

Double the Love, Double the Duty: Supporting Solo Parents Navigating Recreation for Their Child with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the unique challenges faced by solo parents in accessing and providing recreational opportunities for their children with disabilities. Solo parents, who are solely responsible for the care and upbringing of their children without the support of a co-parent, often encounter significant time constraints, financial barriers, and a lack of inclusive programming when trying to facilitate recreational activities for their children with special needs. We derived this article from publications in various journals. We carefully studied over a hundred papers and referenced a few of them while applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. Specialized equipment, tailored programs, and accessible facilities are necessary for these children to fully engage in recreation, which can add to the already burdensome workload of single parents. Furthermore, single parents may experience higher levels of stress, burnout, and social isolation, further limiting their capacity to prioritize and participate in recreational activities with their children. The paper delves into the complexities of these challenges, highlighting the importance of recreation for the developmental, social, and emotional well-being of children with disabilities and the unique obstacles single parents face in accessing such opportunities. It examines the broader barriers to recreational inclusion, such as inaccessible facilities, inadequate staff training, and the emphasis on competitive sports, which can exclude children with varying abilities. The study ultimately shed light on this underexplored issue and informed the development of targeted support systems and inclusive recreational programs to better serve solo parents and their children with disabilities.

Keywords: Solo (Single) parents, children with disabilities, recreation, inclusion, barriers, support systems

1. INTRODUCTION

Setting the Stage

Solo parents are individuals who are solely responsible for the care and upbringing of their children, without the support of a co-parent. Children with disabilities often have unique recreational needs, such as specialized equipment, tailored programs, and accessible facilities. ^(1,2) Recreation is vital for these children, providing developmental, social, and emotional benefits that support their overall well-being ^(3,4) However, solo parents face distinct challenges in accessing appropriate recreational opportunities for their children with disabilities, including time constraints, financial barriers, and a lack of inclusive programming.

Aloro et al. ⁽⁵⁾ define solo parents as those who alone nurture their children and encounter distinct problems that impact their well-being. Furthermore, they encountered the difficulties endured by lone parents and heightened awareness among pertinent groups regarding these issues. Challenges including managing financial obligations, parenting, and childcare responsibilities, experiencing stress, worry, and social isolation, as well as allocating time for personal needs. Assistance for single parents is essential, encompassing social networks and community resources. Extensive support services and community programs can augment aid for single parents in their capacity as family providers.

In 2019, the Philippines implemented the Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act to provide more support and

assistance to single parents. Due to this, the government has implemented a number of policies in each province that will direct its agency toward carrying out the policies.⁽⁶⁾ Consequently, all its agencies will provide valuable insights to policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders, enabling them to further refine and strengthen the Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act. Everyone's involvement is essential to support and cater for single parents with children with special needs, enabling them to navigate reactional activities for their children.

The Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act, enacted in the Philippines in 2019, seeks to furnish enhanced support and aid to single parents. The Act encompasses several essential policies and benefits, including:

The Act requires the provision of monetary grants, educational subsidies, and livelihood initiatives to qualified solitary parents to alleviate their financial challenges.

The Act mandates the formation of support groups and counseling services to cater to the emotional and mental health requirements of lone parents.

The Act mandates the establishment of parenting education and skills training programs to assist single parents in efficiently managing the problems of child-rearing.

The Act requires companies to offer flexible work arrangements, paid leave, and additional accommodations to assist single parents in managing their work and family obligations.

The primary objective of this review is to bring awareness to key stakeholders, government agencies, NGOs, and future researchers about the pressing challenges faced by solo parents of children with disabilities. By highlighting the gaps identified in previous studies, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concerns and challenges encountered by this vulnerable population.

Importantly, the review seeks to offer practical solutions and recommendations to assist solo parents in navigating the complexities of raising children with disabilities. The goal is to empower these parents by informing them about the available government support and resources, thereby motivating them to access the necessary aid and services.

Through this approach, the review hopes to facilitate a more comprehensive and coordinated effort to address the unique needs of solo parents and their children with disabilities. By bridging the identified gaps, the review aspires to contribute to the development of more effective policies, programs, and community-based initiatives that can truly make a meaningful difference in the lives of this underserved demographic.

