



# Unveiling Paternal Journey: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Pantawid Male Solo Parents

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## Abstract

This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of male solo parents who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines. Through in-depth interviews with participants, the study examined family dynamics, challenges, program influence, coping strategies, and community factors shaping their experiences. Findings revealed that male solo parents assume dual roles as both caregiver and provider, fostering strengthened parent-child bonds while balancing authority and nurturance amidst emotional struggles. Challenges included financial strain despite program assistance, time management pressures, parenting role overload, psychological stress, and reduced time for self. The 4Ps program positively influenced their experiences by alleviating financial burden, enhancing parenting awareness through Family Development Sessions, and strengthening their sense of responsibility. Coping strategies encompassed faith and spiritual reliance, children as primary motivation, work engagement, social support seeking, and personal growth. Community factors such as stigma, social support, economic constraints, and cultural norms significantly shaped their parenting experiences. The study highlights the resilience, adaptation, and commitment of male solo parents within the realities of poverty and social constraints.

**Keywords:** *male solo parents, Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program, 4Ps, lived experiences, solo fatherhood, coping strategies, family dynamics, social support, conditional cash transfer, resilience*



## I. INTRODUCTION

Solo parents around the world frequently confront severe financial hardship, social stigma, and psychological distress as they balance caregiving and economic responsibilities alone (Social Work Institute, 2025). In the Philippine context, socio-economic and psychosocial challenges—such as poverty, unemployment, limited access to services, and negative public perceptions persist for solo parents – despite supportive legislation, with male solo parents among the least studied and understood groups (Commission on Human Rights Philippines, 2025). Male solo parents—men who raise children independently in the absence of a spouse or partner (Jones et al., 2022)—assume full responsibility for caregiving, emotional support, and family livelihood, yet often receive limited gender-sensitive interventions and social support.

The lived experiences of male solo parents enrolled in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) reflect daily struggles to fulfill both caregiving and provider roles under poverty and resource constraints, contradicting traditional beliefs that caregiving is primarily a maternal role. These fathers undertake domestic tasks and child guidance while striving to meet basic needs, often experiencing exhaustion, emotional strain, and uncertainty alongside deep commitment and resilience. The 4Ps—designed to improve access to health, education, and nutrition—provides essential assistance through conditional cash transfers but does not fully mitigate the emotional, psychological, and structural challenges these fathers face, including compliance with program requirements such as ensuring school attendance and participating in Family Development Sessions (Dagupon & Garin, 2022).

This study aims to understand the lived experiences of male solo parents who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). As primary caregivers and providers, these fathers navigate the dual responsibilities of raising their children while sustaining their families amid financial, emotional, and social challenges.

Despite their growing presence, male solo parents remain underrepresented in research, particularly within the context of social protection programs. Their experiences are shaped not only by the demands of solo parenting but also by the expectations and conditions associated with program participation.

Through exploring their family dynamics, challenges, influence of program, coping strategies, and community factors, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how Pantawid male solo parents experience and manage their roles. Ultimately, it highlights their resilience, adaptation, and commitment to their children within the realities of poverty and social constraints.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to uncover the essence of the lived experiences of male solo parents participating in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. How do male solo parents describe their family dynamics?



2. What challenges do male solo parents encounter in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities while participating in the 4Ps program?
3. How does being part of the 4Ps program, influence male solo parents' experiences in providing for and raising their children?
4. What coping strategies do male solo parents draw upon as they navigate solo parenting?
5. In what ways do community factors shape the lived experiences of male solo parents?
6. What intervention program may be proposed based on the results of the study?

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach, which focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences and their perceptions of reality (Dragan and Sondaité, 2023). This approach is appropriate for the present study, as it seeks to comprehend how male solo parents make sense of their parenting roles, challenges, and responsibilities within the context of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Descriptive phenomenology allows for an in-depth examination of shared experiences while preserving the meanings attributed to them by the participants themselves.

For data analysis, the study employed the six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke to systematically analyze the lived experiences of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) male solo parents (Yardley, 2025). This approach is particularly appropriate for phenomenological research, as it enables the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of meaning within qualitative data while remaining grounded in participants' narratives. The method's flexibility allowed the researcher to explore both explicit statements and underlying meanings embedded in the fathers' accounts, while bracketing was consistently practiced to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations reflected the participants' perspectives.

## III. RESULTS

The findings revealed that male solo parents experience complex, adaptive, and emotionally driven family dynamics shaped by their dual roles as caregiver and provider. Key themes include father as both parents, strengthened parent-child bond, balancing authority and nurturance, and experiencing challenges and emotional struggles. Despite these difficulties, fathers demonstrate resilience, commitment, and adaptability in fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

Participation in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) further highlights persistent challenges such as financial strain despite program assistance, time management pressures, parenting role overload, emotional and psychological stress, and reduced time for self. These conditions reflect a continuing "double burden" that requires constant adjustment, self-sacrifice, and resilience.

