

Bibliometric Analysis

A Bibliometric Analysis of Single Mothers

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research on single mothers internationally. This article analyzes 1543 research papers on single mothers from Web of Science database using CiteSpace literature analysis software. The study found that research on single mothers covers 79 countries globally, forming a close and comprehensive cooperative network between them. The North American region, including the United States and Canada, is a core research force in the field of single mothers. The top 15 research institutions produced more than 30 papers each, with the University of California System ranking first with a total of 72 papers. The journal with the most publications was the Journal of Marriage and Family, with a total of 44 papers. There were 8 authors who published more than 10 papers, with Herbst CM having the most with 16 papers. The frequency of citations for research on single mothers has shown a significant increasing trend in recent years, with a total of 36,624 citations, an average of 23.74 citations per paper, and an h-index of 83. Through the analysis of clustering networks and high-frequency keywords, the research hotspot on single mothers mainly focuses on four aspects: the psychological health of single mothers, the economic and employment status of single mothers, the children of single mothers, and the social support of single mothers.

Keywords: single mothers; mental health; economic and employment; children; social support; bibliometric analysis; Citespace

Introduction

In recent years, research focusing on single mothers has gained remarkable traction. The term "single mothers" refer to unmarried or married mothers who are widowed, divorced, or abandoned. In the ever-evolving fabric of society, the prevalence of single-parent families has surged, and within this landscape, single mothers constitute a significant portion, serving as the pivotal building blocks of these families. Within the society, the role of women, including single mothers encompasses all spheres of life. This phenomenon has ignited a surge of scholarly exploration across various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, child studies, and family studies, where researchers delve into the intricate dynamics of single motherhood.

The challenges that single mothers face are multifaceted and often formidable. These include economic constraints, a dearth of social support networks, and looming mental health concerns. The potential long-term repercussions of these challenges extend beyond individual women and encompass their children as well. Such difficulties highlight the urgency for comprehensive research that not only acknowledges but also addresses these issues to improve the lives of single mothers and their families.

The significance of studying single mothers extends far beyond academia. It acts as a catalyst for raising societal awareness and enhancing understanding of the complexities within single-parent families. This, in

turn, plays a pivotal role in fostering the growth, stability, and well-being of single-parent households. By shedding light on the unique struggles faced by single mothers, research endeavors facilitate the creation of more effective support systems and policies, ultimately striving for a more equitable and compassionate society.

Simultaneously, research into single mothers mirrors the trajectory of societal development. It underscores the principles of social justice and equality by spotlighting a demographic that often grapples with inequitable challenges. The methodology employed in this pursuit further emphasizes the growing integration of technology and research, as evidenced by the utilization of the Web of Science database and bibliometric techniques.

This paper employs a robust and systematic approach to quantitatively analyze the extensive body of literature centered around single mothers. The analysis encompasses diverse facets, including global research output, academic impact, international collaborations, and emerging research frontiers. Such meticulous observation of the landscape provides valuable insights into the trajectory, trends, and evolving status of international research concerning single mothers. Ultimately, this research endeavor not only deepens our understanding of single motherhood but also enriches the larger discourse on family dynamics, societal progress, and human well-being.

Methodology

In order to reveal the forefront hotspots and development trends, key research areas and directions, research cooperation networks of single mothers, and to observe the general characteristics of the development of single mother research, this paper conducted a bibliometric analysis using the international literature database Web of Science (SCI-Expanded, SSCI) and the bibliometric method CiteSpace. A knowledge map was constructed, and different types of scientific knowledge maps were drawn using knowledge map software tools, including detailed topic types, journals with the most articles, and cooperative network relationships. By visualizing knowledge maps, the forefront evolution law of research can be observed clearly and succinctly (Van Raan, 2003).