2. REVIEW PARAMETERS

This article is compiled from papers in several journals, focusing on single parents, recreational activities for children with disabilities, and support networks. We considered all the publications incorporated in the primary methodology. We meticulously analyzed more than one hundred publications and cited many while implementing inclusion and exclusion criteria. The evaluation required more than four months for completion, spanning from March to August 2024. In this literature review, the authors identified pertinent journals online and performed several literature searches in databases including Publon, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar. We acquired books and published papers from several print periodicals.

3. DISCUSSION

Unique Challenges Faced by Solo Parents: Painting the Picture

Some may argue that solo parents of children with disabilities do not face unique challenges in accessing recreational opportunities. They may claim that all parents, regardless of their marital or parental status, face similar barriers such as time constraints, financial limitations, and a lack of inclusive programming. Furthermore, they could suggest that solo parents may actually have more flexibility in their schedules and decision-making, allowing them to more easily coordinate and participate in recreational activities with their children.⁽⁵⁾

However, the research paints a more complex picture. Solo parents of children with disabilities often experience significant time deficits and financial strains that can significantly constrain their ability to engage in recreational activities with their children.^(7,8) These time and financial limitations stem from the unique challenges solo parents face, such as juggling work, childcare, and household responsibilities without the support of a co-parent.⁽⁹⁾ Additionally, the costs associated with their child's specialized needs, including adaptive equipment, tailored programs, and accessible transportation, can create significant financial barriers that limit their capacity to prioritize and facilitate recreational opportunities.^(10,11) The combination of these time and financial pressures can make it overwhelmingly difficult for solo parents to find the necessary resources and flexibility to regularly participate in recreational activities with their children.

Research has shown these parents are more likely to have lower incomes, less education, and younger ages

compared to their counterparts in two-parent households. The additional responsibilities of being the sole caregiver can also lead to higher levels of stress and burnout. ⁽¹²⁾ further impacting their capacity to pursue recreational activities. ⁽¹³⁾

Additionally, solo parents may face significant social isolation and lack of support networks, which can further compound the challenges of accessing and participating in recreational opportunities. These parents often lack the community connections and family support systems that two-parent households may have access to, leaving them to navigate the complexities of their child's disabilities and the demands of single parenthood in relative isolation. According to a study conducted in an advanced country, solo parents of children with disabilities reported higher levels of stress, burnout, and social isolation compared to their counterparts in two-parent families. ^(14,15,16) The combination of these factors can make it overwhelmingly difficult for solo parents to prioritize and engage in recreational activities with their children. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Barriers to Recreational Inclusion: Examining the Challenges

Children with disabilities often face significant barriers to participating in community recreation programs. Some of the key challenges include:

Lack of accessible facilities and equipment: Many recreational spaces and activities are not designed with the needs of children with disabilities in mind, making it difficult for them to fully engage and participate. ^(18,19,20)

Staff training and attitudes: Frontline staff may lack the necessary training and awareness to effectively support and include children with disabilities, leading to negative attitudes and exclusionary practices. ^(21,22)

Emphasis on competitive sports: Many community recreation programs focus primarily on competitive sports, which may not be suitable or appealing for children with varying abilities and needs. ⁽²³⁾

Social and behavioral challenges: Children with disabilities may face difficulty in developing the necessary social and behavioral skills to navigate and thrive in group recreational settings. ^(24,25) These social and behavioral challenges can create significant obstacles for children with disabilities, preventing them from accessing and fully participating in community recreational activities. ^(26,27,28)

⁽²⁹⁾ theory underscores that the social constructivist perspective shapes children's learning and development through their social and cultural environments, not solely through individual cognitive processes. This is particularly relevant for children with disabilities, who may face unique social and behavioral challenges in inclusive settings. The paper argues that addressing these social and behavioral challenges requires a shift toward more collaborative, culturally responsive, and socially situated teaching practices aligned with social constructivist principles. This can help create inclusive environments that better support the learning and social development of children with disabilities.



Fig 1: Solo parents with a child with special needs (source: Fadare et al., 2024)

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING INCLUSIVE RECREATION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

To address the unique challenges faced by solo parents of children with disabilities in accessing recreational opportunities, a multifaceted and holistic approach is necessary.

