomenological Study in City of Manila

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Abstract

**Background:** Filipino society's normative definition of a 'family' is one that is composed of a married heterosexual couple and their children. In such cultural set-up, both the mothers and fathers are expected to share the responsibility in raising their child or children. However, for solo mother households, this scenario is farfetched wherein solo mothers serve as the primary economic provider and caregiver.

**Objectives:** The study aims to chart the challenges faced by solo mothers and to identify the coping strategies they employed through understanding their lived experiences.

**Methodology:** The study used a phenomenological approach to magnify a better understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by solo mothers. The researcher conducted personal in-depth interviews to thirteen (13) solo mothers from the city of Manila. The inclusion criteria for the participants were: (a) solo mothers who raised their child alone, (b) at least 25 years of age, and (c) has at least one biological child who is 20 years old and below. The participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The interviews were carefully recorded, transcribed and critically analyzed. After careful thematic analysis of the data and with quantitative methods used, seven themes answering the study's objectives emerged.

**Results and Conclusions:** The seven major themes recorded were: Absence of A Partner, Conflicting Responsibilities, Child Care, Social Support, Willing Endurance, Spiritual Guidance, and Self-Care. These themes were gathered from the respondents who on the averaged have been solo mothers for 10 years already. Solo mothers used both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, but the nature of the problem dictates the strategy to be employed. Solo mothers make sure to look after themselves to be able to take care of their children in the future. Given the reality of struggles of solo parenting, solo mothers as a sector must be provided with support programs and policies by the government to strengthen their stand to raise their children well.

**Keywords:** solo mothers, coping themes, child care, self-care, parental challenges

## Introduction

In 2007, 14 million of the 94 million total population of the country were solo parents and this number has steadily increased through the years. The Federation of Solo Parents estimates that this number will grow to 20 million this year, given the 30.5% growth rate for the population of solo parents [1]. With the enactment of the Solo Parents' Welfare Act in 2002 we see the government's efforts in addressing the struggles that solo parents face. The Act provides a comprehensive definition of who are considered solo parents. In general, solo parents are those who are left to raise their children alone because of the absence of a

spouse. It also enumerates the discounts and benefits solo parents are entitled to. Such benefits and entitlements will cease once an individual is no longer left alone with the responsibilities of parenthood.

In the Philippines, female solo parents must possess a lot of strength and budgeting skills as they are most of the time financially-challenged [2]. Indeed, motherhood is a demanding role for a woman. As a solo mother, she is left with the responsibility of raising her child alone, a responsibility normally shared by two people. Solo mothers become the primary caregiver to their children, primary

economic provider, and sole decision maker in her family [3,4]. Thus, it is inevitable for her to encounter stressors, specifically psychological stress while fulfilling her tasks [5]. Financial problems top the nature of the challenges solo mothers face as they wrestle to provide for themselves and their children [6,7,8].

Previous study by Dabne [9] suggests that solo mothers are often from low income families and earn low wages. Furthermore, Cherlin and Yasutake [10] reported that solo motherhood, particularly births outside marriage, occurred more likely to women who did not attain 4-year college degrees. College graduates, on the other hand, are more likely to wait after marriage before having children [10,11]. Thus, we see that mother-only families are more likely to be poor and dependent on welfare because of the mother's lower earning capacity [8,12,13].

Health problems – physically and psychologically – are also part of the struggles for solo mothers. These can be linked to the economic struggles of solo mothers. It is suggested that low income solo mothers are more likely to suffer from mental and physical health disorders compared to their married counterparts [14]. They also tend to report more problems with feelings of pressures and inability to relax [15]. Common psychological stressors for solo mothers include feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and lack of confidence. They also report feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Solo mothers' health challenges can be attributed to two things – to the economic pressures that affect their well-being and second, to their great exposure to stressful life events [8]. Despite this, single mothers have also proven that they can deal with stress as effectively as their married counterparts [5].

Aside from contributing to the growing body of literature highlighting the challenges and coping strategies solo mothers employ through their lived experiences, the study also aims to suggest possible interventions for the development or improvement of appropriate programs and policies to address the concerns of solo mothers and to ensure their over-all welfare.