The search theme was "single mother." Papers in which the phrase "single mother" appeared in the title, keywords, or abstract were defined as research papers related to single mothers. A total of 2285 papers were retrieved (as of April 4, 2023) that were published before 2022 (1990-2022). Most of the literature related to single mothers was published after 1998. The retrieved literature was organized, screened, and invalid data, such as notes, conference notices, and research reports, were removed, and non-English literature was excluded, resulting in 1543 remaining articles. CiteSpace was used to eliminate duplicate articles, and the number of invalid records was 0, resulting in a final 1543 valid articles. The literature metric research in this article mainly addresses the following issues:

- i. What is the output situation and collaboration network of single mothers' research?
- ii. What is the academic impact of single mothers' research?
- iii. What are the hot issues and focuses of single mothers' research?

The Findings

This section provides description of the results of the research, including the data and their interpretation.

1. Characteristics of Single Mothers' Research Publication Output

The characteristics of single mothers' research publication output is discussed in this section.

Distribution of Publication Output by Year

Analysis of the 1543 single mother research articles shows that the number of articles on the topic of single mother research is increasing, from 14 articles in 1998 to 100 articles in 2022 (Figure 1).

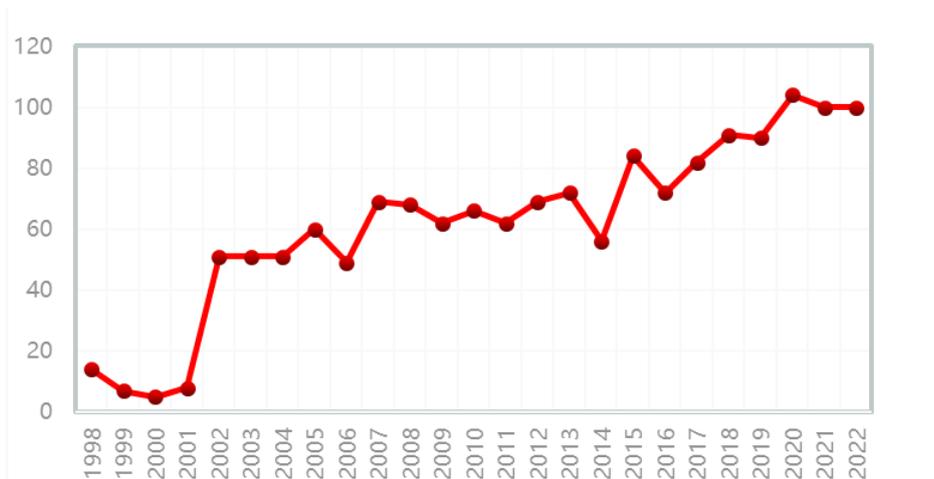


Figure 1. Distribution of publication output by year

The growth was slow between 1998 and 2001. In 2002, the growth was the fastest, with an increase of 43 articles from 8 to 51 within a year. Both 2006 and 2014 showed significant negative growth, with a decrease of more than 10 articles. In other years, the number of articles showed a steady growth trend, and in 2020, the number of articles reached its peak, with a total of 104 articles. The trend indicates that there is continual interest in research on single mothers.

Distribution of Publication Output by Country

Research on single mothers covers 79 countries, with the top 10 countries ranked shown in Figure 2. According to the analysis of national activity, the top 10 countries account for 94% of all publications (a total of 1455 papers). Among them, the United States has been in a leading position in this field of research, with 897 papers, accounting for 58% of the total. Canada and England followed with 109 papers each. Australia, Germany, Sweden, and Israel also published more than 50 papers in this field.

