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**Experiences and Challenges in Single Fatherhood:
A Literature Review on Single, Custodial Fathers**

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Abstract

Households led by single, custodial fathers (SCFs) are increasing in the United States, so the need for further research into this population is critical. To best serve this population, it is important for social work professionals to understand the challenges facing these families, their unique experiences, and the best practices. For this purpose, 33 academic journal articles about SCFs were reviewed and the following seven areas were discussed: (1) fatherhood experiences, (2) overall challenges for SCFs, (3) overall perception of SCFs, (4) economic impact, (5) deviance of youth, (6) academic achievement of the children of SCFs, and (7) applicable interventions. This population was examined through the lens of the social work profession and comparisons were drawn between this family configuration and other family dynamics, specifically single, custodial mothers (SCMs). Findings showed that SCFs experience bias from the public and social work profession and legal, economic, and parenting challenges. More research is needed particularly in specific interventions for SCFs. Suggestions for social work practice include looking past gender biases and stereotypes, recognizing the cultural diversity in this population, and improving educational opportunities and self-efficacy.

Experiences and Challenges in Single Fatherhood: A Literature Review on Single, Custodial Fathers

Evolving trends in parenthood and fatherhood nationwide point to an increase in single fathers that is part of the changing view of family. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), in 2020, single, custodial father (SCF) households made up approximately 2,094,000 households with children in the United States; in comparison, there were an estimated 8,625,000 households headed by single, custodial mothers (SCMs) that year. From 2010 to 2020, there was an approximate 18.84% increase in SCF-led households and a 13.09% decrease in SCM-led households. These statistics also encompass the changing racial makeup and ethnic identity across the United States. While there was an estimated 17.03% increase in White SCF households from 2010 to 2020, both Black and Hispanic SCF households also showed an estimated increase (16.83% and 40.58% increase respectively) in the same time frame (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

The growth in SCF households points to a need for specific interventions in the realm of social service, including social work. SCFs can come into their role through court intervention, widowhood, or adoption, all of which pose unique challenges (Coles, 2009). These fathers also fall into the category of “fragile families.” This term was utilized to define families with unwed parents who are at an increased risk of lower economic status and are more likely to be of a minority background (Bembry, 2011). This vulnerability points to an increased need for support for this population.

To properly support social service work with these fragile families, examining current research is integral. To this end, sources for this literature review were gathered initially from the University of Akron’s University Libraries’ Academic Search Complete database with keywords

of “single father,” “single custodial father,” and “single parent.” A total of 33 articles were selected with limitations set for geographic restraint to the United States and Europe (with the exception of one study conducted in South Africa) and eliminations based on relevance and redundancy. The literature yielded a pattern of seven themes: (1) fatherhood experiences, (2) overall challenges for SCFs, (3) overall perception of SCFs, (4) economic impact, (5) deviance of youth, (6) academic achievement of the children of SCFs, and (7) applicable interventions. These seven themes will provide an overarching framework to simultaneously compare and contrast SCFs and SCMs while identifying challenges faced by SCFs and consequently, effective interventions to address these concerns.

It is of note that the language and definition of SCFs vary throughout the sources identified in this literature review. As discussed by Coles (2015), discourse remains on the legitimacy of single fathers who cohabitate, as well as a cohesive definition of single fatherhood. This paper will use SCF and single father interchangeably.

Fatherhood Experiences

Single Fatherhood Due to Cancer

Although single fatherhood has its own unique facets, research on fatherhood is often focused on comparing SCFs and SCMs (Coles, 2015). Fathers become single parents for many reasons, and the largest cause of widowhood for fathers is cancer. Yopp and Rosenstein (2012) examined fathers who lost their partner to cancer and noted the following three findings. First, a spouse dying of cancer presents a specific challenge. The father may have been the caretaker of the spouse for a lengthy period of time, which can impact the father’s grieving process, his parenting, and his own wellbeing. Second, it is critical that a father model appropriate bereavement practices for his children and guide said children with compassion as these actions

can impact a child's grief. Third, these fathers are multitasking several roles: childcare, helping with bereavement, and teaching family values (Burgess, as cited in Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012). Yopp and Rosenstein (2012) showed that how a parent comes into sole custody of a child may impact their parenting and fatherhood experience. This demonstrates the need for interventions that are tailored to these circumstances.

Single Fatherhood of Multiples

Another aspect of single fatherhood that needs closer examination is fatherhood of multiples, such as twins and triplets. An internationally-conducted study (Heinonen, 2019) of single, custodial parents who had multiples found that some parents felt relief that their conflict with their co-parent had ceased, and they could make independent parenting choices. On the other hand, the stressor of time, competing demands, and having sole responsibility of the children were significant concerns. The need for self-acceptance of personal limitations and the need for a supportive social network among participants was also noted.

