

# A Comparative Study of Factors Affecting Family Well-Being of Single-Father and Single-Mother Families

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## Abstract

Single-father and single-mother families are unique family structures that face challenges in adapting to life situations. Family well-being is a critical factor in the developmental outcomes of children in these households. This study examined and compared family well-being levels in single-father and single-mother families, and analyzed the influence of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors. The sample consisted of 406 single parents with children aged 0–12 years, comprising 105 single fathers and 301 single mothers. Participants were recruited through online platforms, service centers, and community networks. However, uneven regional representation and limited digital access may constrain generalizability. Research instruments included a personal information questionnaire and the Thai Family Well-Being Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and multiple regression. The findings revealed very high overall family well-being in both groups, with spiritual development rated the highest, followed by educational development, while economic well-being was rated the lowest. No significant differences emerged between single-father and single-mother families. However, the factors influencing family well-being differed: for single fathers, negative predictors included work-hour patterns and obstacles to work-family balance. For single mothers, family income and help-seeking behavior were positive predictors, while work-family balance obstacles were negative predictors.

## Keywords

Family well-being; single-father family; single-mother family; work-family balance; family income

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## Introduction

The Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development (2019) states that the family is a fundamental social institution, albeit a small-scale one, that plays the most crucial role and function in human and societal development. Every human being grows up with the "family institution" as a foundation structure that nurtures and develops family members to achieve physical, emotional, social, and intellectual security through loving care and the fulfillment of basic human needs (Krainatee et al., 2020). However, current socio-economic changes, driven by increased access to education, employment opportunities, and self-reliance (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2018), have impacted the structure of family institutions in Thai society. This has led to the emergence of increasingly diverse family types, especially single-parent families.

According to Morgan (2024), single-parent families are a growing demographic worldwide. In the United States, they represent the most significant number of single-parent households, exceeding 10 million, according to the 2020 U.S. Census data. This phenomenon is also observed in many of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries, where the number of single-parent households is projected to increase by 22–29% by 2030. Moreover, a survey conducted under the Integrative Thai Family Study Based on Family Life Cycle in 2018 revealed that single-parent families accounted for 31.3% of all families, ranking third after nuclear and extended families (Phuphaibul et al., 2019). The primary cause of single-parent families is divorce, followed by the death of a spouse and spousal abandonment, respectively (Adsakul, 2012).

The transformation of family structures from extended or nuclear families to single-parent families has introduced significant vulnerabilities and challenges in terms of family adaptation to various circumstances, including economic conditions, income, employment, housing, physical and mental health, child-rearing, and social stigma toward single parenthood, resulting in reduced credibility, lower self-esteem, and harmful discrimination in employment and social participation (Thayansin, 2021; United Nations Population Fund, 2015). This shift also reflects the broader notion of family well-being. Specifically, suppose a single-parent family can successfully adapt to the adversities brought about by such crises. In that case, it is more likely to achieve a state of familial happiness, stability, and quality of life. Consequently, children in these families have greater opportunities to gain life experiences, develop adaptive and life skills, and build self-confidence (Praneetham & Sitthijirapat, 2016).

These experiences enable children to create personal empowerment, become less dependent on changes within the family, accept the realities they face, and recognize their self-worth. Life in an incomplete family structure offers opportunities to confront challenges, make independent decisions, and acquire essential life skills. When single parents consistently provide love, care, and understanding, children are likely to develop these skills more extensively than their peers (Thoranee et al., 2008). Conversely, children may develop emotional, psychological, and behavioral disturbances-such as stress, anger, disappointment, anxiety, feelings of insecurity, inferiority complexes, pessimism, and defiance of authority-when exposed to familial conflict or instability. They may also experience difficulties in trusting others, a fear of abandonment, low self-esteem, and reduced concentration, which can adversely affect their academic performance if the family lacks adequate well-being and fails to navigate the crisis effectively (Thayansin, 2021).

Previous studies on single-parent families in Thailand have primarily emphasized the adaptation to life challenges and the psychological difficulties encountered by single fathers and mothers. However, in the Thai context, there is a notable absence of research comparing the well-being of families with single fathers and single mothers. Such a comparative investigation would provide insights into the patterns of daily life in these families, including economic conditions, environmental circumstances, work-life demands, and intrafamilial relationships, which would be instrumental in identifying both internal and external environmental factors that influence the development of human capital and the overall quality of life of family members (Phuphaibul et al., 2019). This is particularly important for single-parent families with children in the early childhood and school-age stages, critical periods for identity formation and human development, during which the family plays a crucial role in shaping experiences and providing a supportive and high-quality environment. Furthermore, families play a vital role in nurturing capable individuals who can make positive contributions to society.