Enhancing program accessibility and inclusivity: Recreational programs should prioritize the implementation of universal design principles, ensuring that facilities, equipment, and activities are accessible and accommodating to children with diverse abilities. ^(30,26) These barriers can be particularly daunting for solo parents, who may have limited time, resources, and support networks to advocate for and facilitate their child's inclusion in recreational activities. Solo parents of children with disabilities face a daunting challenge in providing recreational opportunities for their families. Juggling work, childcare, and household duties leaves little time for fun and relaxation, while the financial burden of specialized equipment and programs creates significant barriers. ^(31,32)

Adding to this struggle is the scarcity of accessible and inclusive recreational options that accommodate both the child's needs and the parent's unique circumstances. Consequently, solo parents often find themselves socially and emotionally isolated, lacking the support networks needed to facilitate quality family time and leisure activities. Despite these overwhelming obstacles, solo parents strive to ensure their children with disabilities can enjoy the joy and benefits of play. Innovative solutions and community-based support are essential to empower these families and break down the barriers to recreational inclusion. ⁽³³⁾

Key Highlights:

Time constraints and financial costs create significant hurdles for solo parents.

There is a shortage of accessible and inclusive recreational programs.

Isolation and lack of support networks compound the challenges.

There is an urgent need for solutions to enhance recreational opportunities for these families.

Pathways to Inclusion

To support solo parents of children with disabilities in accessing appropriate recreational opportunities, policymakers should consider the following strategies:

Financial Assistance:

- Expand eligibility for recreation subsidies and grants to include solo parent families.

- Offer tax credits or reimbursements for expenses related to adaptive recreational equipment and specialized programs.^(34, 35)
- Provide direct cash assistance to help offset the higher costs associated with raising a child with disabilities as a single parent.

Inclusive Recreational Programming:

- Fund the development of recreational programs specifically designed for children with disabilities and their solo parents.
- Mandate training and resources for existing recreation providers on inclusion, accessibility, and supporting the unique needs of solo parent families.
- Allocate funding for respite care services to give solo parents a much-needed break during recreational activities.

Community Support and Resources:

- Establish support groups, both in-person and online, to connect solo parents of children with disabilities and facilitate the sharing of resources and information.
- Partner with community organizations to provide transportation assistance and volunteer support for recreational outings.
- Implement awareness campaigns to destigmatize solo parenthood and promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in community recreation.

Policy modifications can enhance access to recreational activities for single parents of children with special needs. These modifications encompass enhanced financial aid, inclusive initiatives, and community support. Nonetheless, these alterations may also result in heightened government expenditure, stigma, and an absence of professional assistance. Furthermore, the creation of new programs for this demographic may isolate children with special needs instead of fostering inclusion. An equitable strategy that caters to the requirements of single parents while promoting integration is essential for the comprehensive welfare of these families.⁽³⁷⁾

IV. CONCLUSION

The social integration of unusual groups, such as children with disabilities and their single parents, is a significant challenge for universities and communities. Barriers to inclusion, such as inadequate accessible provisions, poor staff training, and a focus on competitive sports, may hinder their participation. Policymakers have to formulate efforts such as financial assistance, accessible programs, and community support networks for single parents of children with disabilities to mitigate these challenges. This holistic technique can improve social integration, academic performance, and overall well-being, therefore promoting more inclusive and supportive environments for all. By addressing these challenges, universities and community organizations may cultivate more inclusive and supportive environments for all individuals. Policy modifications can improve access to recreational activities for single parents of children with impairments. The alterations include improved financial assistance, inclusive programs, and community support. However, these modifications may also lead to increased government spending, stigma, and a lack of professional support. Moreover, the establishment of new programs for this group may alienate children with disabilities rather than promote inclusion. A fair strategy that addresses the needs of single parents while fostering integration is crucial for the overall welfare of these families.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Policy Recommendations: Charting a Path Forward

Policymakers must devise methods to assist single parents of children with special needs in obtaining suitable recreational options and breaks.

Policymakers should establish barriers to inclusion, such as inadequate accessible provisions, poor staff training, and a focus on competitive sports, which may hinder their participation.

Policymakers have to provide measures such as financial assistance, accessible programs, and community support networks for single parents of children with disabilities to mitigate these challenges.

These measures can enhance the overall well-being of individuals, promote social participation, alleviate the financial strain on single parents, and allow children with disabilities to fully engage in and profit from recreational activities.

Policymakers have the authority to prioritize the requirements of single-parent families with children who have special disabilities, fostering more equal and supportive environments that enable these persons to flourish.

Nonetheless, further study is required to comprehensively grasp the subtleties and any unexpected ramifications of these therapies.

Future researchers ought to analyze the enduring effects of financial aid, accessible programs, and community support on the well-being and social inclusion of this demographic, identify possible obstacles to implementation, and investigate innovative frameworks for collaborative service delivery.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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