

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT GROUP AS A PANACEA FOR ACADEMIC AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR SINGLE MOTHERS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

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Abstract

This study is premised on the assessment of a community-based approach as a means to help single mothers attain career development. The study engaged single mothers in higher institution (University of Lagos) in a group activity with programmes focused on helping every member to cope with the challenges of parenting and academic/career advancement. The study set two objectives for itself, and they are to assess the relationship between education support group and academic outcome of single mother, and to examine the relationship between engagement in education support group and career development for single parent. Respondents were selected, using a non-survey method to select the respondents due to the uniqueness of the study. The study adopted a snowballing sampling method to select respondents as respondents pointed the researchers in the direction of individuals suitable to the study. 146 mothers were engaged in an experimental study where they were assigned randomly to a group for a period of 10 weeks. Questionnaires were administered to them as a sort of programme evaluation exercise with focus on establishing a linkage between involvement of single mothers in education support group and the attainment of career and academic goals. Data collected were analysed, using frequency tables and percentage, a chi-square analysis was adopted to test the hypotheses of the study. The tool used for the data processing is statistical package for social science and findings show that educational groups indeed have a positive correlation with academic outcome and career development.

Keywords: *Single Mother, Social Support, Educational Group, Mental Health*

Background to the Study

Single motherhood is a phenomenon with numerous challenges. These challenges are amplified by the perceived gender inequality that exists in the society even

before a woman becomes a single parent. Women have been found to rely on men for socio-economic support due to unequal opportunities based on gender and African

traditional role of women. The Parsonian division of labour in the family stressed the expressive domesticated role of women and the instrumental role for men. This made the socio-economic space hostile towards women. Although modernization and the advent of feminism has seen a lenient orientation in the society towards women's active participation in affairs beyond the domestic domain, women are now allowed to school, exercise franchise, and contribute economically. These activities are considered secondary to motherhood. Hence, majority of single mothers are often challenged socio-economically. Single parenting is a kind of family structure whereby a man or a woman independently raises his or her child. Almost 1 in 8 Nigerian children live in a family headed by a single mother (Iniunam, 2018).

Being a single parent for women often leads to stress; the level of stress single parents is faced with is determined by the reason why they became single parent in the first place. For women who became single parent due to widowhood, factors like age, reluctance from the men whom they intend to be remarried to in caring for their children often discouraged them from settling and remarrying.

Also, single motherhood that is caused by childbirth outside of wedlock has cultural implications that shape social perception of them, especially from single men. These factors and more have impact the choice of deliberate single parenthood. Single parents are often unavailable for the supervision of their children, and this makes their children have a high susceptibility to abuse (Antwi, 2014).

In Nigeria, socio-economic status is often linked to education attainment which is a function of the availability of financial muscle (Harkness, 2016). Hence, the single mother requires financial wherewithal to successfully attain higher level of education attainment, which is the reason why they work. However, single mothers struggle to attain career development because they are often subjected to role conflict due to playing numerous roles (Olubi, 2014). The adoption of the role of a student with the multiple roles they are playing can negatively impact their wellbeing and alter their parenting style and process (Ferdinand, 2012). It is, therefore, important for single mothers to have a support system that is premised on the attainment of role management and successful professional development (Oru, 2019).

The social support theory argues that individuals are part of a supportive social network (Huijts, Reeves, McKee, Stuckler, 2015). These supportive resources can be emotive (e.g., nurturance), informational (e.g., advice), or company (e.g., sense of belonging); concrete (e.g., financial assistance) or intangible (e.g., personal advice). Social support can be gauged as the perception of an individual on the assistance available to them, and the degree to which a person is integrated in a social network (Olubi, 2014). Support can come from many sources, such as family, friends, pets, neighbours, co-workers, and organizations. The concept of the perception an individual has of a support structure can also be determined by the condition he or she finds himself or herself (Ferdinand, 2012). The type of support

depends on the need or challenges being experienced by the individual; individual's perception, support available to him or her, and the nature and extent of individual's wherewithal.

The application of the theory to this study is that a single mother can have a perception of resilience from the social support available. Single mothers' social support is often in the form of tangible resources like finance (Oru, 2019). It is also noteworthy that social support can be influenced by institutional factors to a larger extent; the same vein where social support for the elderly is often health wise, due to the conclusion that the primary need of the older population is health, single mothers are often perceived poor, because of factors like economic inequality, to a larger extent placed a limitation on their access to economic opportunities.

