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**MANAGING PROBLEMS AND PRESSURES  
FACING SINGLE MOTHERS IN MANAGEMENT  
AND PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS  
IN SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS**

by

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**This research is dedicated to my parents:**

**Professor David Akinnusi and Mrs Grace Akinnusi**

**Your motivation and love for education has led me  
to where I am today.**

**Thank you both from the bottom of my heart.**



## DECLARATION

I, Olubukunola Akinnusi Sonubi, declare that *Managing problems and pressures facing single mothers in management and professional occupations in South African organisations* is my own work, both in content and execution. All the resources I used in this study are cited and referred to in the reference list by means of a comprehensive referencing system. Apart from the support and guidance from my study leader, I have received no assistance, except as stated in the acknowledgements.

I declare that the content of this thesis has never been used before for any qualification at any tertiary institution.

I, Olubukunola Akinnusi Sonubi, declare that the language in this thesis was edited by Idette Noomé (MA English Pret).

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Olubukunola Akinnusi Sonubi

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Date

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## **SUMMARY**

### **Managing problems and pressures facing single mothers in management and professional occupations in South African organisations**

by

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The phenomenal feminisation of the South African labour force since the first democratic elections in 1994 is a result of the new democratic government's efforts to transform South African society into a just, non-discriminatory and non-sexist society. This has, however, heightened several serious psycho-social problems facing working women, especially single working mothers, as they struggle to balance work and home responsibilities.

The study was undertaken, firstly, to develop a valid and reliable measuring instrument to survey the problems and pressures experienced by single mothers in management and professional occupations in South Africa and, secondly, to obtain data on single working mothers' perceptions about the resources they believe would assist them to mitigate the negative effects of the work-home conflict.

To achieve these objectives, an exploratory, sequential, mixed method design was employed within a feminist perspective:

First, based on the information obtained from theoretical and empirical data about the problems and perceived support of working mothers, semi-structured interviews were held with 17 women in management and professional occupations (ten women in dual-career families and seven single working mothers).

Then, on the basis of the interviews, a questionnaire was developed that was piloted among 30 experts and developed according to Lawshe's principles. This questionnaire was called the Work-Family Pressure and Support Questionnaire (W-FPSQ). It was used in conjunction with the Overall Stress Index (OSI) and the Coping Behaviour Index (CBI) to determine the relationship and effect of supportive resources and coping behaviour on the work-family pressure and stress experienced by a purposive convenience sample of 104 single and 101 dual-career mothers (n=205).

For the purposes of this study, descriptive, comparative, associational and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data, using SPSS for Windows, Release 17. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), with varimax rotation, was employed to explore the internal structure and validity of the W-FPSQ, the OSI, and the CBI. The reliability of the questionnaires was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each scale of the measures. The results indicated that the three questionnaires were sufficiently reliable and valid to capture the present sample of working mothers' experience of work-family pressures and stress and to discover the resources they perceived as supporting them in coping with work and family demands.

The comparison of the 104 single working mothers with the 101 married working mothers showed that the single mothers' mean rank scores were significantly lower than those of their married counterparts on the five support scales and on the coping behaviour scale, and significantly higher on the work-family pressure and stress scales.

The computed logistic regression model indicated that management support, organisational flexibility, time for family interaction, work-family pressure and stress were a set of variables that distinguished reliably between the single and married mothers in the sample.

The study has clearly confirmed Gill and Davidson's (2001:397) proposition that single working mothers are a 'distinct group facing unique problems and pressures, and deserve to be recognized as such'. The problems they face as captured in this study demand a multi-pronged approach requiring organisations to provide management support, opportunities for personal growth and career development, work flexibility, time for family interaction and childcare facilities. These resources and a work-family-friendly environment will improve their work attitudes, job performance and well-being. Considering the proportion of single mothers in the society and the impact of their status on their children's development, the issue of single working mothers and their needs deserves urgent attention.

Keywords: Single working mothers; Coping strategies; Personal growth; Management support; Social support and Stress.

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