

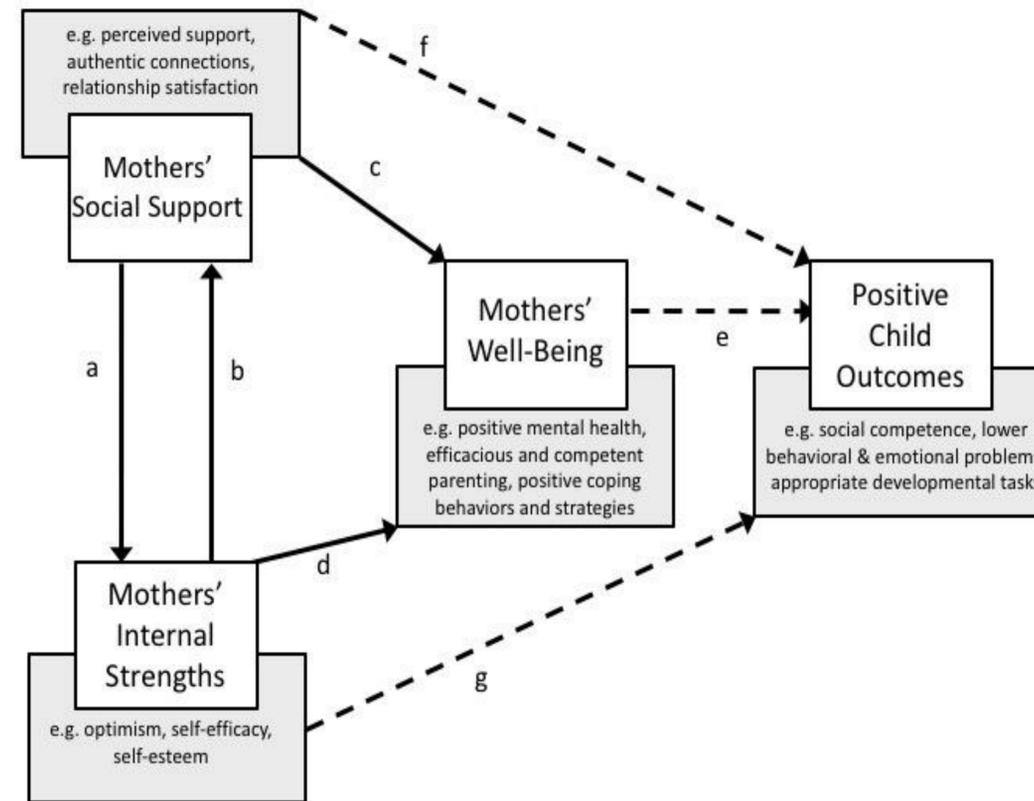
## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Being a mother can be a challenging role for even the most successful, educated, or invested woman (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2015).
- ❖ Mothering can be particularly demanding for single women who are both the primary caregivers and primary wage earners for their children.
- ❖ High levels of both financial and emotional stressors result in single mothers having a high risk for emotional distress and disruptions in parenting, which contributes to their children being more vulnerable to adjustment problems (Taylor & Conger, 2014).
- ❖ Vulnerabilities highlight the importance of identifying ways to effectively intervene in promoting positive adjustment for single mothers and their children across the range of economic circumstances.

## PURPOSE

- ❖ Identifying processes and mechanisms that help single mothers function well, despite the challenges they face, may be the best approach to improving the lives of children in single mother families.
  - ❖ Resilience literature consistently finds that having a warm, competent parent protects children against adversities.
- ❖ Model highlights two resilience factors implicated in the well-being of single mothers. Factors are associated with single mothers' adjustment, are amendable to interventions, and appear to apply equally to single mothers regardless of income or ethnicity.
- ❖ **Social support:** Subjective belief that a person has a caring and available social network that values and takes care of them.
  - ❖ Vital to healthy psychological well-being, coping with stress.
  - ❖ Single mothers with higher social support: higher positive parenting behaviors, lower depression and anxiety, higher self-efficacy, warmer relationships with their children.
- ❖ **Internal Strengths:** Dispositional optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem
  - ❖ Optimistic individuals report less distress across a range of stressful circumstances, have better social networks, higher mental health and well-being, more effective coping strategies (Carver et al., 2010).
    - ❖ Linked to positive parenting/lower depression in single mothers.
  - ❖ Self-efficacy can determine an individual's coping strategies, how much effort they will expend, and for how long.
    - ❖ Mothers with lower self-efficacy more frequently use punitive child disciplinary practices, and their children have higher behavior problems (Olson, Ceballo & Park, 2002).
  - ❖ Maternal self-esteem positively predicts specific parenting behaviors such as regular family routines, involvement, and warm mother-child relationships in African American single mothers (Murry et al., 2001).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Note: Our conceptual model hypothesizes that perceptions of social support and internal strengths are positively associated with mothers' well-being including positive mental health, efficacious parenting, and effective coping strategies (paths c and d). Additionally, it is likely that mothers' social support and internal strengths are bi-directionally related (paths a and b). Although not discussed in the present study, our overall hypothesis is that facilitating well-being in single mothers will positively contribute to child outcomes (path e) and that the selected resilience processes may have direct effects on child outcomes (paths f and g).

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## INTERVENTIONS PROMOTING WELL-BEING IN SINGLE MOTHERS

### ❖ Social Support Research Findings

- ❖ Single mothers who participated in a 10-week program of group sessions offering social support and education had significantly improved mood and self esteem at 3 months post-intervention (Lipman et al., 2007).
- ❖ Single moms who attended more than 70% of a 13-week parenting and self-care group program (Mom Power) showed medium effects of reduced levels of depression, posttraumatic stress, and feelings of helplessness (Muzik et al., 2015).
- ❖ Toth et al. (2013) found that interpersonal psychotherapy reduced depressive symptoms in high risk, low-income mothers.
- ❖ A meta analysis found peer-administered interventions (PAIs) had significant medium effects on pre- post reductions in depression at roughly a 6-month follow up (Bryan & Arkowitz, 2015).
- ❖ Participation in such programs may allow single mothers to form social networks that provide much needed emotional support and mentorship.
  - ❖ cost-effective, empathetic network of peers, opportunity to forge authentic connections with others facing similar challenges.
- ❖ Social support may be crucial for maintaining gains made in treatment.

### ❖ Interventions aimed at Bolstering Internal Strengths

- ❖ Internal resources are linked to effective coping strategies that can be fostered through psychosocial intervention and have the potential to help individuals manage stress and avoid compromising their mental health.
- ❖ Teaching people to think more positively using cognitive behavioral therapies is effective at increasing optimism; however, it is unclear if such procedures have pervasive or long-lasting effects (Carver et al., 2010).
- ❖ “Strengths of the heart” traits such as gratitude, zest, and hope are associated with life satisfaction and well-being (Seligman, et al., 2005).
- ❖ Overall, interventions that target specific internal resources that are linked to coping skills through reformatting negative thinking patterns appear to benefit single mothers.

## IMPLICATIONS AND AND RECCOMENDATIONS

- ❖ Interventions that target the well-being of single mothers are needed.
- ❖ We propose that a strength-based multicomponent group intervention that provides peer support in a group environment, and that additionally combines elements of cognitive-behavioral training, would be highly effective at improving adjustment in single mothers
- ❖ Acknowledging single parents as a multifaceted group deserving to be studied in their own right allows for better insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of this type of family structure and would allow for more effective intervention efforts.