International Single Fatherhood Experiences

Another example of a unique fatherhood experience is that of SCFs internationally. According to Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2019), SCFs are more unique in Israel. While Israel is described as a “family-oriented society characterized by relatively high marriage and childbearing rates and low divorce rates,” of the 33% of divorces, only 4.4% result in single fatherhood likely due to courts being unwilling to grant sole custody to fathers except in cases of incompetence of the mothers (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019, p. 84).

These custodial concerns are also experienced by SCFs in Russia. Kay (2004) studied the celebrated work of Altai Regional Crisis Centre for Men in Barnaul, West Siberia, as well as the negative perception of fatherhood in Russia. Russian essentialist views towards sex and gender,

according to Kay (2004), establish a woman's domain in the home and a man's domain in the workforce. In Russia, 6% of the households are led by single-fathers, but anecdotal evidence points to this being inaccurately low (Kay, 2004). These comparatively low numbers of SCFs can be overlooked in society. Kay (2004) noted that Russian institutions and the public largely view the relationship between a father and child inconsequential in comparison to a mother and child leading to a lack of support for SCFs. This perception of being overlooked can translate to a desire for recognition from both the society and its institutions. SCFs reported the need for increased recognition of their status in Israeli society (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019).

Parenting Behaviors of Single Fathers

An element of the experiences of single fathers is their parenting behaviors, especially in comparison to other types of parents, such as noncustodial fathers, married fathers, single mothers, and married mothers. Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2016) compared 222 married fathers, 218 SCFs, and 105 noncustodial divorced fathers in Israel to examine parental involvement, warmth, self-efficacy, and avoidant caregiving. This same data was utilized in their 2019 study to measure different levels of co-parent cooperation, involvement, and father-child relationships. The findings from the two studies showed that SCFs had the least co-parental cooperation and most involvement with their children, potentially related to the above point of custody in Israel. These fathers were also the most likely to report having a difficult child, which is attributed in part to having the most involvement with their children. Similarly, SCFs reported higher levels of self-efficacy than the other cohorts which was found to correlate to increased warmth and involvement. The increased involvement and efficacy were found to also correlate to a reduction in both avoidant (i.e. detached) parenting and anxious caregiving (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016). In regards to avoidant parenting, avoidant-typed SCFs were more involved than avoidant-typed

married fathers. The avoidant parenting of SCFs was associated with the least parental acceptance of children (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019), and this parental acceptance decreased and increased with the respective increase and decrease of a child's perceived difficulty for married fathers, noncustodial fathers, and SCFs (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016). However, SCFs demonstrated more parental warmth than married fathers (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019).

Parental warmth was also examined by Dufur et al. (2010) who studied 307 children of SCFs and 3212 children of SCMs in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. The authors found that in comparison to SCMs, SCFs were less likely to be affectionate and to have warm relationships with their children, but more likely to experience negative emotions about parenting. They were also less likely to punish via spanking or hitting. In addition, SCFs were more likely to engage in doing puzzles and playing games and sports with their children and less likely to sing or meet their child's teacher than SCMs.

Parental Traits

Parental traits are another factor that may impact parenting. Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2019) looked at parental trait of narcissism in a sample of married and divorced fathers including SCFs. Significantly, SCFs with narcissistic traits were less likely to be involved with their children than noncustodial fathers with narcissistic traits. The authors pointed out that noncustodial fathers with a narcissistic trait may have an inflated opinion of themselves. On the other hand, using a sample of 25 South African single-parent families, including 6 SCFs, whose co-parent had died, Greeff and Ritman (2005) examined positive traits. When considering the concept of resiliency, the authors found that over 50% of the parents had a number of correlating characteristics such as optimism, perseverance, and faith. Supporting these positive traits can be

an important point of future intervention. Furthermore, these findings about paternal traits pose new questions for research into single fatherhood.

Single Fatherhood Experiences of African Americans

When focusing on SCFs from a minority background, the existing research is still largely qualitative (Coles, 2015). In a qualitative study on 10 African American SCFs in metropolitan Wisconsin, Coles (2001) examined how these fathers viewed and valued parenting roles. The author had the fathers rank six roles: (1) provider, (2) nurturer, (3) teacher, (4) disciplinarian, (5) authority figure, and (6) friend. The most valued roles were nurturer and provider as 70% and 60% of the fathers, respectively, ranked these roles either first or second. The fathers reported that being a provider was a “given” and nurturing was a value also seen in two-parent Black households.

