



Gender perspective on the existence of women with single parent status (case study of the women head of household community in Mojosongo, Central Java)

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ABSTRACT

Women as single parents are one of the social phenomena that often cause negative stigma from society. This study aims analyzes the gender perspective on single-parent women and their destigmatization strategies in society, with a case study on the women head of household community in Mojosongo Village, Central Java. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, with a gender perspective approach. The data of this study was obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. The selection of key and primary informants used purposive sampling, while the selection of supporting informants used snowball sampling. The data analysis technique in this study is an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing stages. The results of the study indicate that there are differences in stigma for women and men when they become single parents, especially single parents, due to divorce cases (divorcee). They get a worse negative stigma than single parents because of the death of their husbands case (widow). Therefore, destigmatization strategies must be carried out by both divorcees and widows. One of these strategies is joining the women head of household community, which empowers single-parent women. The existence of the women head of household community can be an effort to reduce or even eliminate negative stigma in society because it can empower single parents socially and economically through various activity programs that improve their lives in society.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Gender Perspective, Single Parents, Women Head of Household, Destigmatization, Community Empowerment

Article History:

Received: October 23, 2024
Revised: November 8, 2024
Accepted: November 11, 2024
Published: November 24, 2024

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Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries with a high population density. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency, it was recorded that the population of Indonesia until mid-2024 was 277,487,371 people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024), with the number of male as

many as 129,171,186 people and the number of female as many as 131,497,682 people (Kementrian dalam Negeri, 2024). This number shows that the number of females is greater than that of males. However, Indonesia still adheres to a patriarchal culture that views women as heads of families as often considered weak, helpless, and dependent on their husbands (Suri, 2024). It is not uncommon for society to give a negative stigma to single-parent women because of the assumption that they will have a negative influence on the environment (Nuzula & Rizkiantono, 2021; Lestari et al., 2023; Siregar & Afini, 2023; Suryana et al., 2023).

Single-parent women or single mothers are mother figures who play the role of both mother and father for their children so that the mother carries out the father as head of the household. One of the factors that puts women in this condition is divorce. Various problems, including disputes or quarrels, economic conditions, and domestic violence (in Indonesian: *Kekerasan dalam Ruamh Tangga* or KDRT), can cause divorce. Divorce itself can be divided into two conditions. Divorce occurs when problems in the household are not appropriately resolved so that they end in separation. In contrast, divorce by death occurs when a situation forces a couple to separate, for example, due to death.

According to Badan Pusat Statistik data (2023), there are 12.73% of female heads of households in Indonesia, both due to divorce and death. The percentage has increased compared to 2022, which is 12.72%. Regarding region, the rate of urban female heads of household is higher, at around 13.36%, while in rural areas, it is 11.84%. In contrast, in terms of gender, the number of women with single-parent status or single mothers is higher than the number of men as single fathers, with a percentage of 14.84% and 4.05% (Endah et al., 2021). A single female parent has a double burden when working. They have difficulty in fulfilling daily life to carry out their role as a mother at home, as well as the pressure of economic needs that require them to continue working (Apriyanti et al., 2020; Lestari et al., 2023).

However, the problem is that these women get a negative stigma that begins with discrimination in society by labeling them as homewreckers. This discrimination creates obstacles that not only disrupt the lives of single parents personally but also hinder them from participating in the community environment, so there is a significant difference in treatment between women as heads of families. The current stereotype of being a "husband snatcher (In Indonesia: *"perebut lelaki orang* or *pelakor*")" discredits single parents in society and damages their social psychology (Nuzula & Rizkiantono, 2021; Gultom & Subroto, 2023; Trinugraha et al., 2023). In the deep identification, Mohamad et al. (2020) identify the use of words used to give a negative stigma to single parents:

1. Use of slang grammar or giving labels to ostracize someone or a group of people.
2. Physical and mental health, ethnicity, culture, race, and religion are used as jokes or jokes.
3. Giving different treatments and isolating or even endangering a person's mental, physical, and social well-being.

