

# Self-Perceptions, Challenges and Coping with Single Motherhood: Experiences of Muslim, Christian and African Traditional Religion Single Mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region of Ghana

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**Abstract:** This study explored the experiences of single mothers from Christian, Muslim and African Traditional Religions in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region of Ghana in terms of their self-perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies. A qualitative approach and phenomenological design were used and this enabled participants to describe their experiences as typical and unique to them. Using stratified and purposive sampling, a total of 30 participants were selected including 10 Muslim, 10 Christian and 10 African Traditional Religion single mothers. Data was collected using focus group discussions. The data collected was coded through thematic and verbatim coding leading to the development of themes. The themes developed were used to present and discuss the findings of the study. The findings revealed that single mothers in the study experience single motherhood as very challenging and view themselves as disrespected, underrated and powerless human beings. Also, the study revealed that single mothers across the three dominant religions in the Nadowli district are faced with several challenges including financial hardships, psychosocial problems, poor nutrition and performing dual roles of fathers and mothers. The study further discovered that single mothers resorted to strategies such as engagement in petty trading, support from social networks, membership of associations and prayer to cope with their situation and challenges. The study recommends that non-governmental organizations interested in the welfare of women and the social welfare department of Ghana should extend their services to single mothers in the form of livelihood support start-up kits to enable them cater for their basic human needs. Religious leaders and counseling practitioners or psychologists should also incorporate community-based counseling into their practices in order to offer psychological assistance to single mothers. The study contributes to the family literature by providing an understanding of how single motherhood is experienced and coped with by single mothers across the Islamic, Christian and African Traditional religions.

**Keywords:** Single Mothers, Perceptions, Challenges, Coping, Nadowli, Ghana.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Single motherhood is a global phenomenon but is more pervasive in sub-Saharan Africa (Odimegwu et al., 2017). Data suggests that the number of single-parent homes remains significant in the world, especially in certain countries (Yusuf et al., 2020; Harkness et al., 2020; Adejoh et al., 2019; Mugove, 2017). Studies (such as Ukoima et al., 2020; Yusuf, 2020; Ali & Soomar, 2019; Ahmad et al., 2018; Odimegwu et al., 2017; Anyebe et al., 2017; Stephen & Udisi, 2016; Usakli, 2013) have attributed single parenthood to death of spouse, divorce, giving birth out of wedlock,

separation and desertion. In Ghana, the statistics from the 2021 population and housing census show that people of 15 years and older, 405,090 are separated, 553,065 are divorced and 1,050,388 are widowed (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Documentation of the experiences of single mothers is growing across the world. In Britain, single mother families are common (Harkness et al., 2020). In Malaysia, Hashim et al. (2015) discovered that single mothers are performing huge responsibilities and roles. Kpoor (2003) argued that single parents are burdened in terms of the raising of children and maintenance of family. It could be very challenging to be a single mother. For instance, research suggests that children

from single-parent households, including those with single mothers, may face challenges in cognitive attainment and academic performance (Harkness et al., 2020). Also, children could suffer psychological, emotional and behavioural problems such as aggression, depression, anxiety, distress, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, violence, social isolation (Ali & Soomar, 2019; Anyebe et al. 2017; Usakli, 2013). Further, single-parent children exhibit improper sexual behaviours (Adejoh et al., 2019; Bogenschneider et al.) as well as experience challenges in their academic performance (Ansah, 2017; Boadu, 2017). Children from single-parent households have been reported to be performing negatively in their academics (Ngure & Amollo, 2017; Jaiyeola & Akinjide, 2016; Abudu & Fuseini, 2013). Single-parent children also struggle to succeed in life (Stephen & Udisi, 2016). Furthermore, single parenting has a negative impact on the development of social skills of children from single-parent households (Chapani, 2021; Maleki et al., 2019; Kol, 2016). Therefore, living in a single-parent home can be very challenging.

In Ghana, the phenomenon of single parenting is rising just as it is at the global level. This is evident in GSS (2021) census data on separated, divorced and widowed people highlighted earlier. Studies on single parenting in Ghana (such as Boadu, 2017; Ansah, 2017; Abudu & Fuseini, 2013) exist, however they were interested in exploring the educational or academic implications of single parenting on children in single-parent families. Other Ghanaian scholarship also explored coping mechanisms of single parents in Kpedze community of the Volta Region (Fiadzo & Osei, 2018) and New Dansoman, Roman Ridge and Maamobi in the Greater Accra Region (Kpoor, 2003). Although these studies contribute to the understanding of single parenting in Ghana, they are not able to help us understand the self-perceptions of single mothers. Also, there is limited data on the experiences of single mothers in the three religions; that is Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Therefore, this study sought to close these gaps by exploring the self-perceptions, challenges and coping strategies of single mothers across the three religions (Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion) in Nadowli District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study thus contributes to the understanding of how single motherhood is experienced and coped with among single mothers within the Islamic, Christian and African Traditional religions.

#### A. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to understand the self-perceptions, challenges and coping strategies of single mothers across the Islamic, Christian and African Traditional religions in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region.

#### B. Research Objectives

Three research objectives were set in this study. They were to:

- Explore how single parenting is perceived by Muslim, Christian and African Traditional Religion single mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region;

- Analyze the challenges single mothers across the three religions in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region face;
- Explore the strategies single mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region adopt to cope with the challenges associated with single motherhood.

#### C. Research Questions

The following research questions directed the conduct of the study:

- How is single parenting perceived by Muslim, Christian and African Traditional single mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region?
- What are the challenges single mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region face?
- What strategies do single mothers in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region adopt to cope with their challenges?

## II. LITERATURE

Single parenthood is a pervasive phenomenon in the world. The number of single-parent families or households in the world is increasing. Single parenthood can arise from any of the following including death of a spouse, divorce, or separation. There are variety of perceptions about single parenting or parenthood. Roman (2011) revealed that single mothers in South Africa were perceived by their children as independent, caring, understanding and psychologically controlling. In the Zaria community of Northern Nigeria, Anyebe et al. (2017) discovered that people perceive single parenthood as an anomaly that is neither welcomed nor accepted. According to Anyebe et al. (2017), community members view single parents as people who require assistance in order for them to cope with their unique circumstances.