## Methodology

### *Study design*

Upon securing approval from the UP Manila Ethics Board [UPMREB2017-556-01], the study employed a phenomenological design. The purpose of using a

phenomenological approach on the study was to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” [16]. This approach was chosen to have a better understanding of the experiences of solo mothers, particularly on the aspects of their challenges and coping strategies. The researcher stopped conducting interviews upon reaching data saturation at 13 respondents. Previous studies [17,18] recommended 5 to 25 respondents as sufficient for the phenomenological design to find and describe common experiences of the participants. The inclusion criteria for the participants were: (a) a solo mother who raises her child or children alone, (b) at least 25 years of age, and (c) has at least one biological child who is 20 years and below. Solo mothers who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study. The respondents were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, of which a written informed consent was provided by the subjects. Respondents were first given a basic information questionnaire, which contained questions on personal information and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. A semi-structured interview guide was used for the interviews. The questions were constructed based on available literature and feedbacks and results from the pretesting of the questions.

### *Data Collection*

Upon obtaining referrals on possible respondents, the researcher proceeded to contact the individuals through giving them a phone call or visiting them at their offices. During initial contact (i.e. phone call or office visit), the researcher first introduced herself and briefed them with the nature and purpose of the study. Once the potential respondent gave her verbal consent, the researcher proceeded to explain the informed consent and had the respondents fill it up to ensure voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted in a private space in the office of the respondents, areas identified by the respondents themselves. Prior to the interview proper, the researcher engaged them to a small talk to ease the atmosphere. Each interview lasted for 45 minutes to an hour; respondents also gave their consents to tape the interview. Since all respondents were locals of the Philippines, the interview was conducted in English and Tagalog to allow the respondents to better express their sentiments and experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

The study used thematic analysis in analyzing the gathered data. Thematic analysis is a way of identifying, coding,

analyzing, and creation of themes extracted from the responses or patterns of responses the data from responses which have reached saturation level. It also helps in summarizing key features of a large body of data [16,19]. The Transcriptions were created for each respondent. The open-coding and inductive coding procedures were utilized to ensure the validity of the creation of the semantic themes and analysis. The researcher re-read the transcripts then wrote the participants' narratives. She also took down notes that might be useful in coding the responses. A thorough scrutiny of the narratives was done to identify new concepts or themes which were recurring and that matched initial created themes. The researcher reviewed the initial themes, checking if they can be further broken down or merged together. A co-analyzer was available to review the initial semantic themes to make sure that all themes had been found and covered. Finally, validation was conducted by going back to the respondent to clarify if indeed the themes captured from the responses was really what the respondent meant.

### Survey Respondents

The final respondents consisted of 13 solo mothers aged 29 to 51 years old. Table 1 shows the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the respondents

| Respondent ID | Age | Civil Status | Education            | Monthly Income | Number of Children | Religion             |
|---------------|-----|--------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 2             | 32  | Single       | College Graduate     | Php 20k - 45k  | 1                  | Born Again Christian |
| 3             | 36  | Single       | Master's Degree      | Php 20k - 45k  | 1                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 4             | 36  | Married      | Master's Degree      | Php 20k - 45k  | 1                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 5             | 44  | Widow        | College Graduate     | Php 20k - 45k  | 2                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 6             | 30  | Single       | College Graduate     | Php 20k - 45k  | 1                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 7             | 45  | Single       | High School Graduate | < Php 20k      | 1                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 8             | 29  | Married      | Master's Degree      | Php 20k - 45k  | 2                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 9             | 41  | Married      | College Graduate     | < Php 20k      | 3                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 10            | 48  | Married      | College Graduate     | Php 20k - 45k  | 3                  | Iglesia ni Kristo    |
| 11            | 47  | Married      | Master's Degree      | Php 20k - 45k  | 2                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 12            | 36  | Single       | Master's Degree      | Php 45k - 75k  | 1                  | Roman Catholic       |
| 13            | 51  | Annulled     | College Graduate     | Php 20k - 45k  | 2                  | Born Again Christian |
| 14            | 51  | Single       | College Graduate     | < Php 20k      | 1                  | Born Again Christian |

