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ERASMUS+ PROJECT
(KEY ACTION 2)

Socio-Cultural (Technological) and Psychological (Cognitive) Based
Approaches for Single Moms

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Detailed information...



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Our Motivation:

Our project was born from recognizing an undeniable reality in Akyurt: many of our students come from divorced families and live with their mothers. Our observations showed that one of the primary reasons for the high number of divorced mothers in the area is economic factors. These strong women have chosen Akyurt not by coincidence, but because of the district's economic suitability as a safe harbor.

Divorce is a significant life change that affects individuals' behavioral, social, parental, economic, and emotional processes, as it marks the end of a socially and legally recognized marriage relationship. Especially in families headed by women, financial difficulties, social isolation, and the responsibilities of childcare are experienced more severely compared to married mothers. Divorced mothers are also more prone to psychiatric issues like depression and anxiety.

Our Goal

The lack of up-to-date approaches in educational centers aimed at individuals experiencing social isolation makes it difficult for them to integrate into society. Therefore, our project aims to equip adult educators with the cognitive (psychological) and technological (social) tools to offer innovative solutions that provide social integration and emotional support to divorced mothers. Through technology-based approaches, the project seeks to help divorced mothers adapt to society while also improving their technological skills.

Our Activities:

- 1.SIRIUS:** Informing adult educators about current research on major life stresses such as divorce.
- 2.CANOPUS:** Guiding adult educators on how to assist these women using basic social-psychological support skills.
- 3.RIGIL KENTAURUS:** Providing adult educators with cognitive (psychological) activities that can help divorced mothers.
- 4.VEGA:** Creating a support module for divorced mothers, blending cognitive and technological approaches.
- 5.ARCTURUS:** Offering adult educators social activities that can support divorced mothers using technological methods such as gamification and multisensory approaches.

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AKYURT MEM

Akyurt Ilce Milli Egitim Mudurlugu (Akyurt MEM), (Akyurt District Directorate of National Education) started its services as a public body in 1990 to fulfill its educational activities and manages, directs, supervises and coordinates the education policies and strategic plans of the Ministry of National Education in line with the legislation and programs, and carries out the procedures in an effective and efficient manner in Akyurt, Ankara in Türkiye. The primary mission of Akyurt MEM is to improve yourself in thinking, understanding, research and problem-solving skills, to be open, artistically sensitive, self-confident, self-respectful, to have high awareness of rights, justice and responsibility, of making learning a lifestyle, to be conscious of national culture and democracy, to provide an environment and opportunity for the growth of healthy and happy individuals, to meet the needs of society for knowledge, technology and social solutions at the most advanced level through ongoing programs in the fields of education.



AKETH

Anaptyxiako Kentro Thessalias, located in Trikala, Greece, is a non-profit continuing vocational education & training (VET) center/provider. AKETH was founded in 2004 in Trikala – Greece. AKETH as a non-profit organization uses its surplus revenues to further achieve its purpose or mission. Its revenues derive by its activities operating as international VET provider, offering counseling services and providing e-solutions through AKETH lab. AKETH is aligned with the E.U. strategic framework about fighting the rising levels of unemployment –particularly among young people. It is the same risk which threatens a high number of adult workers, resulting in phenomena of social exclusion and the increase of poverty. Such phenomena are more and more appearing, threatening the social cohesion and standard of living. The main way to confront the above is through the improvement of provided education/training in terms of quality and efficiency.



UGEP

After 2-year long preparation International Youth and Education Platform was founded in July 2018. Bilgehan Aktaş took a lead of IYEP which will act as a German-based organization. After nominating country representatives in several states IYEP has started functioning with its young and professional personnel. IYEP, as a transparent formation which is an open structure with no discrimination, will meet our people with all sincerity and seriousness. IYEP as an organization which brings together people who have seen the wrongs and deficiencies that have come to this day and therefore have gained experience and have tried to produce solutions. will work as a target-oriented organization by acting in line with needs. Our goal is to become a formation responding to the needs in this direction.



myJUMP

The NGO myJUMP.sk was established in 2019 in Bratislava (Slovakia). The NGO aims to carry out counselling and educational activities that relate to changes in the life of individuals and groups. We focus on development in the following areas: movement (body-oriented therapy) and music (music therapy), psychological health with a focus on the body, the development of psychological health using movement and music is the basis of strengthening self-regulation and the development of motivation, mindfulness, mental coaching, and career counselling, we teach other people to learn all their lives and share the idea and investment in education and personal development that no one will take away from us. We also focus on the implementation of psychological diagnostics and the subsequent creation of individual development programs with a focus on team development, we teach how to implement in organisational activities such as analysis of the work environment, work tools and group dynamics.