Single parenting has multiple and diverse effects on the single parents. Kpoor (2003) discovered that limited finances and the high burden of making decisions are existential challenges that single mothers are confronted with. Zulu (2017) unearthed that single mothers in Zambia experience financial hardship, childcare difficulty, poor nutrition and health and low education. Anyebe et al. (2017) found that economic difficulties, lack of companionship, delinquent behaviours, various kinds of burdens, poor academic performance, psycho-social problems, role confusion and insecurity are some of the challenges single parents face. Maness and Munoz (2019) found among other things the lack of supportive systems, struggling finances, difficulty in raising children, time management difficulties, stigmatization, lack of resources at college for single mothers in the San Bernadino and Riverside County area of California as some of the challenges that single parents face. John and Shimfe (2020) revealed in their study that single parents struggle financially, psychologically and emotionally. The challenges single parents experience in their daily lives tend to also affect their children negatively. For instance, a study by Usakli (2013) reported aggressive behaviours among single-parented children. Bogenschneider et al. (1993)

observed negative psychological, social, educational, sexual and behavioural development among single-parented children. Yusuf et al. (2020) revealed that some of the behavioural challenges single-parented children experience include aggressiveness, anxiety, withdrawal, cynical attention seeking actions, moodiness, restlessness, irritability, confusion and fretfulness. Other behavioural challenges among single-parented children include feelings of guilt, anger, distress, shock, rejection, shame, relief, insecurity (Yusuf et al., 2020). Additionally, poor educational performance, poverty and difficulty in keeping jobs and intimate relationships are some of the challenges single parenting has on children (Bogensneider et al., 1993). Significant studies have revealed that single parenting has a negative effect on the academic performance of children from single-parent households. In a 2017 study in Zimbabwe, Mugove (2017) observed that children from two-parent households performed better than single-parented children. Similarly, Abudu and Fuseini (2013) discovered poorer academic performance among single-parented children compared to children from two-parent households. Mugove (2017) realized that single-parented children were performing poorly in education because their parents had little to no time to attend to their educational needs. In contrast, Ngure and Amollo (2017) observed in their study that single-parented children in Kenya perform lesser compared to their counterparts in other family types because their families lack adequate resources to support their educational needs. Other studies also found that single parenting has negative effect on children's cognitive development (Harkness et al., 2020). Adegboyega (2019) discovered that primary school students in the Ilorin metropolis in Nigeria who are from single-parent homes expressed feelings of abandonment, sadness, discouragement, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, social isolation, rejection and low self-esteem. Adegboyega (2019) also found that such students had suicidal ideation and found it difficult to relate to people.

These challenges tend to lead people in single parent households engage in various activities and behaviours in order to cope. Maness and Munoz (2019) revealed in their study that exercise, reading spiritual books, music therapy, hanging out with their children, smoking of marijuana and use of alcohol were some coping strategies that single mothers in college adopted to cope with their challenges. Yusuf et al. (2020) discovered smoking, reckless driving, use of drug and inappropriate sexual activities among single parenting coping strategies. deCarvalho and Spears (2019) realized that good parent-child relationship help single parent families to cope with their situation. Zulu (2017) observed that support from family, friends, relatives and nongovernmental organizations, part-time jobs, petty trade or business, savings groups, drinking of alcohol, prostitution, selling and use of drugs enabled single mothers in Zambia to cope with their challenges. Lashley (2014, p. 3) found that "cohesiveness, education, spirituality, teaching respect to children, motivation for better life and support of family and government" enabled Black single mothers in America to cope with their situation. Also, Fiadzo and Osei (2018) in their study of single parents in the Kpedze community of the Volta Region of Ghana found different coping mechanisms

among them including petty trading, child fostering, mortgaging of properties, sacrificing personal comfort, remarriage, use of drugs, crediting, sleeping, going to church, avoidance and seeking guidance from people. Similarly, Kpoor (2003) discovered that single mothers in Accra resorted to support from social networks, child fostering, higher education and church attendance to cope with their situation. In Malaysia, some single mothers have been reported sharing their emotions with friends and family, social networks, doing things with their families and friends, calming themselves in variety of ways, refocusing on other things and finding solutions to their problems as their coping mechanisms (Hashim et al., 2015). According to McKendrick et al. (2018), single parents in Scotland adopted strategies such as resort to religion, seeking the advice and help of experts, living in denial of their situation, and use of alcohol or drugs to cope with their situations. Their study revealed that these strategies were informed by the type of challenge faced by each single parent. From the literature, it could be noted that coping varies among individual single parents or families.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### ➤ *Ecological Systems Theory*

This paper draws upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 1998) to understand the single mothers' experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms. Single mothers live in an ecological environment which influences their experiences. Bronfenbrenner developed the theory to understand human development. The ecological systems theory views human development as "the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the lifespan, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environment in which it lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). The ecological systems theory holds that the human person is developing within many interconnected systems – microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem that have multiple effects on each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). These systems affect the single mother's life and the activities of the single mother also affect them.

The microsystem includes the family (children, siblings, and other relatives) school (peers, teachers, other staff), and church or mosque or shrine is the closest system to the single mother's daily life and experiences. The interaction between these systems at the micro level affects the experiences and wellbeing of the single mother. Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 514) described the microsystem as "the complex of relationship between the developing person and the environment in the immediate setting containing that person." The single mother is thus as Rus et al. (2020, p. 240) describe, "...the product of her microsystem..." The influences of the microsystems on single mothers are multiple. However, the family has been identified as the system that affects the individual emotional wellbeing the most (Rus et al., 2020). According to the Ecological Systems Theory, the family plays important role in the development of the individual

from childhood to adulthood. For that reason, the theory argues that how the different elements in the microsystem interact with the individual (in this case, the single mother) has an effect on their wellbeing. The way the various elements within the family (such as children, parents, in-laws and other relatives) relate with the single mother has an effect on their wellbeing. A family, church or mosque or shrine that builds a supportive, friendly, healthy, comforting and caring relationship or atmosphere for a single mother would enable the single mother to cope well and vice versa. As an ecological organism, the single mother's daily experiences from her interaction with the various elements within the family and other microsystems have an effect on their wellbeing, coping strategies and the ways they perceive single motherhood. This study views the single mother as an organism whose wellbeing, experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms are influenced by the systems surrounding her.