At the same time, the 4Ps program positively influences fathers' experiences by alleviating financial burden, enhancing parenting awareness through Family Development Sessions, and strengthening their sense of responsibility. The program serves as a developmental



intervention that encourages responsible parenting and more father engagement in addition to providing financial support.

To cope with these challenges, male solo parents utilize various strategies, including faith and spiritual reliance, focusing on children as primary motivation, focusing more on work as a means of diversion in facing challenges, seeking social support, and personal growth and resilience. These strategies reflect both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Finally, community factors significantly shape their lived experiences, including stigma and social judgment, community support and assistance, economic resources and constraints, and cultural norms and expectations. Although financial constraints and negative perceptions present difficulties, social network support and cultural adjustment strengthen their parenting practices and resilience.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

##### **Description of Male Solo Parents on their Family Dynamics**

The family dynamics of male solo parents reflect the complex and multifaceted roles they assume in raising their children independently. These dynamics are characterized by assuming father as both parents, fostering strengthened parent–child bonds, balancing authority with nurturance, and navigating challenges and emotional struggles. Collectively, these findings demonstrate how male solo parents adapt to their circumstances while striving to provide both guidance and emotional support despite the demands of solo parenthood.

##### *Father as Both Parents*

Participants consistently described assuming full responsibility for caregiving, household management, and financial provision in the absence of a partner. This role expansion required them to perform tasks traditionally associated with both maternal and paternal roles, often without prior preparation or support. These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the “double burden” experienced by solo fathers, encompassing economic, domestic, and emotional responsibilities (Kareem et al., 2024; Capacio, 2024). Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated adaptability and resilience in fulfilling their dual roles.

##### *Strengthened Parent–Child Bond*

The findings indicate that solo parenting can deepen emotional connections between fathers and their children, fostering trust, openness, and mutual reliance. However, economic demands and time constraints limit opportunities for interaction despite strengthened relational ties. These results are consistent with studies highlighting the importance of paternal involvement in promoting child well-being and development, (Yoon et al., 2021). Similarly, Gutierrez (2024) noted that Filipino fathers increasingly adopt nurturing roles, reflecting adaptive changes in family dynamics.

##### *Balancing Authority and Nurturance*



Male solo parents employed diverse disciplinary approaches, combining communication, guidance, and, in some cases, physical or verbal correction. These strategies were influenced by cultural norms, personal experiences, and contextual constraints. While discipline was intended to instill values and responsibility, literature cautions against corporal punishment due to its association with negative developmental outcomes (WHO, 2021; Cuartas, 2021). Overall, the findings highlight efforts to balance control with emotional support in the absence of a co-parent.

### *Challenges and Emotional Struggles*

Participants reported significant emotional strain, including stress, loneliness, and anxiety associated with single parenting. Financial instability, fear of relational failure, and limited support systems further intensified these challenges. These findings are supported by research indicating that solo parents commonly experience psychological distress and social isolation (Baluyot et al., 2023; Cherry, 2023). Despite these difficulties, participants remained committed to their parental roles, demonstrating emotional endurance and resilience.

## **Challenges of Male Solo Parents in Fulfilling Their Roles and Responsibilities while Participating in the 4Ps Program**

Male solo parents participating in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) encountered multiple interrelated challenges that reflect the demanding “double burden” of caregiving and economic provision. These include financial strain despite program assistance, time management pressures, parenting role overload, emotional and psychological stress, and reduced time for self.

### *Financial Strain Despite Program Assistance*

Participants described significant financial strain despite receiving 4Ps assistance, as limited educational attainment, reliance on low-income occupations, and absence of a co-parent compounded difficulties in meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, and school expenses. Irregular income, seasonal employment, and intermittent support from extended family further exacerbated financial pressure, forcing fathers to prioritize immediate survival over long-term aspirations for their children’s well-being. Such economic stress underscores the dual burden of material provision and caregiving that solo fathers often navigate, reflecting broader research showing that the relentless pressure of sole economic responsibility intensifies psychological strain in solo parenthood (Rilling & Hadley, 2023; Gonzaga, 2025).

### *Time Management Pressures*

Male solo parents consistently reported time management challenges arising from the need to juggle full-time work with caregiving and household duties. Coordinating work schedules with childcare needs, preparing meals, attending to school responsibilities, and maintaining household chores left little room for rest or leisure. This relentless cycle reflects the intense “mental load” of solo parenting, where economic survival, caregiving, and self-care compete for limited time and resources (Hispano, 2025; Miller, 2025).



