

Portrait Of Psychological Well-Being In Single Parent Mothers: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the psychological well-being (PWB) of single mothers, related to their experiences managing dual roles and the challenges of raising children independently. The study used a qualitative phenomenological-hermeneutic approach with purposive sampling, involving one 43-year-old participant who had been a single mother for eight years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. The results revealed six dimensions of PWB: self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth. Participants demonstrated the ability to self-regulate, make independent decisions, manage emotions in relationships, prioritize children's well-being, and continue to develop themselves. Self-efficacy, faith in God, and family support played a significant role in improving PWB of single mothers. These findings can form the basis for interventions to improve PWB of single mothers and the quality of life of their children.

1 INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being (PWB) is a multidimensional construct encompassing six key dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive social relationships, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). PWB reflects an individual's ability to cope with life's demands, manage stress, and maintain a balance between personal needs and social responsibilities (Kareem et al., 2024). Low PWB can negatively impact mental health and quality of life, particularly for individuals facing dual burdens, such as single parents who simultaneously serve as breadwinners and caregivers (Muarifaha et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, approximately one in ten families is headed by a single parent. International studies show that single mothers often face high economic pressure and limited social support,

significantly reducing their psychological well-being (Our World in Data, 2024; Dharani & Balamurugan, 2024). Optimal PWB enables single parents to manage stress, maintain emotional stability, and maintain healthy relationships with their children. Conversely, low-risk PWB increases depression, emotional instability, and reduces overall quality of life (Dierker et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2022).

Several dimensions of PWB, such as environmental mastery, are often hampered by economic constraints. Single parents facing financial stress tend to struggle to meet basic needs and maintain income stability, thus impacting their ability to effectively manage their living environment (Dharani, 2024; Single Parent Effect on Child's Well-Being and Educational Outcomes, 2023). Furthermore, social isolation and cultural stigma also

negatively impact social relationships and self-acceptance. Social stigma can lower self-esteem, increase shame, and trigger emotional distress that disrupts psychological well-being (Carroll, 2017; Lena et al., 2021; Muarifaha et al., 2020).

Single mothers' PWB not only affects their own psychological well-being but also significantly impacts their children's well-being, including behavior, emotions, and academic achievement (Sarastanti, 2021; Sri Wahyuni & Raden Diana, 2023). Social support, whether from family, friends, or the community, has been shown to be a protective factor that enhances PWB through emotional and instrumental support, as well as a sense of harmony and togetherness (Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019; Lena et al., 2021; Ewid & Vuspitasari, 2020).

While numerous studies on the lives of single parents exist, studies that comprehensively emphasize the psychological dimensions of PWB are still limited in Indonesia. Most studies focus on economic and social aspects, while psychological dimensions such as self-acceptance, social relationships, and environmental mastery are rarely explored in depth. Therefore, research that examines single mothers' PWB holistically is crucial to provide a foundation for relevant and effective psychological interventions to improve the psychological well-being of single parents and support their children's development.

2 METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the psychological well-being of a single parent mother. The participant's experiences

were examined through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and her psychological well-being was assessed using the Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWB), which measures multiple dimensions including self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. By focusing solely on the participant's self-reports, the study aimed to capture an in-depth understanding of her well-being without involving additional informants or significant others.

Instrument

This study employed a qualitative case study design with a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to explore the psychological well-being of a single parent mother. The research focused on understanding the participant's lived experiences in managing multiple roles and challenges in raising children independently. Data were collected using two complementary instruments. First, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWB), a standardized measure assessing six dimensions of well-being—self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth—provided a framework for interpreting the participant's experiences. Second, a semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit in-depth narratives about her daily life, coping strategies, and perceptions of her psychological well-being. The interview questions were aligned with the six PWB dimensions to ensure comprehensive coverage. Data from both instruments were integrated to generate a rich, contextualized description of the participant's psychological well-being, capturing the meanings she attributes to her experiences as a single parent.

Participants

The participant selection method in this study used purposive sampling. The participant consisted of a single mother. This mother, aged 43, had been the sole head of the family for eight years. During this period, she was responsible for meeting the family's economic needs and caring for her children. Participants were selected based on the criteria of being a single mother, having experience in dealing with economic and emotional challenges, and being willing to share their life experiences related to psychological quality of life.

Procedure

Interviews lasted approximately 1–1.5 hours and were conducted in a comfortable, private setting to allow participants to feel safe and free to speak. During the interviews, researchers also observed nonverbal expressions and reactions of participants. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim and examined for statements relevant to the dimensions of PWB, which include self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth.