Despite the high value placed on parenting roles, many African American SCFs feel largely unprepared for fatherhood. However, they often avoid seeking public assistance or social supports from family and friends due to valuing autonomy and wanting to overcome stereotypes surrounding public assistance and Black fatherhood (Coles, 2001; Coles 2009). For this reason, African American SCFs tend to eschew formal coping strategies, such as therapy, in favor of self-reliance and cognitive-coping skills. Therefore, when developing an intervention for African American SCFs, it would be important to consider coping strategies commonly used in this population.

Experiences with Role Strain

While not unique to single fathers, role strain is a concerning issue for this population. The complexities of the different roles of SCFs are not isolated to Coles (2001); role strain and handling competing and multiple roles is an evident theme throughout the literature examining

the single fatherhood experience (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019; Heinonen, 2019; Hilton & Desrochers, 2000; Maier & McGeorge, 2014; Santos & Alfred, 2016; Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012). Evidence has emerged, however, that SCFs may cope more effectively with role strain than SCMs due to a higher socioeconomic status (Hilton & Desrochers, 2000).

The concern over role strain is evident in Emmers-Sommer et al. (2003), who conducted interviews with five SCFs to determine their views toward parenthood. The fathers reported traditional views towards family (e.g. children out of wedlock), with the exception of acceptance of interracial relationships. Participants stated that they had frustration with their multiple roles, legal issues, and negative societal views towards SCFs. For example, never-married SCFs are perceived to be unable to maintain a household, raise pubescent daughters, and to be dependent on financial assistance (Haire & McGeorge, 2012). On the other hand, the fathers focused on how much they loved fatherhood, which was a strength (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003).

Time Constraints

Part of this role strain can be connected to the time constraints of being a single parent and single father. Hook and Chalasani (2008) compared 16,654 married and single parent households on childcare time and found that the SCFs spent more time than married fathers with their children but less than mothers. The authors attributed this to SCFs having a fewer number of children and being more likely to be employed full time than single mothers and less likely in comparison to married fathers. Albert (2008) also found that single fathers spent more time in household labor, including childcare time, than married fathers. In fact, Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that of their 930 female and 168 male participants, 90% of the SCFs were employed in comparison to the 67% of SCMs. Also, SCFs were less likely to physically be with their children

the day of the study (Hook & Chalasani, 2008). This finding demonstrates that shared custody and co-parental cooperation are significant issues as seen in other research (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016, 2019; Heinonen, 2019; Whisenhunt et al., 2019).

Childcare Time Differences

The way SCFs use their time in respect to childcare also differs in comparison to other household structures. Significant differences were evident in time spent with children aged 5 years and younger: the SCFs were more likely to spend their time on meals and playing instead of on physical care and household chores (Hook & Chalasani, 2008). Play is an important point of childcare time difference. Emmers-Sommer et al. (2003) determined that SCFs spent more time than mothers on playtime with an average of 9.2 hours per week for three of the fathers spent on play, the most time spent in child care for these three fathers. As previously discussed, Dufur et al. (2010) found SCFs spent more time playing than SCMs, and their games often consisted of sports, puzzle, and nature-based activities. Lee and Hofferth (2017) found that SCMs also spend less time in play in comparison to SCFs.

The way childcare time is distributed is not only correlated to the gender of the parent but also the inclusion of adult kin. Using the data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Hook and Chalasani (2008) found that 60% of single fathers did not live solely with their children. Lee and Hofferth (2017) compared the time SCFs and SCMs spent in childcare with and without the addition of adult kin. SCFs spent, on average, 23 less minutes per day in measured child care than SCMs, and the addition of adult kin led to SCFs spending 53 less minutes per day. In regards to specific tasks, the introduction of adult kin led to a specific reduction in time spent in management, and the introduction of adult male kin, in particular, led to reduction in time spent in teaching, typically seen as a masculine role (Lee & Hofferth, 2017). This differs from Hispanic culture, in

which teaching is part of maternal caregiving (Santos & Alfred, 2016). This finding demonstrates the need for research and interventions that delineate the diverse experiences of SCFs.

Overall Challenges for SCFs

Parenthood, irrespective of the parents' background and specific needs of their children, is a daunting and complex role that is often mired in unforeseen challenges. Single parenthood can be more difficult due to a lack of another partner to provide aid, such as financial or emotional support. Some single parents report "negative effects on self," referring to judgment from their communities and criticism over their parenting, demonstrating the difficulties of single parenthood (Whisenhunt et al., 2019, p. 192). Conflict with the noncustodial parent can also be a significant challenge and stressor (Heinonen, 2019; Whisenhunt et al., 2019).