### *Parenting Role Overload*

The cumulative demands of caregiving, employment, and domestic responsibilities frequently exceeded participants' available time and energy, leading to chronic exhaustion and reduced capacity for meaningful engagement in their children's education and development. This finding aligns with evidence that prolonged role overload in solo parenthood often results in physical and emotional burnout, compromising both parental well-being and caregiving quality (Catedral et al., 2025; Lucero-Dueñas, 2024). Solo fathers in the present study described how juggling employment commitments with extensive caregiving duties left them depleted and overextended.

### *Emotional and Psychological Stress*

Solo parenting was associated with significant emotional strain, as fathers navigated caregiving, decision-making, and identity adjustments without support from a co-parent. Participants recounted experiences of emotional exhaustion, identity shock, and sustained psychological burden, which reflect complex stress responses beyond situational adversity. These experiences are consistent with research indicating that solo fathers face silent but significant emotional challenges in balancing caregiving responsibilities and psychological well-being (Capacio et al., 2024; Kareem et al., 2024). Participants' narratives illustrated how psychological stress can manifest in emotional indifference, physical exhaustion, and ongoing internal struggle.

### *Reduced Time for Self*

Participants described persistent limitations on personal time due to the continuous demands of parenting, work, and household tasks, with little opportunity for rest, leisure, or self-care. Fathers reported sacrificing basic routines and hobbies to ensure their children's needs were met, a pattern that highlights how solo parenting frequently entails personal time deprivation. This experience mirrors the broader concept of time poverty in solo parenthood, in which competing obligations leave little discretionary time despite ongoing emotional exhaustion (Capacio et al., 2024). Solo fathers in the study exemplified perseverance and commitment to their parental roles, even at the expense of their own well-being.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate how financial strain, time management pressures, parental role overload, emotional and psychological stress, and reduced time for self, intersect to shape the complex lived experiences of male solo parents participating in the 4Ps program, highlighting the multifaceted and enduring nature of their caregiving and provider challenges.

## **Influence of the 4Ps on Male Solo Parents' Experiences in Providing for and Raising Their Children**

Participation in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) significantly shapes the experiences of male solo parents as they navigate dual roles in caregiving and provision. Its influence is reflected in the alleviation of financial burden, enhanced parenting awareness, and strengthened sense of responsibility.



### *Alleviation of Financial Burden*

Findings indicate that conditional cash assistance helps reduce financial strain, enabling fathers to meet daily household and educational needs while supporting their development as responsible caregivers. This aligns with the Philippine Information Agency (2024), which highlights the role of Family Development Sessions (FDS) and faith in fostering self-sufficiency. Similarly, Orbeta and Paqueo (2020), reported increased school enrollment and reduced dropout rates, while (Canlas, 2020, as cited in RSIS International, 2024), noted improvements in maternal and child health outcomes. These findings collectively support the program's contribution to both immediate financial relief and long-term human development.

### *Enhanced Parenting Awareness*

Beyond financial assistance, participation in FDS enhances parenting knowledge and skills, promoting children's holistic development. This is supported by the Philippine Information Agency (2024), which emphasizes the role of FDS in strengthening parental capability and transition toward self-reliance. Consistent with this, Dela Cruz and Garcia (2022), highlight that beneficiaries associate program success with improved family well-being and education, reflecting the multidimensional impact of conditional cash transfers.

### *Strengthened Sense of Responsibility*

The findings further show that program participation reinforces fathers' commitment to their parental roles, particularly in complying with health and education conditions. Fathers become more engaged in their children's schooling and well-being, demonstrating increased accountability and future-oriented decision-making. This is consistent with Fabela and Pañares (2024), who found that higher parental involvement is associated with improved academic outcomes, and Dominado et al. (2024), who noted that program participation enhances parental self-efficacy and engagement. Overall, these findings suggest that the 4Ps not only alleviates material constraints but also promotes active and responsible fatherhood.

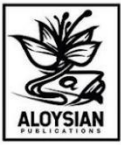
## **Coping Strategies of Male Solo Parents as They Navigate Solo Parenting**

Male solo parents in this study employed multiple coping strategies to manage the practical and emotional demands of solo parenting. These included faith and spiritual reliance, focusing on children as primary motivation, engaging in work as a coping mechanism, seeking social support, and personal growth and resilience.

### *Faith and Spiritual Reliance*

Faith emerged as a central coping resource, providing emotional grounding, hope, and purpose during periods of hardship. Participants reported that prayer, spiritual practice, and reliance on a higher power helped them sustain resilience and meaning in their roles. This finding is consistent with research indicating that solo parents, including fathers, draw strength from faith and commitment to their children despite challenges such as limited social support and emotional stress (Arcilla et al., 2025; Capacio et al., 2024; Sison et al., 2024).