Stigmatizing widows is an act that labels and even ostracizes single-parent women. Worse negative stigma is experienced more by single-parent women due to divorce cases or what is known as divorced widows (In Indonesia: *janda cerai hidup*). They are often considered the cause of the failure of other people's households, considered less obedient, or even labeled as "*pelakor*" (Sofyan & Bakhri, 2021; Katuuk, 2023; Rachman et al., 2023). It makes these widows feel marginalized by some social groups (Motsoeneng & Modise, 2020; Amoo et al., 2022).

Single parents who can fight and overcome negative stigma from society and are in the destigmatization phase will be indifferent to what people around them say about their perceptions. So, they are more confident in carrying out activities and are independent in continuing their lives. The assumption is that when women are in the destigmatization phase, it will be easier to carry out daily activities, enjoy the phase of life, and begin to be independent and empowered. In order to overcome the problems faced by single parents and help them deal with the negative stigma of society, the government has created a

program that aims to support single parents in developing their potential and changing the negative stigma of society by forming the Community of Women Heads of Families (In Indonesian: *Perempuan Kepala Keluarga* or PEKKA) (Ayunisa, 2022), which was initiated in the late 2000s as part of the National Commission on Violence Against Women initiative known as the "*Proyek Janda*," while PEKKA began its activities in mid-2001 by focusing on efforts to empower women heads of families to improve their standard of living and encourage them to be active in social and political life (*pekka.or.id.*, 2022).

Many previous studies have examined women as heads of families. Some of them are literature studies, so they do not focus on empirical cases in a particular region or community (Himawati & Taftazani, 2022; Ghummiah, 2023). On the other hand, there is research based on the results of community service in a PEKKA community, so it does not focus on discussing specific theoretical explorations on efforts to improve the welfare and economic independence of female heads of families (Subasman et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, many previous studies have examined the stigma of society towards single parents (Nuzula & Rizkiantono, 2021; Ayunisa, 2022; Trinugraha et al., 2023). However, there are still many pros and cons regarding the stigma of single parents in society, especially in the patriarchal culture of Indonesian society (Ayunisa, 2022), so there are different points of view or perspectives when a woman or man becomes a single parent, especially a single woman due to divorce. The difference in perspective has not been studied in depth in previous studies. Based on the theoretical and empirical gaps in earlier studies, this study attempts to fill the gaps by examining the gender perspective on the survival strategies of female heads of households through destigmatization strategies, with a case study on the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo, Central Java.

The PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo was formed on January 25, 2022, and is still active today. Members of the PEKKA Mojosoongo Community consist of divorced women, women who have died, women whose husbands have left to work, for example, as Indonesian Migrant Workers (In Indonesian: *Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* or TKI), and women who earn a living alone because their husbands are sick. According to data from the National Socio-Economic Survey of the Central Statistics Agency (*Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional Badan Pusat Statistik*) in 2020, 11.44 million families are headed by women, which means 1 in 4 households in Indonesia are headed by women, and most of them live below the poverty line (*pekka.or.id.*, 2022). They work as labourers, small entrepreneurs, shop owners, and online motorcycle drivers. Limited economic conditions make it harder for single-parent women to support their families by playing dual roles as mothers and fathers. On the other hand, they also have to face social threats in the form of negative stigma from society, which makes their position even more marginalized. They must get the same rights as men in accessing education and employment, participating in decision-making processes, and achieving gender equality and empowerment (Fujiani et al., 2019). Therefore, they must be able to face this negative stigma through a destigmatization strategy, one of which can be realized through efforts to empower single female parents in the PEKKA Community.

