



Baby Mama Syndrome: Psychosocial and Developmental Implications of an Emerging Trend

Gbenusola A. AKINWALE,¹ Timothy O. OLOKO²

¹Department of Political Studies & International Relations
North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa
e-mail: gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng
ORCID: 0000-0002-0290-8827

^{1,2} University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria

Abstract. Single parenting has taken a different turn in recent times, and it has taken a departure from the norm by consenting to be seen as a baby mama, which is a popular lifestyle in society now. The paper explores the psychological and developmental implications for the mothers and the children involved, as well as its implications for the society in which they live. A vignette was designed to explore the factors contributing to this array of lifestyles among young women. The study used a Google form to elicit responses from N(166) female students of the University of Lagos. Questions were generated from the vignette (short story) titled *Achanugo*, to see how women can agree to become a baby mama for material reasons. The items asked questions on morality, social expectations, family reasons, among others, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. A question was deliberately sought for their consent to guide against ethical issues. The findings showed that a woman's age is a factor in consent to being a baby mama; also, the level of education did not show any significant differences in the acceptance of tangible offers to become a baby mama. From our research, we found that despite the cultural shifts, baby mamas face a lot of stigmas in their society, as changes in family structure are not welcome, especially in conservative societies. We also found that children tend to have developmental challenges because of being in a single-parent home and that the mothers themselves also go through a lot of stress, both at home and as members of their society. By analysing existing literature, this study provides insights into how societal attitudes and family dynamics influence mental health, resilience, and future opportunities for individuals involved, and it offers suggestions on further research to be done and how to make the lives of baby mamas and their children easier.

Keywords: baby mama syndrome, adolescents, young women, society, developmental challenges

Introduction

Mothers and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda ensure that mothers are at the centre of peacebuilding, justice, and strong institutions, which are all-encompassing regarding the growth and development of the next generation. In today's society, women are taking up the sole parenting task, thereby advancing a new trend called "baby mama syndrome". The term is used to describe women who have chosen to raise their kids single-handedly despite having beside a male person as the father of the kid(s). There are several social, psychological, and economic challenges faced by single mothers who have one or more children with a man that they are not married to (Adejo et al. 2021). The term "baby mama" originated from the Jamaican Creole term "baby mada", and it was used factually and affectionately, without judgment, to refer to a woman who had a child or children with a man with whom she was in a relationship. "Baby mama" itself became a term when "baby mada" spread to the United States through reggae music. It was here that it developed its negative inference (Ewan et al. 2021).

A baby mama is regarded as a parent, particularly a woman who is not living with a spouse or partner and shoulders the entire or most of the day-to-day responsibilities of raising the child or children, as the case may be (Nomaguchi–Milkie 2020). However, a single parent is the primary caregiver with whom the child or the children share residency most of the time (Berman, 2020).

This concept is used to describe a particular family situation and acts as a source of social stigma against women, depicting them as "poor single mothers" (Ewan et al. 2021). People in their adolescence and early adulthood, as critical stages for identity development and social integration, are the most likely to become "baby mamas" themselves (Mbulu et al. 2024, Office of Population Affairs 2021).

However, this paper seeks to view this phenomenon from three perspectives: the "baby mamas", the children born into this family structure, and their respective societies, to highlight the psychological and developmental impacts of the baby mama syndrome on adolescents and young adults. As much as young people are more likely to become "baby mamas", their children will eventually also become adolescents and young adults, and so we are curious about how they are affected by this family structure, as well as how different societies treat the prevalence of this phenomenon.

Globally, single-parent households, including those resulting from the baby mama syndrome, are becoming more common due to various factors such as shifting cultural norms, economic challenges, and changes in how we define family (Adejo et al. 2021). These changes especially affect adolescents and young adults, shaping their mental health, resilience, opportunities, and life outcomes (Chavda–Nisarga 2023, Grüning Parache et al. 2024, Gupta–Kashyap 2020). It will be insightful to understand how these family dynamics play out during

these critical life stages so that we can plan useful interventions. By exploring recent studies and theories, this paper dives into how unique family structures, specifically ones with a single mother and an absent father, leave a lasting impact on young people.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, the prevalence of single-parent families is increasing rapidly. In the United States, for instance, about 28% of the children are currently raised in single-parent households, and a majority (over 80%) of the households are headed by single mothers (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Myrskylä et al. (2017) found that the number of baby mamas has been on a steady increase from the 1970s to the twenty-first century, and they have exceeded 40% of the entire population.