Single fatherhood also has its own specific challenges. SCFs take on both the role of the mother and the father in the eyes of the public (Maier & McGeorge, 2014), and the decreased annual income and increased household activities can be specifically taxing (Albert, 2018). Understanding these unique concerns is critical to overcoming said challenges and providing appropriate support and interventions.

In a qualitative study of 20 African American SCFs, Coles (2009) identified nine types of stressors commonly experienced by these fathers: (1) divorce, (2) widowhood, (3) moving, (4) employment-related challenges, (5) children's behavior, (6) discrimination, (7) legal issues, (8) health concerns, and (9) "complex paternities." It is important to note that this stressor of discrimination in this study referred to race or sexual orientation-based discrimination. Complex paternities were included because, of the 20 fathers, five of them had noncustodial children and

four of them had non-biological children in their home. This is a unique challenge that needs further research. These stressors can provide the foundation for intervention strategies.

Challenges in Social Work

While some fathers tend to avoid receiving support from social service professionals due to personal values (Coles, 2009), unconscious bias in the social work profession may in part be responsible. Haworth (2019) conducted a literature review on social work with SCFs and found the following two overarching themes. First, the fathers reported feeling that services were not relevant to their needs or explicitly welcoming. Second, the social workers had stereotypical views of the incompetence of fathers. Consistent with these findings, in a comparative analysis of Swedish social workers' views of SCMs and SCFs, Kullberg (as cited in Haworth, 2019) found that social workers viewed the SCFs as having more serious problems, especially in terms of mental health and obtaining work, but the SCFs were less likely to receive any service except financial. However, with SCMs, the social workers emphasized and encouraged the importance of a social network. Gender biases in the social work profession against SCFs is a clear and pervasive concern that must be examined further and recognized.

Challenges with Parenting

Parenting is a difficult task, but compounding the challenges of single parenthood and single fatherhood can create further concerns. For example, Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2010)'s analysis of the children of SCFs using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that children of SCFs experienced issues with a lack of involvement, permissiveness, routine, high school graduation, and societal connectivity (defined in this study as employed or receiving education). Children in SCF households were the most likely to self-report an uninvolved parent and were less likely to graduate high school or be connected to society when compared to other

family structures. They also reported that their father's parenting style was more permissive than authoritarian or authoritative. This permissive parenting is an overarching challenge for SCFs (Breivik et al., 2009; Coles, 2015) and has correlations with increased deviant behavior in the youth of SCFs (Breivik et al., 2009; Coles, 2015; Eitle, 2006). Coles (2009) also reported that misbehavior of children was a significant stressor for SCFs, demonstrating that deviancy in the youth of SCFs is a significant parenting challenge.

Parenting with a cohabiting partner (CP) is another challenge experienced by SCFs (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). Single fathers with CPs can sometimes be excluded from research as SCFs. This defining factor is not similarly applied to single mothers (Coles, 2015). Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2010) found that when the fathers had a CP, their children reported the lowest levels of routines (defined in this study as the number of family dinners per week), closeness, support, and awareness (defined by how much the parent knew about the child's life). Children of SCFs without a CP and those of SCFs with a CP had respective high school graduation rates of 84.6% and 74.3%. When looking at parenting styles, SCFs with CPs had the highest rates of uninvolved parenting and authoritarian parenting (defined as strict and lacking in support), in comparison to the other family configurations.

In theory, a CP could reduce the stressors on a single parent, but it appears that it can create further challenges, such as reduced graduation rates and parent-child closeness, for the children of SCFs (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). This is of significant concern because SCFs are more likely to have a CP than SCMs (Coles, 2015). This is a challenge that needs to be addressed in intervention and understood by social service professionals.

Challenges with Obtaining Custody

A significant challenge in single fatherhood is the ways by which fathers come into custody of their children. As previously discussed by Coles (2009), single fathers may come into parenthood through court intervention, death, or by choice, presenting the beginning of fatherhood with challenges. One father in the study stated that upon the death of his children's mother, he had to go to court to fight for custody against the mother's family, who believed he could not raise two daughters. Another father reported that he had been arrested after attempting to see his daughter when he did not have custody of her (Coles, 2009).

Cross-culturally, similar circumstances regarding single fathers and custody occur. Kay (2004) noted that one father had lost custody of his children to his mother-in-law after his wife's death. The author also stated that fathers may be reluctant to report to the government their current household configuration and family dynamic in fear of losing custody. Also, in Israel, as previously discussed, custody is largely only granted to fathers if the mother is deemed incompetent (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019).