Statement of the Problem

Female members of the society are being touted more for marital roles with little or no socio-economic benefits. In cases where they experience family disintegration via divorce, death of a spouse or by having a child outside wedlock, their low socio-economic status often becomes apparent as the struggle to care for themselves and their children becomes difficult. This often leads to reliance on non-governmental organisations, friends, and family for survival. Support structure in Nigeria often comes via poverty alleviation through vocational training with little or no consideration for the hopes and aspirations of the single mother, lack of provision for capital for the business aimed to be started with the vocational skill learned and lack

of mechanism that ensures the continuity of such programmes. Hence, majority of single mothers sought alternative means to survive following the realisation of the weight on their shoulders. Hence, there is the need to further their education for the attainment of a better socio-economic status. Single mothers are often torn between multiple roles, where they must be responsible for their children, be employed to cater for their needs and those of their children and be a student. This study, therefore, investigated the relationship between educational support group and academic and career development among single mothers in post-graduate education in the University of Lagos.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between educational support groups on career development of single mothers, while the specific objectives are to:

- I. Investigate the relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers.
- II. Examine the relationship between participation in educational support group and career development.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- I. What is the relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers?
- II. What is the relationship between participation in educational support group and career development?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- I. There is no significant relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers.
- II. There is no significant difference between participation in educational support group and career development.

Methodology

This study adopted a mix method of quasi-experimental and survey research design as it is aimed at promoting the formation of a social support system for single mothers with aspirations. The method of selection of respondents is a non-survey method called snowballing as respondents were selected based on recommendation. This is because finding respondents was difficult since there was no official data of single mothers in the school of post-graduate studies in the University of Lagos.

The population of the study consisted of 150 single mothers enrolled in post-graduate academic programme in the University of Lagos. The study targeted single mothers who have children between 3–9 years old and were enrolled in a post-graduate programme in the University of Lagos. There was no official data of the marital and parental status of individuals in post-graduate school. Hence, the study relied on referral through snowballing. The sample size for the study was 150 single mothers currently enrolled in post-graduate education in the University of Lagos. Data accessed showed that there were 250 single mothers in post-graduate school in the University of Lagos, only

150 were willing to participate in the study. Assumed factors responsible for the level of participation could be non-recognition of the need for academic assistance (Harkness, 2016).

Using Snowballing, the respondents identified, helped to point the researchers in the direction of other single mothers. This group of people was captured with a questionnaire and was then randomly assigned into 10 support groups comprising of 15 single mothers. The respondents were later randomly assigned to the intervention or control group (75 people in each group). Randomization was done in blocks of 4, with numbers generated by a random-numbers table and sealed in opaque envelopes. The single mothers assigned to the experimental group were required to participate in 10 weeks group session, specifically, 4 hours every weekend, where tutorial, knowledge sharing, and academic materials were distributed. Each participant was encouraged to identify areas where she was being challenged as a single mother, employee, and student and how these roles clashed with one another. The subject of the community was to provide social and educational support for single mothers through sharing of ideas and collective work and improving academic performance of single mothers. Each support group (control group) entailed 15 single mothers making a total of 5 experimental groups. The group sessions were held on weekends to allow the single mother focus on their life during the week and to experiment the strategies discussed during the group session. Group sessions were also held on virtual platforms. To enhance participation in the group

sessions, mothers received weekly phone reminders as well as bus tickets or taxi fare to assist with transportation for physical meetings. In addition, mothers and children attending sessions were given refreshments.

A structured questionnaire was developed and used for the study. A manual was used to guide the structure, content, and implementation of the programme as well as the training of the leaders. Content covered 3 thematic areas: Maternal (e.g., parenting style and parenting process), employment (the impact of academic engagement on employment, working condition and productivity), and Academic (e.g., academic performance, attendance, career choice).

The data gathered in the study were edited and screened for possible errors. The univariate and bivariate variables were tabulated and analyzed. Data generated from the questionnaires was scientifically processed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). For easy computation, close ended responses were be coded into numbers, and open-ended

responses were edited and re-categorized. Chi-Square test was used to test the hypotheses.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Below is the analysis of the findings from the study. A total number of 150 questionnaires were administered, but only 146 were considered good enough for analysis. Means and variances were estimated for selected variables and compared between the intervention and control groups. In addition, a linear regression analysis was used to test differences in outcome measures before and after the semester.