Considering the Nigerian media, the term “Baby Mama” has become increasingly prevalent, indicating a social phenomenon that challenges traditional norms and values surrounding family structures and parenthood (Babayemi 2024). Furthermore, as indicated by Barker et al. (2019), baby mama has emerged as a notable phenomenon in the media environment, reflecting the rise of a complex interaction of social norms, cultural values, and shifting gender dynamics. To support this point, Ekwueme et al. (2023) posited that “Baby Mama Syndrome refers to the high prevalence and acceptance of baby mamahood, often characterised by unmarried women bearing children with men who do not assume active parental roles”. Thus, observing from the viewpoint of the Nigerian media, this phenomenon has garnered significant attention across various platforms, including television, film, music, and social media (Adenubi et al. 2025).

Literature Review

The concept of baby mama syndrome has been explored in many different studies under various names, with researchers offering diverse perspectives on its causes, consequences, and implications. One of the dominant themes in these different literature studies is the cultural and societal factors that contribute to the phenomenon (Adejo et al. 2021, Ekwueme et al. 2023, Wariboko–Isichei 2022). Other studies have employed a range of methodologies, from qualitative interviews to quantitative surveys, to explore the experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by the baby mama syndrome (Aye Beng et al. 2022, Grüning Parache et al. 2024, Hiadzi et al. 2023, Malatji et al. 2020). This literature review will synthesise the existing research on the baby mama syndrome, with a focus on identifying the major findings, controversies, and notable gaps in current understanding.

The Mother

To start off, single motherhood and the baby mama syndrome are not mutually exclusive. However, it is common to see baby mamas end up being single mothers because the man involved becomes absent physically and financially (Oriakpono 2024). If this is the most common outcome of the situation, it makes one wonder why women willingly become “baby mamas”. Wariboko and Isichei (2022) discuss a variety of “self-serving” reasons in their paper, among which are poverty, shifting cultural values, distaste for a committed relationship, and a desire to gain more social relevance. With increasing economic problems on a global scale (Partington 2024), some women become baby mamas as a means of survival. They reason that the father of the child will send money for the child’s upkeep, and they can use that to get money for themselves, too. Alongside the money, they may also want to be associated with male celebrities, who have a high social influence, so that they, too, may gain the said status. A study by Akinwale et al. (2025) noted how unemployment has changed the patterns of living and affected the definition of morality in our society in recent times. Similarly, Akinwale et al. (2023) reported that adverse childhood experiences have affected the psychological well-being of young people in Lagos, so much so that they rationalize and accept unhealthy lifestyles for whatever reasons.

As for shifting cultural values, Oriakpono (2024) delves into this topic in her paper, which offers a feminist perspective on the social acceptance of baby mamas in Nigeria. She highlights that the increased visibility of baby mamas in the media is not only a result of the changes in societal norms and values but is also generating gradual changes in values. In essence, it is a sort of feedback loop. Baby mamas are depicted more often in the media, which makes many people accept them, leading to a change in cultural values and greater visibility in the media. Koops et al. (2021) provide yet another angle on the possible reasons behind baby mamas: low parental socio-economic status (SES). In their study across 18 European and North American countries, they posit that women whose parents have a lower socio-economic status may be less supervised or monitored. Thus, they may not plan to become single mothers but tend to be “more ambivalent about the subject and welcome motherhood”. They also say that women with a lower parental SES tend to be more religious and, as a result, they may not want to use family planning or carry out an abortion.

In Ghana, similar findings have been made. According to Ayebeng et al. (2022), women from higher socio-economic backgrounds and less religious women were less likely to become single mothers compared to their more religious counterparts coming from a lower socio-economic background. All in all, literature suggests that baby mamas / single mothers can be found mostly among economically poor women.

Now, while it is important to understand how and why women may become “baby mamas”, the underlying reasons, ranging from financial survival strategies to shifting cultural values, it is also crucial to look at the psychological and developmental impacts of their day-to-day reality. deMontigny et al. (2020) hypothesized that “mothers’ perception of paternal involvement with childcare responsibilities contributes to explaining better maternal mental health and well-being”. Their study showed that the well-being of the mother is strongly and significantly related to co-parenting alliance, which was their operationalized term for the “mothers’ satisfaction with their relationship with their partner”, and their own well-being too. The father of the baby mama’s child is rarely ever involved (Wariboko–Isichei 2022). Also, despite the evolving cultural norms, there is still a social stigma linked to being a baby mama. This is especially the case in conservative societies that continue to prioritize traditional family values, such as in African, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultures (Oriakpono 2024). Even in more “progressive” societies, the stigma persists, and it can create feelings of shame, anger, and even low self-worth (Li 2020). Finally, from a developmental perspective, since baby mamas tend to be the primary providers for their children, they often juggle multiple roles such as taking care of their children, earning an income, and sometimes pursuing education or undertaking other responsibilities. Without strong support systems, this can lead to exhaustion or burnout. However, some women may find strength, personal growth, and even pride in this as they overcome these challenges on their own (Glazer 2022).