Despite the increasing prevalence of single-parent households in Thailand, most existing studies have predominantly focused on single-mother families, leaving the well-being of single-father families comparatively underexplored. This lack of comparative evidence limits understanding of whether and how family well-being differs between these two groups, as well as the unique challenges and resources that may shape their family life. To address this gap, the present study examines and compares the levels of family well-being in single-father and single-mother families, and analyzes the influence of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors on family well-being in both groups by employing the Thai Family Well-Being Scale. Developed from empirical data gathered from Thai families and designed to reflect the current Thai familial context, the findings provide a contextually grounded understanding of family well-being. The results are expected to generate new insights into the dynamics of family well-being, clarify important distinctions between single-father and single-mother families, and contribute to a more balanced body of knowledge. Ultimately, the study will inform policies and interventions aimed at supporting and enhancing the well-being of single-parent families in Thailand.

## Methodology

### Populations and samples

The study population comprised single-father and single-mother families in Thailand with children aged 0–12 years residing in the household. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula with a 95% confidence level ( $z = 1.96$ ), a margin of error of .05, and an assumed population proportion ( $p$ ) of 0.5, as no prior data were available. This yielded a minimum required sample of 385 families. To account for potential non-response or incomplete data, an additional 5% was added, resulting in a final target of 406 participants. The achieved sample comprised 105 single-father families and 301 single-mother families, all of whom voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

### Research instruments

The research instruments consisted of two parts:

Part 1: The personal questionnaire consisted of 31 items, including both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and collected information on four areas: demographics, family, environment, and work-life factors. Three research advisors carefully reviewed the questionnaire for content accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness, and revisions were made based on their collective recommendations to enhance clarity, relevance, and suitability for the study population. Although additional validation steps (e.g., pilot testing or statistical reliability analysis) were not conducted, the comprehensive review process aimed to ensure that the questionnaire was appropriate and robust for data collection.

Part 2: The Thai Family Well-Being Scale was developed by Phuphaibul et al. (2020) and Thayansin et al. (2021). The instrument's reliability was examined through item-total correlation coefficients, which ranged from .250 to .693. Although the item with a correlation of .250 falls near the commonly cited cutoff of .30, it was retained due to its theoretical and practical significance within the construct, ensuring that all relevant aspects of family well-being are represented. Overall, the coefficients suggest that the items effectively capture the constructs without redundancy. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, yielding values between .703 and .925 for each construct. The overall Cronbach's Alpha for the entire instrument was .952, demonstrating that the instrument is reliable and appropriate for use in this study. The researcher formally requested permission to use this instrument from Prof. Emeritus Dr. Rutja Phuphaibul on February 14, 2023.

The questionnaire is a closed-ended instrument comprising 36 items across nine dimensions: relationships, roles and responsibilities, economics, sufficiency economy, cooperation and community safety, spiritual development, health, education, and self-sufficiency and dependency.

The response scale for measuring family well-being is a 5-point rating scale as follows:

- 1 = Least true - the statement does not reflect the family's actual situation
- 2 = Slightly true - the statement reflects the family's situation to a small extent
- 3 = Moderately true - the statement moderately reflects the family's situation
- 4 = Mostly true - the statement reflects the family's situation to a great extent
- 5 = Most true - the statement fully reflects the family's actual situation

The total score is obtained by summing the responses to all 36 items and dividing by the total number of items. The average scores are then classified into five levels of family well-being (Thayansin, 2022):

- Level 1: Lowest well-being (mean score < 1.50)
- Level 2: Low well-being (mean score 1.51–2.50)
- Level 3: Moderate well-being (mean score 2.51–3.50)
- Level 4: High well-being (mean score 3.51–4.50)
- Level 5: Highest well-being (mean score 4.51–5.00)

## Data collection

This research is quantitative research conducted with ethical approval for human subjects research from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (Certificate No. IPSR-IRB-2023-022).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to target single-father and single-mother families who were members of service networks or enrolled in relevant child and family development centers. In addition, convenience sampling was applied in cases where participants were accessible via social network groups on Facebook and LINE, or through schools willing to distribute the questionnaires. Data collection was conducted as follows:

- 1) Requesting cooperation from agencies related to single-father and single-mother families to distribute the online survey questionnaire to groups of single-parent families receiving services from 12 single-parent family network groups and single-mother and family service centers across Thailand.
- 2) Mailing paper questionnaires to coordinators in each area where single-father and single-mother families reside, including child development centers in Bangkok and primary schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission, local administrative organizations, and private schools in Nakhon Pathom Province.
- 3) Distributing the questionnaire via online channels (Google Form), sent to social network groups on Facebook and LINE applications, where single-father and single-mother families are members.

