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EDITORIAL

Advancing the Science of Human Development in a Changing World

Human development is neither linear nor isolated. It unfolds through continuous interactions among biological processes, psychological experiences, interpersonal relationships, cultural meanings, social structures, and the environments in which individuals live. The five contributions featured in this issue of *Optimal Development* collectively reinforce this understanding, demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship in explaining behavior, promoting wellbeing, and addressing contemporary developmental challenges.

A major strength of this issue is its attention to behavior as both a product of development and a potential target for meaningful change. The paper traces the evolution of behavioral science from Pavlov and Thorndike to B.F. Skinner and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) provides an important historical and conceptual foundation for understanding how behavior can be systematically studied and modified. Its application to the acquisition of two-word phrasal minds in a Nigerian child with autism demonstrates the practical value of evidence-based behavioural intervention while drawing attention to the need for cultural validation and contemporary neuro-affirming ethical practices. The emphasis on assent, dissent, and technological integration is particularly relevant to the future development of behavioural science.

The issue also examines behaviour within broader social and developmental contexts. The systematic review of adolescent sexual health demonstrates that knowledge does not automatically translate into safe sexual practices. Peer pressure, socioeconomic circumstances, family communication, cultural norms, substance use, and media exposure interact to shape adolescent sexual behaviour. This knowledge-behaviour gap highlights the need for interventions that extend beyond information provision to address the environments within which young people make decisions.

Similarly, the review of gender differences in psychopathology illustrates the complex pathways through which psychological difficulties develop across the lifespan. Although females tend to demonstrate greater vulnerability to internalizing disorders and males higher rates of externalizing difficulties, the paper appropriately cautions against deterministic interpretations. Gender interacts with biological maturation, psychological processes, and sociocultural experiences, underscoring the need for an integrative biopsychosocial-developmental framework.

Culture emerges even more explicitly in the study of Nigerian youths' understanding of Koro syndrome. Limited awareness and the influence of spiritual interpretations on

help-seeking demonstrate how cultural beliefs can shape mental health experiences and decisions about professional care. These findings call for culturally responsive mental health education that neither dismisses indigenous belief systems nor permits misinformation to obstruct appropriate care.

Finally, the exploration of the baby mama phenomenon brings family structure, stigma, psychological well-being, and social change into the conversation. The paper highlights the stress experienced by mothers, the challenges associated with social stigma, and the potential developmental implications for children growing up in diverse family arrangements. Importantly, it invites a more nuanced examination of family diversity rather than simplistic assumptions about what constitutes a successful family.

Taken together, the five contributions demonstrate that **optimal development requires more than understanding individuals in isolation**. Behaviour, Mental Health, Sexuality, Family relationships, Disability, and Cultural beliefs are embedded within social systems that can either constrain or facilitate human flourishing. The scholarship presented in this issue therefore calls for interdisciplinary, culturally grounded, developmentally sensitive, and ethically responsible approaches to research and practice.

African Gender Studies Quarterly is committed to creating a scholarly platform where diverse perspectives converge to advance knowledge of gender and human development across the lifespan. We invite researchers, practitioners, educators, policymakers, and scholars across disciplines to continue generating evidence that does not merely explain human behaviour, but contributes meaningfully to the creation of conditions in which individuals, families, and communities can flourish.

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UNPACKING BABY MAMA SYNDROME: THE MOTHER, THE CHILD, THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

This term paper aims to explore the causes behind the baby mama phenomenon, its psychological and developmental impacts on the mothers and the children involved, and its impact on the society in which they live. Our review included papers across various disciplines, from psychology to philosophy. We explored factors contributing to the phenomenon, its consequences for adolescents and young adults, and cultural shifts in how it is perceived. From our search, we found that despite the cultural shifts, baby mamas face a lot of stigma in their societies, as changes in family structure are especially not welcome in conservative societies. We also found that children tend to have developmental challenges as a result of being in a single-parent home, and that the mothers themselves also go through a lot of stress, both at home and from their society. By analysing existing literature, this study provides insights into how societal attitudes and family dynamics influence mental health, resilience, and future opportunities for individuals involved, and also offers suggestions on further research to be done and how to make the lives of people who fall into the category easier.

Keywords: baby mama, adolescents, young women, society, single mothers.