The circumstances in which fathers are granted custody or take on the mantle of single parenthood in comparison to mothers also points to distinctive challenges. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Goldscheider et al. (2015) studied the likelihood of a family being led by a SCM or SCF and found that the likelihood of single fatherhood is increased by maternal depression, maternal substance use, and maternal usage of public assistance. This reduced socioeconomic status and maternal concerns could result in increased challenges for the father.

According to Goldscheider et al. (2015), single fatherhood is more likely to occur when the child has a disability, which presents a new area for potential intervention. The increased socioeconomic status of single fathers in comparison to single mothers (Albert, 2018; Bronte-

Tinkew et al., 2010; Zhan & Pandey, 2004) may also be a correlating factor for single fatherhood over single motherhood. Goldscheider et al. (2015) found that fathers who attained custody of their children were more likely to have a higher education, but a higher income did not correlate with increased chances for obtaining custody. Higher education can indicate a higher socioeconomic status, however. These findings point to a need for further research into the specific needs of this population.

Overall Perception of SCFs

An important aspect of single fatherhood is the overall public perception of this population. Research shows that there are both negative and positive perceptions of single fathers. As discussed by Steele (as cited by Haire & McGeorge, 2012), a negative societal perception can negatively impact a person's view of themselves. Examining the stigmas faced by these parents demonstrates both the necessity of appropriate interventions and an understanding of the fragility (Bembry, 2011) of this population.

Perceived Optionality of Fatherhood

There are conflicting views of SCFs when it comes to their perception in the eyes of the public. A study of 1351 participants (DeJean et al., 2012) noted that SCMs faced increased stigma in comparison to SCFs showing the impact of gender biases in association with parenting. The participants also believed that single motherhood was the result of failure while single fatherhood was a praiseworthy choice. Single fatherhood's perception as a choice was echoed by Maier and McGeorge (2014) in their study on the positive perceptions of never-married single parents. The authors point out that a societal perception of fatherhood as optional creates a counterpoint that motherhood is a necessity. The authors agreed with DeJean et al. (2012)'s findings that fathers had the choice to pursue parenting and custody while mothers did not. Kay

(2004) found a similar perception in Russia; specifically, there was a cultural viewpoint that fathers could not nurture and raise their children effectively in comparison to mothers, demonstrating the need for mothers over fathers.

Viewing fatherhood as a choice, instead of an obligation, can stigmatize SCFs and create a lasting impact in the courts. For example, as previously described by Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2019), Israel is similar to the United States in family structure because fathers are rarely granted custody. In the same vein, Kay (2004) discussed that some single fathers in Russia were concerned with coming forth in fear of losing custody of their children. Coles (2009) also found that four of the 20 Black SCFs interviewed had court battles over custody and two were still paying child support for children whom they now had custody of to avoid, in part, legal challenges. These legal challenges point to an important aspect for future intervention and to the biases faced by SCFs in comparison to mothers. It is important to note that this challenge of societal perception is also related to negative societal perceptions of Black fathers, in general (Coles, 2009).

Positive Perceptions

The positive perception of single parents is also gendered. Maier and McGeorge (2014) found that never-married SCFs are perceived as breadwinners and masculine role models. They are also seen as taking on both the role of the mother and the father and overcoming stigma. On the other hand, never-married SCMs are seen as being more socially acceptable and utilizing the skills of organization and time management to handle both work and family. This creates a gendered divide between how SCFs and SCMs are viewed.

The societal perception of SCFs being the breadwinners can be also seen in other studies. Vega (as cited by Santos & Alfred, 2016) stated that in Hispanic culture, the fathers are seen as

the providers, which is also viewed as the most important parental role by African American fathers (Coles, 2001). Kay (2004) argued that Russian culture also framed a father's importance in his ability to provide. The value associated with being a provider has roots in the economic status of SCFs, as well. This is because SCFs are typically of a higher socioeconomic status than SCMs (Albert, 2018; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Dufur et al., 2010, Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019; Zhan & Pandey, 2004), and gender-based discrimination in employment negatively impacts SCMs (Zhan & Pandey, 2004).

Negative Perceptions

Negative perceptions, besides the perception of the choice of fatherhood, are another concern for this population. The focus of the financial attributes of SCFs can create a negative opinion around public assistance for this population. Specifically, the emphasis on extrinsic value may result in a decreased use of public assistance. The African American SCFs in Coles (2009) predominantly did not use public assistance programs for a number of reasons, including avoiding stereotypes around Black fathers. According to Kullberg (2005), social workers often view SCFs as less worthy of assistance in comparison to SCMs and as more independent. In Russia, some SCFs avoided social support that was not practical in nature, valuing self-reliance, while others avoided public assistance due to the demoralizing perception of fatherhood in comparison to motherhood (Kay, 2004). Society's limited view of SCFs both applauds their breadwinner status and denigrates any usage of public assistance. This simplifies what it means to be a father and further adds to the perception that only mothers are necessary.