In growth curve analysis, developmental outcomes are modelled as a function of time to establish individual-level trajectories, showing a starting point (baseline) and change per unit of time or growth (slope) for each person. This modelling made it possible to compare differences between the intervention and control groups in their baseline values and the rates of change.

Table 1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20- 29 years	74	50.6
30- 39 years	50	34.3
40-49 years	9	6.2
Total	146	100.0

Ethnicity		
Hausa	10	6.8
Igbo	30	20.5
Yoruba	82	56.3
Others	24	16.4
Total	146	100.0
Employment Status		
Employed	90	61.6
Unemployed	56	38.4
Total	146	100.0
Monthly Income		
Less than N50,000	42	35
N51,000-N100,000	30	25
N101,000-N150,000	10	8.3
N151,000- N200,000	30	25
Above N200,000	8	6.7
Total	120	100.0
Do you have other source(s) of income?		
Yes	68	46.6
No	78	53.4
Total	146	100.0

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by their socio-demographic characteristics. According to the table, most of the respondents (50.6%) were between the ages of 20 – 29 years old, 34.3% were between 30 -39 years of age,

while only 6.2% were 40 – 49 years old, while 8.9% were 50 years and above. The table also shows that 56.3% of the respondents were Yoruba, 20.5% were Igbos, 16.4% of the respondents were recorded as others which means that they

were not members of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, these ethnic groups may be Efik, Ibibio, Kwale, Igbira, etc. only 6.8% of the respondents were Hausas. The table also shows that 61.6% of the respondents were employed, while 38.4% were unemployed. Majority of those that were employed at 35% earned less than ₦50,000 monthly, 25% of the employed population earned ₦51,000 – ₦100,000 monthly, and another 25% of the population earned between ₦152,000 – ₦200,000 monthly, 8.3% of the population earned between ₦101,000 to ₦150,000 monthly. Given that the total number of employees that were employed was 90, one would expect that the frequency of all respondents according to their monthly

income would also be 90, but the table shows that 20 respondents out of those that were unemployed stated their income. This shows that there is a possibility that some of the respondents have access to financial support or they are self-employed and apportioned certain amount of their income as salary. This also implies that the material used for data collection is not comprehensive enough as there should have been an option for “self- Employed” in the employment status section of the questionnaire. The table also shows that 46.6% of the study population was reported to have other sources of income, while 53.4% did not have other sources of income.

Table 2: between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
How do you fund your academics?		
Myself	56	38.4
My family	19	13.2
Education loan	43	29.4
NGOs	20	13.6
Others (specify)	8	5.4
Total	146	100.0
What type of academic program are you enrolled for?		
Full time		
Part time	71	48.7
Distance Learning	13	8.9
	62	42.4

Total	146	100.0
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In what ways is being a single mother affecting your career development?

Financial	120	82.2
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Time	3	2.1
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Inability to meet academic deadlines	23	15.7
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Total	146	100.0
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Has being a member of a support group helped you cope with these challenges?

Yes	138	94.5
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No	8	5.5
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Total	146	100.0
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In what ways has the education support group helped you cope with your academics?

Meeting deadlines for assignment	91	62.4
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Exam preparation	45	30.8
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Being punctual for classes	10	6.8
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Total	146	100.0
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What other benefits have you been able to get from the educational group?

Employment opportunities	35	24
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Financial support	60	41
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Social relationships	31	21.3
Other (specify)	20	13.7
Total	146	100.0

I get information about other professional courses that can advance my career through my educational support group.

Yes	126	86.4
No	20	13.6
Total	146	100.0

Has the educational support group influenced your academics positively?

Yes	126	86.4
No	20	13.6
Total	146	100.0

Table 2 above shows the distribution of respondents by the relationship between engagement in an educational group and career development for single mothers. According to the table, 38.4% of the study population asserted that they were self-funding their academics. The foregoing connotes that majority of the respondents have a source of income responsible for the financial requirement of caring for their children, for themselves and their education. Although, the source of funding for a single mother could be from numerous support systems like the immediate family, employment, father of the child, and other social relationships. However, since the study is more focused

on support that enables the attainment of academic and career support, questions along the trajectory of external source of income did not feature as none of the primary variables of the study requires data along this line. 29.4% of the population asserted that their academic activities were a function of education loan, 13.2% were supported by their family. The table also shows that there are non-governmental organisations that support single mothers with sponsorship in terms of education as 13.6% were in this category. The least representation is those in other forms of support as they constituted 5.4% of the population. The table also shows that responses along the