Introduction

In today's society, the term "baby mama syndrome" is used to describe the unique social, psychological, and economic challenges faced by single mothers who have a child or children with a man they are not married to (Adeojo et al., 2021). The term "baby mama" originated from the Jamaican creole term "baby madda", and it was used factually and affectionately, without judgement, to refer to a woman who had a child or children with a man that she was in a relationship with. "Baby mama" itself became a term when "baby madda" got

transported to the United States through reggae music. It was here that it developed its negative inference. (Ewan et al., 2021, pp. 127-128)

This colloquial term carries a double connotation: it describes a particular familial situation and acts as a source of societal stigma against women, depicting them as "poor single mothers" (Ewan et al., 2021, p.125). People in adolescence and early adulthood, critical stages for identity development and social integration, are the most likely to become "baby mamas" themselves (Mbulu et al.,

2024; Office of Population Affairs, 2021).

However, this term paper seeks to view this phenomenon from three perspectives: the “baby mamas”, the children born into this family structure, and their respective societies, to highlight the psychological and developmental impacts of the “baby mama syndrome” on adolescents and young adults. As much as young people are more likely to become “baby mamas”, their children will eventually also become adolescents and young adults, and so we are curious about how they are affected by this family structure, as well as how different societies treat the prevalence of this phenomenon. As an aside, since single motherhood and the baby mama syndrome are not mutually exclusive, we shall use “baby mama” and “single mother” interchangeably throughout this paper.

The number of single-parent homes is growing worldwide, including families shaped by the “baby mama syndrome.” Factors such as changing cultural values, economic hardship, and new ideas about what counts as “family” contribute to this trend (Adejo et al., 2021). For adolescents and young adults, growing up in these settings can significantly impact mental health, resilience, life chances, and future outcomes (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Gupta & Kashyap, 2020). To develop meaningful support programs, we need to understand how these family dynamics affect youth during key developmental stages. This paper examines recent studies and theories to

explore the lasting impact of being raised by a single mother with an absent father.

Literature Review

The “baby mama syndrome” has been examined across multiple bodies of literature under different labels, with scholars providing varied explanations for its origins, effects, and broader significance. A recurring theme across these studies is the role of cultural and societal factors in shaping the phenomenon (Adejo et al., 2021; Ekwueme et al., 2023; Wariboko & Isichei, 2022). Researchers have also used diverse methods, including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, to capture the lived experiences of individuals impacted by this family structure (Ayeibeng et al., 2022; Grüning Parache et al., 2024; Hiadzi et al., 2023; Malatji et al., 2020). This review aims to synthesise existing research on the baby mama syndrome by highlighting key findings, ongoing debates, and critical gaps in the literature.

Section 1: The Mother

Single motherhood and the “baby mama syndrome” are related but not identical. However, baby mama arrangements frequently result in single motherhood because the father often becomes both physically and financially absent (Oriakpono, 2024). Given that this is the most common outcome, it raises the question of why some women choose to become “baby mamas.”

Wariboko and Isichei (2022) identify several “self-serving” motivations, including poverty, changing cultural

values, avoidance of committed relationships, and the pursuit of greater social status. In the context of growing global economic hardship (Partington, 2024), some women enter these arrangements as a survival strategy. The expectation is that the child's father will provide financial support, which may also benefit the mother. In addition, association with socially influential male figures, such as celebrities, can offer a pathway to increased visibility and status.

Shifting cultural values also play a key role. From a feminist perspective, Oriakpono (2024) argues that greater media representation of baby mamas in Nigeria both reflects and reinforces changing social norms. This creates a feedback loop: increased visibility fosters greater acceptance, which in turn leads to more representation in media and further normalisation (Akinwale et al, 2025).

Koops et al. (2021) offer another explanation tied to parental socioeconomic status. In a study across 18 European and North American countries, they found that women from lower-SES backgrounds often experience less parental supervision. As a result, they may not actively plan for single motherhood but may be more ambivalent toward it and more open to early motherhood. Lower parental SES is also associated with higher religiosity, which may reduce the likelihood of using contraception or seeking abortion.