According to the ecological systems theory, the single mother as a human organism is also affected by the mesosystem. The mesosystem is explained as "the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point of his or her life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). According to the mesosystem how the various microsystems surrounding the single mother interact has an unmediated effect on the wellbeing of the single mother. For example, a pastor or Imam or native doctor may visit the family of the single mother who is faced with difficulties in her spiritual life to determine what is happening in her life and the possible ways to assist her. The way in which the pastor or Imam or native doctor and the family of the single mother interact would have unmediated effects on the development of the single mother. Hence, as shown in the study, single mothers sought guidance and spiritual support from their religious leaders as a way to cope with their challenges. Further, the third system identified by Bronfenbrenner is the exosystem. The exosystem involves the larger community within which the single mother lives. This system surrounds the microsystems and includes the extended family members, workplaces, neighbours, family friends, mass media, health, education and social welfare services as well as political systems and policies. These exosystems influence the microsystems (Rus et al., 2020). As such, the single mother tends to be affected by these exosystems because they influence the microsystems that the single mother has direct contact with. The application in this study is that a single mother may be facing a challenge in training her child or children in school if there is no support from the extended family, family friends or policies (e.g., free education) that provide opportunities for the single mother to educate her child. As shown in the study (see 5.2), some single mothers are struggling to train their children in school due to lack of support from their extended family and community.

The macrosystem is another system within which the individual lives. It has to do with the larger elements in society that affect the other systems surrounding the single mother. Elements such as culture, ideologies, economics, laws, national identity, political systems, values, laws,

customs, attitudes and traditions are examples of macrosystems (Rus et al., 2020) that affect the single mother and her experiences. The application is that the manner in which single mothers perceive single motherhood as well as the challenges they experience and how they cope with these challenges will be influenced by these macrosystems. For example, a single mother may resort to remarriage to cope if the customs of her society allow a woman to remarry after the death of her husband. Also, some single mothers in the study indicated that they cannot perform fatherly roles in addition to their motherly roles because the culture does not allow a woman to perform the role of a man while there are other men in the family. On the other hand, a single mother who is in a society whose customs prohibit a woman from remarrying after the death of her husband maybe be denied of her of sexual and emotional needs. The chronosystem is the final system highlighted by the ecological systems theory. The chronosystem involves changes in the environment that the individual experiences over his/her lifetime. In this case, the single mother's life starts to change over time as she experiences changes within her environment. Some of these changes that may occur in the life of the single parent as Rus et al. (2020) highlight, include [re]marriage, death of a loved one, birth of a child, unwanted pregnancy, displacement, and income changes. For instance, in this study, it was discovered that the single mothers' lives changed over time after the death of their husbands which also affected their finances. The study realized that some of the single mothers were struggling to meet their basic needs such as taking care of their children (see 5.1 & 5.2). Therefore, the ecological systems theory highlights how these interconnected systems within which the individual finds herself/himself influence their development and overall wellbeing. The theory was useful because it enabled the study to understand how the ecological systems surrounding single mothers affect their self-perceptions, coping strategies and their overall wellbeing.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Nadowli District of the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative studies are concerned with understanding a phenomenon from the participants own perspectives. Employing a qualitative approach allowed the study to understand the single mothers' self-perceptions, challenges and coping mechanisms from their own perspectives. In terms of design, the study used phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that focuses on exploring the "lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 42). This design enabled the participants to share their lived experiences as single mothers in terms of their self-perceptions, challenges and coping mechanisms. The study selected a total of 30 single mothers consisting of 10 Christian single mothers, 10 Muslim single mothers and 10 African Traditional Religion single mothers. Participants were sampled using stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Participants were accessed through the assistance of community leaders.



Participants were selected to participate in the study if they met the following criteria: were single mothers; lived in the Nadowli District; were Muslims or Christians or African Traditionalists and were willing and available to participate in the study. Apart from one, all the participants' single motherhood was the result of the death of their husbands. The remaining participant's single parenthood was due to giving birth out of wedlock. All the participants selected willingly consented to take part in the study. Focus group discussion (FGD) was used as the method of data collection. Three (3) focus group discussions were conducted in the field. A semi-structured interview guide was used to direct the discussions with participants. Questions were open-ended and the data that shaped the study emerged from the natural setting of the research participants. All the focus group discussions with participants were conducted in an open space in the community.

During the focus group discussions in the field, participants were asked probing questions and this ensured the clarification of assertions and claims made by some of the participants. Focus group discussions were conducted in 'Dagaare' (the local language of the people of Nadowli). Participants were asked to describe their experiences in terms of their perceptions, challenges and coping strategies and how those experiences were shaped by the ecological environment within which they live. The discussions with the participants were audio-recorded with their consent. The data collected were thematically analyzed. After the collection of the data, the audios from the discussions with the participants in the field were transcribed. The transcripts were read through and screened by the researcher.

The coding of the data started as soon as the transcripts were read through and screened. Thematic and verbatim coding shaped the study's coding regime. The coding process was iterative and rigorous whereby the researcher reviewed the themes that emerged. The data were familiarized with, coded, developed, reviewed and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by the researcher and in a manner that addressed the research questions of the study. The themes that emerged from the coding process shaped the presentation and discussion of the findings of the study. The researcher explained the benefits of the study to participants. Prior to the focus group discussions, participants' rights were also explained to them. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection process if they no longer wanted to continue. Participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms. As such, participants' names were not attached to the quotations nor mentioned in the final report of this study.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. The analysis of the data revealed no significant differences in the self-perceptions, challenges and coping mechanisms among single mothers in the three religions – Christianity, Islamic and African Traditional Religion. The challenges and strategies adopted to cope with single

motherhood did not vary with participants' religious affiliation. The findings have been presented under the three research objectives of the study. The first part presents the self-perceptions of participants about single parenthood. The second part presents the challenges participants face. The final part presents the strategies participants adopt to cope with their situation and challenges.