Technical Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the interview transcripts to identify meaningful codes related to Ryff's PWB dimensions, which were then grouped into themes. These themes were interpreted to provide an in-depth understanding of how the single parent role influences the participant's psychological well-being.

Tools and Materials

This research was conducted at the Basic Chemistry Laboratory of Sunan Ampel State Islamic University in Surabaya. Some of the equipment used in this research included a UV-Vis spectrophotometer, cuvettes, measuring pipettes, measuring cups, reaction tubes, Erlenmeyer flasks, Falcon tubes, beaker glasses, vortexes, centrifuges, drying ovens, analytical scales, rotary evaporators, as well as *Fourier Transform Infrared* (FTIR) and *High Performance Liquid Chromatography* (HPLC) devices. Meanwhile, the materials used included papaya leaf powder, noni leaves, p.a methanol solution, 70% ethanol, distilled water, hydrochloric acid (HCl), sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄), acetic acid, chloroform (CHCl₃), sodium carbonate (NaCO₃), Folin Ciocalteu reagent, Dragendorff reagent, Liebermann Burchard reagent, magnesium, FeCl₃, Mayer Wagner, NaOH, DPPH (2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl), ABTS (3-ethylbenzothiazoline-6-sulfonic acid), TPTZ (2,4,6-tripyridyl-s-triazine), ferrous sulfate, as well as gallic acid, quercetin, and Trolox standards.

3 RESULT

This study aims to describe the experiences of working single parents in managing their lives, as well as the challenges they face across various dimensions. Based on the interviews conducted, various themes and subthemes related to their lives as individuals and parents were identified. The analysis revealed six main dimensions: Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, Positive Relationships with Others, Purpose in Life, Environmental Mastery, and Personal Growth. Table 1 summarizes the phases

faced by participants based on the themes and subthemes provided in each aspect.

Table 1: Summary of Result

Aspect	Theme	Subtheme
Self acceptance	Accepting the Circumstances with Gratitude	- Depressed - Try to enjoy accepting reality
	Making Decisions Alone	- independent - Although at first it was difficult
	Finding Happiness Through Work	- more entertained - not making the condition a burden
	Prioritizing Children's Needs	- having great responsibility for children without husband's support
Autonomy	Confidence in the Decisions Made	- Trust in the decisions taken - Support from experience and belief in God
	Maintaining Principles Amid Pressure	- Stay strong despite pressure from family or other people
	Facing Criticism Calmly	- Stay calm even when criticized - Stay focused on the goal
	Trusting Yourself	- certain on the decision made
Positive Relationships with Others	Maintaining Relationships Through Communication	- Feeling the need to maintain relationships through communication even when busy
	Controlling Emotions in Relationships:	- Be more patient. - Learn to control your emotions before communicating.
	Seeking Help from Family	- Stronger with support from family and children
Purpose of life	Saving for Children's Education	- Children's education is the most important thing for their future.
	Recognizing the Importance of the Future	- Responsible for the future of children so work hard
	Prioritizing Children	- Children's welfare is a priority even when life is hard
	Regarding Children's Education	- Great hope that children will grow into successful and religious individuals
Environmental Mastery	Separating Work and Home Matters	- Limiting office and home affairs so they don't mix. Need your own time.
	Managing Personal Time	- Own time - Try to take a break to fill up energy
	Creating a Daily Plan	- Be more organized by having a plan, especially after the children are adults.
	Maintaining a Good Mood	- The importance of keeping a good heart before meeting the children
Personal Growth	Experiencing Personal Change	- Stronger - Independent - Not dependent on others

		Self-Esteem	- More confident - Appreciate every small achievement
		Wanting to Set a Good Example	- Want to be the best version for children

The researchers also conducted interviews. The interviews were also based on Ryff's six aspects of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, building relationships with others, building autonomy, mastering the environment, focusing on life goals, and personal growth.

Aspect 1: Self acceptance

This dimension describes how the subject accepts her challenging life circumstances and faces difficult situations with a positive attitude. This self-acceptance is reflected in how the subject accepts her role and life circumstances as a hard-working single mother.

Accepting the Circumstances with Gratitude: The subject revealed that despite living as a single mother and facing heavy burdens, she chooses not to wallow in sadness. She tries to enjoy life despite its limitations. The subject stated:

"I'm forced by circumstances... when they say it's tough, it must be tough, but I have to enjoy it... if I don't work, I might get stressed."

This statement indicates that the subject has developed an attitude of sincere acceptance. Although her role as the family's breadwinner is not an easy choice, the subject realizes that happiness in life does not always depend on circumstances, but rather on how we face and enjoy life. The decision to work is not merely an obligation, but a means to maintain emotional stability and avoid further stress.