Similar patterns appear in Ghana. Ayebeng et al. (2022) report that women from higher socioeconomic

backgrounds and less religious women are less likely to become single mothers compared to more religious women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, the literature suggests that baby mamas/single mothers are disproportionately represented among economically disadvantaged women.

Beyond understanding the motivations, it is equally important to examine the psychological and developmental consequences of this lived experience. deMontigny et al. (2020) proposed that a mother's perception of paternal involvement in childcare predicts better maternal mental health and well-being. Their findings confirmed that maternal well-being is strongly linked to the quality of the co-parenting alliance, defined as satisfaction with the relationship with the child's father, as well as to the mother's own well-being. Because fathers are often minimally involved in baby mama arrangements (Wariboko & Isichei, 2022), mothers in these contexts are at greater risk for poor psychological outcomes, including isolation, which can in turn affect mother-child bonding.

Despite evolving norms, stigma remains. This is particularly pronounced in conservative societies that uphold traditional family structures, such as many African, Middle Eastern, and Asian contexts (Oriakpono, 2024). Even in more progressive societies, stigma persists and can contribute to shame, anger, and diminished self-worth (Li, 2020).

From a developmental standpoint, baby mamas often serve as the primary

caregivers and providers. They must balance childcare, income generation, and sometimes education or other responsibilities. Without adequate support systems, this multiple-role burden can lead to exhaustion and burnout. At the same time, some women report resilience, personal growth, and pride as they navigate these challenges independently (Glazer, 2022).

Section 2: The Child

Moving further, the syndrome cannot be fully explored without the consideration of the children born to these “baby mamas”. The children raised in such households are often subject to various challenges affecting their emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Though the effect size is small, research suggests that children born to teenage mothers may face increased risks of externalising behaviour problems, with behaviours such as aggression, delinquency, and hyperactivity (Lee et al., 2020). This is often because these mothers are likely to face various socioeconomic and psychological challenges, such as limited financial resources, lower levels of education, and minimal social support. Thus, children in single-parent households may experience poorer health outcomes, psychological well-being, and educational attainment compared to those in two-parent households (Lut et al., 2021).

Children of single mothers may also be taunted and teased by their peers, which can lead to feelings of embarrassment, shame, and low

self-esteem (Lee et al., 2020), particularly when their mothers are not present enough to combat and alleviate these feelings. Research further indicates that the likely exposure of these children to domestic violence, verbal abuse, and emotional distress can significantly impact their mental health. Children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk of developing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Showalter et al., 2020; Almış et al., 2020). Dual exposure to physical abuse and intimate partner violence is particularly detrimental, predicting various trauma symptoms in children (Showalter et al., 2020), and resulting either from the actions of their frustrated mothers toward them, from their mothers’ likely continually changing partners, or even both at a time.

The absence of a second parent can also lead to inconsistent discipline, as children may be able to negotiate rules and boundaries with their single mother (Wariboko & Isichei, 2022). Research consistently shows that parenting styles and family dynamics significantly influence children's internalising and externalising problems. Parental practices, including permissive and inconsistent styles, as well as dysfunctional reactions to disobedience, contribute to both types of problems in children (Moreno Méndez et al., 2020). Parenting styles, including conflicts, overload, impulsivity, and inconsistency, are associated with internalising, externalising, and

adjustment problems in children (Moreno Méndez et al., 2020).

Research also indicates that children in single-parent families may experience more externalising and internalising behaviour problems compared to those in two-parent households (Faulconer et al., 2022; Fu, 2023). These issues can stem from various factors, including economic constraints, lack of parental support, and societal prejudice (Fu, 2023). Parental acceptance-rejection plays a crucial role in children's behavioural outcomes across cultures, with parental indifference/neglect and other forms of rejection associated with increased externalising and internalising problems (Rothenberg et al., 2022).

However, when controlling for physical and social resources, differences in child behaviour problems between single-parent and two-parent families may be reduced or eliminated (Faulconer et al., 2022). Recent research actually highlights the resilience and adaptability of children in single-mother families, emphasising the potential for positive outcomes with **proper support**. Children in single-parent households often display their resilience through adaptive thinking and effective emotion regulation, and while areas like academic achievement and stress levels may differ slightly from two-parent households, these outcomes are influenced by various factors beyond family structure. Accessible support systems, including government assistance and community organisations, are crucial for alleviating challenges faced by single-parent families (Echave Rees et al., 2023).