Mojosoongo Village as one of the areas experiencing an increasing trend in divorce rates in the last 3 years (Figure 1). The increase in the divorce rate has increased the number of PEKKA members in Mojosoongo. In 2021, the number of heads of household in Mojosoongo was recorded at 13,405, and 3,605 of them being women. In 2022, the number of female heads of families in Mojosoongo increased rapidly, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the high divorce rate. Mojosoongo is one of the villages with the most significant number of female heads of families in Surakarta City, with 1,670 PEKKA members. Based on this condition, this study attempts to answer two main questions: (1) How the gender perspective on women with single-parent status in the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo? (2) How is the destigmatization strategy of single-parent women in the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo? This study aims to analyze the gender perspective on single-parent women and their destigmatization strategies in society, with a case study on the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo, Central Java.

This study has theoretical and empirical contributions. The theoretical contribution of this study relates to the gender perspective on the strategy of destigmatizing single parents in the PEKKA Community. The empirical contribution of this study explores the empowerment efforts of the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo in fighting the negative stigma of society, which can be used as a lesson for other PEKKA communities throughout Indonesia.

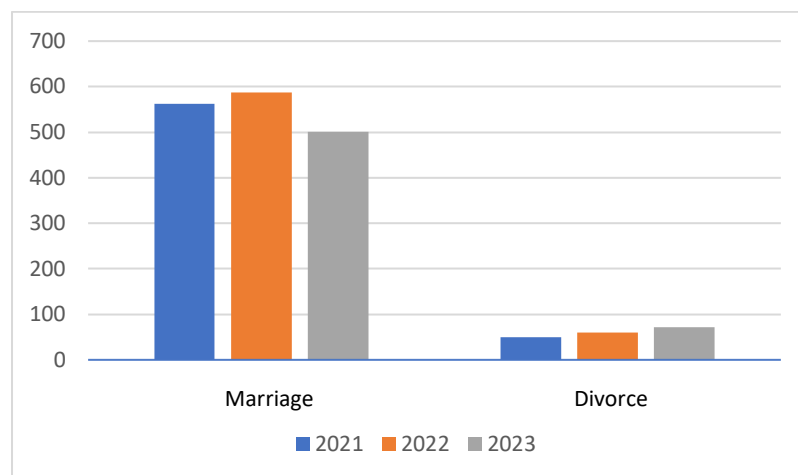


Figure 1. The graphic of marriage and divorce data in Mojosongo Village, Central Java
Source: Suri (2024)

Theoretical Framework

This study examines the gender perspective of single-parent women in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo in their efforts to carry out destigmatization strategies to preserve their lives in society. This study is rooted in the problem of social construction of women with single-parent status who often face negative stigma in society. Therefore, it is crucial to carry out destigmatization efforts for single-parent women by involving them in empowerment activities while providing them with space where they have the same rights in obtaining social and economic access. More clearly, the theoretical framework in this study can be seen in Figure 2.