**Table 2.** Themes of lived experiences of solo Mothers

| Themes                       | Responses | Year as Solo Mother |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Absence of partner           | 12        | 10                  |
| Conflicting responsibilities | 13        | 10                  |
| Spiritual guidance           | 12        | 9                   |
| Self care                    | 13        | 10                  |
| Child care                   | 11        | 9                   |
| Social support               | 8         | 11                  |
| Willing endurance            | 13        | 10                  |

## Results

After carefully analyzing the data, seven themes answering the study's objectives emerged. The following themes were: absence of a partner, conflicting responsibilities, child care, social support, willing endurance, spiritual guidance, and self-care (Table 2).

### Absence of a Partner

During the first few years into the pregnancy, 11 out of the 13 respondents shared experiences of stigmatization from their peers. Respondents who had been born and raised in the provinces were more likely to share such experiences.

*"Mahirap nga kasi wala akong katuwang. Hindi na ako naghahanap ng katuwang. Kung meron lang sana, hindi ko rin alam kung baka, hindi natin alam di ba. Kung may katuwang ka, makakuha ka ng katuwang na ikaw rin ang mamomroblema, di ba. Mas maganda yung ako na lang mag-susupport sa kanya kaysa mag-aano ako. Kukuha lang ako parang ipunukpok mo yung ulo mo sa pader."* – Respondent No. 13

(It's hard because I don't have a partner. I'm not looking for a partner anymore. I hope I had one. I don't know; we'll never know, right? If you had and found a partner that would only give you trouble, it is better that I support my child on my own. It's like asking trouble for myself.) Respondent No. 13

The solo mother expressed her doubts about finding someone who can really support her and was worried more on the possibility of having problems with a new partner.

Although romantic relationships were the least of the solo mothers' priorities, they still expressed wishes of finding a partner (i.e. *katuwang*) who can help them with fulfilling parenthood responsibilities and, at least, provide them with moral support.

Absence of the other parent also became a problem when the child develops concepts of marriage and family since the child starts asking about the father. Never married solo mothers expressed having a hard time answering such questions. They often result in telling the child about different types of families or telling the child that they will answer the questions when the child reaches a certain age.

*"kasi she has the concept na na kailangan magpakasal muna ulit ako bago ako magkakababy ulit - so sabi niya mommy nung nabuntis ka sa akin, sinong daddy? Sinong husband mo? She has concepts like that already. And medyo mahirap din siyang i-explain. Pero she gets it naman if siguro I need lang to constantly remind her lang na i love her. Para lang makacope siya na okay lang kahit kaming dalawa lang. And we have conversations like it's okay, kasi sila -- I explain to her that there are different kinds of family. There are family na may daddy and mommy and there are family na minsan mommy lang and minsan daddy lang. It's not bad, it's just different."* - Respondent No. 2

(She has the concept that I need to get married before I can have a baby. So she asks, "Mommy, when you were pregnant with me, who's my daddy? Who's your husband?" She has ideas like that already, and it's a bit hard to explain. But she understands it. Though I need to constantly remind her that I love her so she can cope despite it being just the two of us. We have conversations like "it's okay because they..." – I explain to her that there are different kinds of families. There are families with daddy and mommy, and there are also those that only have a mommy or

only a daddy. It's not bad; it's just different.) Respondent no. 2

The absence of a father figure negatively influences their sons. Sons often developed negative attitudes in school during their adolescent years; however, they still maintained good relationships with their mothers and other family members.

*"Ung dalawang son ko, medyo nagkaroon ng rebellion attitude lalo na nung high school years nila. Nagkaroon ng effect yun sa studies nila. Na parang hindi sila papasok, ung rebellion attitude nila when it comes to studies nila. Yun nga nagstop sila ng schooling parang bine-blame nila na o wala naman si papa, wala naman yang pakialam eh."* - Respondent No. 9

(My two sons, they kind of had a rebellious attitude especially during their high school years. It affected their studies. They don't go to class. They had a rebellious attitude when it comes to their studies. They stopped going to school and kind of blamed their father. They say that he's not there, he doesn't care anyway.) Respondent No. 9

### Conflicting Responsibilities

Most of the solo mothers in the study (n=7) reported supporting and taking care of their parents as well, on top of providing for their children. Aside from responsibilities as a daughter and as a mom, their work responsibilities also add up to their tasks.