Single Moms

Introduction

Single motherhood is a multifaceted topic that spans psychological, social, and neurological dimensions. A single mother is defined as a woman who raises her child or children without the involvement or support of the child's father or a live-in partner. This definition encompasses a wide range of circumstances, including divorce, separation, abandonment, widowhood, or the choice to have a child without a partner.

Single mothers are the sole caregivers and financial providers for their children, a responsibility that significantly impacts their mental and physical well-being. The primary purpose of this guide is to inform readers about current research on single mothers and to highlight the psychological and social challenges they face. This guide is intended for adult educators who provide social skills training, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and understanding to better support the single mothers they work with. Research on single mothers possesses three fundamental characteristics: theoretical, experimental, and neuroscientific.

Theoretical research on single mothers provides the conceptual frameworks necessary to understand their psychological and social dynamics. Experimental research highlights specific challenges faced by single mothers and effective ways to address these challenges. Neuroscientific research examines brain-based factors that influence the psychological well-being and social interactions of single mothers.

Circumstances Leading to Single Motherhood

1. Divorce and separation:

Many single mothers have experienced the end of a marriage or a long-term partnership. The dissolu-



on of these relationships can be emotionally taxing and often involves legal battles over custody and financial support. The emotional aftermath of divorce or separation can leave mothers grappling with feelings of loss, betrayal, and loneliness, all while adjusting to their new roles as sole caregivers.

2. Abandonment and widowhood:

In some cases, single motherhood is thrust upon women due to abandonment by a partner or the untimely death of a spouse. These situations can be particularly



devastating, as they often occur suddenly and without warning. Widows may struggle with profound grief while trying to maintain stability for their children. Mothers abandoned by their partners may feel a deep sense of rejection and face significant financial instability.

3. Elective Single Parenthood:

Some women choose to become single mothers through assisted reproductive technologies or adoption. This choice can stem from a strong desire for motherhood despite the absence of a suitable partner. While elective single mothers may be emotionally prepared for their role, they still face the same practical challenges of single parenting, such as balancing work and childcare without support.

This guide will discuss each research theme in detail and offer practical suggestions for integrating these insights into training programs, helping educators enhance their support for single mothers.



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A. Theoretical research

Theoretical research on single motherhood delves into various dimensions, encompassing psychological well-being, work-life balance, coping mechanisms, and socio-economic factors.



1. Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being:

Single mothers generally experience higher levels of depressive symptoms, experience significantly higher stress levels, have a higher propensity for suicidal thoughts and higher alcohol-related problems compared to married mothers. The elevated levels of depressive symptoms, stress, and suicidal ideation among single mothers can be attributed to multiple stressors, including financial strain, social stigma, and the dual burden of providing for and raising children alone. The lower income and higher work responsibilities further exacerbate these psychological challenges, highlighting the need for targeted mental health support and social services.



2. Work-Life Balance:

Single mothers face distinct challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, often experiencing financial and role strain. Research categorizes their coping strategies into four perspectives:

- **re-invented motherhood:** Single mothers in this category prioritize their maternal role and often reinvent their approach to motherhood to adapt to their new circumstances.

- **work-family symbiosis:** These mothers integrate their work and family responsibilities, finding a balance that allows them to fulfill both roles effectively.



- **work-centered motherhood:** Mothers with this perspective prioritize their work, often out of necessity to ensure financial stability, which can sometimes lead to conflicts with their maternal responsibilities.

- **work-family conflicted:** This group struggles to balance work and family roles, experiencing significant stress and conflict between the two.

3. Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems:

Single mothers rely on both informal support networks and formal community services to manage stress. Personal coping strategies, including effective time management and self-care, are also crucial. Strengthening these support systems is vital for improving the well-being of single mothers. Single mothers often rely on informal support networks, including family and friends, to manage the demands of single parenthood. This support can range from emotional encouragement to practical help with childcare and household tasks. Organizations and community services provide crucial assistance, such as financial aid, counseling services, and parenting programs. These formal supports help mitigate some of the socio-economic challenges faced by single mothers. Effective time management, prioritizing self-care, and setting realistic goals are personal strategies that single mothers use to cope with the stresses of their dual roles. Developing resilience and a positive outlook also play significant roles in their ability to manage stress.

4. Lived Experiences and Socio-Economic Factors:

Qualitative research reveals the complex experiences of single mothers, influenced by lower education levels, reduced income, and increased responsibilities. Cultural and religious beliefs also play a significant role in their decisions and coping mechanisms. Single mothers often face lower education levels, reduced income, and increased work responsibilities compared to their married counterparts. These socio-economic factors contribute to the overall stress and reduced quality of life. Comprehensive policies addressing these socio-economic challenges are essential for supporting single mothers effectively.

B.Experimental Research

The study analyzes various experimental research findings to understand how these approaches impact the well-being, economic stability, and cognitive development of single mothers and their children.



1. Socio-Cultural (Technological) Based Approaches

a) Digital Literacy and Economic Empowerment

Study A:

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluated the impact of digital literacy programs on single mothers' employment opportunities. Participants received training in computer skills, online job searching techniques, and digital communication. The intervention group showed a significant increase in employment rates and income levels compared to the control group. Additionally, participants reported improved confidence in using technology, which facilitated further learning and job opportunities.

Study B:

Another RCT focused on mobile app-based financial management training. Single mothers who used the app demonstrated better budgeting skills, increased savings, and reduced financial stress. The app provided interactive modules on financial planning, debt management, and goal setting, which were instrumental in enhancing financial literacy.

b) Online Support Communities

Study C:

An experimental study examined the effects of online support groups for single mothers. Results indicated improved psychological well-being, with participants reporting lower levels of depression, anxiety, and isolation. The support groups provided a platform for sharing experiences, emotional support, and practical advice, fostering a sense of community and belonging.



c) Telehealth and Mental Health Support

Study D:

This study investigated the use of telehealth services for providing mental health counseling to single mothers. The findings revealed significant improvements in anxiety and depression symptoms among participants who received regular telehealth counseling sessions. The accessibility and convenience of telehealth were highlighted as key factors in its effectiveness, allowing mothers to receive support without the barriers of travel and scheduling conflicts.



2. Psychological (Cognitive) Based Approaches

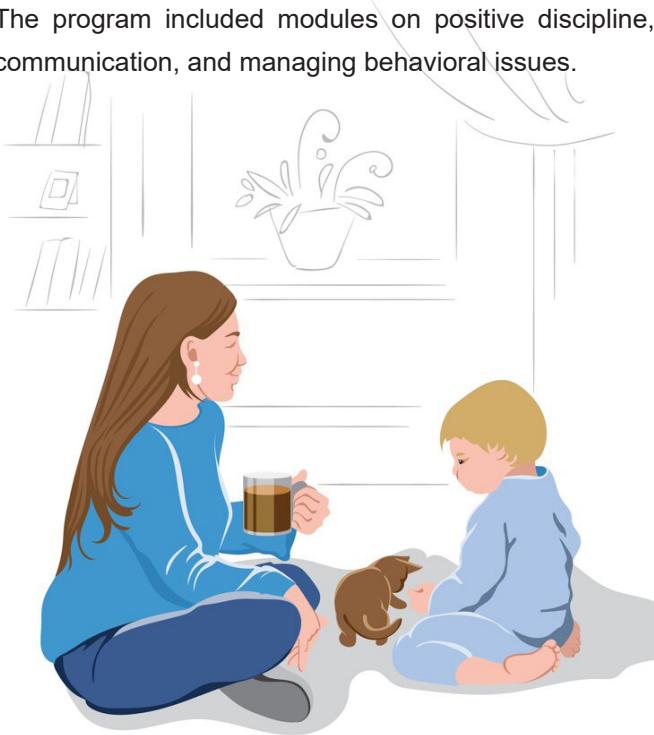
a) Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Study E:

An RCT assessed the effectiveness of CBT on single mothers experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety. The intervention group showed significant reductions in stress and anxiety levels compared to the control group. Participants also reported improved coping strategies and better emotional regulation.