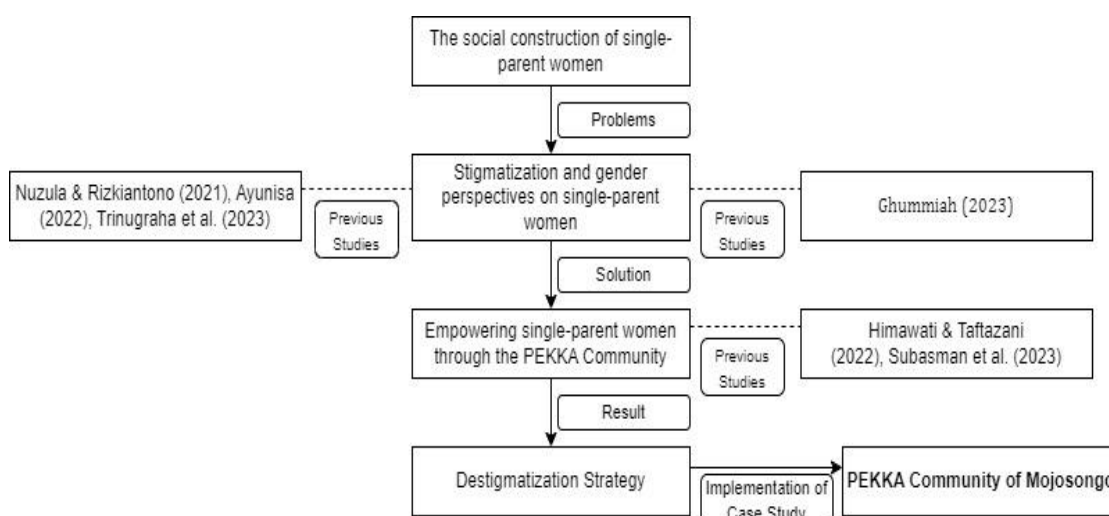


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Method

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, with a gender perspective approach. This study used primary data from observations and interviews and secondary data from documentation of previous reports related to the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo. Three data collection techniques were used as a form of data triangulation, so the study results are valid (Sugiono, 2020). Interviews were conducted with informants as research subjects who would provide information regarding problems in the field (Heryana, 2018). The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques to determine critical informants (someone who has all the information related to the problem) and general informants (someone who understands the problem technically and in detail), and snowball sampling to determine supporting informants (someone who can provide additional information). The key informant in this study was the Chairperson of the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo, the primary informants were the administrators of PEKKA Community of Mojosongo, and the supporting informants included PEKKA members and the Mojosongo Village community.

The analysis technique used in this study is interactive model analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This analysis consists of the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion (Figure 3). Based on the figure, data analysis is carried out simultaneously during data collection until data collection is complete. The researcher is the key to the study. Suppose the appropriate answer has not been found at the time of analysis. In that case, the researcher may ask the informant several more questions until, at a particular stage, the researcher obtains a credible answer so that the research data received is valid and unbiased.

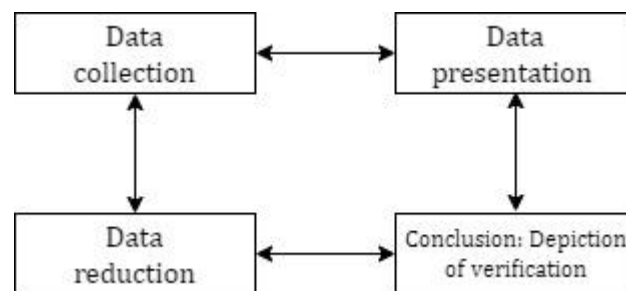


Figure 3. Analysis of the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994)

Results and Discussion

Gender Perspective on Single Parents in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo

One of the complex social phenomena in the community is single parents. A person's unwillingness to become a single parent is based on several aspects: individual, social, cultural, and economic. Losing a life partner has a significant psychological impact, especially for female heads of households, such as a sense of loss, deep sadness and isolation. The social impact is also felt by female heads of households, such as changes in social status and negative stigma from a society that seems to be directly attached to them, so they are often faced with social pressure and negative stigma that makes them feel ashamed, ostracized, and burdened by all negative stereotypes from society. Whereas single parents have a double burden in providing for, caring for, and educating their children and must participate in society activities. They often get a negative stigma because of the society perspective that an ideal family consists of a father, mother, and children. Differences in stereotypes occur when a man becomes a single father and a woman becomes a single mother. When a woman is a single parent, they are considered to have violated social norms because of the expectation that a woman must have a partner as an economic and emotional support. That is why when they are single parents,

they get opposing perspective because they do not fulfil the traditional role of women who must be in the household.

The stigma and discrimination faced by single-parent women cause their image to be wrong and lower their self-esteem as heads of families. The stigma of society causes individuals or groups to be socially excluded and impacts social inequality. This social inequality is experienced by women members of the PEKKA Community, including the members of PEKKA Community in Mojosongo Village. This condition is even worse when women have single-parent status due to divorce cases, also known as divorcee (In Indonesian: *janda cerai hidup*). It will be different when women become single parents because their partners die, or what is known as widow (In Indonesian: *janda cerai mati*).