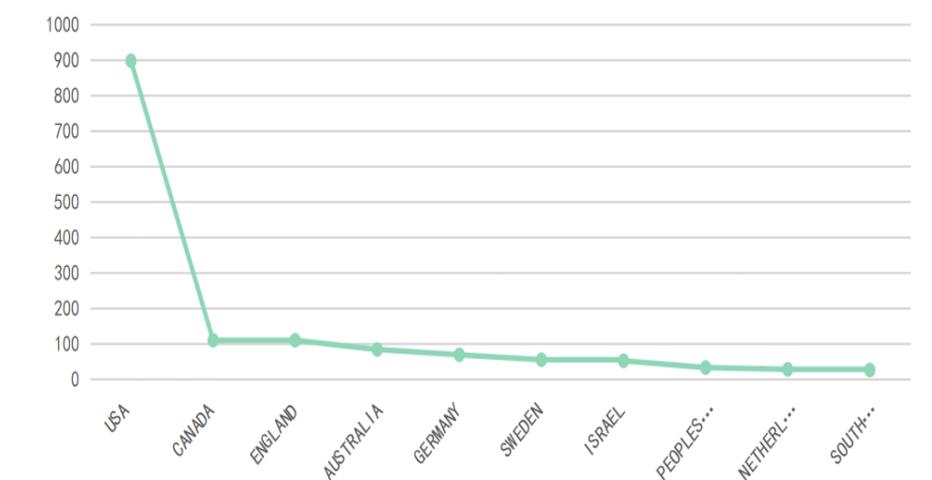


Figure 2. Distribution of top 10 publication country

From the keyword clustering map between countries (Figure 3) and the timeline view (Figure 4), it can be seen that the research on single mothers is divided into five distinct clusters among countries. The first cluster includes research from the United States, Denmark, Mexico, Iran, Chile, and other countries on welfare reform, material well-being, smart growth environments, family structure, family inequality, children development, and post-nuclear family. The United States has been researching this topic since 1998 and is the earliest and most prolific country in this category.

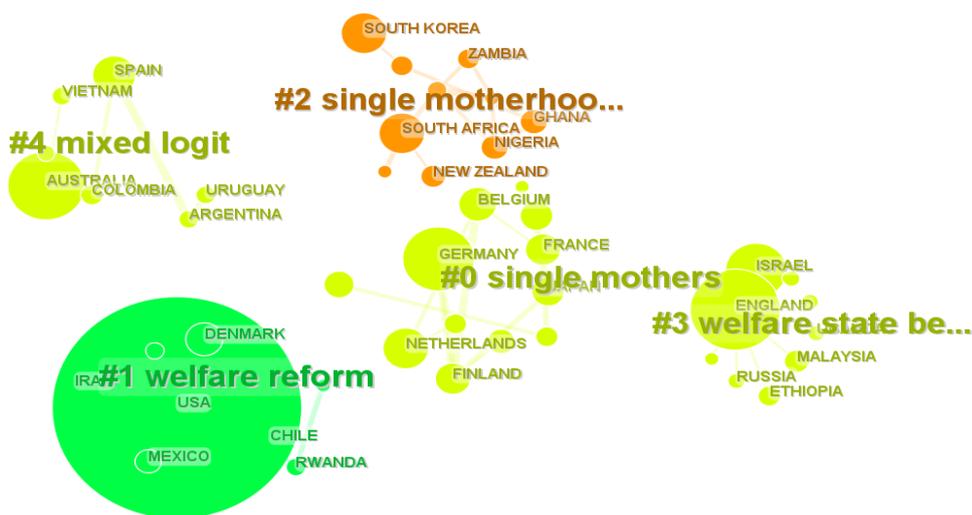


Figure 3. Cluster map of different published countries

The second cluster includes research from South Africa, South Korea, Ghana, Nigeria, New Zealand, and other countries on public health interventions, under-5 mortality, sub-Saharan Africa, Pacific women, intergenerational economic mobility, and single mother-headed families. New Zealand was the first to research this topic in 2001, but with relatively few publications. South Africa and South Korea began research on this topic in 2007 and have since produced more publications.

The third cluster includes research from England, Israel, Malaysia, Ethiopia, and other countries on welfare state benefits, community development, job creation, mental health, role strain, and role conflict. Finland began researching this topic in 1998 and has produced the most relevant articles, followed by Israel, which began researching in 2002.

The fourth cluster includes research from Australia, Spain, Colombia, Uruguay, and other countries on mixed logit, part-time work, maternal employment, asset accumulation, and residence characteristics. Australia began researching this topic in 2002 and has produced the most publications, followed by Spain.