*"Kasi sa amin, nakita mo, pag may trabaho, hindi kami agad-agad nakakaalis. Andyan pa si boss. Anytime pwede ka tawagan kaya di kami maka.. Kaya nakakaligtan na namin."* - Respondent No. 10

(Because in our office, you see, when there are things to do, we cannot leave anytime. The boss is also there. The boss can call you anytime, we cannot... that's why sometimes we forget about it.) Respondent No. 10

*"Syempre may work na, tapos ung time mo kailangan mo siyang...syempre kailangan mo ung support sa bata di ba lalo na ganon sa school. Hindi mo rin siya hayaang mag-isa siya sa school. Papanig siya sa stage, may award siya. May mga ganyang ano siya. Isa yun sa mga challenges, Mahirap maka-cope pagkaganon. Nakaano ka sa work mo tapos kailangan ka ng anak mo. Mga school activities ganon."* – Respondent No. 12

(Of course there's work...then your time... Of course you need to support the child in school. You also cannot leave the child at school alone. S/he would go up the stage and receive an award, sometimes they have that. That's one of the challenges, and it's hard to cope when it happens. You're at work but your child needs you in school activities.) Respondent No. 12

Common challenges extend beyond finances, to include even psychological support for the solo mother. The challenge is felt especially when there is conflict of duties and responsibilities to perform, which also lead to self-doubt.

#### Child Care

Adjusting to the first few years of solo motherhood often proved to be a challenge for solo mothers. They expressed that the child's earlier years tend to be harder because s/he has more basic needs, compared to when s/he is older. Primary fears include who will care for their child should they die early. Second, the fear of whether they have raised their child appropriately, to include inculcating the right values and attitudes.

*"Ang unang fear is baka di ko mapalaki nang maayos yung mga kids, baka hindi ko maibigay lahat ng needs nila."* – Respondent No. 7

(I fear that I won't be able to raise my kids properly, that I won't be able to give all their needs.) Respondent No. 7

*"Syempre nga ang dami kong insecurities, akala ko wala ng magmamahal sa akin kasi single mom maraming biases sa single mom. I did not feel beautiful kasi iniwanan ako for another woman. Tapos I was taking care of my daughter on my own, so feeling ko ang pangit pangit ko."* - Respondent No. 11

(Of course I had a lot of insecurities. I thought no one loved me because I am a single mom. Single moms receive many biases. I did not feel beautiful because I was left for another woman. I was also taking care of my daughter on my own; I felt that I was so ugly.) Respondent No. 11

Another challenge reported by some (n=4) solo mothers in looking after the child was the conflict in parenting principles with their parents. Grandparents tend to be more 'caring' and tolerating of the child's behaviors. They spoiled the children more than the mothers do. Conflicts also tend

to happen when the grandparents oppose or contradict the mother on disciplining the child.

#### Social Support

Solo mothers shared receiving social support from family and friends, both in financial and non-financial matters, such as time for child care

*"Mahirap siya nung time na maliit pa yung bata pero may support system kasi ako, yung family ko. So parang naging mas madali yung maging solo parent para sa akin kasi meron naman sumusuporta di ba. Pero kung wala sobrang hirap siguro."* – Respondent No. 5

(It was hard when the child was still young, but my family was my support system. Solo parenthood became easier for me because someone was supporting me. If not (for them), it would have probably been very hard.) Respondent No. 5

This is one cultural value of the Filipino, a family system that is always ready to support a member in need. Filipino Family support extends beyond just financial but even physical support in terms of child care. A relative is always ready to lend a hand for child assistance in whatever capacity that the parent is unable to provide.