Society has different perspectives on a divorcee and widow (Simpson, 2020). It's because of the assumption that a divorcee experiences a separation that is full of conflicts and negative emotions, such as disappointment, anger, and sadness. The traditional perspective considered the divorce as something inappropriate and caused by women's failure to carry out their domestic roles and as wives. That is what underlies the emergence of stereotypes of evil women, seducers of other people's husbands, snatchers of other people's husbands, and they are often considered prostitutes. This stereotype is also inseparable from gossip in their social environment, which causes verbal and physical abuse for single parents. One of the participants mentioned in an interview:

".....if you are divorced, it shows that there must be problems in the household, even though we don't know what the problem....." (Interview transcript, SK, 58).

The stigma of society assumes that every household conflict that ends in divorce is a problem of moral shift that leads to disgrace for the family. Whereas so many factors cause divorce, which cannot be resolved and cannot find a way out; if the household is continued, it will be detrimental and hurtful to one or both parties. Some of the causes of divorce include domestic violence, incompatibility, or other factors that cannot be resolved. However, society often ignores the causal factors that ultimately have an impact on their negative stigma towards single-parent women because of divorce cases. As a result, these women face discrimination and difficulty in obtaining social and economic support. Meanwhile, single-parent women who are caused by the death of their husbands are seen as more honorable by society because society considers that a person's death is destiny or God's will that cannot be avoided (Cholilah & Nurmaidah, 2022; Sugiarto & Fida, 2022; Rachman et al., 2023). In other words, losing a husband due to death is regarded as a tragedy beyond control and not because of conflict or personal failure. One of the participants mentioned in an interview:

".....if people divorce because their husbands die, it's a pity because it's God's destiny, not because there are problems in the household, so they are more respected....." (Interview transcript, YS, 48).

Below in Table 1 shows the difference in social stigma for single-parent women due to divorce and death case in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo.

Table 1. Differences of social stigma towards single-parent women because of divorce and death cases

No	Stigma due to divorce cases (divorcee)	Stigma due to death cases (widow)
1.	Involved in an adultery case	Must get appreciation
2.	Giving lousy influence on society	More honourable
3.	They have a lot of problems	Be more respected
4.	Looked down on	Unable to support their children

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5. Engaged in prostitution
 6. Becoming a seducer of other people's partners
 7. Sexual and verbal harassment
 8. Not allowed to complain
 9. Often changing partners
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Source: Researcher Analysis (2024)

Table 2 above shows that single-parent women due to divorce cases (divorcee) have a worse stigma than single-parent women due to the death of their husband (widow). Many of them are often accused of being involved in extramarital affairs to the point of treating them as objects of sexuality and viewed as individuals with low status because they commit social and moral deviations that cannot be tolerated. Whereas, both of them (divorcee and widow) need moral support from the community to live their lives better because the defiance they face are not only physical but also mental in dealing with the stigma of society. One of the efforts made by single-parent women in the Mojosongo to face these defiances is to be actively involved in the PEKKA Community. Their participation in the PEKKA Community is a form of their resilience in living their social status as single parents because they do not only focus on personal problems but also contribute through efforts to empower other women who are in similar situations. Through the PEKKA Community, they get more meaningful emotional support, making them stronger in facing the challenges of carrying out their dual roles as fathers and mothers.

This condition shows that single-parent women are also able to make positive changes and have a better life, as stated by Laxmi et al. (2024) , who said that after divorce, women would be more resilient and work hard to earn a living for their children, initially only having one profession after divorce being able to establish a new profession to increase economic resources. The single-parent women in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo also do this. The women head of household who are members of the community can carry out many professions, for example, opening a rice and vegetable food stall while selling beauty products, becoming a village line while becoming a content creator. The involvement of single-parent women who are members of the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo is their effort to survive amidst the negative stigma of society that is directed at them, regardless of the single-parent status being caused by divorce or the death of a husband. This condition is in line with study by Ayunisa (2022) regarding efforts to change the negative stigma of society that adheres to a patriarchal culture towards the existence of single-parent women.