The fifth cluster includes research from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Finland, Japan, and other countries on welfare state, child benefits, mental health, family policy, social capital, and immigrants and refugees. Germany and Finland were the first to research this topic and have produced a relatively large number of publications, followed by France, which began researching in 2004 but has since produced a relatively high number of publications.

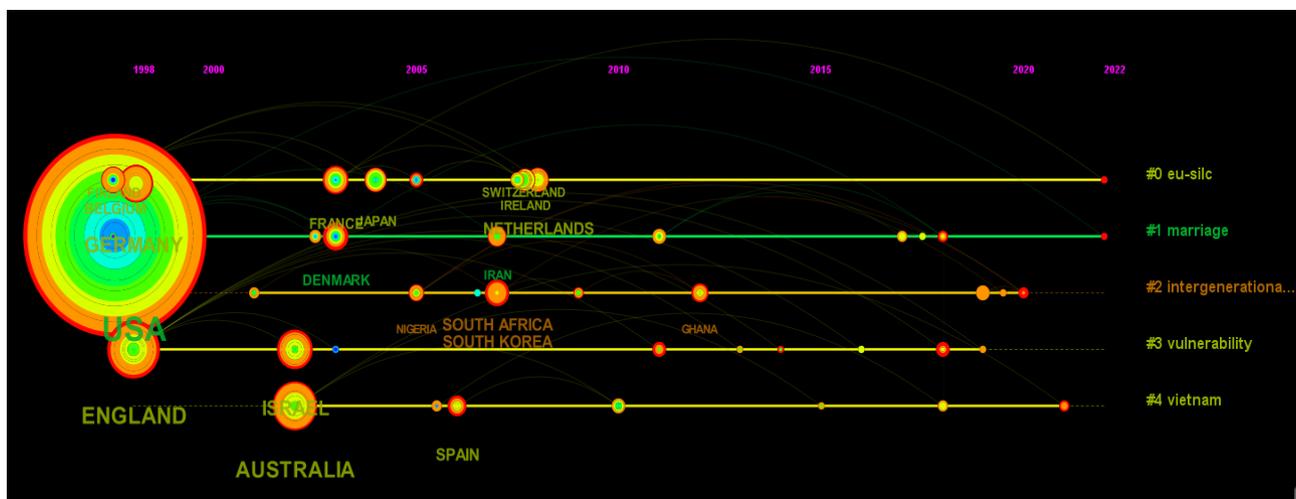


Figure 4. Time distribution of clustering in different published countries

The nodes in the clustering graph represent different countries involved in single mother research, with the size of the node representing the number of published articles, and the lines between the nodes indicating the level of cooperation between countries. From a global perspective, many countries have formed a close and comprehensive network of cooperation, particularly among scientifically advanced countries. The North American region, where the United States and Canada are located, is also a core research force in the field of single mother research.

Distribution of Publication Output by Publishing Institutions

An analysis of the institutions publishing papers shows that there are a total of 1329 institutions that have published papers on the topic of single mothers, with the top 15 institutions each having published 30 or more papers. The top 10 institutions in terms of the number of papers published are shown in figure 5. The University of California system ranks first with 72 published papers, followed by the University System of Ohio and the University of North Carolina, both of which have published over 50 papers.



Figure 5. Distribution of top 10 publishing institutions

In the keyword clustering graph of research institutions (Figure 6), five distinct clusters of single mother research institutions can be identified: The first cluster includes research institutions such as the University of Wisconsin System, University of Michigan, University of Michigan System, University of Wisconsin Madison, PCSHE, and others, conducting research on child support, welfare state, lone motherhood, nonmarital fertility, adolescent health, and welfare reform.