### A. Self-Perceptions of Single Mothers in the Nadowli District about Single Parenting

#### ➤ Difficult, Burdensome and 'Not Good'

Participants shared that they perceive single parenting as difficult and something that is not good. All the single mothers in the study indicated that being a single parent is very difficult. They explained that raising children and maintaining the family as a single parent is challenging. This supports Zulu's (2017) study which found that single mothers in Zambia experience childcare difficulties. For instance, a participant indicated that:

*Single parenting is very difficult. You cannot raise the child properly. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]* Thus, participants stated that children are supposed to be raised by both parents – husband and wife. A single mother said: *It is not good. It is not good to be a single parent taking care of the family. It is supposed to be a both man and woman. It is too much on me alone taking care of the children. Raising the child alone is not easy. If the father was there at least he would help or support me but once he is no more alive I have to carry all those responsibilities alone. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

This finding is affirmed by Maness and Munoz (2019) in their study of single mothers in college in the San Bernadino and Riverside County area of California. They found that one of the challenges single mothers in their study faced was difficulty in taking care of their children. Thus, one explanation for participants' perception of single parenting as being difficult and burdensome could be due to the numerous challenges that they face (which will be discussed in a subsequent section). It was discovered that one of the reasons why participants think single parenting is not good is because they are sometimes accused of killing their husbands. Some participants shared: *Single parenting is not good. Sometimes they say you killed your husband and turn around to be pretending like innocent person. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

*I think my single parent status is as a result of the death of my husband. I think it is Allah that called him but people sometimes blame us for the death. They say that if you had done something or go and consult a spiritualist that he would have been healed but that because you refused to seek help somewhere that is why your husband died. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

Consequently, participants indicated that they feel different from other women who are staying with or still have their husbands. One of the participants noted: *I feel different from people who are staying with their husbands. It is true we*

*are not the same. Since they are having husbands and I don't have mine that is why we are not the same.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Explaining why she feels different from other women who still have their husbands or are staying with their husbands, one of the single mothers stated during the focus group discussion as follows: *If you had a problem the man would have helped or supported you. If I was also having a husband we will talk or put heads together to solve my problems but once I am alone I alone will be struggling with it. So, I see myself as different from my colleagues who are having their husbands.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Anyebe et al. (2017) argued that single parenting is burdensome. Participants indicated that they feel burdened in taking decisions and solving their problems alone. They view the absence of their husbands as course of their struggle to solve their problems and take care of themselves. For example, a participant shared:

*Everything is on our head. Nobody is helping us. No one will be eating or have his or her food and say that you should come and take some and go and eat since you are a single parent. Even if you give the person food too he or she will take. They will also take.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022] Hence, one of the single mothers stressed during the focus group discussion that: It is difficult to be a single parent. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

#### ➤ 'Disrespected and Underrated Human Beings'

The study discovered that single mothers perceive themselves as being disrespected and powerless human beings. Participants indicated that they are disrespected in the community and sometimes accused of being responsible for being a single parent. A participant stated:

*People even underrate you. No matter what nobody respects you. To cut things short single parents they don't respect us. People say it is your fault that you are a single parent. People always feel that you have refused to marry and you are having children. And the thing is it is not everything that you could tell the public that this is the reason I am a single parent.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Participants reported that they experience disrespect and hatred from their family, community and relations. One of the single mothers indicated during the focus group discussion as follows:

*Even your close relatives they rather hate you. If you see a single parent you will know because as you are a single parent, you have children and you know how you are taking care of them alone.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Other participants shared how they are sometimes verbally and physically abused by members of the community. Some of the single mothers in the study reported

being beaten, slapped and insulted by members of the community. Participants stated:

*The community members do not respect us. One of them recently nearly slapped me at a provision store.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*The other time someone was insulting me. She insulted me and when I got to the house this woman sitting here said yesterday that they nearly broke her head too.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Participants explained that they experience various forms of disrespectful attitudes from their family and community members because they do not have husbands. According to them, if their husbands were alive, people would not disrespect them in any form. Some of the participants accused or blamed their extended families of causing the disrespect they experience in their interaction with others in the community. One of the single mothers indicated that:

*Even your own relatives will be the ones who will sell you out or carry your issues to the public. If nobody in the family goes out to tell the public about you will they know? It is your own relatives who will start disrespecting you and the public or outsiders too will see and also disrespect you.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Participants further view their experience of disrespect from the members of the community as borne out of the disrespect their families exhibit towards them. Hence, the comment appears to illustrate the popular African adage that "it is the house rat that normally tells the bush rat that there is fish in the basket." Participants explained that when their families respect them it sends a signal to the members of the larger community to also respect them.

#### B. Challenges Faced by Single Mothers in the Nadowli District

The study revealed that single mothers experience several challenges. The challenges single mothers in this study face range from financial to psychological, poor nutrition, and limited family support.

##### ➤ Financial Difficulties or Hardship

As indicated earlier, participants perceive single parenting as a difficult reality. It emerged from the study that one of the difficulties that participants face is lack of financial resources. The single mothers in the study indicated that financial difficulty is the major problem they face. For instance, some participants stated:

*Lack of finance is even our challenge. That is even the challenge we have.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*Lack of finance is a challenge to us. That is the problem of every one of us here. How to get money to feed, clothe and take care of ourselves is always difficult.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Meeting their basic needs becomes difficult for single mothers in the study due to financial constraints. Some of the participants indicated that financial hardship makes it difficult for them buy medication when they are ill. Participants explained that the Ghana National Health Insurance does not cover all medications and as such they are sometimes asked to buy medication when they visit the hospital for medical care. A participant stated:

*When you go to the hospital they will sometimes ask you to buy medicine. And one day if you don't have money and go to the hospital and they ask you to buy medicine then you are finished. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

Others shared that they are struggling to take care of their children in school and pay their fees. One of the participants described how she is struggling financially to cater for her adopted children in the following comment:

*Now you cannot pay school fees again. As I am sitting down I have children and they are even orphans that I took and I have never seen anybody who will come and say that oh as you are having these your orphans and they are going to school how are you managing to take care of them? So today how many calls have I received? As I was sitting you saw me pick the first one and the second. As for my own child I have been able to take care of him and he is a worker now. However, orphans that I adopted and now the girl is pursuing midwifery at Techiman hospital and the boy is at Sunyani Technical University so all them know how much their school fees is. The Techiman person every semester I pay fees. As I was sitting didn't you see me get up to pick a call now? It is the girl that called me and I was about to talk and the line hanged up like that. So it is not easy. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

Some of the single mothers indicated that they struggle to engage in petty trading to support themselves and their children. They said:

*Although we want to engage in petty trade to support ourselves poverty will not allow us. [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

*Life has become difficult. People don't buy things again so it is difficult to engage in petty trade. Even those who are 'pito' brewers sometimes find it difficult to buy the millet. They will buy millet and brew and when they sell they don't even get the money to buy the millet again. For those who fry cakes, the bowl of the beans is 30ghc and shea nuts too the bowl is 50ghc so you will buy and after selling you don't even make the capital again. So it is not easy. [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