Study F:

Another study implemented a CBT-based parenting program. Single mothers reported improved parenting skills, increased patience, and a better understanding of their children's cognitive and emotional needs. The program included modules on positive discipline, communication, and managing behavioral issues.



b) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Study G:

This experimental study evaluated the impact of an MBSR program on single mothers' psychological well-being. Participants who engaged in mindfulness practices reported lower stress levels, enhanced emotional regulation, and improved overall mental health. The program included guided meditations, mindfulness exercises, and stress management techniques.

c) Positive Psychology Interventions

Study H

A positive psychology intervention aimed at fostering resilience and optimism among single mothers was tested. The intervention group showed higher levels of life satisfaction, resilience, and optimism compared to the control group. Activities included gratitude journaling, strengths identification, and goal-setting exercises.

Discussion

The reviewed studies demonstrate that socio-cultural (technological) and psychological (cognitive) based approaches can effectively support single mot-

hers. Digital literacy and online support communities enhance economic stability and psychological well-being. Psychological interventions like CBT, MBSR, and positive psychology foster cognitive development and emotional resilience.

- **Digital Literacy and Economic Empowerment:**

Digital literacy programs and financial management training via mobile apps significantly improve economic outcomes and financial stability for single mothers. These interventions empower mothers with the skills and knowledge needed to secure better employment opportunities and manage their finances effectively.



- **Online Support Communities:**

Online support groups offer a crucial platform for emotional and social support, reducing feelings of isolation and depression. The sense of community and shared experiences provide single mothers with practical advice and emotional encouragement.

- **Telehealth and Mental Health Support:**

Telehealth services make mental health counseling more accessible, leading to significant improvements in mental health outcomes. The convenience and flexibility of telehealth enable single mothers to seek help without logistical barriers.

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):**

CBT interventions are effective in reducing stress and anxiety, improving coping mechanisms, and enhancing parenting skills. These programs provide single mothers with tools to manage their mental health and foster better relationships with their children.

- **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):**

MBSR programs contribute to lower stress levels and improved emotional regulation. Mindfulness practices help single mothers develop resilience and better manage the challenges they face.



- **Positive Psychology Interventions:**

Positive psychology activities enhance life satisfaction, resilience, and optimism. These interventions promote a positive mindset and help single mothers build a hopeful and resilient outlook.

C. Neuroscientific research

Single motherhood is associated with a range of mental health challenges, which are more prevalent compared to those experienced by mothers in two-parent households. The psychological strain of raising children alone, coupled with financial and social stressors, significantly impacts the mental well-being of single mothers. This section delves into the various mental health issues faced by single mothers, the contributing factors, and potential interventions to support their mental health.



Prevalence of Mental Health Issues

- **Psychological distress:**

Approximately 32% of single mothers experience moderate or severe psychological distress, compared to 19% of married mothers. This distress includes symptoms such as persistent sadness, anxiety, and irritability, which can impair daily functioning and quality of life.

- **Severe psychological distress:**

Single mothers are more than three times as likely to experience severe psychological distress as married mothers. Severe distress can manifest as debilitating depression, chronic anxiety, and other serious mental health conditions that require clinical intervention.

- **Financial hardship correlation:**

There is a strong correlation between financial hardship and increased rates of anxiety and depression in single mothers. The constant worry about meeting basic needs and providing for their children exacerbates mental health issues.