The second cluster includes research institutions such as the University of California Los Angeles, New York University, Bar Ilan University, CUNY, and others, conducting research on physical child abuse, case advocacy, behavior problems, parenting stress, father involvement, and adverse childhood experiences. The third cluster includes research institutions such as Columbia University, University of London, University of Cambridge, Georgetown University, and others, conducting research on welfare state benefits, dental health services, mental health, maternal employment, and healthy eating. The fourth cluster includes research institutions such as the University System of Georgia, Arizona State University, National Bureau of Economic Research, Georgia State University, and others, conducting research on childcare subsidies, maternal health, maternal employment, family well-being, job training, and income dynamics. The fifth cluster includes research institutions such as the University System of Ohio, University System of Maryland, Rutgers State University New Brunswick, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, and others, conducting research on fathers' involvement, social work research, socioeconomic status, marital status, and child-care

arrangements. In addition, from the collaboration network of research institutions, the main research institutions have engaged in close collaboration in their areas of expertise.

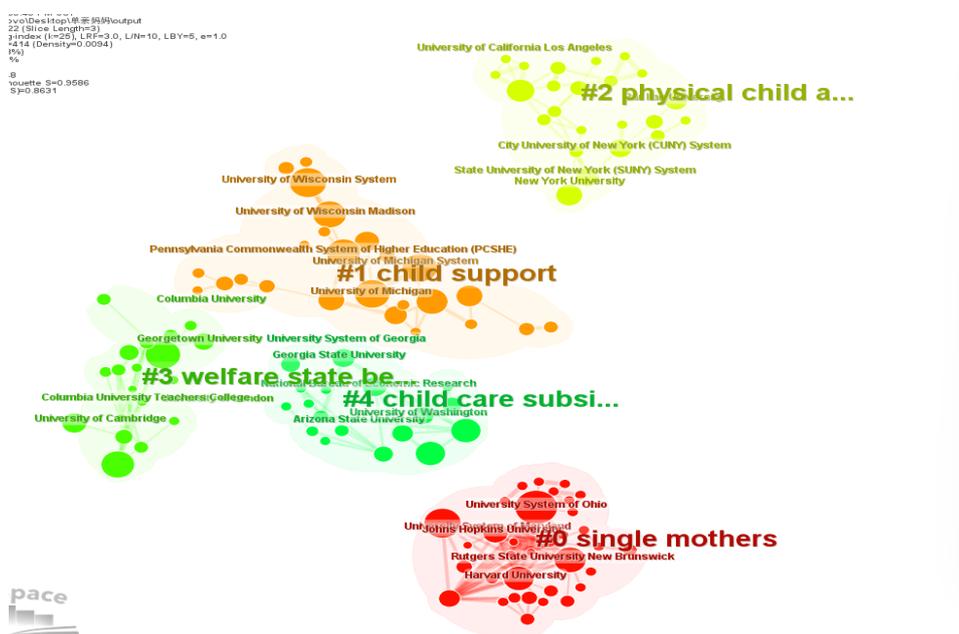


Figure 6. Cluster map of different publishing institutions

Distribution of Publication Output by Journal

An analysis of the journals where the papers were published was carried out. The analysis shows that the top 10 journals with the most published papers are shown in Figure 7. The journal with the most papers published is the Journal of Marriage and Family, with a total of 44 papers, followed by the Journal of Family Issues with 41 papers published. The Children and Youth Services Review and Demography also has more than 30 papers published.



Figure 7. Distribution of top 10 publication output by journal

Distribution of Publication Output by Author

Analyzing the authors who have published papers, as shown in Figure 8, the top 10 authors with the highest number of publications are listed. Herbst CM has published the most, with 16 papers, and there are a total of 8 authors who have published more than 10 papers.