Financial difficulties often inhibit the ability of participants to engage in and sustain their petty businesses. Additionally, single mothers often find it daunting to take care of their children's education due to the lack of financial resources. This challenge often leads to early marriages by girls from single-parent homes while the boys often leave

such homes to engage in illegal small-scale mining known as 'galamsey' in Ghanaian parlance. A participant stated:

*As for education you cannot even take care yourself so how can you support your child to go to school? Wherever you help him or her to get to if you can no longer support, he or she will come and sit down. This is what has caused the galamsey and the girls too will not be up to the age of marriage but will run and marry. Since she doesn't have anyone to take care of her what will she sit down and do? What you want to do for her you cannot do it so will she agree to stay back with you? [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

Similarly, another participant described how her lack of financial resources and lack of support from people made her unable to help her child further education:

*I have one of my children who completed JHS and also completed SHS and came back home. She came home and everybody will see that she has completed SHS and say that she can sell in a bar and gather money to further her education. And I will tell this girl but she will not go. Someone will get a job that they think she can work and support herself but she will refuse. So I always tell her that all these people are advising you and you are not heeding as I am sitting I am alone your father is dead, how will I support you to become useful in future but this girl will not listen. When she took her bags out it is recently that she called me and said that she went to Bole and filled some form and they picked her and that I should sent her 1000ghc for her to pay the fees. And I told her that if that is the case that she should come home, that as I am sitting down I don't have anything. I will go to this person and they will say they don't have. I will think of someone whom I think can help me but when I go the person too will say they don't have anything to support me. As at now whether my daughter is still in Bole or she has gotten the money to go to the school or what she is doing I don't know but she calls me alright. All these we don't know where to go and get help. [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

The study thus realized that getting help to support the education of their children was difficult for single mothers in this study. According to the ecological systems theory when there is lack of support from the exosystems (such as extended family, friends and the community members) within which the single mothers live, they may struggle to take care of their children in school. Hence, some participants reported helplessness and frustrations due to their inability to support their children's education and other needs. This finding is affirmed by several scholarships including Zulu (2017), Anyebe et al. (2017), Maness and Munoz (2019) and John and Shimfe (2020) among others that reported financial hardship among single mothers.

#### ➤ Psychosocial Problems

From the discussions with the participants, it also emerged that participants experience different psychosocial problems as a result of their single-parenthood. Anyebe et al. (2017) reported psychosocial problems as some of the



challenges faced by single parents. Psychosocial problems reported by participants include overthinking, sleeplessness, depression, social withdrawal and isolation, anger, and restlessness. For instance, one participant indicated how single motherhood has caused her distress in the following comment:

*It is the overthinking that always makes us to grow lean. As for the thinking that is what we bath, carry, drink and lay our head on. You think all the time because the person that was there supporting you is no more. As I am sitting down bare you can see that I am even holding my chin, I am thinking like that. You want to let some out but they are not. As for overthinking, it is in every widow. [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

The study found that participants experience sleeplessness which tends to worsen when they are not able to get financial support from people to help their children go to school. One of the participants shared her experience in the following comment:

*Sometimes you will lie down and your thoughts will not allow you to sleep and you will be thinking of someone that you will get up and go share your worries with that I couldn't sleep last night and my children school bills have come and I don't have the money to help them go to school and I don't sleep because of that and if you can support me in any way, the person will say he too doesn't have anything. So when he or she says that he has further worsened your worries. And they will even take your issue and spread it to people. All these give us worries that make us sleep with unstable mind. [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]*

Other participants stated that they sometimes withdraw or isolate themselves from others or refuse to talk to people. She stated: *Some days you will just get up and don't want to talk to anybody at all. Some days I will just wake up and think of not talking to anyone. Sometimes when you are angry, you don't want to talk to anyone. Sometimes I just get up and lock myself in the room and don't want to talk to anyone. I will not go out until my mind is calm then I will start mingling with people again. It comes and goes. Something will just be telling me not to talk to anyone or go out. So when it happens like that I stay in my room throughout. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

*Sometimes I isolate myself and I will be in my room all day. Certain times you don't even want to talk to anyone. Sometimes I don't want people to talk to me. Even my children sometimes I don't want them to talk to me. I just want to be alone. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

*Especially when your heart is disturbed, you think of not talking to people or isolating yourself. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

Although avoidance or isolation has been identified as a single parenting coping strategy (Fiadzo & Osei, 2018), in this study, it was seen as a challenge by single mothers. One participant claimed that the reason she does not socialize or

participate in gatherings is because they are sometimes not given the opportunity to talk or contribute in such gatherings. She intimated:

*During gatherings sometimes they give you the chance to talk and other times they don't. So I sometimes join gatherings and other times I don't. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

Consequently, some participants tend to question why they are the ones who are single parents. For instance, a participant indicated that:

*Sometimes I will sit down and say why is it that my situation is like this? Of all the people why am I the one in this situation? Why me? Hmmm! It is not easy. I am always thinking and asking myself; why me? [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

Some participants while lamenting their loneliness, expressed their desire to be part of the everyday life and activities of their communities. For instance, one of the single mothers indicated:

*As for me I even want people to talk to me. I want to feel like a full member of my community. [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]*

Despite the psychological problems that single mothers in the study struggle with, they indicated that they have no suicidal intentions. According to them, they have never thought of committing suicide due to the challenges single parenting has presented to them. Although some of them indicated that they would have wished to be dead than alive, they said they will not kill themselves unless God 'calls' them. For instance, one of the participants stated:

*The death of my husband sometimes made to overthink and fall sick and this sometimes make me think if I had also died it would have been better. I sometimes want God to also take my life. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

#### ➤ Poor Nutrition

Some participants in the study indicated poor nutrition as one of the challenges they face as single parents. The study realized that single mothers blame their inability to feed well on their lack of finance. Studies (such as Zulu, 2017) have found poor nutrition as a challenge among single mothers. As such, some of the single mothers in the study stated that they focus on getting satisfaction and not good nutrition. One of the participants indicated:

*You don't get good nutrition again. The only thing we focus on is satisfaction not good nutrition. If you get TZ to eat and be satisfied you don't think of nutrition. As you were saying if you get the green leaves soup even without salt it is heaven. [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]*

*Hmmm! You don't even get to eat and you are talking about good nutrition. When my husband was alive at least he tries to make sure we eat good food. But now if you see a*



*small meat in your soup you thank God. I don't have the money so how can I eat good food. Since I am alone taking care of the children, I focus more on getting something for us to eat and survive and not on eating nutritious food. I don't even think about it. Once I eat and I am satisfied I am okay.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

Participants focus on survival rather than good nutrition or balanced-diet. They are more concerned about eating something to survive than seeking good nutrition. Other single mothers stated that they just find it difficult to find food. They stated:

*Even feeding is difficult so when you see your colleague you will know that this person is a single parent.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*As I am sitting like this no one knows how I get food to eat. I am the only one who knows how I manage to get food to eat.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

It is important to note that the poor nutrition situation of participants affects their health which could further lead to a worsening of their already precarious situation.

