

Single Mothers' Strategies in Internalizing Moral Values in Children: A Phenomenological Study in Sembahe Baru Village, Deli Serdang

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Abstract

This study examines the strategies employed by single mothers to internalize moral values in their children, while also exploring the challenges they face and the solutions they develop in the parenting process. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method and was conducted in Sembahe Baru Village, Deli Serdang Regency. The research informants consisted of four single mothers with school-aged children, four children, and one community leader, all of whom were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that the internalization of moral values is carried out through behavioral role modeling, the habituation of moral and religious practices, and the strengthening of warm emotional relationships between mothers and children. The main challenges faced by single mothers include limited time, physical exhaustion, and economic pressure. Nevertheless, single mothers are able to overcome these challenges through adaptive strategies, such as making effective use of quality time, building contextual communication, and maintaining consistency in values within the parenting process. This study concludes that the quality of parenting and maternal role modeling play a more decisive role in shaping children's moral development than the mere completeness of the family structure.

Keywords: Single Motherhood, Moral Values Internalization, Family Education, Child-Rearing, Role Modeling

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Introduction

The family is the first environment where children learn to understand values, attitudes, and behaviors through continuous interaction. Family education not only addresses cognitive development but also plays a crucial role in shaping children's morals and character in everyday life [1]. Within this context, mothers play a strategic role because of their intensive and consistent interactions with children. This role becomes increasingly complex when mothers are required to assume the responsibilities of single parenthood.

Single mothers bear dual responsibilities as both primary caregivers and family breadwinners within the family. This condition often leads to time constraints, physical exhaustion, and psychological pressure, which may influence parenting patterns and educational practices within the family [2]. Nevertheless, structural limitations do not necessarily hinder the success of moral education. When parenting is carried out consistently and grounded in strong values, children's moral development can still be effectively nurtured [3]. Within Islamic education, moral education is grounded in a strong normative foundation. The Qur'an emphasizes the nobility of the Prophet Muhammad's character as the ultimate model of moral excellence, as stated in QS. Al-Qalam (68): 4,

وَأَنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

“And indeed, you are of a great moral character.”

QS. Al-Qalam (68): 4

This verse highlights that morality lies at the core of human personality and serves as a fundamental pillar of Islamic education [4]. Consequently, the principle of role modeling becomes particularly relevant within single-mother families, where mothers serve as the central figures in instilling moral values in their children.

The phenomenon of single-mother households in Indonesia has shown a growing trend. Data from the Central Statistics Agency indicate that households headed by women constitute a significant component of contemporary social dynamics and require particular attention, especially in relation to children's education and moral development [5]. This social reality underscores the urgency of examining how single mothers navigate their parenting roles under conditions of limitation.

Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth and contextual examination of the strategies employed by single mothers to internalize moral values in their children. Such a study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of family-based moral education, particularly within single-mother households, while also providing insights into effective parenting practices despite structural and socio-economic challenges.

Literature Review

The internalization of moral values is a gradual process through which moral principles are instilled and eventually become an integral part of an individual's attitudes and behavior. This process involves stages of value recognition, habituation, and reinforcement in daily life [6]. Within the family context, the internalization of values occurs primarily through continuous and direct interaction between parents and children [7].

From the perspective of Islamic education, morality is understood as a manifestation of faith that is expressed through observable behavior. Moral education not only emphasizes the cognitive understanding of right and wrong but also focuses on developing moral awareness and cultivating positive behavioral habits [8]. Therefore, parental role modeling is considered one of the most effective approaches in children's moral education. The Qur'an further emphasizes the responsibility of parents in educating and safeguarding their families, as stated in QS. At-Tahrim (66): 6 [9].

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire.”

QS. At-Tahrim (66): 6

This verse indicates that moral education constitutes a fundamental responsibility of parents. It does not depend on the completeness of the family structure but rather on parental commitment, awareness, and consistency in guiding children [10].