Section 3: The Society

That said, in Wariboko & Isichei's thorough ethical-cultural critique of the baby mama phenomenon (2022), they note that Nigerian society places emphasis on ethical altruism. This means that the moral value of a person's actions is judged solely by how those actions affect others, while the consequences for the person acting are considered unimportant (Snedegar, 2023). In essence, ethical altruism is living for the sake of others. The baby mama syndrome is considered to be in opposition to that, as it is based on ethical egoism, which is the belief that it is more moral for people to always act in their self-interest even at the expense of others.

Attitudes toward the "baby mama syndrome" in Nigeria appear to be generationally divided. While most elderly Nigerians view it as immoral and undesirable, youth perspectives are more conflicted. Some studies report that young people do not accept the phenomenon (Adejo et al., 2021). In contrast, other research suggests it is increasingly glamorised and even framed as a legitimate form of motherhood (Oriakpono, 2024; Wariboko & Isichei, 2022). Wariboko and Isichei (2022) warn that growing acceptance of baby mamas signals a cultural erosion in Nigerian and broader African societies, describing it as a clear departure from traditional norms (p. 65). Conversely, Oriakpono (2024) frames the acceptance of single motherhood as evidence of social progress and greater inclusivity.

Similar generational and cultural shifts have been documented elsewhere. In

the United States, for example, single motherhood, once heavily stigmatised, is now increasingly associated with capability and independence (JJuffer 2022). This shift is evident in both media portrayals and political discourse (Juffer, 2022; Yorks, 2022), underscoring the complex ways these platforms shape perceptions of motherhood and single parenthood. Recent scholarship also highlights the diversity of single-parent experiences and challenges dominant stereotypes (Yorks, 2021).

Some women who choose single motherhood actively resist the “problematic single mother” narrative by distancing themselves from stigmatised representations. However, Mackenzie (2021) notes that this strategy can unintentionally reinforce other exclusionary ideals. Adding to the complexity, other studies caution that the media’s glamorization of single motherhood can have negative effects. By promoting an idealised image, often one involving a wealthy or famous “baby daddy”, media coverage may further stigmatise single mothers who do not fit that narrow narrative.

Research indicates that in other countries, like Sweden for one, single motherhood is generally also less stigmatised compared to other countries, though challenges do remain. While Swedish single mothers face better material conditions than those in former communist countries, many *do* still worry about their economic situation due to increasing costs of social services and childcare (Björnberg, 2022). However, in some African countries, such as Ghana,

single motherhood still presents significant challenges, including stigmatisation and economic hardships. The prevalence of single mothers increased from 14.1% in 1993 to 19.5% in 2014, with premarital births being a major contributor (Castro Ayebeng et al., 2022).

The narrative surrounding single parenthood has evolved, highlighting the diversity and complexity of these families (Yorks, 2022). Media representations have also transformed, with single mothers often portrayed as hardworking and self-sufficient. Despite these positive shifts, challenges remain, including the persistent emphasis on self-sufficiency over community support (Juffer, 2022). As single parenthood becomes more prevalent, research continues to explore its various subtypes and societal implications (Yorks, 2022).

Discussion

The findings in this term paper show just how complex the baby mama syndrome is and its implications for individuals, families, and society at large. While the literature review reflects an extensive range of perspectives, certain themes need closer examination. This section will put the key findings into context, reflect on their implications, and outline potential avenues for future research and policy.

Cultural Norms

It has been established in our findings above that cultural beliefs significantly influence the perception and experience of the baby mama

syndrome, as well as single motherhood as a whole. In many societies, traditional family structures are emphasised, leading to stigma against single mothers. In some contexts, however, extended families step in to provide support, reflecting how cultural values shape resilience. These dynamics impact the opportunities and challenges faced by baby mamas. Understanding these norms is crucial to framing interventions tailored to different communities. We have little we can do when it comes to wanting to stop the prevalence of the baby mama phenomenon. The best we *can* do as a society is try to manage it and ensure the children unwillingly born into these situations are well cared for.