Common Mental Health Challenges

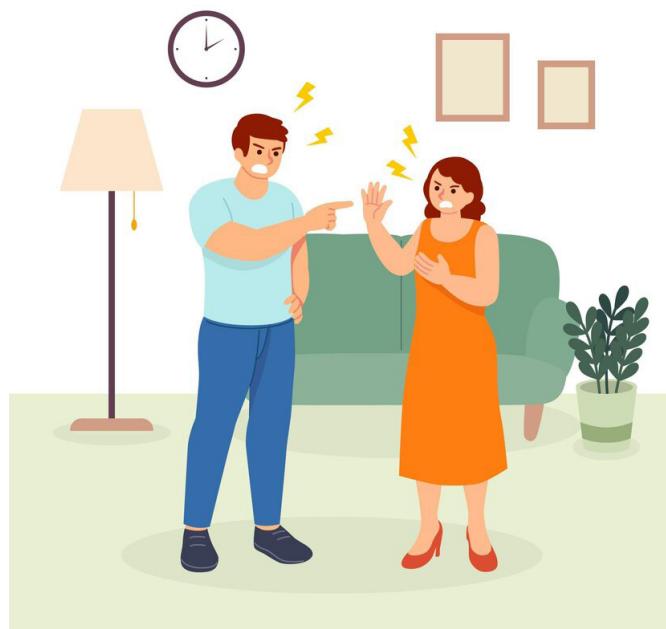
- **Sleep deprivation and inadequate self-care:**

The demands of single parenting often lead to chronic sleep deprivation. Single mothers may stay up late to complete household tasks after their children are asleep, or they may be woken frequently by young children. Inadequate sleep contributes to fatigue, irritability, and difficulty concentrating, further affecting mental health. Additionally, the lack of time and resources can result in neglecting personal self-care, which is crucial for maintaining mental and physical health.



- **Ongoing conflicts with ex-partners:**

For single mothers who share custody or have ongoing interactions with an ex-partner, conflicts can be a significant source of stress. Disagreements over parenting styles, financial support, and visitation rights can lead to chronic stress and anxiety. These conflicts can also affect the emotional well-being of the children, creating additional pressure on the mother.



- **Weak support networks and isolation:**

Many single mothers report feelings of loneliness and isolation due to insufficient social support. Without a partner to share daily responsibilities and emotional burdens, single mothers often feel isolated. The absence of a supportive network of family and friends can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and increase the risk of depression.

- **Dealing with a child's special needs:**

Caring for a child with special needs requires additional time, energy, and resources. Single mothers in this situation face heightened stress levels as they navigate medical appointments, therapies, and educational accommodations. The emotional and physical demands of caring for a child with special needs can lead to burnout and exacerbate mental health issues.

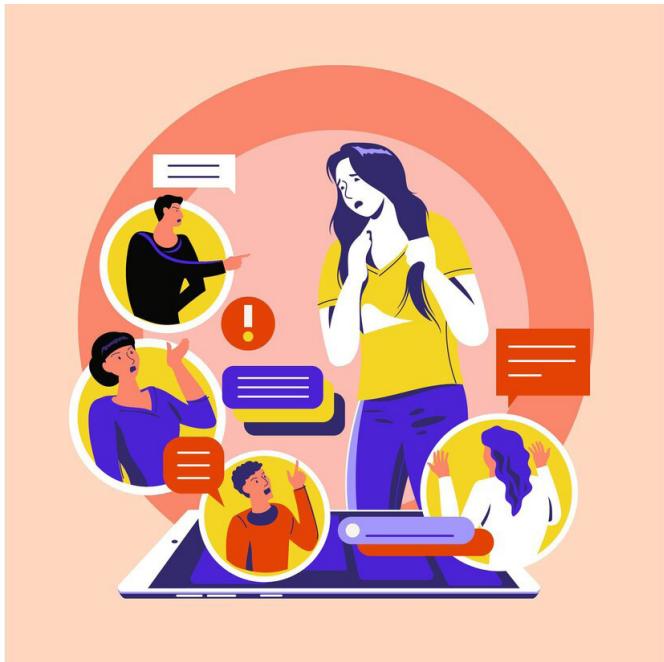


- **Trauma from past abuse:**

Some single mothers have a history of abuse, either from a former partner or in their own childhood. The trauma from past abuse can have long-lasting effects on mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The stress of single parenting can trigger memories of past trauma, making it difficult for mothers to cope effectively.

- **Stigma and judgment from others:**

Single mothers often face societal judgment and stigma, which can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. They may be perceived as less capable or responsible, leading to internalized shame and guilt. This societal stigma can also affect their children, who may face similar prejudices from peers and educators.