Furthermore, the family is widely recognized as the primary environment exerting a dominant influence on the formation of children's values and character. Intensive and repeated interactions between parents and children enable a deeper and more meaningful internalization of values compared to interactions in other social environments. In this regard, the quality of emotional relationships within the family plays a crucial role in determining the success of children's moral education [11].

Previous studies have shown that parenting patterns emphasizing emotional closeness, open communication, and consistency in values contribute positively to children's moral and personality development. Children raised in family environments characterized by warm emotional relationships tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation, higher levels of empathy, and stronger moral awareness [12]. These findings suggest that moral education is not solely dependent on verbal instruction but is strongly influenced by the quality of daily interactions within the family.

In the context of single-mother families, the internalization of moral values often takes place under various conditions of limitation. However, such limitations do not necessarily result in negative outcomes for children's moral development. Several studies indicate that single mothers who possess strong parenting resilience are able to develop effective and adaptive parenting strategies for instilling moral and religious values in their children [13]. This resilience is reflected in their ability to manage economic, emotional, and social pressures without neglecting their educational responsibilities within the family.

Moreover, moral education within the family is closely associated with the consistent practice of religious habits. Religious practices internalized from an early age, such as worship, prayer, and religious attitudes in daily life, serve as effective mediums for character building and self-control in children [14]. These practices not only strengthen spiritual development but also reinforce values of discipline, responsibility, and patience.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that the internalization of moral values within the family, including single-mother households, is a multidimensional process influenced by parental role modeling, the quality of emotional relationships, adaptive parenting strategies, and the consistent internalization of religious values. This conceptual framework provides an essential foundation for understanding the strategies employed by single mothers in internalizing moral values in their children in specific social contexts.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have tended to position single mothers as a general object of analysis. Therefore, further contextual research is needed to highlight the concrete strategies employed by single mothers in internalizing moral values in children within specific social and cultural environments.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically using a phenomenological method, to gain an in-depth understanding of single mothers' lived experiences in internalizing moral values in their children [15]. The research focused on the strategies adopted by single mothers, the challenges they faced, and the solutions they developed in their daily parenting practices. The study was conducted in Sembaha Baru Village, Deli Serdang Regency.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in parenting and the relevance of their experiences to the study's objectives [16]. A total of nine informants participated in the study: four single mothers, four school-aged children, and one community leader. The primary criteria for selecting single mothers included residing in Sembaha Baru Village for more than three years and having school-aged children, ensuring sufficient experience in local parenting practices. The children interviewed were directly raised

by single mothers, while the community leader was included to provide additional perspectives on social conditions and parenting practices in the community.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews to comprehensively explore parenting practices, the habituation of moral values, and the dynamics of mother-child relationships. Data analysis was conducted interactively, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as outlined by Miles and Huberman [17]. To ensure data validity, source triangulation and member checking were employed, confirming the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Results

1. Single Mother's Strategies in Internalizing Moral Values

The findings of this study indicate that single mothers in Sembahe Baru Village internalize moral values in their children through parenting practices that are natural, contextually relevant, and continuous. The process of value internalization does not follow rigid or formal instructional approaches; instead, it is seamlessly integrated into daily interactions between mothers and children. Moral values are introduced and reinforced through simple yet meaningful daily activities, including how mothers communicate, behave, and respond to situations their children face.

Based on interview data, single mothers tend to emphasize behavioral role modeling over verbal instruction. Mothers consistently exhibit honesty, patience, responsibility, and discipline in various situations, including times of physical fatigue or economic pressure. These behaviors serve as effective learning models, allowing children to directly observe how moral values are practiced in real-life situations. Through continuous observation and imitation, children gradually learn proper ways to behave, manage their emotions, and respond to challenges calmly and responsibly.