#### ➤ Insecurity

Another challenge that single mothers in the study experience is personal insecurity. Anyebe et al. (2017) identified insecurity as one of the challenges single parents face. Participants expressed that they feel insecure because no one is there to take care of their children when they are absent or dead. Also, some participants are worried that because they are staying with their children alone that they may not find help when their children are absent in times of emergency. A participant shared:

*You are talking about security right? If I am not there at least I always let the child to know that if I am no more today they have to do their best because you don't have anybody that will take care of you. I always let them to know. At times I feel insecure. For the insecurity it is not easy because anything can happen to you and nobody asks of you if your children are not around. If your children are not around and something happens to you, you can just die without anyone coming to your help. Nobody asks or checks on you so in case it is an emergency and your children are not there, then something bad can happen to you.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Another participant described her feeling of insecurity in the following comment: *You always have a feeling of insecurity. Sometime you think if you are not there a lot of things would spoil or go wrong. As I am sitting now I have my issues and you also have your issues so you will not leave your problems and come and solve mine. So I will have to come and solve my issues myself. I have to come back before my issues can be solved.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

The concern of participants is that their problem would not get solved or things would go wrong in their house if they are not around.

#### ➤ Difficulty in Performing both Fatherly and Motherly Roles

One of the challenges single mothers in the study face is difficulty in performing the role of the father and the role of a mother. Some participants indicated that they were not allowed to play the role of a man even if they could. For instance, the African Traditional single mothers in the study indicated that performing the role of a man while there are men in the extended family would cause problems or invoke spiritual harm on them. A participant shared:

*In terms of performance of both fatherly and motherly role, there are certain things that you yourself can do but if you use your own power to do them it will cause problem. So you just leave it and wait for a man to come. If it comes to playing a man's role, even if you have the power to do it you still have to wait until a man comes. You cannot just get up and use your own power and do it. If you do it by yourself without involving a man it will affect you. You will have the power to do it but it will affect you. Yes, it will affect your spirituality. So when it comes to performance of a man's role you have to wait until a man comes even if the man doesn't have the wherewithal while you have you still must wait until he comes then you can now support him to perform that role of a man. However, if it is about motherly role even if men are not around I will be performing them without consulting or waiting on anyone.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

The study realized that participants within the African Traditional religious context cannot play the role of man without consulting or seeking approval of a man in the family. It could be realized from the comment above that the macrosystem (such as customs and traditions) within which African Traditional Religion single mothers in this study live, makes it difficult for them to perform the role of a 'father.' This therefore supports the ecological systems theory which argues that an individual's life is affected by the macrosystems (such as customs and traditions) within which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Other participants indicated that although performing the role of a 'father' and mother is very difficult, they nonetheless muster courage, counsel themselves and perform such roles. For instance, she stated:

*When it comes to performing the role of a mother and father, although it is not easy, I always gather courage to carry them out. Who will I give it to? I always counsel myself when I am to perform both fatherly and motherly roles. I always counsel myself and get up to perform those roles. The child too, I always sit him down and talk to him so that he will know that this is the true situation, I am the only one with him. I let them know that there is no help coming from anywhere so that the children will also know that I am the only one who will support and take care of them.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Other participants indicated that they attempt to perform the fatherly role too and leave it when they get to a point they cannot do. *As for me I always perform the fatherly role to a point and leave it. It is not easy but I try to do what I can do and leave the ones I cannot do. Something that you are not used to performing will be difficult to do it all of a sudden. I cannot do all. So I do those that I can do and leave the rest.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Some express difficulty in controlling their older children due to the absence of their husbands. For instance, she stated:

*In terms of performance of both roles, if the child brings home the school fees if the man was alive, he would have been the one to pay. You try to perform them but if the child is bigger than you, can you control him again?* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

### C. Coping Strategies Adopted by Single Mothers in the Nadowli District

In this section, the study explored the strategies that single mothers within the three religions in the Nadowli District adopt to cope with their situation and challenges. The findings revealed that single mothers adopt multiple and diverse strategies to cope with their daily challenges including petty trade or business, prayer, seeking guidance and advice, and support from social networks. Each single mother in the study adopts at least one or two of these strategies to cope.

#### ➤ Petty Trade and Business

The study realized that participants engage in petty trading and small businesses to support themselves and their children. The study discovered that some participants engage in various petty trade and businesses including brewing of 'pito' (local beer), frying of cakes, selling of food stuff, and the like. Participants indicated that although they experience financial difficulties, they try to engage in some petty businesses instead of being idle and this helps them support their families. Some participants shared:

*We engage in petty trade or business to support ourselves and children. You cannot sit idle like that.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*We brew 'pito'. It is the old women 'pito' that is even sweet.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*We engage in petty trade and business such as selling of fried cakes, porridge, salt etc. to support ourselves.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

*I was brewing 'pito'. It is 'pito' that I always brew but when I became down with a certain ailment they said I should not go near fire again so that is why I am not doing it again. Because of lack of money [capital] I am not doing anything now.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*We do petty trading. Some of us fry cakes, others sell Shea butter but this raining season everyone goes to the farm then during the dry season we go back to our petty trade and business.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

*This woman sitting down like this she has sold fufu seriously and took care of the children before growing old like this. Now she is old but she used to sell fufu and the whole village everyone knows her to be good in it.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

*We do some petty trade to support ourselves. You do some petty trade to support yourself and the children. You don't just sit down and put your hands in between your thighs. I sell salt, onion, oil, chicken parts, and chicken. I also sell rice.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