The Child

Children raised in such households are often subject to various challenges affecting their emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Though the scale of the effect is small, research suggests that children born to teenage mothers may face increased risks of externalizing behavioural problems such as aggression, delinquency, and hyperactivity (Lee et al. 2020). This is often because these mothers are likely to face various socio-economic and psychological challenges, such as limited financial resources, lower levels of education, and minimal social support. Thus, children in single-parent households may experience poorer health outcomes, psychological well-being, and educational attainment compared to those in two-parent households (Lut et al. 2021). In terms of identity formation, which is a major task of adolescence, Akinwale (2024) reported that social media models have largely influenced several young people so much that they believe all that they see in the social media world, thereby forming their identity based on what has been seen.

Children of single mothers may also be taunted and teased by their peers, which can lead to feelings of embarrassment, shame, and low self-esteem (Lee et al. 2020), particularly when their mothers are not present to counterbalance and alleviate these feelings. Research further indicates that the likely exposure of these children to domestic violence, verbal abuse, and emotional distress can significantly impact their mental health. Children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk of developing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Showalter et al. 2020, Almış et al. 2020). Dual exposure to physical abuse and intimate partner violence is particularly detrimental, predicting various trauma symptoms in children (Showalter et al. 2020) and resulting either from the actions of their frustrated mothers to them, from their mothers' likely continually changing partners, or both at the same time. The absence of a second parent can also lead to inconsistent discipline, as children may be able to negotiate rules and boundaries with their single mother (Wariboko–Isichei 2022). Research consistently shows that parenting styles and family dynamics significantly influence children's internalizing and externalizing problems. Parental practices, including permissive and inconsistent styles, as well as dysfunctional reactions to disobedience, contribute to both types of problems in children (Moreno Méndez et al. 2020). Parenting styles, including conflicts, overload, impulsivity, and inconsistency, are associated with internalizing, externalizing, and adjustment problems in children (Moreno Méndez et al. 2020).

Research also indicates that children in single-parent families may experience more externalizing and internalizing behavioural problems compared to those in two-parent households (Faulconer et al. 2022, Fu 2023). These issues can stem from various factors, including economic constraints, lack of parental support, and societal prejudice (Fu 2023). Parental acceptance/rejection plays a crucial role in children's behavioural outcomes across cultures, with parental indifference/neglect and other forms of rejection associated with increased externalizing and internalizing problems (Rothenberg et al. 2022).

However, when controlling for physical and social resources, differences in child behavioural problems between single-parent and two-parent families may be reduced or eliminated (Faulconer et al. 2022). Recent research actually highlights the resilience and adaptability of children in single-mother families, emphasizing the potential for positive outcomes with *proper support*. Children in single-parent households often display their resilience through adaptive thinking and effective emotion regulation, and while areas like academic achievement and stress levels may differ slightly from two-parent households, these outcomes are influenced by various factors beyond family structure. Accessible support systems, including government assistance and community organizations, are crucial for alleviating challenges faced by single-parent families (Echave Rees et al. 2023).

The Society

Consequently, Wariboko et al. (2022), expressing a thorough ethical-cultural critique of the baby mama syndrome, noted that the Nigerian society places great emphasis on ethical altruism. This means that the moral value of a person's actions is judged solely by how those actions affect others, while the consequences for the person acting are considered unimportant (Snedegar 2023). In essence, ethical altruism means living for the sake of others. The baby mama syndrome is in opposition to that, as it is based on ethical egoism, which is the belief that it is more moral for people to always act in their self-interest, even at the expense of others. Any society that has its young people worship money over morality will be severely affected by the emerging trends. Akinwale (2024) found that young people are money worshipers, and the implication is that such people would not mind accepting tangibles in place of real commitment to relationships.