Data collection was conducted over nine months, from March to November 2023, to ensure sufficient coverage and accessibility of the target population across multiple regions and channels, allowing participants in different provinces and service networks adequate time to respond. The returned questionnaires were subsequently reviewed for accuracy and completeness, and the data collected from the respondents were analyzed using statistical methods.

## Data analysis

To examine the level of family well-being among single-father and single-mother families, descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean, were employed. An Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare family well-being between single-father and single-mother families. Furthermore, Multiple Regression Analysis was utilized to compare the factors influencing family well-being in both family types.

## Results

### Family well-being of single-father and single-mother families

According to Table 1, the total family well-being scores for single-father families ranged from 78 to 180 points, whereas for single-mother families, the scores ranged from 53 to 180 points. When classified by levels of family well-being, most single-father families scored at a moderate level (44.8%), followed by a very high level of well-being (43.8%). In contrast, most single-mother families reported a very high level of well-being (46.5%), followed by a moderate level (38.5%). Additionally, it was found that single-mother families had the lowest level of family well-being, at 0.3%.

**Table 1:** Family Well-Being Among Single-Father and Single-Mother Families ( $n = 406$ )

Family Well-Being	Single-Father Families (Total 105)					Single-Mother Families (Total 301)				
	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD	%	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD	%
Overall Family Well-being Score	36-180	78-180	129.11	22.12	-	36-180	53-180	132.17	23.83	-
Levels of Family Well-being			3.59	0.614	-			3.67	0.663	-
Lowest (mean score < 1.50)					-					0.3
Low (mean score 1.5-2.50)					3.8					2.3
Moderate (mean score 2.51-3.50)					44.8					38.5
High (mean score 3.51-4.50)					43.8					46.5
Highest (mean score 4.51-5.00)					7.6					12.3

Regarding family well-being, as seen in Table 2, the highest average scores were found in the spiritual development domain for both single-father and single-mother families, with mean scores of 15.55 and 15.78, respectively. The next highest domain was education, with mean scores of 15.20 for single-father families and 15.61 for single-mother families. However, the domain with the lowest average score was economic well-being, with mean scores of 12.57 for single-father families and 12.60 for single-mother families.

**Table 2:** Family Well-Being by Dimension Among Single-Father and Single-Mother Families ( $n = 406$ )

Family Well-Being	Single-Father Families (Total 105)				Single-Mother Families (Total 301)			
	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD
Family Well-being by Dimension								
1. relationship	4-20	7-20	14.63	3.21	4-20	4-20	15.49	3.29
2. roles and responsibilities	4-20	4-20	14.30	3.31	4-20	4-20	14.92	3.60
3. economic	4-20	5-20	12.57	3.57	4-20	4-20	12.60	3.67
4. sufficiency economy	4-20	9-20	14.26	2.81	4-20	5-20	15.05	2.91
5. community sharing and safety	4-20	5-20	13.02	3.27	4-20	4-20	12.99	3.77
6. spiritual development	4-20	8-20	15.55	3.10	4-20	8-20	15.80	2.93
7. health	4-20	8-20	14.99	3.22	4-20	6-20	15.16	3.17
8. education	4-20	8-20	15.20	2.93	4-20	7-20	15.61	2.89

Family Well-Being	Single-Father Families (Total 105)				Single-Mother Families (Total 301)			
	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD	Score range	Total score	$\bar{x}$	SD
9. self-sufficiency and dependency	4-20	8-20	14.38	2.98	4-20	4-20	14.54	3.34

According to Table 3, the results of the comparison analysis of family well-being between single-father and single-mother families showed a  $p$  value of .251. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in family well-being scores between single-father and single-mother families at the .05 significance level.