Making Decisions Alone: A life that drastically changed due to the separation from her husband

forced the subject to make decisions alone without the support of her partner. This deeply emotional experience revealed that these decisions were initially very difficult, but over time, the subject learned to face them with inner strength and courage. The subject revealed:

"The first moment, when my husband left me..., that was the hardest, so I had to make decisions alone, continue to do everything alone."

The subject also realized that the strength to make decisions comes from faith and sincerity in living life.

Finding Happiness Through Work: Work became an escape for the subject from the emotional burdens she faced in her personal life. The subject felt that work provided comfort and happiness, while also protecting her from depression. She said:

"I really accept this situation, because fortunately I was working..., and by working I feel comforted, I don't feel sad, and I don't feel like it's a burden."

In other words, work is not only for fulfilling material needs, but also plays a vital role in maintaining the subject's emotional and mental stability.

Prioritizing Children's Needs: The subject stated that although her role as a single mother is very challenging, she accepts it wholeheartedly. She feels that her top priority is her toddler children. This is reflected in the following statement:

"I have to fulfill this role for my child... I have to prioritize my toddler child... so I can do everything alone without my husband."

This statement demonstrates the subject's ability to accept the reality of facing life without her husband's support. The decision to live life with sincerity despite the difficulties is part of her self-acceptance process. She focuses on meeting her children's needs as a form of responsibility and acceptance of her situation.

Aspect 2: Autonomy

This dimension describes the subject's ability to make independent decisions and adhere to life principles despite facing various external pressures, including from family and society.

Confidence in the Decisions Made: The subject demonstrated strong confidence in every decision he made, driven by challenging life experiences. These decisions were always oriented toward the well-being of his children and family. The subject explained:

"Confidence comes from experience...So whatever I decide, it's definitely for their good. God always helps, as long as we try and are sincere."

This statement demonstrates that the subject's self-confidence stems from his trust in his past life experiences and his belief that God always supports us as long as we strive sincerely.

Maintaining Principles Amid Pressure: Despite facing criticism, especially from family and those around him regarding his decision to continue working, the subject remained steadfast in upholding his life principles. He was unwavering in the opinions of others who considered work a burden to be avoided. The subject firmly stated:

"There have been times, especially from family or other people who told me not to work... But I can't. I know if I don't work, I'll be stressed and

won't be able to provide the best for my children... So I stick to my principles."

This courage to stand by my decisions despite being under social pressure demonstrates a very high level of independence.

Facing Criticism Calmly: The subject is not only able to uphold her principles but also demonstrates an extraordinary ability to calmly handle criticism and differing opinions from others. She wisely filters the input she receives, but ultimately still makes her own decision. The subject emphasized:

"I listen to people's input, but ultimately I still make the decision... The important thing is that I know my goal, so I keep going even if people don't agree."

This ability reflects strong independence and self-confidence that has developed over time. Since losing her husband, the subject has learned to make decisions independently.

Trusting Yourself: The self-confidence that has grown with her life experiences helps the subject remain steadfast in her life. In her confession, the subject stated:

"Since my husband left, I've learned to make my own decisions... So I'm always confident, whatever the decision, it's what's best for me and my children."

This demonstrates that despite facing stressful situations, the subject was not only able to overcome these challenges but also began to trust herself in every decision she made. This self-confidence became the main foundation for the subject in navigating life as a single mother.

Aspect 3: Positive Relationships with Others

This dimension describes how the subject builds and maintains relationships with those around her, despite facing various challenges as a single

parent. The positive relationships she builds are not limited to her children, but also her family and social environment, which contribute to her psychological well-being.

Maintaining Relationships Through

Communication: The subject recognizes the importance of good communication for maintaining family relationships, despite her busy schedule with work and household chores. She strives to make time to maintain communication with her family members and children to maintain harmonious relationships. The subject stated:

"Even though I'm busy, I still try to maintain communication with my family because it makes me feel closer and stronger."

This demonstrates that the subject understands communication as a means of maintaining healthy and supportive relationships.

Controlling Emotions in Relationships: The subject also learned to control her emotions before interacting with others. She recognized that patience and self-control are essential for maintaining harmonious relationships and preventing conflict. The subject stated:

"I learned to be more patient, to control my emotions before speaking, so that communication with my children and family remains good."

This ability to control emotions helps the subject build positive relationships and supports her psychological well-being.