The cultivation theoretical framework was employed by a recent study on the establishment of baby mama as the new form of personality identity among young people, especially in Nigeria (Ekwueme et al., 2023). The **cultivation theory** was propounded by George Gerbner in 1969 and is a theory mainly seen in media psychology. It proposes that repeated exposure to media over time influences perceptions of social reality (Vinny, 2024). It is not the same as the **agenda-setting theory**, according to which 'the media sets the national agenda, in the sense that they do not exactly tell you what to think, but they may tell you what to think about'.

Gerbner insists in this theory that exposure to media cultivates the belief

and shapes the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs that media messages should be applied to real-life situations. Consequently, this is evident in today's Nigeria, where youths perceive that being a baby-mama or *having* a baby-mama is the new form of personality identity, because all over the screens and social media platforms they see celebrities or career-successful youths who are supposed to be 'role models' embrace such a personality identity. Recent studies highlight the emergence of the "Baby Mama Syndrome" in Nigeria, where women increasingly embrace single motherhood without commitment from the father (Ekwueme et al., 2023). This trend is influenced by media portrayals that normalise and sometimes glamorise the lifestyle, despite its challenges (Oriakpono & Babayemi, 2024). The phenomenon is part of broader changes in Nigerian family structures due to globalisation, including the rise of non-marital childbearing and single parenthood (Ajani et al., 2021). These shifts occur alongside other societal changes. The "Baby Mama Syndrome" reflects complex interactions between societal views, cultural changes, and media representations, prompting calls for more balanced portrayals and educational programs to promote informed decision-making about family structures (Oriakpono & Babayemi, 2024) as most current media presentations of such people tell stories of a 'happy ever after' situation of such personalities, often with no regrets from both parties, especially the women.

Socioeconomic & Psychological Challenges

As baby mamas tend to come from single-parent households with low-income backgrounds, they may generally lack positive guidance from parents or trusted adults. This creates an environment that makes it easy for them to become baby mamas themselves, not to mention the effect of growing up in poverty and then witnessing the huge turnarounds in the lives of baby mamas of celebrities, particularly in Nigeria, as we have earlier mentioned. This is usually also a driving force in the decisions of these women to take steps into becoming baby mamas. 'Tie the men down with a child' is what is seen; 'they will have to provide for you then'. Additionally, growing up in poverty can also limit access to education, healthcare, and other resources, further exacerbating the challenges faced by baby mamas who may not end up experiencing such turnarounds.

The psychological challenges faced by baby mamas can also not be overstated. As earlier cited, baby mamas may experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can impact their ability to provide stable and nurturing environments for their children. This results from challenges such as financial strain due to often limited income, along with the burden of their often lone childcare responsibilities. The stress associated with these challenges can significantly impair emotional and cognitive functioning, reducing the quality of parent-child interactions. Programs that alleviate these burdens, such as subsidised child

care or parental counselling, have shown promise in mitigating adverse effects.

This term paper thus collectively emphasizes the need for more nuanced representations of motherhood and single parenthood that acknowledge the complexities and challenges faced by diverse family structures, ultimately advocating for supportive frameworks that empower women (Sinha, 2024; Yorks, 2021) as well as educate them so they do not ever find that they have to resort being a 'baby mama' for either social or economic reasons.

Moreover, the stigmatisation of adolescent mothers and their children in society, professional settings, and policies contributes to stress and poor health outcomes for both the mothers and the children (Wittenberg et al., 2022). These findings highlight the need for more balanced media representations of motherhood, educational programs promoting informed decision-making, and supportive frameworks that recognise the challenges and complexities of motherhood (Oriakpono & Babayemi, 2024; Sinha, 2024).

Impact on the Children

The impact of the baby mama syndrome on children is a critical concern, one that should be talked about way more than we have found that it currently is in the course of writing this term paper. We have been able to discern, however, that children born to single mothers face several increased risks compared to an

average child born to both parents, including poverty, poor academic performance, as well as various emotional and thus behavioural problems due to all they are likely to be exposed to.

Recent studies have even explored the relationship between maternal distress and children's emotional responses. Mertin et al. (2021) found no significant correlation between trauma symptoms in mothers and their children, suggesting that older children's emotional responses may reflect their own experiences rather than mirroring maternal distress, and thus emphasising the importance of independent assessments and early interventions for these children. It has been found that childhood trauma, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, is a significant predictor of long-term mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and borderline personality disorder (Aziz, 2020). It is also important to note that the impact of domestic violence extends beyond immediate effects, potentially impairing children's long-term mental development and increasing their risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence later in life (Almis et al., 2020); a serious concern.