**Table 3:** Comparison of Family Well-Being Classified by Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristic	Equality of Means				
	$\bar{x}$	SD	t	df	$p$
Single-Father Families	3.59	0.614	-1.149	404	.251
Single-Mother Families	3.67	0.663			

### Correlation of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors with family well-being in single-father families

The analysis of the correlations between demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors and family well-being in single-father families, using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, showed that family income was positively correlated with family well-being at the .05 level of statistical significance. In contrast, working hour patterns and work-family balance obstacles were negatively correlated with family well-being at the .05 and .01 significance levels, respectively. Other factors, including the number of children, the single father's health problems, the child's behavioral issues, the persons providing support in child-rearing, and the help-seeking behavior, were not found to be significantly correlated with family well-being, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Correlation Analysis Between Demographic, Familial, Environmental, and Work-Life Factors and Family Well-Being in Single-Father Families

Factors	Correlation Between Factors and Family Well-Being in Single-Father Families								
	Family income	Work-hour patterns	Number of children	Health problems of the single father	Child's behavioral problems	Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	Help-seeking behavior	Work-family balance obstacles	Family Well-Being
Family income	1								
Work-hour patterns	-.303**	1							
Number of children	.151	.036	1						
Health problems of the single father	.017	-.034	.410**	1					
Child's behavioral problems	-.042	.172	.051	.111	1				
Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	-.040	.008	-.108	.007	.010	1			
Help-seeking behavior	.065	.053	.060	.025	.046	-.039	1		
Work-family balance obstacles	-.103	.066	.052	.190	.150	-.003	-.123	1	
Family Well-Being	.240*	-.230*	.075	.037	.035	-.050	.098	-.282**	1

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level; \*Correlation is significant at the .05 level



## Demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors affecting the family well-being score in single-father families

According to Table 5, the factors that significantly affect the family well-being of single-father families at the .05 level are work-hour patterns and work-family balance obstacles, both of which have a negative impact on family well-being. In other words, single-father families experiencing greater challenges in work-hour patterns and more obstacles in balancing work and family time tend to have lower levels of family well-being.

**Table 5:** Analysis of Factors Affecting Family Well-Being in Single-Father Families

Variable	Family Well-Being			Collinearity Statistic	
	B	Beta	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Family income (baht/month)	.000	.099	.392	.850	1.176
Work-hour patterns (Reference group-standard office hours)	-5.874	-.229	.046*	.886	1.129
Number of children	1.414	.041	.732	.784	1.275
Health problems of the single father	10.045	.105	.373	.829	1.206
Child's behavioral problems	7.941	.156	.161	.924	1.083
Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	1.532	.023	.836	.905	1.105
Help-seeking behavior	10.925	.058	.593	.968	1.033
Work-family balance obstacles	-11.463	-.276	.016*	.898	1.113
R = 0.420, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.177, Adjust R <sup>2</sup> = 0.087, F-value = 1.959. Constant = 125.203					

Note: \*Statistically significant at the .05 level; \*\* Multicollinearity was assessed using VIF values, all of which were below the acceptable threshold of 3, indicating no multicollinearity issues

The regression model for single-father families yielded an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.177, indicating that the variables of interest in this study collectively explained approximately 17.7% of the variance in family well-being. The relatively low R<sup>2</sup> value implies that other unmeasured factors, such as social support, mental health, coping strategies, or community resources, may also play essential roles in shaping family well-being. Despite the modest explanatory power, the significant predictors identified in this model highlight key areas where interventions could be targeted to improve outcomes for single-father households.

## Correlation of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors with family well-being in single-mother families

According to Table 6, the analysis of the correlations between demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors and family well-being in single-mother families, using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, revealed that family income and help-seeking behavior were positively correlated with family well-being at the .01 level of statistical significance. In contrast, work-family balance obstacles were negatively correlated with family well-being at the .01 significance level. Other factors, including work-hour patterns, the number of children, the single mother's health problems, the child's behavioral problems, and the persons providing support in child-rearing, were not found to be significantly correlated with family well-being.