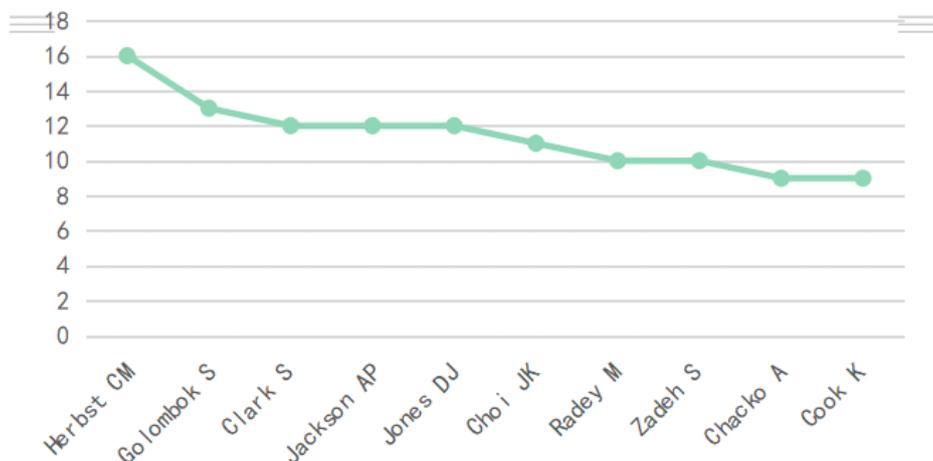


Figure 8. Distribution of top 10 publication output by author

2. Academic Impact of Single Mothers' Research Publication Output

Citation is an effective method to measure the academic impact of research papers. According to the WOS database, as shown in Figure 9, citations of single mother research literature have shown a significant upward trend in recent years, with a total of 36,624 citations as of the search date. The average number of citations per article is 23.74, and the h-index is 83. The time distribution graph of the number of citations of single mother papers shows a significant upward trend, indicating that the research topic of single mothers has been highly valued by the academic community.

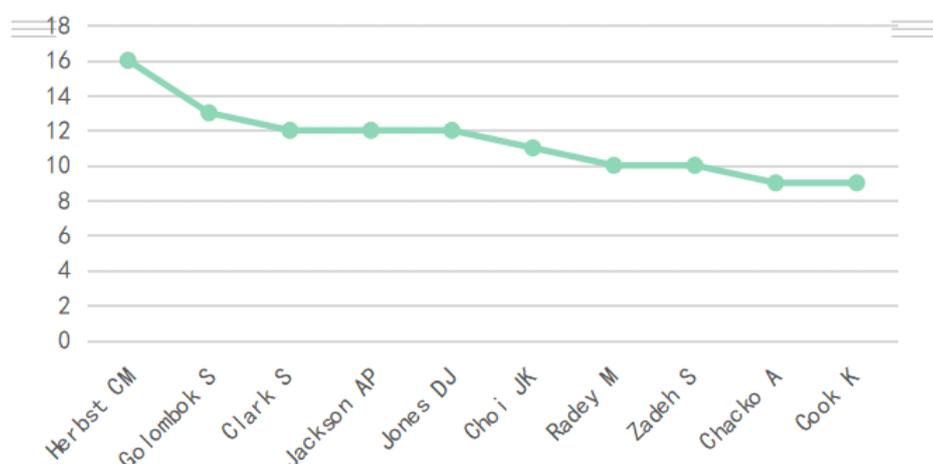


Figure 9. Yearly citation frequency

The higher the citation frequency of a paper on a journal, the greater its academic impact. Table 1 lists the top 10 most cited papers. These papers cover different research topics and methods, and some scholars have studied the physical and mental health and social support of single mothers. Olsson et al. (2001) concluded that "Mothers with children with autism had higher depression scores than mothers of children with ID without autism." Thompson et al. (2006) delineated the prevalence, chronicity, and severity of intimate partner violence among adult women. Cairney et al. (2003) examined the effect of stress and social support on the relationship between single-parent status and depression and found that compared to married mothers,

single mothers were more likely to have suffered an episode of depression. Brand et al. (2015) studied "The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss and Unemployment."

Some scholars conducted research specifically on African American single mothers. Mistry et al. (2002) concluded that lower levels of economic well-being, and the corollary elevated perceptions of economic pressure indirectly affected parenting behavior. Ceballo et al. (2002) investigated how stressful environmental conditions influence the relation between single mothers' social support and parenting strategies.