Negative public perceptions can also involve the parenting of SCFs. Haire and McGeorge (2012) compared the negative perceptions of never-married SCMs and SCFs. The predominantly White female participants believed that SCFs would struggle with household

labor, nurturing, supporting their daughters through puberty, finding childcare, and dating. SCFs were also seen as unable to pay child support and dependent on public assistance, which shows a perception that fathers are in a financially supportive role even when they have custody of their children. This can also result in unconscious bias for social service professionals (Haire & McGeorge, 2012). To this end, it is critical that there is a deeper understanding of the public stigma surrounding SCFs and its real-world implications.

Economic Impact

A specific concern and challenge faced by SCFs is the economic impact of raising a family on one income. Compounding this financial limitation is the unpaid labor associated with child rearing. As previously mentioned, there is a perception that SCFs are breadwinners (Maier & McGeorge, 2014) but are also unable to maintain a household (Haire & McGeorge, 2012), which speaks to the view of masculinity and fatherhood in the United States. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that SCFs are more likely to be highly educated and employed than SCMs. This economic advantage is also correlated with parenting. Hilton and Desrochers (2000) found that the increased economic status experienced by SCFs resulted in increased parenting abilities. Goldscheider et al. (2015) also determined that single fathers were more likely to obtain custody if they had a higher education than the mother. It is important to note that this higher socioeconomic status has demographic implications for race, age, and gender. SCFs are more likely to be older and White than SCMs, and when controlling for these variables in the context of economic impact, there is race and gender-based discrimination (Zhan & Pandey, 2004).

It is evident that single parenthood impacts the finances of fathers differently, but single fatherhood itself can be a detriment to financial status. SCFs, in comparison to married fathers, had a decreased annual income of approximately \$10,000 attributed to a change in household

work (Albert, 2018). However, Hook and Chalasani (2008) determined that SCFs tend to spend less time on household work than SCMs. This could be attributable to typically having custody of less children than SCMs (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Hook & Chalasani, 2008). Single fathers having less children than SCMs could also speak in part to the difference in socioeconomic status of SCFs and SCMs.

Regardless, this gap in household labor between SCMs and SCFs is also seen between SCFs and married fathers (Albert, 2018; Hook & Chalasani, 2008; Lee & Hofferth, 2017). Albert (2018), in particular, noted that SCFs work less hours than married fathers at an approximate difference of 300 annual hours while performing almost twice as much household labor. The economic impact of changes to formal paid labor and informal household labor for SCFs cannot be underestimated, and neither can societal expectations of the earning capacity of this cohort.

Deviance of Youth

Comparative analysis of SCFs and SCMs is a key tenet of literature regarding SCFs, specifically when looking at the behavior and achievements of their children. An important aspect of this behavior is deviant actions, also referred to as delinquent behavior. When comparing youth who live with their biological, married parents to children living with a single-parent, there is increased deviancy in the latter (Breivik et al., 2009). Eitle (2006) notes that single-parent households are a risk factor of the deviance of youth.

Breivik et al. (2009) defined this deviant behavior as engaging in substance use and antisocial behavior (e.g. skipping school and vandalism) and found that when comparing children of three household dynamics (two-parent, SCFs, and SCMs), the absence of a parent increased deviancy, and the increased permissiveness in SCFs was a mediating factor. This permissiveness in SCFs is significant in terms of their children's misbehavior (Bronte-Tinkew et

al., 2010; Coles 2015). The aforementioned reduced time spent with their children in comparison to mothers (Hook & Chalasani, 2008; Lee & Hofferth, 2017) and increased likelihood of full-time employment in comparison to their female counterparts (Hook & Chalasani, 2008) may be responsible for this permissiveness.

Additionally, this increased delinquency in the children of single parents also differs when examining these patterns of behavior through the lens of race and ethnic background. In a study of adolescents of single parents and their alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit substance use and delinquent behavior (e.g. being arrested and bringing a gun to school), Eitle (2006) found that single fatherhood was associated with increased rates of deviancy. Specifically, the children of SCFs had increased rates of alcohol usage, and their daughters had increased rates of delinquent behavior. Also, in the households of Hispanic SCFs, there were increased rates of marijuana usage. This may be connected to the aforementioned trait of permissive parenting evident in research on SCFs (Breivik et al., 2009; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Coles, 2015). This is of particular interest for future research and intervention as the rate of Hispanic SCFs is increasing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Coles (2015) indicated that the rates of negative internalized (e.g. depression) and externalized (e.g. delinquency) behaviors in the children of single parents are similar but the permissiveness of SCFs leads to increased externalized factors.