Seeking Help from Family: The subject felt stronger because of the support he received from his family and children. He acknowledged that despite having to bear many burdens alone, the social support from those closest to him was very helpful in maintaining his emotional stability and motivation. The subject stated:

"If I have a problem, I can ask my family for help... their support makes me stronger in facing life."

This indicates that the subject is able to utilize social support as a strategy to maintain psychological well-being and continue to live life with more ease.

Aspect 4: Purpose of life

The subject has a clear vision of life goals, focused on her children's education and the family's future. Awareness of her responsibilities as a single mother is a key driver for her to work hard and plan for a better future.

Saving for Children's Education: Her children's education is her top priority, and she is determined to provide the best for her children's future. She firmly stated:

"My children must go to college for sure... my main goal is for them to go to college, and that's what I want."

She views education as the primary means to provide a better future for her children, and hopes they will become pious and successful individuals in this world and the hereafter.

Recognizing the Importance of the Future: As the breadwinner of her family, she realizes that the future cannot be postponed. She is determined to ensure her children have a better life than she did. She stated:

"Being the breadwinner of my family makes me realize that the future cannot be postponed... I can't relax, because they must have a better life than I did."

This statement illustrates how this awareness of responsibility is a primary driving force behind her hard work and efforts to provide a better life for the next generation.

Prioritizing Children: Children are the subject's top priority in her life. All her efforts and struggles are

focused on her children's well-being and future. She asserted:

"Yes, because I really prioritize my children... so no matter how hard it is, I have to live my life, both as a mother and a father, for them."

This reflects her deep commitment to providing the best love and education for her children.

Regarding Children's Education: The subject has a clear vision for her children's future, which is her primary motivation in life. In her confession, she stated:

"I hope my children grow up to be pious women... the important thing is that they go to college first."

Focusing on children's education as a top priority indicates that the subject has a life goal oriented towards the success and well-being of her children. Higher education is a means for her to ensure her children can achieve a better future. This also reflects the subject's dedication and commitment to provide the best for his children, even though he has to face it alone.

Aspect 5: Enviromental Mastery

The subject demonstrated an exceptional ability to manage various aspects of his life, including work, family, and personal time. He successfully created a balance that reduced stress and increased productivity.

Separating Work and Home Matters: The subject understands the importance of maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life. He doesn't bring work matters into his home life, and vice versa. The subject explained:

"For me, when I'm at the office, I take care of work matters, but when I'm at home, I take care

of home matters, so I don't bring home matters into the office."

This ability to separate roles demonstrates good time and energy management, which is essential for avoiding stress caused by overlapping roles.

Managing Personal Time: The subject recognizes that personal time is also crucial for maintaining a balanced life. Despite his busy schedule, he still makes time for himself. The subject stated:

"So, I have Saturdays and Sundays off, so I optimize that... my alone time is when the kids are asleep."

This demonstrates that the subject has learned to manage his time wisely, prioritizing family needs while still making room for relaxation and self-care.

Creating a Daily Plan: Daily planning is one of the subject's strategies for managing her responsibilities more efficiently. The subject finds it easier to maintain her routine because her children are more independent and have more flexible time. The subject stated:

"I don't find it difficult because I have a plan... Especially now that the children are grown up, so I don't have to worry so much about taking care of them."

This demonstrates that good planning is key to creating a balance between work and family life.

Maintaining a Good Mood: In managing her busy life as a single parent, the subject demonstrated the ability to maintain a crucial emotional balance. The subject stated:

"I instill in myself the need to be happy first... so I have to instill in myself that my heart must be happy first, so when I'm happy and calm, then I'm ready to meet my children."

This demonstrates the subject's high awareness of the importance of maintaining a good mood before interacting with her children. By preparing herself emotionally in advance, the subject is able to give her

best in her relationships with her children and face life's challenges with more composure and compassion.

Aspect 6: Personal Growth

The subject experienced significant changes in his thinking and behavior after facing various challenges in his life. These changes led to increased self-confidence and awareness of his potential.

Experiencing Personal Change: The subject revealed that he has undergone many positive changes since facing various difficulties. He has become stronger, more self-confident, and no longer relies on others for decision-making. The subject stated:

"I used to get down very easily... I can make my own decisions and don't depend on others."

This change reflects profound psychological and emotional development.

Self-Esteem: Through reflection on his experiences, the subject learned to value himself more. He is now more confident and able to overcome doubts. The subject stated:

"Slowly, I'm becoming more confident, because now I can say to myself, 'I can do it, don't hesitate.'"

This self-confidence is an important asset for the subject in facing the future and overcoming life's challenges.