Additionally, some scholars have studied children's issues. Yeung et al. (2002) examined how family income matters for young children's development. Reyno et al. (2006) predicted the response to parent training for child externalizing behavior problems. Strauss et al. (1999) concluded that "Children with obese mothers, low family incomes, and lower cognitive stimulation have significantly elevated risks of developing obesity."

Table 1. Top 10 highly cited literature

Title	Author	Publication name	Year	Citation
How money matters for young children's development: Parental investment and family processes	Yeung, WJ; Linver, MR; Brooks-Gunn, J	Child Development	2002	704
Predictors of parent training efficacy for child externalizing behavior problems - a meta-analytic review	Reyno, SM; McGrath, PJ	Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry	2006	456
Economic well-being and children's social adjustment: The role of family process in an ethnically diverse low-income sample	Mistry, RS Vandewater, EA; Huston, AC; McLoyd, VC	Child Development	2002	396
Depression in mothers and fathers of children with intellectual disability	Olsson, MB; Hwang, CP	Journal of Intellectual Disability Research	2001	391
Influence of the home environment on the development of obesity in children	Strauss, RS; Knight, J Thompson, Robert S.; Bonomi, Amy E.;	Pediatrics	1999	379
Intimate partner violence - Prevalence, types, and chronicity in adult women	Anderson, Melissa; Reid, Robert J.; Dimer, Jane A.; Carrell, David; Rivara, Frederick P.	American Journal of Preventive Medicine	2006	335
Stress, social support and depression in single and married mothers	Cairney, J; Boyle, M; Offord, DR; Racine, Y	Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology	2003	329
Union formation in fragile families	Carlson, M; McLanahan, S; England, P	Demography	2004	304
The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss and Unemployment	Brand, Jennie E.	Annual Review of Sociology, Vol 41	2015	290
Social support and parenting in poor, dangerous neighborhoods	Ceballo, R; McLoyd, VC	Child Development	2002	279

3. Research Hotspot Analysis

Keywords are a condensed and refined expression of the core ideas in literature, and high-frequency keywords reflect the research hotspots in the field. Table 2 displays the top 100 keywords that appear most frequently in papers related to "single mothers," each appearing at least 16 times.

Table 2. High-frequency keywords (Top 100)

No	Keywords	Frequency	No	Keywords	Frequency
1	single mothers	616	51	mortality	34
2	family	198	52	depressive symptoms	34
3	children	154	53	behavior problems	34
4	work	149	54	race	33
5	women	138	55	maternal depression	33
6	mental health	137	56	patterns	32
7	health	130	57	marital status	32
8	social support	123	58	single motherhood	31
9	welfare	111	59	fathers	30
10	employment	110	60	achievement	30
11	united states	108	61	trends	29
12	family structure	108	62	program	28
13	impact	105	63	child	28
14	stress	103	64	single mother	26
15	gender	100	65	predictors	26
16	marriage	98	66	involvement	26
17	poverty	97	67	domestic violence	26
18	income	83	68	symptoms	25
19	welfare reform	82	69	education	25
20	risk	82	70	determinants	25
21	parents	82	71	model	24
22	mothers	77	72	young children	23
23	low income	75	73	follow up	23
24	policy	71	74	community	23
25	depression	71	75	parenting stress	22
26	support	61	76	context	22
27	behavior	61	77	childhood	22
28	outcome	56	78	transitions	21
29	reform	55	79	parent	21
30	divorce	55	80	family policy	21
31	childcare	54	81	economic hardship	21
32	care	54	82	child support	21
33	African american	54	83	time	20
34	prevalence	50	84	population	20
35	cohabitation	50	85	life course	20
36	adjustment	50	86	fertility	20
37	socioeconomic	48	87	low birth weight	19
38	pregnancy	47	88	living arrangements	19
39	risk factors	46	89	labor	19
40	participation	46	90	association	19
41	psychological	45	91	transition	18
42	quality	43	92	single parents	18
43	experiences	41	93	infants	18
44	adolescents	41	94	childcare subsidies	18
45	lone mothers	39	95	married mothers	17
46	life	39	96	intimate partner	17
47	inequality	39	97	abuse	17