For other non-financial woes, such as problems related to emotions, work, or relations, they often sought the support of friends and peers. Solo mothers often run to friends rather to family members. This is so to shield their family members from worrying of their predicament

#### Willing Endurance

The respondents expressed willingness to sacrifice and endure all the challenges that come along, regardless of its nature. To address financial concerns, solo mothers willingly took on part time jobs on top of their full-time jobs. In order to meet the demands of the additional job, solo mothers willingly sacrificed their time with their children and endured longer work hours just to make ends meet.

One respondent shared that after her 7AM to 4PM shift at work, she still engaged in part time jobs beyond 4PM. Despite the extreme physical fatigue, however, solo mothers were more than willing to endure for the comfort of their child.



*“ Kailangan kong maging strong para sa anak ko. Kailangan kong, minsan nga kahit na nakakaramdam ako ng sakit, ung may sakit na ako sa katawan, health ko, nilalabanan ko yon, kasi kailangan kong mabuhay para sa mga anak ko eh.” – Respondent No. 8*

(I have to be strong for my kids. Sometimes I feel sick, that something's wrong with me, but I fight that because I need to live for my children.) Respondent No. 8

Filipinos are believed to be very resilient. This is an expression of a solo mother's determination and resilience in child rearing. Glaringly such is the high cost of being a solo mother [3].

The willingness of solo mothers to endure pain was also evident in the way they dealt with health-related concerns. When asked of their health-seeking behavior, their responses reflected strong inclinations to self-medication. In some cases, respondents reported that they still go to work despite being sick.

*“ Kasi sa amin, nakita mo, pag may trabaho, hindi kami agad-agad nakakaalis. Andyan pa si boss. Anytime pwede ka tawagan kaya di kami maka.. Kaya nakakaligtaan na namin.” – Respondent No. 10*

(Because in our office, you see, when there are things to do, we cannot leave anytime. The boss is also there. The boss can call you anytime, we cannot... that's why sometimes we forget about it.) Respondent No. 10

They reported seeking consultation and treatment only if their symptoms were deemed not normal or if they feel severe pain. Respondents reported various reasons for not seeking medical advice that include a busy work schedule, the need to attend to other important responsibilities, the fear to learn the negative outcome of the diagnosis, and financial reasons.

*“ Oo, kasi dito [sa trabaho], ito relax kasi galing lang sa bakasyon, wala pa rito ung mga kasama namin na ano pero most of the time kasi lagi kaming may training so busy talaga yung office namin. So isa pa yun na instead magpapacheck up ako, di pwede kasi may inaayos kaming mga logistics. May training kami sa ganito.” - Respondent No. 9*

(Yes because here at work, now it's more relaxed since we just got back from vacation, and some (of my co-

workers) are not yet back. But most of the time, our office is really busy since we conduct trainings outside. So instead of going for a check-up, I can't go since I have to work on the logistics for our trainings.) Respondent No. 9

### Spiritual Guidance

The respondents shared having good and strong spiritual beliefs, which is a typical trait of Filipinos. Commitment to pray and having a closer personal relationship with God strengthens them. Their perceptions on their problems were also greatly influenced by their religious beliefs and practices. They viewed their problems in a positive light, believing that God would not give them problems they cannot surmount. They often run to God to seek help on how to cope with their problems. Through prayers, they present their wishes and asked for two things – the first was for the Greater Being to guide them through and help them solve the problem and second, for God to lead them to the right person for help.

*“ Lahat ng sama ng loob ko, kinikimkim ko siya. Pagdating ng... punta ako sa Nazareno, sa Quiapo, doon ko na lahat binubuhos. Kaya doon ako umiiyak. Kay Lord lang ako umiiyak. Lahat yan. Lahat sinasabi ko kay Lord.” – Respondent No. 4*

(I keep all my frustration and unhappiness. When I go to the Nazareno, in Quiapo, I release all my emotions there. That's when I cry. I cry to the Lord. I tell the Lord everything.) Respondent No. 4

### Self-Care

Coping strategies employed by solo mothers were geared towards self-care. All 13 respondents (Table 2) shared that they coped through doing activities that divert their attentions, such as engaging in art activities, reading, playing with the children, and often doing household chores to while away boring time. Respondents also shared spending some time alone and treating themselves to something (e.g. meal, material object) as a way of coping. They also reported engaging in activities that promote good health as part of their coping with stress, such as hiking, mountain climbing, exercising (e.g. at the gym, doing routines at home), and dancing.