Destigmatization Strategies for Single Parents Women in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo

A destigmatization strategy is an effort and method aimed at reducing or eliminating the negative stigma to a group or individual, and this study focuses on single-parent women in the PEKKA Community of Mojosongo. The destigmatization strategy aims to reduce discrimination from unfair or harmful treatment of these women who receive negative stigma in society. In addition, destigmatization also aims to increase their understanding and acceptance in the community and improve their mental and emotional well-being through social support and acceptance from the community. Table 2 below

shows some community stigmas and destigmatization strategies carried out by single-parent women in the PEKKA Mojosoongo Community.

Table 2. Society Stigma and Destigmatization Strategies of the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo

No	Society Stigma	Impact of stigma	Destigmatization Strategy	Implementation
1	Single parents are great and should not complain about anything	It causes psychological pressure because you always have to appear strong	Try to be strong and not complain to anyone in fighting for your child	Hold a support group to share experiences and provide emotional support
2	Activities outside at night are considered a prostitute worker	Negative moral judgment from society	It must lead to a rise in adversity because they must be responsible for the family	Holding an awareness campaign about the reality and challenges of single parents
3	A single parent who has four children with different fathers	Negative stigma about morality	Must be able to support children, care for and educate children, and participate in community organizations	Provide skills training and economic support
4	Husband seducer	Causes social isolation	Trying to be a strong mother to the children	Increase positive media representation of single parents
5	Sexual and verbal abuse	Lowering self-esteem and mental health	Ignoring negative words from others	Establishing legal counseling and advocacy services

Source: Researcher Analysis (2024)

Based on Table 2 above, it can be said that single-parent women who act as heads of families in Mojosoongo Village have faced a phase of negative stigma from society. It is not an easy struggle for them to reach the destigmatization phase. The strategy they used to go through a depression phase is to feel lost and sad when they have to bear the status of the divorcee or widow, accept all the stigma and rejection from society, and go through a phase of depression, despair, and fear because they have to be able to support their children alone without a husband.

The negative stigma has a negative impact and influence on the mental and emotional health of single parents. Therefore, the destigmatization strategy that the PEKKA Community can carry out is in the form of psychological support by providing access to counseling and mental health services to help them overcome feelings of despair and stress. In this case, they can collaborate with the *Puspaga* (*Pusat Pembelajaran Keluarga*, in English: Family Learning Center) community as an integrated service unit in dealing with family and child problems. Furthermore, the PEKKA Community can educate single parents about available resources and their rights through campaigns to increase public awareness of the realities and challenges faced by PEKKA.

After experiencing a depression phase, single-parent women will get into the awareness phase. In this phase, single parents build strength, feel that they are not alone, and seek social support. That is why they started to join the PEKKA Community in

Mojosongo Village and even dared to join a city-level community. PEKKA began to realize the stigma they felt and the negative impact of the stigma on their daily lives, so they began to seek information and support to get out of difficult situations. The destigmatization strategy that is carried out can be in the form of providing accurate and practical information about stigma and accessing existing support by joining a community so that they can share experiences and strategies to overcome the negative stigma.

The third phase experienced by single-parent women in Mojosongo Village is the rise phase. In this phase, women have begun to develop strategies to continue their lives by taking concrete steps to change their situation. They are starting to be more active in building self-confidence by participating in training and developing new skills, beginning to accept themselves as they are, and strengthening their identity that a single parent is a great and independent woman because she can take care of the household and earn a living on her own.

There was a tremendous increase when single-parent women could inspire other single parents that a single parent is strong, capable, and has the right to be happy. The destigmatization strategy carried out economic empowerment by providing skills training and economic opportunities to help them become financially independent, such as cooking, sewing, bouquets, MUA (make-up artist), and liquid soap-making. It also gave positive representation by raising PEKKA's success stories on social media or mass media to provide inspiring stories and improve positive images.