Another possible explanation is to look at the different sociological theories. Eitle (2006) points out that his research gives credence to the maternal theory that single mothers have increased beneficence to the delinquency of their children while detracting from the paternal theories of single parenthood and childhood delinquency. In contrast, Dufur et al. (2018) came to a different conclusion. They studied the association between single parenthood and adolescent sexual behavior with a variety of variables, such as motivations for having sex, knowledge of

birth control, previous sexual intercourse experiences, attitudes towards relationships, and motivations for using birth control and pregnancy. It was found that there was not a significant difference between the youth of SCFs and that of SCMs in terms of attitude and behavior, and both were similarly likely to engage in sexual behavior. It is of note that the youth of SCFs were more likely to report more welcoming attitudes towards pregnancy and physical intimacy but were also more likely to report usage of birth control and social barriers to sexual activities. This finding is not consistent with either a maternal or paternal theory of sexual behavior (Dufur et al., 2018).

Academic Achievement of the Children of SCFs

Academic achievement and performance can be an important determinant of the success of parenting and often is utilized for this purpose in comparative analyses of SCFs and SCMs (Battle & Scott, 2000; Dufur et al., 2010; Krueger et al., 2015; Lee & Kushner, 2008). These questions around the achievement of the youth of single parent families can be examined critically through the lens of race and gender.

In a study on the African-American sons of both SCFs and SCMs and their comparative educational achievement in school and two years later, post-graduation, Battle and Scott (2000) found that the sons in single-mother households performed better in school but worse post-graduation. However, these differences became insignificant with the inclusion of socioeconomic status controls, such as the parent's employment, education, and income. These findings raise further questions about the importance of socioeconomic status in parenthood, especially as research has noted that SCFs are more likely to have a higher socioeconomic status than SCMs but less than married fathers (Albert, 2018; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Dufur et al., 2010; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2019; Zhan & Pandey, 2004).

When looking at Hispanic SCFs and their children, Santos and Alfred (2016) found that there was a high value placed on literacy and English language proficiency in the home with the inclusion of reading materials in the house and the utilization of tools, such as flashcards. The authors also noted that this value was emphasized, in particular, by two of the eight fathers interviewed who spoke Spanish primarily and unintentionally encouraged bilingualism in their children. The bilingual nature of their children's education is a point of further research and intervention (Santos & Alfred, 2016). This is increasingly important as the Hispanic SCF population continues to grow in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), and education of the children in Hispanic culture is seen as a maternal domain (Santos & Alfred, 2016).

Another element of the literature on the academic achievement of the youth of single parents is the lens of gender. While not unique to this specific topic, theories have been proposed as to whether children perform better or worse academically when raised by single parents of the same or opposite sex (Dufur et al., 2018; Eitle, 2006; Lee & Kushner, 2008). These opposite-sex and same-sex parenting theories emerge in the examination of the educational achievement of children raised by single parents. Lee and Kushner (2008) established that there were no significant differences in educational achievement between SCMs and SCFs in terms of raising their sons versus daughters; the only exception was the significant difference that emerged in daughters raised by SCFs. Daughters of SCFs had increased academic achievement compared to the other three family combinations, which may be due to the embodiment of masculine traits, such as focus and competitiveness, a lack of closeness in the relationship between the father and daughter, and paternal modeling (Lee & Kushner, 2008). There is a lack of evidence supporting a same-sex theory, but fathers also typically have custody of sons, not daughters (Coles, 2015). In

fact, in Lee and Kushner (2008)'s study, more sons than daughters lived with the fathers and the opposite held true for the mothers.

Children of SCFs may have the upper hand in educational achievement and academic outcomes as observed by Krueger et al. (2015). In a study comparing nine different household and the impact on health and school outcomes, the authors found that the children of SCFs, with or without their grandparents, had better outcomes than those of SCMs, with or without their grandparents, and those living with their grandparents. However, children living with their married, biological parents had better outcomes in a majority of the different variables measured. Dufur et al. (2010) agreed that the educational achievement was higher for children of SCFs than for those of SCMs. However, the authors prefaced this by adding that children with the best academic achievement came from households where the parent was affectionate, had met their teachers and attended conferences, and discipline was managed through open dialogue about the misbehavior. SCFs were reported to be less engaged in these areas than SCMs (Dufur et al., 2010).