The lack of a stable father figure can also affect children's emotional and psychological development, leading to difficulties with attachment, trust, and intimacy as explained in John Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Specifically, Bowlby's theory suggests that children who experience inconsistent or unreliable caregiving,

such as these children who lack a stable father figure and sometimes even a fully immersed mother, may develop an **anxious-ambivalent** attachment style, characterised by difficulty in forming close relationships and a tendency to be overly dependent on others.

Furthermore, children of baby mamas may also experience stigma and social exclusion, which can negatively impact their self-esteem and social relationships. It is, however, essential to recognise that these challenges are not inherent to single parenthood or the baby mama culture but rather a result of the societal and economic contexts in which baby mamas operate. In fact, as mentioned and cited earlier, recent studies underscore the resilience and adaptability of children in single-mother families, highlighting their potential for positive outcomes with adequate support. It has also been noted that children from single-parent households actually often exhibit remarkable coping mechanisms, including adaptive thinking and effective emotional regulation. This suggests that with proper resources and support systems in place, children of baby mamas *can* thrive and achieve positive outcomes, underscoring the need for comprehensive policies and programs that address the socio-economic challenges faced by these families.

We have little we can do when it comes to wanting to stop the prevalence of the baby mama phenomenon in society, as it is slowly developing into one of those 'it's not that bad when you do it right' mindsets. The best we *can* do, though,

as a society, is try to manage it and ensure that the children unwillingly born into these situations are well cared for and do not end up paying for decisions that were not theirs to make.

Research Gaps

In the process of writing this term paper, we noticed that there was barely any literature on the baby mama syndrome itself. When we did find literature, it was mostly Nigerian, or it approached the phenomenon from a philosophical, ethical, or critical perspective. We even came across a paper that viewed the phenomenon from the perspective of the men involved (Hiadzi et al., 2023), which is not what we were looking for. This made us realise that there are various notable research gaps in the literature.

For one, there were no longitudinal studies or cross-sectional studies on children who are born into a family where the mother is a baby mama and the father is absent. The cross-sectional studies we found were largely focused on single motherhood and single fatherhood or were comparing single-parent households to multi-generational households, households with stepparents, and households with two biological parents. We suggest that future research specifically study the children born to a baby mama and the psychological implications it has on them.

Another major research gap was the lack of cross-cultural studies on the phenomenon. As we mentioned earlier, most of the papers we found only studied the phenomenon in African

countries like Ghana and Nigeria. We hypothesise that our inability to find papers from other regions could be due to lexical differences in different cultures, i.e. different cultures could have different names for the baby mama phenomenon. However, if the term “baby mama” has Jamaican roots and became popular in the United States of America, then there should have at least been papers from Jamaica and the United States. However, we found none. We propose that subsequent research done on the baby mama phenomenon should look at how it manifests in different countries and how the people there react to it. There is a dearth of cross-cultural research, and we think that can change if more researchers look into the phenomenon in various countries and regions like Jamaica, the United States, South Africa, and the Middle East. We would also love to see comparisons be made between conservative and progressive regions.

One more research gap we noticed was that there was no research done on how technology shaped the experience of the baby mamas. All the papers we found that spoke of the baby mamas themselves were either criticising them or merely informing the readers about them. There have been no studies into the experiences of these women, their lives, how they cope, and their support systems, if any. The exploratory papers we found that touched on the women’s experiences were solely focused on single motherhood. As much as the baby mama phenomenon is not fully mutually exclusive from single motherhood, the two phenomena cannot be confounded. All baby mamas

may not be single mothers, just as all single mothers are not baby mamas. Thus, we cannot confidently generalise the results found in those papers. We strongly recommend that more research be done into the lives of baby mamas and how technology affects their experiences and their lives.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the baby mama phenomenon extends beyond individual choice; it reflects larger issues of culture, economics, and stigma. This review highlights how these factors disadvantage mothers and create developmental risks for children. Addressing these outcomes will require both tangible support systems for families and a societal shift toward more inclusive understandings of motherhood.

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