Children raised by single mothers tend to emulate the positive behaviors modeled by their mothers. This is reflected in their participation in religious activities, willingness to help with household tasks, and respectful attitudes toward elders. These values are gradually and consistently internalized through close and emotionally supportive mother-child relationships. Such emotional closeness enables children to accept moral values without coercion, facilitating deeper and more enduring internalization.

These findings are supported by insights from community leaders, who noted that the limited time and multiple roles of single mothers do not diminish their commitment to their children's moral education. Instead, the moral examples demonstrated by mothers in daily life are perceived as the primary factors shaping children's politeness, patience, and sense of responsibility.

Overall, the findings suggest that moral education in single-mother families is largely shaped by the intensity and quality of mother-child interactions, rather than by strict supervision or formal control [18]. Analytically, behavioral role modeling emerges as the most effective strategy for internalizing moral values in single-mother families. Children do not merely learn moral concepts or rules; instead, they internalize values through repeated, direct experiences in daily life. These findings align with Ismaraidah's (2016) assertion that role modeling is at the core of moral education within the family context [19]. This principle also has a strong normative foundation in Islamic teachings, as emphasized in QS. Al-Ahzab (33): 21:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

“Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for those who hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah often.”

QS. Al-Ahzab (33): 21

This verse underscores that the Prophet Muhammad represents the ultimate moral exemplar for all of humanity. In single-mother families, the mother serves as the closest and most influential figure in shaping her children's behavior and character.

2. The Habit of Worship as a Medium for Character Building

The habit of worship is an essential part of internalizing moral values in children within single-mother families. Findings reveal that mothers consciously and consistently guide their children to perform prayers, recite supplications, and engage in simple religious practices at home. Despite work and economic pressures, worship remains an integral part of children's daily routines.

Interview data indicate that mothers view religious practices as a foundational element in shaping their children's discipline, responsibility, and moral awareness. Children are encouraged to recognize prayer times, respond to the call to prayer, and participate in worship alongside their mothers. This habituation occurs gradually and repeatedly, helping children perceive worship not as a burdensome obligation but as a meaningful and integral part of daily life.

From the children's perspective, the religious practices instilled by their mothers are seen as expressions of care, guidance, and emotional support. Children feel supported and accompanied in performing acts of worship, fostering positive emotional bonds with their mothers. These findings suggest that religious practices influence not only spiritual development but also help cultivate calm, disciplined, and responsible behaviors in daily life.

Community leaders also observed that children from single-mother families in Sembaha Baru Village demonstrate strong discipline in participating in religious activities within their communities. Such involvement reflects consistent religious habituation practiced within the family environment, highlighting that the role of single mothers in religious education remains significant despite the limitations they face.

Analytically, the habit of worship serves not merely as a ritual but also as a medium for developing character traits such as discipline, patience, responsibility, and self-control. This finding aligns with the teachings of Allah SWT in QS. Luqman (31): 17:

يٰٓبُنَيَّ اَقِمِ الصَّلٰوةَ وَاْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاَنْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاصْبِرْ عَلٰى مَا اَصَابَكَ اِنَّ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْاُمُوْر ﴿١٧﴾

“O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, that is among the matters requiring determination.”

Qs. Luqman(31): 17

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized instilling the habit of worship from an early age, stating: “Command your children to pray when they are seven years old, discipline them if they neglect it at ten, and separate their beds.” (HR. Abu Dawud) [20]

These findings are further supported by Siregar (2019), who asserts that children's character development is strongly shaped by the consistent practice of religious values within the family [21].

3. Challenges and Solutions in the Internalization of Moral Values

The findings indicate that single mothers encounter various challenges in internalizing moral values in their children. The most prominent challenges include limited time due to economic demands, physical exhaustion from their dual roles as caregivers and breadwinners, and emotional pressures arising from daily life. If not managed effectively, these conditions could reduce the intensity of maternal guidance.