While most elderly Nigerians consider the phenomenon to be immoral and bad, there is a contradiction in how it is viewed by the youths. Some papers claim that the baby mama syndrome is not welcome among the youths (Adejo et al. 2021), while others show that it is being in fact glamorized and considered a legitimate form of motherhood (Oriakpono 2024, Wariboko–Isichei 2022). Wariboko and Isichei posit that the gradual acceptance of baby mamas will lead to the cultural erosion of Nigerian and African societies at large and is a clear deviation from the norm (p. 65). However, others argue that the acceptance of single motherhood is a sign of progress and a more inclusive society (Oriakpono 2024).

Similar observations have been made in other cultures. For instance, recent research indicates a shifting perception of single motherhood in the United States. While historically stigmatized, single mothers are increasingly viewed as capable and independent (Juffer 2022). This change is reflected in media representations and political discourse (Juffer 2022, Yorks 2022), highlighting the complex effects on the perceptions of both motherhood and single parenthood. However, the narrative around single parenthood *is* evolving, with studies examining the diverse experiences of single parents and challenging stereotypes (Yorks 2021). Some single mothers by choice actively negotiate the discourse of “problematic single motherhood” by distancing themselves from stigmatized positions, though this can inadvertently reinforce other discriminatory ideals. However, another seemingly contradictory study found that the glamorization of single motherhood in the media can have negative consequences, such as perpetuating stereotypes and stigmatizing single mothers who do not fit in the idealized narrative, i.e., have a rich, famous “baby daddy” (Mackenzie 2021).

Research indicates that in other countries, such as Sweden, for one, single motherhood is generally also less stigmatized compared to other countries, though challenges persist. While Swedish single mothers have better material

conditions than those in former communist countries, many *do* still worry about their economic situation due to increasing costs of social services and childcare (Björnberg 2022). However, in some African countries, such as Ghana, single motherhood still presents significant challenges, including stigmatization and economic hardships. The prevalence of single mothers increased from 14.1% in 1993 to 19.5% in 2014, with premarital births being a major contributor (Castro Ayebeng et al. 2022).

The Current Study

The narrative surrounding single parenthood has evolved, highlighting the diversity and complexity of these families (Yorks 2022). Media representations have also transformed, with single mothers often portrayed as hardworking and self-sufficient. Despite these positive shifts, challenges remain, including the persistent emphasis on self-sufficiency over community support (Juffer 2022). As single parenthood becomes more prevalent, research continues to explore its various subtypes and social implications (Yorks 2022). The lifestyle of opting for raising a child in the absence of the father is a public health emergency, as it has implications for the woman, the child, and society. The authors are compelled to ask a rhetorical question to understand factors that could make a woman decide to be a baby mama in Nigeria. There is a paucity of documented evidence to understand this lifestyle, hence this study is interested in exploring it through a vignette among university students in the Lagos metropolitan area, which is considered the bubbling centre of Nigeria, where all things happen. Two research questions were raised: (a) Does age influence the perception of women in deciding to become a baby mama? (b) Can marital status of students influence their perception of being a baby mama?

Method

The study used a survey-vignette-based design that was developed and pilot tested by a steering group of four professionals in the field of human development. The expert ensured that the vignette content and format portrayed the characters and the setting described in the vignette. The rationale for the choice of participants (N = 166) is informed by availability and their knowledge of this array of lifestyles that is predominantly common in elite societies like Lagos, Nigeria. Given the hypothetical nature of vignette-based research, the questions were valid, and a reliability score of .82 was achieved for the items. Realistically, the vignette portrays the scenario in question that was assessed for perceived realism and

aspects of participant engagement with the *Achalugo* story using participant ratings. The choice of vignettes is useful in this study in exploring potentially sensitive topics that participants might otherwise find difficult to discuss. The vignette provides a valuable technique for exploring people's perceptions, beliefs, and meanings about specific situations, and it is especially useful for sensitive areas of inquiry that may not be readily assessable through other means. The data were analysed using ANOVA.

Results

Table 1. *Comparison of age groups – both undergraduate and postgraduate students – based on their perception of the baby mama phenomenon*

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Square	F Ratio	R ²	Sig
Undergraduates							
18–25 Years	95	17.25	4.02	29.090	1.767	.035	.064
26–30 Years	4	15.25	5.19				
31 and above	2	12.50	3.54				
Postgraduates							
18–25 Years	7	17.00	3.61	.677	.039	.001	.826
26–30 Years	15	17.47	3.38				
31 and above	43	17.47	4.48				

Table 1 above shows the comparison of age groups (both undergraduate and postgraduate students) on their intentions to become baby mamas. It was revealed that being an undergraduate or a postgraduate student has no significant influence on their perception of accepting a tangible offer for becoming a baby mama, given the P-value for both undergraduate (.064) and postgraduate (.826) students. Furthermore, age accounts for 3.5% (R^2 .035) variance in the acceptance of the offer for the undergraduate category and for 0.1% (R^2 .001) variance in the case of the postgraduate category.