**Table 6:** Correlation Analysis Between Demographic, Familial, Environmental, and Work-Life Factors and Family Well-Being in Single-Mother Families

Factors	Correlation Between Factors and Family Well-Being in Single-Mother Families								
	Family income	Work-hour patterns	Number of children	Health problems of the single mother	Child's behavioral problems	Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	Help-seeking behavior	Work-family balance obstacles	Family Well-Being
Family income	1								
Work-hour patterns	-.197**	1							
Number of children	.000	.101	1						
Health problems of the single mother	-.017	-.017	.026	1					
Child's behavioral problems	.105	.024	.247**	.092	1				
Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	-.008	-.030	-.070	-.043	-.171**	1			
Help-seeking behavior	-.013	-.106	.080	-.139*	-.126*	.148*	1		
Work-family balance obstacles	.005	.013	-.019	.098	.188**	.033	-.031	1	
Family Well-Being	.164**	-.089	-.016	-.037	-.088	.093	.189**	-.216**	1

Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level; \*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

## Demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors affecting the family well-being score in single-mother families

According to Table 7, the factors that significantly affect the family well-being of single-mother families at the .05 level are family income and help-seeking behavior, both of which have a positive impact on family well-being. In other words, single-mother families with higher family income and higher levels of help-seeking behavior tend to report higher levels of family well-being. Conversely, work-family balance obstacles were found to have a negative impact on family well-being. That is, single-mother families who are facing challenges in balancing work and family time tend to report lower levels of family well-being.

**Table 7:** Analysis of Factors Affecting Family Well-Being in Single-Mother Families

Variable	Family Well-Being			Collinearity Statistic	
	B	Beta	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Family income (baht/month)	.000	.174	.006*	.940	1.064
Work-hour patterns (Reference group-standard office hours)	-.633	-.027	.670	.928	1.077
Number of children	-1.587	-.047	.459	.926	1.079
Health problems of the single mother	-.052	-.001	.990	.965	1.036
Child's behavioral problems	.667	.016	.805	.873	1.145
Person(s) providing support in child-rearing	3.787	.056	.367	.961	1.041
Help-seeking behavior	18.576	.180	.005*	.929	1.077
Work-family balance obstacles	-9.113	-.185	.003*	.952	1.050
R = 0.327, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.107, Adjust R <sup>2</sup> = 0.077, F-value = 3.614. Constant = 111.502					

Note: \*Statistically significant at the .05 level; \*\*Multicollinearity was assessed using VIF values, all of which were below the acceptable threshold of 3, indicating no multicollinearity issues

For single-mother families, the regression model yielded an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.107, indicating that the study's variables of interest explained approximately 10.7% of the variation in family well-being. The relatively low R<sup>2</sup> indicates that additional unmeasured factors-such as social support, mental health, coping mechanisms, or community resources-may also significantly influence family well-being. Nevertheless, the predictors that reached statistical significance in this model point to critical areas where targeted interventions could enhance outcomes for single-mother households

## Discussion

### Family well-being of single-father and single-mother families

This study found that family well-being scores in both single-father and single-mother families were generally moderate to very high, with no statistically significant difference between the two groups. This similarity may reflect comparable individual, familial, and environmental contexts across the sample. Among the specific domains of family well-being, spiritual development had the highest scores. Spiritual development refers to a family's internalized system of shared values, moral and religious principles, life philosophies, and culturally respected traditions, which collectively form a guiding framework for daily family

functioning and decision-making (Phuphaibul et al., 2019). These spiritual anchors offer families a sense of meaning, coherence, and adaptive strategies that foster resilience and overall well-being (Thongworn, 2023; Walsh, 2002).

These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating the role of spiritual or religious practices in sustaining mental and emotional well-being in single-parent households. For example, Soison (2010) reported that single fathers and single mothers often rely on spiritual or religious activities as primary mechanisms for coping with family challenges. Similarly, Uratanamanee et al. (2016) found that single mothers frequently regard their children as sources of emotional strength, serving as spiritual anchors that foster resilience, patience, and mindfulness in daily life. Collectively, these results suggest that strong spiritual development and culturally guided belief systems enable families to navigate adversity effectively, maintain psychological well-being, and cultivate resilience.

The next highest scoring component for both types of families was education. According to Adsakul (2012), even though single parents raise their children alone, they can still provide their children with educational opportunities, just as married parents usually do. Some families even manage to support their children through undergraduate and graduate studies. This aligns with the findings of Phimthavorn et al. (2014), who noted that most single mothers plan their children's futures step-by-step in terms of education and financial readiness, aiming for their children to have a good, stable, and happy life. In addition, the study on adaptation to single fatherhood by Uratanamanee et al. (2016) found that single fathers, despite raising their children alone without the mother's support, still prioritize their children's education by taking them to school daily and allowing them to participate in extracurricular activities. Many even go into debt to provide educational opportunities for their children (Phothithawil, 2020).