poverty. Moreover, the pressing demands of childcare often limit their employment options, exacerbating the prevalent gender discrimination and wage disparities ingrained within the labor market. Consequently, the economic predicament of single mothers remains an enduring challenge, warranting comprehensive attention and targeted support. Amidst these obstacles, empowering single mothers through improved economic opportunities and equitable work policies becomes imperative for fostering a more just and inclusive society.

(3) Children of single mothers. Keywords include children (154), childcare (54), adolescents (41), behavior problems (34), child (28), education (25), young children (23), parenting stress (22), child support (21), infants (18). Research consistently highlights that children raised by single mothers often grapple with a spectrum of challenges encompassing psychological, academic, behavioral, and social spheres. The altered family dynamics and parent-child relationships that arise from the single-parent household structure are intrinsically linked to the psychological well-being of these children. The manifestations of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues in this context are deeply intertwined with these changes, and additional factors play pivotal roles in exacerbating these problems. The academic trajectory of children within single-parent households also warrants scrutiny. Substantial evidence underscores that academic performance is often compromised for these children, compared to their peers from dual-parent families. Moreover, the social implications of growing up in single-parent households cannot be overlooked. Isolation, social withdrawal, and a dearth of essential social skills can crystallize into pronounced social problems for these children. By addressing psychological, academic, behavioral, and social hurdles holistically, society can better equip these children to forge resilient paths toward successful and well-rounded futures.

(4) Social support for single mothers. Keywords include social support (123), welfare (111), welfare reform (82), policy (71), support (61), community (23), and childcare subsidies (18). Social support for single mothers refers to support from various aspects of society, such as family, friends, neighbors, community organizations, and social service agencies. Studies show that single mothers may face a lack of social support, which can lead to physical and mental health problems for them and developmental problems for their children. Social support is an important resource for single mothers, as it can help them better cope with difficulties and improve their quality of life. Therefore, society should provide more support and resources to help single-parent families. Governments and community organizations can provide various types of support and services, such as financial assistance, psychological counseling, and family education. At the same time, society should also strengthen its understanding and recognition of single-parent families, avoid discrimination and prejudice, and help them gain more social support and recognition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that single mother research is highly significant. This research can help us better understand the challenges and issues faced by single mothers, as well as explore how to help them achieve better development. This study analyzed 1543 literature on single mother research and found that the number of papers on the topic has been increasing from 14 in 1998 to 100 in 2022 (Figure 1).

Single mother research covers 79 countries, and a close, comprehensive cooperation network has been formed among them. The North American region, where the United States and Canada are located, is also a core research force in the field of single mother research. A total of 1329 institutions have published papers, with the top 15 institutions each producing more than 30 papers. The University of California System has the highest number of publications, with 72 papers. The journal with the most publications is the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, with a total of 44 papers. The author with the most publications is Herbst CM, with 16 papers, and 8 authors have published more than 10 papers each. Single mother research literature has shown a significant increase in citation frequency in recent years, with a total of 36,624 citations. The average number of citations per paper is 23.74, and the h-index is 83. Through the analysis of clustering networks and high-frequency keywords, the hotspots of "single mother" research mainly focus on four aspects: the psychological health of single mothers, the economic and employment status of single mothers, the children of single mothers, and the social support of single mothers.

This study gives an overview of single mother research and its pertinent aspects by providing an overview of the present research trends. A comprehensive viewpoint on single mother research makes it easier to find relevant academic publications, significant authors, and novel works that might be useful in developing

theoretical frameworks and creating research models in the subject matter. As a result, it serves as an important tool for researchers looking to deepen their comprehension of the many dimensions of single mother research, encouraging continued development in the area.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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