However, it was further demonstrated that some age groups are more susceptible to accepting the offer than others. For the undergraduate category, participants who fall in the age group of 18–25 years are more susceptible to accepting the offer (17.25), followed by participants who fall in the age group of 26–30 years (15.25), while participants who fall in the age group of 31 years and above are less likely to accept the offer.

For the postgraduate category, participants who fall in the age group of 26–30 years and participants aged 30 and above have an equal mean (17.47), which implies that both categories are susceptible to accepting the offer when presented,

while participants who fall in the age group of 18–25 years are less likely to accept the offer.

Table 2. *Comparison of the marital status of both undergraduate and postgraduate students based on their perception of the baby mama phenomenon*

Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Square	F Ratio	R ²	Sig
Undergraduates							
Single	100	17.06	4.10	3.726	.221	.000	.639
Married	1	19.00					
Postgraduates							
Single	27	17.48	4.02	96.496	6.716	.039	.002
Married	32	18.34	3.56				
Single mothers	6	12.17	3.92				

Table 2 above shows the comparison of marital status of both undergraduate and postgraduate students on their baby mama intentions. Results revealed that the marital status of undergraduate students has no significant influence on their perception of accepting a tangible offer for becoming a baby mama, given the P-value for undergraduates (.639), while the marital status of postgraduate students has a significant influence on their perception of accepting a tangible offer for becoming a baby mama, given the P-value for postgraduates (.002). Furthermore, marital status accounts for 0.0% (R^2 .000) variance in the acceptance of the offer for the undergraduate category and for 3.9% (R^2 .039) variance in the case of the postgraduate category.

However, it was further demonstrated that some categories are more susceptible to accepting the offer than others. For the undergraduate category, married (19.00) participants are more susceptible to accepting the offer, while participants who are single (17.06) are less likely to do so. For the postgraduate category, married participants (18.34) are more susceptible to accepting the offer, followed by participants who are single (17.48), while participants who are single mothers (12.17) are less likely to accept such an offer.

Discussion

The findings in this paper show just how complex the baby mama syndrome is and its implications for individuals, families, and the society at large. While the literature review reflects an extensive range of perspectives, certain themes need closer examination.

Cultural Norms

Culturally speaking, age does influence the perception of a woman deciding to become a baby mama. This is shocking, as several young participants preferred to go through the route of being a baby mama. This is embarrassing, seeing young ladies, who are supposed to enjoy dating and relationships, opt for this lifestyle. There are so many cultural beliefs that significantly influence the perception and experience of the baby mama syndrome, even single motherhood as a whole. In many societies, traditional family structures are emphasized, leading to stigma against single mothers. In some contexts, however, extended families step in to provide support, reflecting how cultural values shape resilience. These dynamics impact the opportunities and challenges faced by baby mamas. Understanding these norms is crucial to framing interventions tailored to different communities.

There is little we can do when it comes to stopping the spread of the baby mama phenomenon. The best we *can* do as a society is to try to manage it and ensure that children born into these situations are well cared for. Consequently, this is evident in today's Nigeria, where youths perceive that being a baby mama or *having* a baby mama is the new form of personal identity because all over the screens and social media platforms, they see celebrities or successful youths careerwise, who are regarded as “role models”, and embrace such a personal identity. Recent studies highlight the emergence of the baby mama syndrome in Nigeria, where women increasingly embrace single motherhood without commitment from the father (Ekwueme et al. 2023). This trend is influenced by media portrayals that normalize and sometimes glamorize this lifestyle despite its challenges (Oriakpono–Babayemi 2024). The phenomenon is part of broader changes in Nigerian family structures due to globalization, including the rise of non-marital childbearing and single parenthood (Ajani et al. 2021). These shifts occur alongside other societal changes. The baby mama syndrome reflects complex interactions between societal views, cultural changes, and media representations, prompting calls for more balanced portrayals and educational programmes to promote informed decision-making about family structures (Oriakpono–Babayemi 2024), as most current media presentations of such people tell stories of a “happy ever after” situation of such personalities, often with no regrets from both parties, especially the women.