Applicable Interventions for SCFs

A majority of the studies in this literature review encompassed topics related to the challenges faced by SCFs and comparisons between SCMs and SCFs, but few pointed to specific interventions. It is of note that there was significant attention given to the necessity of social workers to be abreast of the stigmas associated with single fatherhood (DeJean et al., 2012, Haire & McGeorge, 2012) as well as the purposeful awareness of the aforementioned stereotypes held in this field regarding SCFs (Haworth, 2019; Kullberg, 2005). Whisenhunt et. al (2019) also examined the particular needs of single parents in professional counseling and found that empathy, focus on self-care, knowledge of available resources, and a holistic approach using the

family-systems perspective were highly valued in formal interventionists. These are important guiding principles for the practice of social work, but it is also crucial for further research to indicate necessary interventions to overcome the challenges faced by this population

Educational opportunities appear as an important aspect of interventions for SCFs. Zhan and Pandey (2004) discuss that there is a need to promote obtaining higher education among single parents. As Goldscheider et al. (2015) points out, higher education of SCFs correlates with increased rates of fathers obtaining custody over mothers. Bemby (2011) agrees, stating that interventions should provide access to concrete services that can include education, job training, and English classes. Another important aspect is self-efficacy. Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2016) state that interventions should consider increasing self-efficacy because of the correlation to increased parental involvement and warmth.

It is clear that interventions must be relevant to the needs of SCFs given the wide array of challenges faced and diversity of this population. Zhan and Pandey (2004) cite the need for interventions that are culturally aware of the specific needs of minority parents and the discrimination that may face, particularly in the job market. Santos and Alfred (2016) discuss the need for interventions specific to Hispanic SCFs, focusing on educational opportunities. Adult Basic Education programs appear particularly important, and Santos and Alfred (2016) share that these programs should focus on providing childcare, increasing literacy at home, and bilingual education to effectively meet the needs of Hispanic SCFs. Coles (2009)'s work with Black SCFs demonstrates that there could be a refusal of formal services for this population due in part to valued independence and self-sufficiency. Social workers need to be aware of this reluctance to participate in formal interventions as well as negative societal perceptions around formal interventions (Coles, 2009).

Support groups are another point of intervention for SCFs. Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2016, 2019) note that online support groups could assist SCFs with their concerns and struggles. Heinonen (2019) also points to the usefulness of support groups, with multiple participants using in-person and online supports. These participants did discuss, however, feeling excluded at parenting support groups, for example, that focused on couples or marriage. This points to a need for practitioners to recommend support groups for SCFs that fit their specific background and increased awareness of the need for support groups for this population.

Research into specific interventions for SCFs, albeit limited, does raise some noteworthy points. Using a sample of divorced or separated fathers, DeGarmo and Jones (2019) examined *Fathering Through Change (FTC)*, an interactive online behavioral parent training program. The results indicated that single fathers can benefit from FTC, which found to reduce coercive parenting (defined in this study through the variables of harsh and inept discipline and prosocial behavior) and improve child adjustment concerns. Another intervention that may prove beneficial for many SCFs is the Family Bereavement Program that works with the bereaved spouse and children in 12 group sessions and two individual sessions. It has found some positive benefits in emotional and behavioral functioning, especially with mediation of parental discipline and warmth. This program does need more research, especially with SCFs, as only 21% of spouses participating were fathers and a large focus of the program is the children (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012).

Conclusion

Social work's inherent focus in supporting the needs of vulnerable populations and championing the interests of individuals, families, and communities points to an exigency for increased research into single fatherhood. This family dynamic is marked by complex and

varying experiences that are proportional to the wide diversity in this population. From racial and ethnic background to how SCFs come into single parenthood, single fatherhood is far from uniform. As discussed in this literature review, SCFs encounter unique experiences and face significant legal and economic challenges, stigma from the public and social workers, and concerns of increased deviant behavior in youth. This translates into a need for specific interventions.

The SCF population continues to grow in the United States and gain recognition internationally. It is thus crucial that research is conducted to further examine the experiences of fathers from different backgrounds. Research must also be done in order to determine effective, evidence-based interventions for social workers serving SCFs. These interventions should be responsive to the unique needs and strengths of SCFs. Social work practice with this population also must be introspective to move past the previously discussed unconscious biases about fatherhood in comparison to motherhood and employ a strengths-based approach to counteract the stigma faced by this population. As the definition and picture of family and fatherhood in the United States continues to evolve and change, it is essential that social work and public perception evolves too.

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