The peak phase or final phase in the destigmatization strategy for single-parent women is the survival phase. These single-parent women have built resilience and tenacity in facing all kinds of life problems so that they no longer give up easily and continue to fight for the happiness and ideals of their children and maintain balance and happiness by maintaining a balance between work, family, and themselves. They already have the mechanisms and support needed to deal with stigma effectively. In addition, they have begun to become part of an inclusive society and have contributed to building a culture that is fair to everyone, especially for single parents.

In addition, they also participate in fighting for gender equality and eliminating the negative stigma against single parents. The destigmatization strategy is to strengthen the community by building a community network where the community holds meetings and just regular meetings to gather to share stories and reinforce each other—providing policy advocacy by encouraging policy changes that support and protect the rights of single-parent women as heads of families and reduce discrimination in various sectors, such as the workplace, education or community environment.

The destigmatization strategy of single-parent women in the PEKKA Mojosongo Community aligns with the study by Himawati & Taftazani (2022) regarding women's survival strategies as heads of families. Referring to that study, the destigmatization strategy carried out by single-parent women is more dominated by active strategies and network strategies. Active strategies are proven by women's efforts to utilize their potential to open businesses, such as opening food stalls, educating snacks, or doing additional work in the informal sector. Network strategy can be seen from their efforts to utilize social networks by establishing good formal relationships through the institutional and existing social environments. The evidence of this condition can be seen in the involvement of women in the PEKKA Community to obtain emotional, instrumental, informational, and even appreciation support (Yulfa et al., 2022).

This study also aligns with previous study by Ayunisa (2022), which also examined society's stigma toward single-parent women. However, the difference is in the Ayunisa's study, the efforts to reduce or eliminate the negative stigma were carried out through the construction of Arbain housing to improve the abilities, skills, and attitudes of single-parent women, while in this study, these efforts were carried out with the support of the women's empowerment community through the PEKKA Community. These efforts are also different from the study by Nuzula & Rizkiantono (2021), which applied a campaign method with the tagline "#BreakTheStigma". They used social media, websites,

print ads, transportation ads, and ambient media at various strategic points in the city. Despite using so much kind effort, this study and previous studies share the same viewpoint: the destigmatizing strategy of single-parent women is important thing.

The existence of the PEKKA Community in empowering single-parent women as a form of destigmatization strategy has succeeded in changing the public's perception of these women. Previously, women who were heads of families were often seen as weak and dependent. However, with the existence of the PEKKA Community, this stereotype has begun to erode. The public now sees that women who are heads of families can also be strong, independent, and empowered, both economically and socially. They are a real example of women overcoming various social obstacles with determination and solidarity. Such an opinion is justified that women are not weak but strong, resilient, patient, and loving people (Utami et al., 2022). They will continue to strive to adapt to the community environment under the social pressure they experience and fight against society's negative stigma towards destigmatization as the study by (Krach et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The Women Heads of Families Community (In Indonesian: *Perempuan Kepala Keluarga* or PEKKA) is a group of women who become heads of families due to various backgrounds, for example, due to divorce or death of a husband. Regardless of the cause of women becoming single parents, they have the primary responsibility to meet the needs of their families. However, the problem they face is that they often get a negative stigma from society, especially for women who are single parents due to divorce (it's called divorcee), they have limited social and economic access to community life. Therefore, they must implement a destigmatization strategy through efforts to empower single women as heads of families by joining the PEKKA Community. This condition is undoubtedly not manageable because they have to go through several phases of destigmatization, which begins with their sense of depression towards their situation, until finally, they reach the peak phase when they are not only able to overcome the negative stigma of society but also contribute to building society and fairness for everyone, especially for single parents. In the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo, the destigmatization strategy for empowering single women parents is carried out by providing individual capacity building through skills training and support from the government and NGOs. Training in soap making, sewing, and managing independent businesses increases their economic independence and quality of life, making PEKKA socially and economically empowered agents of change.

Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the PEKKA Community of Mojosoongo, which has been willing to inform and support this study. We would also like to recognize the Program Penyuluhan Pembangunan, Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, which provides space for developing this study theme.

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