The comments suggest that most single mothers resort to doing petty businesses in order to raise and sustain their families. This finding is corroborated by Fiadzo and Osei's (2018) study of single parents in the Kpedze community of the Volta Region of Ghana. They found that single parents in the Kpedze community engaged in petty trade in order to support themselves and cope with their situation. Also, the finding is affirmed by Zulu (2017) who found that single parents in Zambia resorted to petty trade or business as a coping mechanism. However, other participants indicated that they struggle with their petty businesses due to lack of finances or inadequate capital to boost such businesses. For instance, some participants stated:

*We engage in petty trade to support ourselves but the capital that you will use to start the petty trade or business is not always enough. I sell banku. I buy one bowl of maize but I will divide it into two and keep half for the house to take care of the children and use the other half to stir the banku and sell so if they don't buy then you are finished like that. I have to be there like that until I get money again then I will go and buy the maize again. If you don't get the money you cannot do anything again. Apart from the banku, I brew pito, fry cakes and make soap. But how to get the money to go and buy the soda is always difficult. The money is not always there.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

*Now things are costly so getting the capital to buy things is very difficult now.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Financial hardship is a major challenge faced by single mothers in study. It hinders their productivity.

#### ➤ Social Networks and Groups

The study found that single mothers rely on their social networks such as extended families, friends, and associations to cope with their situation and challenges. This supports the establishment of social networks in literature as a single parenting coping strategy (Zulu, 2017; Hashim et al. 2015; Lashley, 2014; Kpoor, 2003). For instance, Hashim et al. (2015) found in their study that support from friends, family and social networks helped single mothers in Malaysia cope with their situation. Some participants indicated that they get

support from their extended family members only when they are ill and probably hospitalized. However, they claim that they do not get monetary support from the same extended family members to feed their children. Some of them shared:

*There is family support towards us in certain times. If you are sick and admitted at the hospital and they require blood they will donate to save you. Even if they arrest you and send you to the police station, they will not allow you to sleep there. They will come and bail you. But when it comes to supporting you to feed is what they don't do.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

*Also they don't support you in terms of money to take care of your children. When it comes to that it is always difficult for them to support you. But if you are sick they can buy you medicine, they can send you to hospital. However, once you recover you have to find ways and means to pay the bills. If you die at the hospital then you will not have any problem but if you recover you will pay your bills.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

The findings are thus supported by Kpoor (2003) who found that single mothers in Accra relied on support from family, and social network to cope. The findings also support Zulu's (2017) study which realized that support from friends, family and relations enabled single parents in Zambia to cope with their situation. Other participants stated that although they receive support from their husband's family, such support is always limited. They indicated:

*Sometimes the family supports you when they have. They have not abandoned us. You get support from people but not always. When someone supports me with something I always pray for the person.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

*You don't get the things you used to get when your husband was alive. You sometimes get support from your husband's family but not everything. Sometimes some may want to support you but they don't have the capacity.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Participants explained that because their deceased husbands' families have their own challenges to deal with, that they are often unable to support or provide all their needs. Also, some participants noted that visits from their friends and relations help them to cope with their situation.

*Sometimes friends and people come to check on me. Sometimes people come to visit you and say it is been long they saw you that is why they came to check on you and this also makes me to feel okay.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

Other participants indicated that their family supported them with a piece of land to grow crops and support themselves: *Sometimes they give you a portion of land to cultivate groundnuts. Some of us get a piece of land to farm groundnuts. If you have the wherewithal you can get a place to farm but because you don't have what it takes to farm it*

*becomes difficult to farm even if they give you. So that is one of the help the family sometimes give.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

Other participants noted that membership of associations enables them to cope as it gives them the opportunity to meet their fellow single mothers and chat together. They explained that such interaction with colleagues help them to alleviate their worries. One of the participants stated how her association helps her to cope with her situation in the following comment:

*As for associations they don't have any problem. That is where you even go and enjoy. If you are lonely that is where you even go and you are okay. Because I can say people that I am free with are my colleague Marshallans. Most of them are single mothers so when we come together we speak our mind and laugh together. It helps us to release stress and depression. You know it is not easy to live alone so when we meet like that we use that opportunity to talk about everything. Most of them are single and some of them their husbands are busy so most of us get to release our stress and things bothering our mind through our association meetings and chat with each other.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

From the comment, it could be understood that one's membership in various associations provides a platform for single mothers to interact with other people as well as give them access to benefits and opportunities. A participant indicated: *We belong to associations and it helps us to cope. Yesterday we had our meeting and shared some things among ourselves. The other day we helped this woman sitting here during the husband's funeral including cooking food. When we come together and support each other it helps us to cope.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

According to some participants, they are still alive because of they are members of some associations and they attend meetings regularly. Some of the participants described how membership of association and attendance of meetings help them to cope with their situation in the following comments: *You see that is why this old woman sitting here is saying that if it is not because of associations that some of them would not have been alive today. Because when you attend association meetings your overthinking and disturbed mind will reduce. You talk to people and by the time you come back to the house you are always okay. So the meetings are helping us.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*Let me also add something. You see, even this thing that you brought us together and we are discussing like this is helpful. You don't know what you have done for us like this. I was sitting down worried but by just coming here and sitting down with my colleagues to talk have calmed my mind and you see that I was able to laugh and talk with them. So some of these meetings are very good for us because they are the ones helping us to cope with this our unfortunate situation we find ourselves.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]



Attendance of meetings and joining of associations are therefore strategies that some single mothers adopt to cope with their situation. Hence, socialization helps some participants to cope with their situation. Some of the participants said: *Socialization with people helps us to cope. If you lock yourself up in the room by the time you realize you will be a mad person.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*I socialize with people. I have been attending meetings and when I go for gatherings they will talk and when I also have something to say then I will say too. When I become a widow I don't isolate myself or withdraw from socializing with people. It is now that I don't have the energy again to move about like I used to do, if not I used to go for gatherings and meetings.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022]

*For me, sometimes I think and my anger will rise and will be shedding tears. But if I mingle and go out by the time I come back to the house and realized that although I am like this but I am still better than others. When I go out and realized my situation is better than others my anger always calms down. Someone will be there you will think the person is better than you and when you go out and see their situation you will come to the realization that yours is better than their own. When I mingle and realized my colleague single mothers are many, I always become fine.* [FGD with African Traditional Single Mothers, 2022] Socialization is therefore one of the major sources of coping for single mothers in the study.