The Cumulative Impact of Stress

- **Burnout:**

The constant pressure to manage all aspects of family life without adequate support can lead to burnout. Burnout is characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and feelings of detachment or cynicism. For single mothers, burnout can impair their ability to effectively care for their children and manage daily responsibilities.



- **Mental health crises:**

The relentless stress can sometimes lead to acute mental health crises, such as severe depression, anxiety attacks, or suicidal thoughts. These crises require immediate intervention and support to ensure the safety and well-being of the mother and her children.



- **Seeking support:**

While seeking support is crucial, many single mothers struggle to ask for help due to stigma, pride, or lack of resources. They may feel that admitting they need help is a sign of failure or inadequacy. Encouraging a culture of openness and providing accessible mental health resources can help alleviate this burden.

Interventions and Support Strategies

- **Mental health services:**

Accessible and affordable mental health services are essential for single mothers. Counselling, therapy, and support groups can provide a safe space for mothers to express their feelings, receive professional guidance, and connect with others in similar situations. Tailored mental health programs that address the specific needs of single mothers can be particularly effective.

- **Financial assistance programs:**

Providing financial support and resources can alleviate some of the economic pressures faced by single mothers. Government assistance programs, subsidized childcare, and housing support can help reduce financial stress and improve overall well-being.

- **Social support networks:**

Building strong social support networks is crucial for single mothers. Community programs, peer support groups, and family-friendly social events can help mothers connect with others, share experiences, and reduce feelings of isolation. Encouraging family and friends to offer practical support, such as childcare or assistance with household tasks, can also make a significant difference.

- **Education and employment opportunities:**

Improving access to education and employment opportunities can empower single mothers to achieve financial stability and personal growth. Job training programs, educational scholarships, and flexible work arrangements can help mothers balance their responsibilities and pursue their career goals.

- **Public awareness campaigns:**

Raising public awareness about the challenges faced by single mothers can help reduce stigma and promote understanding. Campaigns that highlight the strength and resilience of single mothers can shift societal perceptions and encourage more supportive attitudes.

- **Impact on Brain Development from a Neuropsychological Perspective**

The impact of single motherhood on the brain,

both of the mothers themselves and their children, is an emerging area of research in neuropsychology. While extensive research has focused on the neurological changes that occur in all mothers, specific studies on single mothers remain limited. However, existing research provides valuable insights into the broader neurological changes that occur during motherhood and the potential unique challenges faced by single mothers.

Neurological Changes During Motherhood

Pregnancy and motherhood trigger significant changes in a woman's brain. These changes are believed to enhance a mother's ability to care for her child, but they can also lead to cognitive and emotional challenges.

- **Gray Matter Reduction and Social Cognition**

Pregnancy-Related Changes:

Studies have shown that pregnancy leads to a reduction in gray matter volume in certain areas of the brain. This reduction is particularly evident in regions involved in social cognition, such as the prefrontal cortex and temporal lobes. This restructuring is thought to help mothers better understand and respond to their infants' needs by enhancing empathy and social attunement.



Mommy Brain: The phenomenon commonly referred to as “mommy brain” includes temporary memory and language lapses. These cognitive changes are believed to be a side effect of the brain’s prioritization of caregiving tasks over other functions.

- **Heightened Stress Response**

Stress Systems:

The demands of motherhood can significantly impact the brain’s stress response systems. For single mothers, these stresses are often more pronounced due to the lack of a supportive partner. Increased activation of the amygdala, which is responsible for processing emotions like fear and anxiety, is one potential adaptation. This heightened stress response can help mothers remain vigilant and responsive to their children’s needs but may also contribute to anxiety and stress-related disorders.

- **Synaptic Pruning and Neuroplasticity**

Synaptic Pruning:

During pregnancy and postpartum, the brain undergoes synaptic pruning, a process that eliminates extra neural connections to enhance efficiency. This pruning is crucial for neuroplasticity, allowing the brain to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. For single mothers, the demands of solo parenting may necessitate even more significant neural adaptations.

Neuroplasticity:

The brain’s ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections is a key aspect of neuroplasticity. This capacity is particularly important for mothers as they adapt to the multifaceted challenges of parenting. Single mothers may experience unique patterns of neuroplasticity as their brains adjust to the increased demands of single parenting.