The economic aspect was found to have the lowest average scores for both single-father and single-mother families. These families often face financial challenges characterized by decreased income and increased expenses. They tend to work harder to earn enough to raise their children alone (Natruirote, 2017). This corresponds with studies by Uratanamanee et al. (2016), which reported that single fathers experience economic stress as they bear the full burden of income and expenses after family changes. Some single fathers work even harder to make ends meet (Praneetham & Sitthijirapat, 2016). Single mothers also must increase their income to cover family expenses (Phimthavorn et al., 2014). Sanguanwong (2018) found that economic problems are most pronounced when single mothers become the sole breadwinners, leading to poverty, economic decline, and a reduced quality of life for family members.

Regarding other components of family well-being, such as relationships, roles and responsibilities, economics, sufficiency economy, cooperation, community safety, spiritual development, health, education, and self-sufficiency versus dependency, no differences were found between single-father and single-mother families.

## **The influence of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors on family well-being in single-father families**

The study found that only demographic factors and work-life factors significantly affected the family well-being of single-father families. Among the demographic characteristics, the work-hour patterns were found to be significant. For work-life factors, work-family balance obstacles were found to be influential. Both factors were negatively correlated with family

well-being at the .05 level of statistical significance. This suggests that single fathers who face challenges related to work-hour patterns and obstacles in balancing work and family responsibilities tend to report lower levels of family well-being.

According to the findings, most single fathers in the sample had unclear or inconsistent work hours depending on the nature of their jobs. Some worked shifts (e.g., morning or night shifts), while only a small proportion worked fixed hours comparable to those of government offices. As a result, achieving a balance between work and child-rearing responsibilities was particularly difficult. The transition to being the sole caregiver for their children often contributed to increased work-family conflict. In the present study, 14.3% of participants reported being frequently assigned to work on holidays or becoming so consumed by work responsibilities that they had limited time to spend with their families. These findings are consistent with those of Uratanamanee et al. (2016), who reported that some single fathers were compelled to adapt their lifestyles, change occupations, or adjust work arrangements to sustain their families.

These challenges reflect employment conditions within the Social Determinants of Health framework, which considers factors such as employment security, physical working conditions, work pace and stress, working hours, and opportunities for self-expression and individual development as having significant impacts on human health and well-being (Raphael et al., 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest that single fathers facing employment-related challenges tend to report lower levels of family well-being (Sukmag, 2018).

### **The influence of demographic, familial, environmental, and work-life factors on family well-being in single-mother families**

The study revealed that certain factors significantly influenced family well-being among single-mother families. These included one familial factor (family income), one environmental factor (help-seeking behavior), and one work-life factor (obstacles to work-family balance). Family income and the help-seeking behavior showed a statistically significant positive correlation with family well-being at the .05 level, indicating that higher income and stronger help-seeking behavior were associated with greater well-being. While most studies agree that single-mother families commonly face poverty and inadequate income, which adversely affects family well-being (Phiphattechakon, 2009), this study's sample included many single mothers with bachelor's or master's degrees, with an average monthly income of 16,017 THB (436 USD). Some individuals earned over 25,000 THB (682 USD) per month, demonstrating that higher education and income levels were associated with increased family well-being.

The findings of this study align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that various environmental contexts influence family well-being. Factors such as family income and parental education fall within the exosystem, the layer of the environment that includes external institutions and systems, such as economic, education, healthcare, and welfare, that indirectly affect family life. These factors are not directly controlled by family members but significantly shape daily life and overall well-being. Families with sufficient economic resources and educational attainment can create environments that promote well-being (Kumhom et al., 2020; Stanley & Kuo, 2022). This supports the findings of Kumhom et al. (2020), who noted that higher family income and education levels are predictive of improved family well-being.

In terms of help-seeking behavior, most single mothers lived with relatives rather than alone with their children. Many had parents or extended family members who helped care for their children, offering assistance when needed. The majority sought help from relatives, followed by social media platforms and friends. These avenues provided emotional support and empowerment, as also noted by Phetsuk (2017). Similarly, the study by Ritthimon et al. (2023) found that positive social support, including the provision of knowledge, information, and encouragement from family, friends, and the community, played a crucial role in successful breastfeeding among Karen Ethnicity Mothers. Together, these studies underscore that social support plays a vital role in daily life and overall family stability, regardless of the context or form it takes. Moreover, these findings are consistent with Social Support Theory, which emphasizes that interactions within social networks and access to various forms of support—whether emotional or informational—enhance individuals' sense of security and stability (Caplan, 1974), thereby contributing to overall family well-being.