#### ➤ Prayer and Spirituality

Participants also indicated during the discussions that prayer enables them to cope with their challenges. According to participants, nothing is impossible for God. As such, participants tend to resort to prayer and rely on God in order to overcome their challenges and cope with their situations. One of the participants stated:

*For me, as I am sitting down like this, when my mind is disturbed I start to pray. I put it into prayers. Sometimes you will realize that the issues will not last and they will be solved. They will be solved in manner that you will be surprise or don't know what to say. So as for me I put it into prayers.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

During the discussion with Christian single mothers, it was discovered that some of them resort to requesting Masses and prayers from their priests and pastors when they are experiencing challenging situations. A participant stated during the discussion as follows:

*When you are suffering or I know that this issue is worrying me you always say let me go and request mass.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

Similarly, some participants indicated that they seek spiritual guidance from their religious leaders when they have dreams of their deceased husbands. For example, one of the participants stated:

*Sometimes when something is worrying you perhaps it about religion I go to one of Islamic scholars. Or when I dream, for instance some people always dream that their husband has come back to them or he has come back and doing something I can go to someone that I know he understands the Quran and he will show me what to do. For instance, either I should give money to a need person or go and request prayer for my husband or prepare food for children. We always seek guidance and advice from Islamic scholars when you have such a problem.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Another participant indicated that whenever she feels lonely, she prays by first mentioning God's name then proceeds to mention her husband's name and this has helped her to gain the strength to live as if her husband was still alive. She stated thus:

*When I feel lonely I always mention the name of God first and go ahead to mention my husband's name and it makes me to feel okay. It reminds of the fact that it is God who gives and takes and he knows why he has taken him away. Bare he is the one who brought that loneliness in me so I always tell him not to make to think and feel lonely. When I make this prayer request God gives me the strength to live as normal as if my husband was there.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Thus, participants tend to rely on spiritual support from God to cope with their situations. The findings of this study are corroborated by scholarship such as Lashley (2014) and McKendrick et al. (2018). Lashley found that Black single mothers in the United States of America resorted to spirituality to cope with their situation. In their study, McKendrick et al. (2018) discovered that faith or religion was relied upon by single parents in Scotland as a strategy to cope with their situation.

#### ➤ Children

It also emerged from the discussions with participants that their children sometimes serve as sources of coping, in terms of the support they get from them and the hope that they will become successful people in future to take care of them. Maness and Munoz (2019) affirmed this finding when they found in their study that single mothers in college were able to cope because of their children. According to some participants, they are able to share their problems with their children as well as have good conversations with them. This enables participants to cope as their children tend to fill the void created by the absence of their husbands. One of the participants shared:

*When I am staying with my child we talk to each. When I am having my problems I share with him and when he also has any problem he will also tell me. This is helping me to cope with m situation because I am able to share my problems with him and not keep it in my mind for it to be troubling me. I cannot have my problem and go and be telling an outsider while my child is in the house. As for me and my children, my secrets they even know more than. I will never go and tell*

*people outside my secrets. They don't understand what I am going through.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

From the comment, it could be noted that participants seem to prefer to share their problems with their children but not with strangers. Further, the comment suggests that one reason that participants prefer to share their problems with their children and not outsiders is because they think outsiders may not understand the challenges they go through. The implication is that parent-child relationship can help single mothers to cope with their situations. This is affirmed by deCarvalho and Spears (2019) who discovered in their study that good parent-child relationship helps single parent families to cope with their situation. Some single mothers in the study indicated that they are able to cope and meet some of their basic needs because their children are taking care of them. A participant stated:

*After the death of my husband my son started to engage in petty jobs to make money and provide for me. He was now my husband. I was not feeling the absence of my husband due to the way he was supporting and taking care of me with the small small that he was getting from the small works that he was doing. He used to drive a tricycle. He makes sure that there was food in the house. However, Allah called him too last year and now I am alone with nobody to take care of me. When he was still alive he was taking care of me and that helped me to cope but now he is no more. Hmmm! but what can I say, I cannot question Allah. So I have accepted my fate.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

Notwithstanding the fact that participants' relationship with their children enables them to cope, some of the single mothers bemoaned that their situation is sometimes worsened by the behaviours of their children. Some indicated that their children sometimes exhibit troublesome behaviours thereby making them angry and worsening their situation. For instance, some participants indicated:

*Sometimes the children help you to cope and other times too they make your situation worse. Sometimes some of the issues are like that. When he does something that makes you angry whenever you see him or her you are always angry.* [FGD with Christian Single Mothers, 2022]

*The children are ones who rather cause most of the problems. Some can take after the father and be doing things that the father used to do and this makes you to see him as your husband and that makes you feel better. But some of the children will disturb you and you would wish if you had died it would have been better. The way he will trouble your life may not be easy. So the children and us can play and at the same time fight.* [FGD with Muslim Single Mothers, 2022]

The suggestion is that children's behaviours can enable single mothers to cope with their situation or cause them more worries. Overall, the findings of the study reveal that single mothers need assistance in order for them to cope with their situations (Anyebe et al., 2017).

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Single mothers in the study experience single motherhood as a challenge and perceive themselves as often being disrespected, underrated and powerless human beings. The study revealed that single mothers are faced with several challenges including financial hardship, psychosocial problems, poor nutrition and difficulty in performing both 'fatherly' and motherly roles. These challenges make it difficult for single mothers in the study to meet some of their basic needs. Single mothers resort to strategies such as engagement in petty trading, getting support from social networks, membership of associations, prayer and spirituality to cope with their situations. From the focus group discussions, it stands out that the challenges experienced by single mothers and the strategies they adopt to cope do not vary among the participants in the three different religions. The study recommends that non-governmental organizations interested in the welfare of women and the social welfare department of Ghana should extend their support services to single mothers in the form of livelihood support start-up kits to enable them cater for their basic human needs and become self-reliant. The findings also highlight the need for religious leaders and counseling practitioners to incorporate community-based counseling into their practices in order to offer psychological assistance to single mothers who may be going through difficulties. During the data collection process, participants expressed happiness with the focus group discussions and thanked the researcher for bringing them together to discuss their common issues and indicated how it helped them to learn other ways to cope with their situations. In response to this enthusiasm, the researcher recommends that the Nadowli District Assembly and other non-governmental organizations interested in women's welfare should consider establishing a platform that would give single mothers a voice to share and learn from one another best practices for coping with single motherhood.

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