Interview data reveal that time constraints are the primary challenge faced by single mothers. Nevertheless, mothers strive to remain actively involved in their children's lives by maximizing the quality of the time they spend together. Ordinary moments, such as shared meals, bedtime routines, or household activities, are intentionally utilized as opportunities to

instill moral values. Children also demonstrate understanding of their mothers' circumstances and continue to feel cared for through consistent and warm communication.

Community leaders acknowledge that the limitations experienced by single mothers are an unavoidable social reality. However, these constraints do not necessarily hinder moral education when mothers maintain open communication, foster emotional closeness, and consistently demonstrate positive behaviors. These findings reinforce the notion that the quality of interaction and role modeling is more decisive than the sheer quantity of time spent together.

Analytically, the solutions implemented by single mothers are adaptive and contextually grounded. Using everyday moments as opportunities for moral education, strengthening emotional communication, and maintaining consistency in role modeling emerge as key strategies for overcoming structural limitations within the family. These findings are consistent with Rahmawati and Hakim (2024), who emphasize that parenting resilience among single mothers is reflected in their ability to manage life pressures without compromising the internalization of values in children [11]. This principle is further supported by the message conveyed in QS. Al-Insyirah (94): 5–6:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

“Indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.”

QS. Al-Insyirah (94): 5–6

This verse emphasizes that challenges faced by single mothers do not constitute absolute barriers to moral education. Through consistent effort, patience, and commitment, single mothers retain significant capacity to effectively internalize moral values within the family.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that single mothers employ strategies for internalizing moral values in their children through behavioral role modeling, religious habituation, and the strengthening of warm emotional relationships. These findings confirm that moral education within the family is not solely determined by the completeness of the family structure but is more strongly influenced by the quality and consistency of parenting practices.

Behavioral role modeling emerges as the most dominant factor in shaping children's character. Children learn values such as honesty, patience, and responsibility not through abstract verbal instruction but through direct observation of their mothers' attitudes in responding to daily life challenges. This finding supports the Islamic educational perspective, which emphasizes that character formation occurs through habituation and concrete examples in everyday life.

Consistent religious practices also play a strategic role in building children's moral and value systems. Religious activities function not only as ritual obligations but also as mechanisms for cultivating discipline, self-control, and emotional stability. In single-mother families, religious habituation represents an effective adaptive strategy, as it can be implemented continuously despite constraints related to time and physical energy.

Furthermore, emotional closeness between mothers and children is a crucial factor in the successful internalization of moral values. Warm, communicative relationships enable children to accept values voluntarily rather than through coercion, resulting in deeper and more sustainable internalization. These findings suggest that emotional quality within the family can compensate for structural limitations often associated with single-mother households.

Overall, this study reinforces previous research indicating that the resilience of single mothers is reflected in their capacity to manage life pressures without neglecting their educational roles within the family. Adaptive, contextually grounded, and role-model-based parenting strategies constitute key elements in the successful internalization of moral values in children. Consequently, the findings contribute to a broader understanding of family-based moral education, particularly within single-mother contexts.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that single mothers play a crucial and strategic role in the internalization of moral values in their children. The main strategies employed include daily behavioral role modeling, habituation to moral and religious practices, and the cultivation of warm emotional relationships between mothers and children. Among these strategies, maternal role modeling emerges as the most effective, as children learn moral values directly from the real-life examples they observe and experience daily.

The habit of worship, including prayer and supplication, serves not only as a religious practice but also as a means of fostering children's discipline, responsibility, patience, and emotional stability. Although single mothers face various challenges, such as limited time, economic pressures, and physical exhaustion, these obstacles do not entirely hinder the process of moral education. Instead, single mothers demonstrate the ability to overcome these challenges through adaptive parenting strategies that prioritize quality time, contextual communication, and consistency in transmitting values.

Overall, this study confirms that the quality of parenting and maternal role modeling has a greater impact on the development of children's character than the completeness of the family structure. These findings underscore the importance of reinforcing family-based moral education practices, particularly in supporting single mothers in their crucial role as primary educators within the family.

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