trajectory of the specific benefit respondents got from education support groups as regards their academic led to the understanding that majority of the respondents at 62.4% were supported in meeting deadlines for assignment. This is a subject of the creation of study groups within each educational group created, engaging one another on tips to carryout assessments, creation of deadlines for assignment submission where all group members were reminded of the time. It is noteworthy that all respondents have certain element of resilience when it came to academics and career development. Hence, support was premised on the attainment of resilience in areas where they fell short, due to role conflict, negative spill/cross over. This was expected to form the basis for their latent factor behind their engagement in a support group. This can be said to be responsible for 30.8% of the study population who opined that the educational support group helped them to prepare adequately for their exams, and 6.8% said it helped them to be punctual for

class, this was partly due to the reminder every group is tasked to do concerning every class and the provision of logistics support to make classes. Other functions of the group along the trajectory of academic and career development were the creation of awareness on affordable means of career development through professional courses that was cheap, networking for employment opportunities, scholarship opportunities and other elements of social relationships. Hence, 41% of the study population asserted that they get financial support from their groups, 24% said that they get employment opportunities, 21.3% said they had access to social relationships, while other benefits were recorded by 13.7% of the population. The same statistics was found to have represented the opinion of the respondents on the impact of the education support group on respondents' academics. Hence, it can be assumed that the level of benefits and individuals got from an educational support group was a subject of their level of involvement.

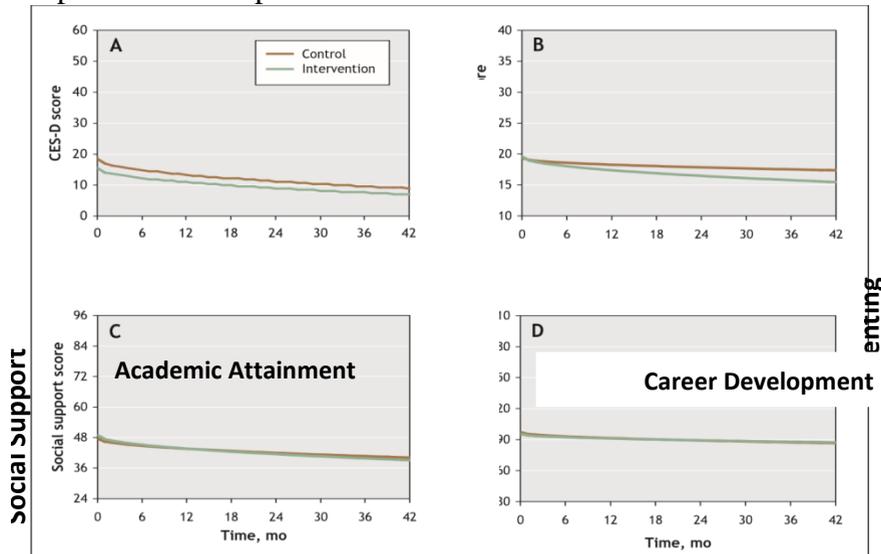


Fig. 2: Growth curves for changes in Academic attainment (A), Career development (B), social support (C) and parenting (D). CES-D = Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale. For details about the scales and score ranges see the online appendix at www.cmaj.ca/cgi/con-

The estimated growth curves showing changes in functioning over time and the differences between the intervention and control groups at baseline and at the third follow-up assessment (mean 20.2 months after baseline) are presented in an online table. Both the intervention and the control groups showed improvements in all 4 measures of functioning, with no statistically significant differences between them. For example, at baseline, the adjusted mean mood scores in the

control and intervention groups were 18.38 and 15.44 respectively, for a difference of 2.94. By the third follow-up visits, these estimates were 12.22 and 9.92 respectively, for a difference of 2.30. The rate of change in mood from baseline to the third follow-up visits was -1.45 in the control group and -1.30 in the intervention group, for a difference of 0.15. Fig. 2 illustrates the growth curve models for the 4 measures of functioning.