### *Focusing on Children as Primary Motivation*



Children were a primary source of motivation for participants, shaping their daily decisions, perseverance, and resilience. Fathers described their children's well-being, education, and future as central reasons for enduring economic strain and emotional burdens. This aligns with prior research showing that fathers interpret their parental role as a key source of resilience and purpose, reinforcing both identity and commitment in the face of adversity (Gürkan et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024).

#### *Focusing on Work as a Means of Diversion in Facing Challenges*

Engagement in work and other productive activities served as both a practical and psychosocial coping strategy. Participants described how remaining busy with employment, gardening, or other tasks provided emotional distraction from stress, reaffirmed their identity as providers, and offered psychological relief in difficult periods. Narratives indicate that work engagement enabled fathers to manage distress and maintain emotional equilibrium, reflecting coping repertoire described in studies of solo parent coping behaviors (Jeong et al., 2024).

#### *Seeking Social Support*

Support from family, friends, neighbors, and faith-based groups provided emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. Participants emphasized that interpersonal networks offered vital buffers against stress, isolation, and emotional fatigue, enabling them to sustain parental responsibilities despite hardship. This theme corresponds with literature that highlights the importance of social support in reducing stress and fostering resilience among solo parents (Loyola, 2023; Jones et al., 2022).

#### *Personal Growth and Resilience*

Finally, male solo parents demonstrated personal growth by developing new skills, cultivating self-discipline, and strengthening confidence as they adapted to solo parenting demands. Fathers described using adversity as opportunities to enhance competence, redefine fatherhood, and build resilience—transforming hardship into strength. This pathway mirrors the identity reconstruction and adaptive coping documented in studies of solo fathers' lived experiences (Shorey & Pereira, 2023; Butt et al., 2025; Baral et al., 2024; Pinatil et al., 2023).

Collectively, these strategies reflect how male solo parents navigate the emotional, practical, and social complexities of solo parenting, balancing caregiving responsibilities with personal adaptation and growth.

### **Community Factors that Shaped the Lived Experiences of Male Solo Parents**

The lived experiences of male solo parents were significantly influenced by community factors, including stigma and social judgment, community support and assistance, economic resources and constraints, and cultural norms and expectations.

#### *Stigma and Social Judgment*

Male solo parents frequently encountered stigma and social judgment rooted in gender stereotypes and traditional expectations of fatherhood. Participants reported critical, skeptical, or



negative remarks from neighbors and peers, which affected their self-perception, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging. Instances of internalized stigma and emotional distress were evident, as some fathers felt responsible for familial separation or experienced social isolation due to criticism. These observations align with findings by Reed (2025), which indicate that solo parents, including fathers, often face social shame and condemnation that intensify feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. Sison et al. (2024), further highlight that social stigma may exacerbate emotional struggles, increasing stress and a sense of isolation among solo fathers.

### *Community Support and Assistance*

Conversely, community support and assistance emerged as a positive influence on male solo parents' experiences. Informal support networks, including family, friends, neighbors, and religious communities, provided emotional reassurance, encouragement, and practical help, strengthening fathers' resilience and psychological well-being. Supportive interactions validated participants' efforts and reduced feelings of isolation, consistent with Loyola (2023), which emphasizes the importance of family and community networks in reducing stress and fostering belonging. Jones et al. (2022), similarly note that solo fathers receive both supportive and critical reactions, with positive support contributing to improved well-being.

### *Economic Resources and Constraints*

Economic resources and constraints profoundly shaped daily decision-making and overall well-being. Male solo parents faced persistent financial limitations due to unstable employment, low and irregular income, and competing demands of livelihood and childcare. These constraints restricted their ability to provide adequately for their children's needs and heightened emotional stress and vulnerability. This finding is supported by Melad et al. (2020), who emphasize that while cash support mechanisms influence how households manage scarce resources, they do not transform entrenched patterns of economic vulnerability. Pajarillo and Rabago (2025), further note that despite receiving conditional cash transfers, beneficiaries continue to experience food insecurity and difficulty meeting educational and healthcare expenses, underscoring persistent financial hardship.

### *Cultural Norms and Expectations*

Cultural norms and expectations influenced how male solo parents perceived and performed their roles within their families and communities. Traditional beliefs that caregiving and domestic labor are primarily female responsibilities created role strain and social scrutiny for fathers, compelling them to negotiate competing expectations of masculinity and fatherhood. Participants described adapting to these norms by integrating caregiving duties into their paternal identities and redefining their roles beyond conventional breadwinner expectations. Sison et al. (2024), illustrate how emotional sacrifice and caregiving intersect with broader social perceptions of fatherhood, highlighting the negotiation of culturally embedded gender roles.

Overall, these community factors collectively shaped male solo parents' lived experiences by either constraining or facilitating their emotional well-being, parenting practices, and social integration within their social environments.

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