*“ Nag-zu-zumba ako. Kumbaga yun na lang yung ano ko eh sa buhay, pag-zu-zumba, yan na lang yung ano ko maalis ang mga stress.” - Respondent No. 6*

(I do Zumba. That's my only... Doing Zumba is the only thing I do to destress.) Respondent No. 6

*"I still feel that I need to have my individuality, parang separate from my role as a mom. So I make, naghihike pa rin, nag mountain climb ako, naghihike ako. There are still these I go to na... At first I felt really guilty about it kasi feel ko, you know, as a mom kasi, as a parent parang you feel na lahat ng resources mo, lahat ng oras mo dapat nasa anak mo. Pero ngayon I'm thinking na if I need time para sa akin lang talaga, different from my time as a mom kasi kung hindi parang ma-sa-saturate siya. I love my daughter, there's no question about it pero you know sometimes kailangan din natin to love myself parang loving myself strengthens me as a person and makes me a better mom."* – Respondent No. 2

(I still feel that I need to have my individuality, separate from my role as a mom. So I make (time), I still go hiking and mountain climbing. There are still these (things) I go to that... At first, I felt really guilty about it because I feel that, you know, as a mom and as a parent, you feel that you should give all your resources and your time to your child. But right now, I think that I need time for myself, different from that of being a mother. If I don't, I would feel saturated. I love my daughter; there's no question about it. But you know, sometimes, we need to love ourselves too because loving myself strengthens me as a person and makes me a better mom.) Respondent No. 2

Self-care behaviors as coping strategies were also reflected in the ways that solo mothers cope with health worries. Solo mothers actively take care of themselves by consciously changing their eating habits and doing basic exercises. Furthermore, the respondents also mentioned that while they do not immediately go to the hospital for a check-up, they tend to seek the advice of family, friends, and acquaintances who are medical professionals.

*"Nung pumunta ako sa kanya (doctor), nagpapacheck up talaga ako sa kanya. Ang dami kasi niyang sinasabing gagawin mga ganyan ganyan. So pag may pera ako tsaka lang ako dumadalaw sa kanya. Alam niya naman yon. Doon lang niya ako ginagawa kapag may pera ako. Kapag ano may pera tsaka available siya."* - Respondent No. 4

(When I go to the doctor, I really go for a check-up. The doctors would recommend a lot of things for me to follow and do, so I only go to them when I have money. They

know it. I only go for treatment when I have money and they are also available for consultation.) Respondent No. 4

Table 2 shows that on the average the respondents have been on their own raising their children and family a little over 10 years. Despite the length of time of being alone, the themes still reveal that there are major concerns that our solo mothers confront on a daily basis.

## Discussion

Solo motherhood, as viewed by study respondents, is a life-changing event. It has caused drastic changes in their lives in terms of their roles and priorities. From putting themselves and their family first, they now put their children as the top priority.

In Philippine society, the notion of a family being composed of a heterosexual couple and their unmarried children was considered the norm for the longest time. Consequently, solo mothers tend to contend with disgrace since their family's structure deviated from the norm [21]. Despite receiving stigma from other people, solo mothers eventually came to terms with it.

Several Filipino values played very crucial roles on how solo mothers respond to challenges as well as dictated the coping strategies that they would take. The values of being family-oriented and of "filial piety" were reflected on the tendency of solo mothers to provide financial support and care for their aging parents, despite resulting in conflicting and additional responsibilities for them. On the other hand, the solo mother also derived social support from her family members and parents. Instead of leaving her alone in child-rearing, such duties were often extended to the solo mother's parents. The Filipino value of 'lakas ng loob,' (strong optimism and confidence in oneself) was also crucial for the willingness of the solo mothers to sacrifice and to endure challenges to make ends meet. Because they had to be strong and had to believe in themselves, they were able to accomplish things that can help them and their children survive.