Table 2: Estimated mean scores for outcome measures at baseline and at follow-up assessments*

Outcome†	Estimated mean scores (SD)							
	Baseline		First follow-up visit‡		Second follow-up visit‡		Third follow-up visit‡	
	Intervention n=59	Control n=57	Intervention n=53	Control n=48	Intervention n=51	Control n=41	Intervention n=50	Control n=33
Academic attainment			17.0 (12.0)		19.1 (13.1)		17.8 (11.7)	16.1 (11.3)
Career development	24.1 (11.4)	24.2 (12.5)	22.0 (12.6)	20.2 (5.6)	17.1 (12.8)	19.9 (4.5)	19.8 (5.8)	
	22.6 (4.9)	21.7 (5.5)	20.8 (4.2)	21.0 (5.4)	19.9 (5.6)			
Social support	49.4 (10.3)	48.2 (11)	46.0 (13.2)	44.4 (1)	42.9 (11.3)	42.7 (11.9)	42.7 (11.3)	42.3 (10.0)
Parenting	98.1 (19.8)	96.6 (19)	92.0 (19.6)	92.3 (1)	93.0 (19.0)	91.5 (19.5)	91.9 (19.9)	90.2 (20.8)

Note: SD = standard deviation.

***See the online appendix (at www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/173/12/1451/DC1) for details about the outcome measures.**

†All outcomes were scored to reflect poor functioning (higher score is worse).

‡Mean 7.0 (SD 3.5) months from baseline to first follow-up visit (after intervention period); mean 13.7 (SD 4.1) months from baseline to second follow-up visit; mean

Sample losses at the third follow-up assessment differed between the 2 groups (intervention 15% [9/59] v. control 42% [24/57]). The researchers investigated this difference using logistic regression analysis and modelled nonresponse at the third follow-up assessment as a binary outcome (1 = response, 0 = nonresponse). The predictors included in the model were the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and their baseline functioning scores. The only predictor significant at $p < 0.05$ was group allocation (intervention v. control).

Hypothesis One

Has being a member of a support group helped you cope with these challenges?	Has the educational support group influenced your academics positively?		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	5 (8.2%)	56 (91.8%)	61 (100.0%)
No	80 (94.2%)	5 (5.8%)	85 (100.0%)
Total	85 (6.8%)	61 (93.1%)	146 (100.0%)
$\chi^2 = 3.241^a$, $d.f = 4$, $p \text{ value} = 0.02$			

H₀: There is no significant relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers.

Table1: Relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among single mothers

Table 5.2.1 reveals that the calculated value (χ^2) is 3.241^a and the ‘p’ value is 0.02, which is lower than the level of significance of 0.05. Hence, the Null Hypothesis (H₀) is rejected while the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁) is accepted. This implies that there is a significance relationship between educational support groups and academic attainment among

single mothers. This is in line with the findings of Akannam (2015) that community approach to the identification needs and the intervention strategy to meet those needs have been found to be sustainable.

Hypothesis Two

H₀ = There is no relationship between participation in educational support group and career development.

H₁ = There is a relationship between participation in educational support group and career development.

Table 2: Relationship between participation in educational support group and

Has being a member of a support group helped you cope with these challenges?	I get information about other professional courses that can advance my career through my educational support group.		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	95 (95%)	5 (5%)	100 (100.0%)
No	26 (56.5%)	20 (43.5%)	46 (100.0%)
Total	118 (34.9%)	28 (55.7%)	146 (100.0%)
$X^2 = 7.271^a$, $d.f = 5$, $p \text{ value} = 0.003$			

career development

The table above shows that the calculated value (X^2) is 7.271^a and the 'p' value is 0.003, which is lower than the level of significance of 0.05. Hence, the Null Hypothesis (H_0) is rejected while the Alternative Hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This implies that there is a significance relationship between participation in educational support group and career development

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the results from our randomized controlled trial indicate that participation in this community-based programme of group sessions offering educational support to single mothers accelerated improvements in career and academic outcomes during the intervention phase but had no significant differential effect on levels of social support or parenting. Although, this is an area the study was not premised on, but it will be ideal if a group can encompass all areas that a single parent needs support. This will help streamline the level of engagement of a single mother and increased the level of engagement instead of having to alternate between several groups for different purposes.

The study adopted a communal approach to the provision of support to vulnerable single mothers of young children that were randomly assigned to participate in group sessions offering educational support. From the study, it was discovered that the programme significantly improved academic and professional outcomes. This finding may indicate a generalized response among the mothers' consistent with a natural descent from peak periods of stress and conflict observed at enlistment.

Our study had limitations; the outcome of the educational group is perceived to have been greatly influenced by the fact that all respondents are from the same educational institution (University of Lagos) and are residence of the same state (Lagos). Hence, activities were aimed at provision of support to meet assessment, engage course adviser and lecturers who recognise and applauded the initiative. In cases where respondents are from different group, instances where there will be withdrawal, lack of interest in group participation, and low turnout may be witnessed.

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