Socio-economic and Psychological Challenges

One would have ordinarily believed that the marital status of a student influences their perception of being a baby mama. This is contrary to the expectation that young people who have studied at the postgraduate and graduate levels support this lifestyle, which we consider unhealthy because of various psychological

implications that surround it. As baby mamas tend to come from single-parent households with low-income backgrounds, they may generally lack positive guidance from parents or trusted adults. This creates an environment that makes it easy for them to become baby mamas themselves, not to mention the effect of growing up in poverty and then witnessing the huge turnarounds in the lives of baby mamas of celebrities, particularly in Nigeria, as we have earlier mentioned. This is usually also a driving force in the decisions of these women to take steps to become baby mamas. “Tie the men down with a child” is what is seen, as “they will have to provide for you then”. Additionally, growing up in poverty can also limit access to education, healthcare, and other resources, further exacerbating the challenges faced by baby mamas who just may not end up experiencing such turnarounds.

The psychological challenges faced by baby mamas can also not be overstated. As earlier cited, baby mamas may experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can impact their ability to provide stable and nurturing environments for their children. This results from challenges such as financial strain due to their often limited income, along with the burden of their childcare responsibilities often undertaken on their own. The stress associated with these challenges can significantly impair emotional and cognitive functioning, reducing the quality of parent–child interactions. Programmes that alleviate these burdens, such as subsidized childcare or parental counselling, have shown promise in mitigating adverse effects.

This paper thus emphasizes the need for more nuanced representations of motherhood and single parenthood that acknowledge the complexities and challenges faced by diverse family structures, ultimately advocating for supportive frameworks that empower women (Sinha 2024, Yorks 2021) as well as educating them so they do not ever end up having to resort to being baby mamas for either social or economic reasons.

Moreover, the stigmatization of adolescent mothers and their children in society, professional settings, and policies contributes to stress and poor health outcomes for both the mothers and the children. These findings highlight the need for more balanced media representations of motherhood, educational programmes promoting informed decision-making, and supportive frameworks that recognize the challenges and complexities of motherhood (Oriakpono–Babayemi 2024, Sinha 2024).

Implications for the Children

The impact of the baby mama syndrome on children is a critical concern, one that should be discussed far more extensively than we have found in the course of writing this paper. We have been able to discern, however, that children born

to single mothers face several high risks far more than an average child raised by both parents, including poverty, poor academic performance, as well as various emotional and behavioural problems they are likely to be exposed to.

Recent studies have even explored the relationship between maternal distress and children's emotional responses. Almiş et al. (2020) found no significant correlation between trauma symptoms in mothers and their children, suggesting that older children's emotional responses may reflect their own experiences rather than mirroring maternal distress, and thus emphasizing the importance of independent assessments and early interventions for these children. It has been found that childhood trauma, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, is a significant predictor of long-term mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and borderline personality disorder (Aziz 2020). It is also important to note that the impact of domestic violence extends beyond immediate effects, potentially impairing children's long-term mental development and increasing their risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence later in life (Almiş et al. 2020), thus rendering it a serious concern to be considered.

The lack of a stable father figure can also affect children's emotional and psychological development, leading to difficulties with attachment, trust, and intimacy, as explained in John Bowlby's attachment theory. Specifically, Bowlby's theory suggests that children who experience inconsistent or unreliable caregiving, such as those who lack a stable father figure, and sometimes even a fully immersed mother, may develop an *anxious-ambivalent* attachment style, characterized by difficulty in forming close relationships and a tendency to be overly dependent on others.

Furthermore, children of baby mamas may also experience stigmas and social exclusion, which can negatively impact their self-esteem and social relationships. However, it is essential to recognize that these challenges are not inherent to single parenthood or the baby mama culture but rather a result of the social and economic contexts in which baby mamas operate. In fact, as mentioned and cited earlier, recent studies underscore the resilience and adaptability of children in single-mother families, highlighting their potential for positive outcomes with adequate support. It has also been noted that children from single-parent households often exhibit remarkable coping mechanisms, including adaptive thinking and effective emotional regulation. This suggests that with proper resources and support systems in place, children of baby mamas *can* thrive and achieve positive outcomes, underscoring the need for comprehensive policies and programmes that address the socio-economic challenges faced by these families.

Conclusions

The baby mama phenomenon is an issue with various aspects and heavy implications for mothers, their children, and the society at large. This paper has thus highlighted how shifting cultural norms, social stigma, and economic pressure shape the experiences of baby mamas, often placing them at a disadvantage. The psychological effects it has on these women, combined with the developmental challenges faced by their children, highlight the need for reliable support systems and societal shifts in perception.