However, this study also revealed that work-family balance obstacles significantly influenced the family well-being of single-mother families. These obstacles were negatively correlated with family well-being at the .05 level of statistical significance. In other words, single mothers who experienced difficulties in managing work and family responsibilities tended to report lower levels of family well-being.

The findings showed that the majority of single mothers in the sample were overburdened with work, leaving them with little or no time for their families. Family members often had mismatched schedules, and some mothers were assigned to work on weekends or holidays, further reducing the time they spent together. As the sole breadwinner, single mothers must work hard to earn sufficient income to meet their families' needs (Sanguanwong, 2018). Their irregular and job-dependent working hours made it difficult for them to allocate adequate time to care for their children.

This situation aligns with Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964), which posits that conflict between roles occurs when the demands of one role are incompatible with the needs of another. For single mothers, managing both employment and family responsibilities simultaneously exemplifies this type of conflict, as irregular working hours and mismatched family schedules reduce the time available for quality interaction with their families. Such conflict is likely to affect their daily behaviors and overall health (Burke, 1998). This is further supported by Phetsuk's (2017) study, which explored the design of social spaces to assist single mothers in Bangkok. The study found that managing time between work and childcare is a significant challenge for single mothers, negatively impacting their family well-being.

## Policy recommendation

The findings of this study indicate that financial challenges, including income insufficiency, employment status, and economic stability, continue to significantly affect the well-being of single-parent families. Consequently, it is recommended that relevant government agencies and stakeholders implement targeted and sustainable support initiatives to address these challenges. These initiatives may encompass the establishment of dedicated financial assistance programs for single-parent households, provision of child-rearing subsidies, and facilitation of access to stable employment opportunities with adequate remuneration. Given that inadequate income remains a primary barrier for both single-father and single-mother

families, such measures are essential to improving their overall family well-being and resilience.

The study also identified work-family balance as a critical factor influencing family well-being in single-parent households. Accordingly, it is imperative to implement targeted interventions aimed at supporting single-father and single-mother families in effectively managing their dual responsibilities, which include earning income and caring for their children, and which were constrained by work-family balance obstacles identified as significant in both groups. One viable approach is to promote work-life integration through policies that encourage flexible working arrangements, such as adjustable working hours and remote work options. These strategies have the potential to alleviate work-related stress and enhance parental availability, thereby fostering stronger family relationships and improving overall family well-being.

The findings revealed that social media has become increasingly crucial for single-father and single-mother families seeking parenting guidance. Online platforms are efficient, easily accessible, and responsive to immediate needs. As such, government bodies and relevant agencies should take a more proactive role in enhancing these platforms as supportive spaces for single-parent families. For example, they could develop targeted online content that addresses relevant parenting issues, or create interactive digital platforms that enable continuous, expert-guided support through an integrated Q&A system. Such initiatives would help single fathers and mothers navigate challenges more effectively.

## **Recommendation for study research**

Given that the present study did not include single-parent families from all regions of Thailand, future research should aim to recruit participants from a broader geographic range. Doing so would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse family contexts and regional differences that may impact family well-being.

Additionally, this study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing self-administered questionnaires. Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with single-father and single-mother families, to capture more nuanced perspectives and lived experiences. Such qualitative insights could complement quantitative findings and contribute to the development of more context-specific and effective strategies for supporting single-parent families in Thailand.

## **Limitations**

The sample in this study consisted of single-father and single-mother families with children aged 0–12 years living in the household. Due to the inherent challenges in accessing this specific population, the researcher employed multiple data collection methods to enhance sample diversity and adequacy. Online questionnaires were distributed through 12 single-mother and family service centers nationwide. Additionally, outreach was conducted through single-parent groups on Facebook and LINE, and paper-based questionnaires were distributed to child development centers in the Bangkok metropolitan area and primary schools in Nakhon Pathom province.

While this study facilitated access to a broad range of participants, the sample was not evenly distributed across all regions of Thailand and included participants recruited via online platforms. Consequently, the study is subject to sampling bias due to non-random selection and the potential exclusion of families with limited or no access to digital resources. These limitations suggest that generalizing the findings to the entire national population of single-parent families should be approached with caution. Nonetheless, the results provide valuable insights into the well-being and parenting challenges experienced by single-father and single-mother families in the Thai context, offering a strong foundation for further research, policy development, and the design of targeted support interventions.

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