Impact on Single Mothers’ Brains

- **Increased Cognitive Load**

Multitasking and cognitive strain:

Single mothers often juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously, leading to a significant cognitive load. The need to manage household tasks, work, and childcare alone requires enhanced executive functioning, which involves planning, decision-making, and

problem-solving. This constant multitasking can strain cognitive resources and contribute to mental fatigue.

Cognitive flexibility:

The ability to switch between tasks efficiently, known as cognitive flexibility, is crucial for single mothers. This adaptability helps them respond to the dynamic demands of solo parenting, but it also increases cognitive demands and stress.

- **Emotional Regulation and Stress Management**

Amygdala activation:

As mentioned earlier, the amygdala plays a crucial role in processing emotions and stress. Single mothers may experience heightened amygdala activation



due to the increased stressors of solo parenting. This heightened state can help them remain alert and responsive to their children’s needs but may also make them more susceptible to anxiety and emotional dysregulation.

Prefrontal cortex involvement:

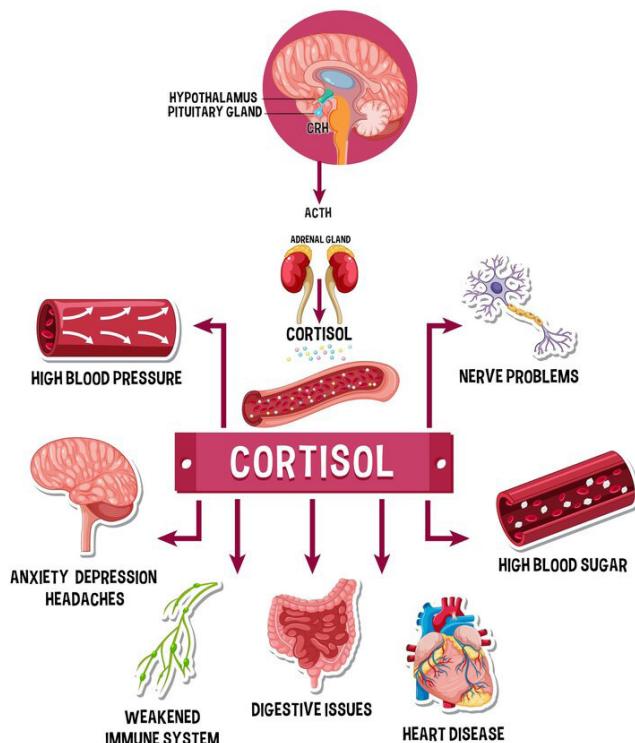
The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions and emotional regulation, may also undergo significant changes. Enhanced activity in this region can improve a mother’s ability to manage stress and make effective decisions. However, chronic stress can impair prefrontal cortex function, leading to difficulties in emotional regulation and decision-making.

- **Hormonal Influences**

Oxytocin and bonding:

Oxytocin, often referred to as the “love hormone,” plays a crucial role in bonding between mothers and

their children. High levels of oxytocin can enhance maternal behaviors and emotional bonding. Single mothers may rely more heavily on this hormone to strengthen their bond with their children in the absence of a partner.



Cortisol and stress:

Cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, can affect brain function and overall health. Chronic high levels of cortisol, often resulting from prolonged stress, can impair cognitive functions and increase the risk of mental health disorders. Single mothers, who often experience higher stress levels, may be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of elevated cortisol.

Conclusion

As we conclude this guide, we hope that the insights provided have illuminated the complex and multifaceted experiences of single mothers. Our goal has been to equip adults with a deeper understanding of the psychological and social challenges faced by single mothers and to offer practical strategies for supporting them more effectively.

The theoretical, experimental, and neuroscientific research discussed in this guide underscores the importance of a holistic approach to social skills training. By integrating these diverse perspectives, educators can create more empathetic, informed, and impactful training programs that address the unique needs of single mothers.

We encourage you to take these insights and apply them in your work, fostering environments where single mothers feel supported, understood, and empowered. Your role is vital in helping them navigate their challenges and achieve their full potential.

Thank you for your commitment to this important work. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of single mothers, helping them to build brighter futures for themselves and their families.