References

- Adenubi, A., Oduroye, A. 2025. *The Internet Usage in Nigeria: Streaming, Music and the Digital Revolution in the Entertainment Industry*. 10.13140/Rg..2.2.33486.16960.
- Adejo, O. S., Egerson, D., Mewiya, G., Edet, R. 2021. The Ideology of Baby-Mama Phenomenon: Assessing Knowledge and Perceptions among Young People from Educational Institutions. *Archives of Educational Studies* 1(1): 37–50.
- Akinwale, G. A., Aroyewun, B. A. 2023. Exploring the Interconnection between Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Psychological Well-Being of Emerging Adults in a Rural Community in Lagos, Nigeria. *KIU Journal of Health Sciences* 3(2): 10–24.
- Akinwale G. A., Atiri, S. O., Olatunji, O. A., Akinbode, G. A. Ojakorotu, Victor. 2025. Exploring the Impact of Unemployment on the Development of Young Adults. *Kurdish Studies* 13(1): 123–130. <https://doi.org/10.53555/ks.v13i1.3769>.
- Akinwale, G. A., Ogunleye, Oluwaseun A. 2024. Exploring the Connection between Social Media Usage and Identity Formation among Selected Emerging Adults in the University of Lagos. *Lagos Journal of Psychology* 2(1): 92–108.
- Akinwale, G. A., Ojakorotu, Victor, Nwoko, Maureen. 2024. Influence of Money Script and Substance Abuse on Gambling Behavior among Emerging Adults in Lagos. *Gender & Behaviour* 22(1): 22423–22432.
- Almiş, H. B., Gumustas, F. Kutuk, E. K. 2024. Effects of Domestic Violence against Women on Mental Health of Women and Children. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry* 12(2): 232–242.
- Ayebeng, C., Dickson, K. S., Seidu, A.-A., Amo-Adjei, J. 2022. Single Motherhood in Ghana: Analysis of Trends and Predictors Using Demographic and Health Survey Data. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9(1): 345. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01371-6>.

- Babayemi, John. 2024. The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies Analysis of Media Discourse on Baby Mama Syndrome in Nigeria. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* 12(5): 96–103. 10.24940/theijhss/2024/v12/i5/HS2405-021.
- Barker, K. M., Subramanian, S. V., Selman, R., Austin, S. B. 2019. Gender Perspectives on Social Norms Surrounding Teen Pregnancy: A Thematic Analysis of Social Media Data. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting* 2(2): e13936. <https://doi.org/10.2196/13936>.
- Berman, R., Daneback, K. 2020. Children in Dual-Residence Arrangements: A Literature Review. *Journal of Family Studies* 28(4): 1448–1465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2020.1838317>.
- Chavda, K., Nisarga, V. 2023. Single Parenting: Impact on Children's Development. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342231179017>.
- deMontigny, F., Gervais, C., Pierce, T., Lavigne, G. 2020. Perceived Paternal Involvement, Relationship Satisfaction, Mothers' Mental Health and Parenting Stress: A Multi-Sample Path Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2020.578682>.
- Ekwueme, O., Eze, G., David-Ojukwu, I. 2023. Interrogating Baby-Mama Syndrome as the New Personality Identity in Mosunmola Abudu's Chief Daddy. *Spring Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(06): 01–10. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i06.112>.
- Ewan, A. R., Mullings, D. V., Clarke, J. 2021. The Cultural Production of Problem Baby Mamas. In: *Africentric Social Work*. Fernwood Publishing. 124–159. https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=rwF0EAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA124&dq=%22baby+mama%22&ots=lZtRw3qxTk&sig=tPo aGcyd12xOpD0sbkO3rDmxwSc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22baby%20mama%22&f=false.
- Faulconer, S. C. M., Hveem, M. R., Dufur, M. J. 2022. Gendered Associations between Single Parenthood and Child Behavior Problems in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19(24): 16726. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416726>.
- Fu, Y. 2023. The Impact of Single-Parent Families on Children's Externalizing Behaviour. *SHS Web of Conferences* 180: 02013. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202318002013>.
- Glazer, E. S. 2022. *Paths to Parenting: Choosing Single Parenthood through Pregnancy*. Harvard Health. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/paths-to-parenting-choosing-single-parenthood-through-pregnancy-202203282709>.
- Grüning Parache, L., Vogel, M., Meigen, C., Kiess, W., Poulain, T. 2024. Family Structure, Socioeconomic Status, and Mental Health in Childhood. *European*

- Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 33(7): 2377–2386. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-023-02329-y>.
- Gupta, A., Kashyap, S. 2020. Growing up in a Single-Parent Family: A Determining Factor of Adolescents' Well-Being. *Advanced Journal of Social Science* 7(1): 138–144. <https://doi.org/10.21467/ajss.7.1.138-144>.
- Hiadzi, R. A., Agyeman, J. A., Akrong, G. B. 2023. 'Baby Mamas' in Urban Ghana: An Exploratory Qualitative Study on the Factors Influencing Serial Fathering among Men in Accra, Ghana. *Reproductive Health* 20(1): 37. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-023-01585-0>.
- Juffer, J. 2022, December 31. *Single Mother: The Emergence of the Domestic Intellectual*. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814743799.001.0001>.
- Koops, J. C., Liefbroer, A. C., Gauthier, A. H. 2021. Socio-economic Differences in the Prevalence of Single Motherhood in North America and Europe. *European Journal of Population = Revue Européenne de Démographie* 37(4–5): 825–849. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-021-09591-3>.
- Lee, J. O., Jeong, C. H., Yuan, C., Boden, J. M., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Noris, M., Cederbaum, J. A. 2020. Externalizing Behavior Problems in Offspring of Teen Mothers: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 49(6): 1146–1161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01232-y>.
- Li, Q. 2020. Mothers Left without a Man: Poverty and Single Parenthood in China. *Social Inclusion* 8(2): 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i2.2678>.
- Lut, I., Woodman, J., Armitage, A., Ingram, E., Harron, K., Hardelid, P. 2021. Health Outcomes, Healthcare Use and Development in Children Born into or Growing up in Single-Parent Households: A Systematic Review Study Protocol. *BMJ Open* 11(2): e043361. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-043361>.
- Malatji, H., Dube, N., Nkala-Dlamini, B. 2020. "Every Time When I Make a Mistake in Class, Educators Would Say, You Baby Mama, You Must Keep Quiet:" Challenges Confronting Teenage Mothers When Re-engaging with Secondary School Education in a Johannesburg Secondary School, South Africa. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 30(3): 306–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2019.1682100>.
- Mbulu, C. O., Yang, L., Wallen, G. R. 2024. Adolescent Pregnancy Persists in Nigeria: Does Household Heads' Age Matter? *PLOS Global Public Health* 4(5): e0003212. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0003212>.
- Myrskylä, M., Barclay, K., Goisis, A. 2017. Advantages of Later Motherhood. *Der Gynäkologe* 50(10): 767–772. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00129-017-4124-1>.
- Nomaguchi, K., Milkie, M. A. 2020. Parenthood and Well-Being: A Decade in Review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 82(1): 198–223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12646>.
- Office of Population Affairs. 2021. *Trends in Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing* | HHS Office of Population Affairs. <https://opa.hhs.gov/adolescent-health/>

adolescent-sexual-and-reproductive-health/trends-teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing.

- Oriakpono, M. 2024. Navigating Identity and Language: A Feminist Perspective on the Social Acceptance of Baby Mamas in Nigeria. *NIU Journal of Social Sciences* 10(3): Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.58709/niujs.v10i3.1985>.
- Partington, R. 2024. Global Economy Faces Period of Prolonged Weakness, UN Warns. *The Guardian* 4 January. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/jan/04/global-economy-faces-period-of-prolonged-weakness-un-warns>.
- Rothenberg, W. A., Ali, S., Rohner, R. P., Lansford, J. E., Britner, P. A., Di Giunta, L., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Steinberg, L., Tapanya, S., Tirado, L. M. U., Yotanyamaneewong, S., Alampay, L. P., Al-Hassan, S. M., Bacchini, D., Deater-Deckard, K. 2022. Effects of Parental Acceptance–Rejection on Children’s Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors: A Longitudinal, Multicultural Study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 31(1): 29–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-02072-5>.
- Snedegar, J. 2023. *Ethics and Contrastivism* | *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://iep.utm.edu/ethics-and-contrastivism/>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2014. *Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children under 18 Years*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- Vinny, C. 2024. *What Is Cultivation Theory in Media Psychology?* Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/cultivation-theory-5214376>.
- Wariboko, O., Isichei, C. 2022. An Ethico-Cultural Critique of ‘Baby Mama’ Phenomenon in Contemporary Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanitatis Theoreticus* 6(1): 57–69.
- Yorks, J. 2022. Singled Out No Longer: The Changing Narratives and Types of Single-Parent Families. *Sociology Compass* 16(2): e12951. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12951>.