Wanting to Set a Good Example: the subject realizes that he must be a good example for his children, both in managing his emotions and in his daily life. He strives to be the best version of himself, even though he sometimes finds it difficult. He revealed:

"I still feel impatient sometimes, especially when I'm tired... I just want to be the best version of myself for my children."

This awareness shows that the subject is not only focused on self-development for personal gain, but also as a form of responsibility for the development of his children.

4 DISCUSSION

This study reveals how single mothers face various challenges in their lives, as well as how this role relates to their psychological quality of life, which can be analyzed through the dimensions of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) according to Ryff. Based on the results of in-depth interviews, there are six main dimensions of PWB reflected in the experiences of single mothers, as follows: Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, Positive Relationships with Others, Purpose in Life, Environmental Mastery, and Personal Growth.

Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance was a very dominant dimension in the participants' experiences. This study showed that although the subjects faced significant difficulties in their lives, such as being single parents and facing economic and emotional burdens, they managed to accept these realities with grace. Self-acceptance in this case does not mean resignation, but rather an active process of adapting and finding happiness even in less-than-ideal circumstances. The subjects stated that working became a way to avoid stress and feel more entertained. This reflects the concept of positive self-acceptance, where individuals are able to accept their circumstances without sacrificing their psychological quality of life. Previous research also shows that individuals who accept their life circumstances with open arms tend to have better

levels of psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1996).

Autonomy

Autonomy, as a dimension that describes the ability to make independent decisions, was also clearly reflected in the participants' experiences. As single parents, the subjects had to learn to make their own life decisions without the support of their partners. Confidence in decision-making emerged from challenging life experiences and the belief that the decisions they made were best for their children. This aligns with Ryff's autonomy theory, which emphasizes the importance of courage in making decisions despite external pressures (Ryff, 1989). Despite frequent criticism from family, the subject remained steadfast, asserting that the decision to work for the well-being of her children was the most appropriate choice. This research supports the finding that autonomy can enhance psychological well-being by providing a sense of control and responsibility over an individual's life.

Positive Relationships with Others

The dimension of positive relationships with others reflects the importance of social support in maintaining psychological quality of life. Although the subject faced difficulties in her relationship with her separated husband, she still felt the need to maintain relationships with her family and children through good communication. The subject revealed that despite her busy schedule, she maintained relationships with family members through intense communication and felt strengthened by their support. This study confirms the importance of social support in improving an individual's psychological well-

being, especially when facing major life challenges like those experienced by the subject (Ryff, 1995). The subject's emotional management skills also demonstrated her ability to manage healthy relationships with others, which contributed to her psychological well-being.

Purpose of life

Life goals are the subject's primary motivation in living her life as a single parent. The subject's primary focus is providing the best education for her children, and she has a clear vision that education is the primary means to creating a better future. The subject recognizes that her children's future cannot be postponed, and she works hard to ensure that her children can achieve a better life than she did. This research shows that having a clear life purpose, particularly related to family well-being, provides a strong sense of direction and meaning in an individual's life. This aligns with Ryff's theory, which states that individuals with a clear life purpose tend to have higher psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989).

Environmental Mastery

The subject demonstrated exceptional ability to manage his living environment, including work, home, and personal life. He possessed strong managerial skills, such as separating work and home affairs and creating a daily plan to organize time and priorities. The ability to maintain balance between these various roles is essential for reducing stress and maintaining psychological well-being. Environmental mastery is a crucial dimension in improving quality of life, as it provides a sense of control over daily life and increases effectiveness in achieving life goals (Ryff, 1989). The subject also recognized the importance of

maintaining a positive mood before meeting his children, indicating that he strives to create a positive and emotionally healthy environment for himself and his family.

Personal Growth

Personal growth is a dimension that describes positive changes within an individual, including attitudes, feelings, and knowledge. The subject revealed that challenging life experiences have made him stronger, more independent, and less dependent on others. The self-confidence that develops over time provides important capital for the subject to face the future. This research supports the finding that challenging life experiences can be a vehicle for personal growth, particularly in terms of increased self-confidence and independence. According to Ryff (1995), personal growth reflects progress in managing life's challenges and improving the psychological quality of life.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that despite facing significant challenges as single mothers and the breadwinners of their families, the subjects successfully managed the dimensions of Psychological Well-Being positively. Self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth interacted to create greater psychological well-being. The subjects' skills in facing life's challenges, their ability to make independent decisions, and their focus on clear life goals indicate that the role of single mother not only presents challenges but also opportunities for

significant growth and self-development. As a recommendation for further research, further studies can be conducted on the influence of social support and psychological interventions for single mothers in managing their psychological well-being.

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