Our study showed that solo mothers used two types of coping strategies which were in line with the Stress and Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman [22]. In problem-focused coping, individuals attempted to eliminate distress by doing something to address its source. For emotion-focused coping, individuals tried to regulate their emotions through changing how they would attend to the situation or how they would relate meaning to the situation.

Problem focused coping was used to address both financial and health concerns. Self-medication and home remedy palliative care were generally employed by solo mothers. Whereas previous studies have identified the limited provisions for private health insurance and sheer lack of adequate medical care [23,24,25] as the reasons why solo mothers do not seek medical treatment, our study revealed that the health seeking behavior of solo mothers was basically affected by three factors: (a) time or availability, (b) severity or seriousness of the symptoms she felt, and (c) availability of funds. Being worried about the expense of illness, self-medication has been the option which demonstrates that the priority is always the child. The act of sacrifice of a solo parent defies all other concerns. The present study offered the explanation that solo mothers engage in self-care behaviors, both in general and in coping with stress, because they wanted to live longer, to care for their children, and to see them grow older.

Emotional-focused coping, on the other hand, was reflected in the respondents' inclination to spirituality as a source of strength and care for one's self. The idea of religion, while it did not solve problems directly, gave the respondents a sense of hope and security. They felt secured knowing that a Greater Being was caring for them and that everything will eventually fall into the right place [23]. Other form of coping involves sharing their emotions with friends and taking part in spiritual groups. This behavior proved to be healthy as taking part in support groups or spiritual communities can boost their strengths while promoting their personal growth and resiliency [2,4]. The care for oneself, as an emotional-coping scheme, was achieved by treating themselves to something or engaging in activities that promote good health and to de-stress [25,2].

Women are self-empowered and armed with strong determination to undertake their responsibility despite their struggles. However, they still need further support for them to continue with their noble task. Their struggles are more than enough to capture the attention of the government for more macro-social assistance.

On the part of the government we are aware that there is an existing Solo Parents Welfare Act of 2000, the Republic Act No. 8972 (An act providing for benefits and privileges to solo parents and their children, appropriating funds thereof and for other purposes) [20]. Several solo parent organizations also exist in almost all barangays in Metro Manila. However, almost all respondents

mentioned that having a strong support from the government is hardly felt, especially in terms of provisions for child care facilities in offices where mothers can securely leave their toddlers while at work. Solo parents also decry of having very poor financial support and of not having similar privileges that senior citizens and the PWDs enjoy [26]. Hillary Clinton's book "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child," which did not specifically focus on solo parenting but emphasizes that normal parenting needs a network of support system in the formation of productive adults in the community [27].

There is a need for a more in-depth explanatory sequential study to arrive at a statistical bases for correlating governmental support as a positive function to alleviate the socioeconomic plights of our solo parents. Unlike the senior citizen and PWDs aggregates in our country, the solo parent populace is disadvantaged. In fact, it was just very recent that an estimated 300 solo parent-leaders, advocates and representatives of different government agencies and local government units (LGUs), attended the very first Solo Parent Summit, July 14, 2018 held at the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) Gym, Elliptical Road, Diliman, Quezon City, despite having an estimate of about 14M single parents in the country [26,28]. Only 1 out of the 16 cities in Metro Manila has an ordinance institutionalizing a special week/day for solo parents [29].

Accordingly, policy makers from the Congress and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has called for urgent need to amend the RA No. 8972. While we are waiting for this to happen, our paper recommends that the basic discounts and benefits of the vulnerable groups, PWDs and Senior Citizens be awarded to solo mothers as well. These include, 20% discount for purchased medicines if there is doctor prescription and 20% for dine in expenses, to mention a few [30]. To enhance more time for child-care, solo mothers must be given a day in a month to attend to the academic and health needs of their children. The sick leave privileges afforded for them should be longer while the un-used leave credits be converted to cash at the end of the calendar year. In the same manner that the senior citizens, pregnant women, and PWDs have priority lanes for economic transactions in various institutions, all these should be accrued to solo mothers as well, to lessen time spent away from home for child care and household chores. Indeed it is about time that the solo mother's welfare be given utmost attention by the government and related agencies of our society.



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