

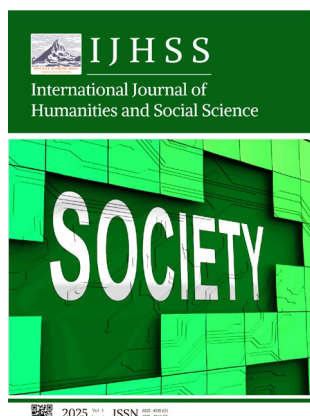
Article **Open Access**

"I Won't Be the Same": A Narrative Inquiry of Chinese Mother-Daughter Conflict Resolutions

Tiantian Yu ^{1,*}

¹ Beijing Academy of Social Science, Beijing, China

* Correspondence: Tiantian Yu, Beijing Academy of Social Science, Beijing, China



Received: 11 March 2025

Revised: 19 March 2025

Accepted: 04 April 2025

Published: 11 April 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.

Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract: Objective: This study illuminated the mother -daughter conflict resolution in a special single-mother household, by interpreting the participants' narratives. Background: Single mother-daughter dyads in many studies were seldom explored through specific, personal narratives. The results of these studies cannot explain the specific family conflicts that occur in certain households. This study focuses on a specific single mother-daughter relationship in order to identify effective strategies for resolving family conflicts. The mother was a single mother who was forced to divorce twenty years ago and suffered from major depressive disorder (MDD). The daughter, who had experienced single-motherhood for seven years, underwent a transformed life. There were more family conflicts in this single-mother-daughter household compared with present reported cases. Method: Exploring the phenomenon and participants' experiences with the utilization of narrative inquiry methodology, I analyzed the single-mother-daughter conflict resolution. Results: Conflicts in single-mother-daughter households are often driven by differences in attitudes towards marriage, parenting styles, and social skills between the mother and daughter, which can be attributed to various factors such as cultural norms, socialization processes, and personal experiences. Conclusion: The positive family dynamics in single-mother households include a combination of behavioral discipline, deep understanding, and forgiveness. Implications: These results can provide community workers with the practical guidance to help single-mother households to have their psychological well-being and positive family dynamics.

Keywords: family narratives; family conflict; Asian family

1. Introduction

Single-mother families in China face a dual burden: the weight of societal stigma and the daily challenges of navigating complex family dynamics. While existing research has thoroughly documented the economic hardships and mental health struggles of single mothers, the intricate processes of conflict resolution within these families — particularly in unique cases where compounded identities intersect with psychological stressors — remain underexplored. This study seeks to illuminate these hidden dynamics through a close examination of a distinctive single-mother household, where conventional assumptions about pathology and dysfunction are challenged by observable resilience.

The following analysis begins by contextualizing the societal and psychological landscapes of Chinese single-mother families, then systematically builds toward revealing a critical research gap: the transformative potential of mother-daughter conflict resolution

in reshaping family narratives. Crucially, all existing literature cited herein has been rigorously selected to maintain focus on this underexplored dimension, while preserving the original structural integrity of the discussion.

2. Literature Review

Chinese single mothers are regarded as weak and minority group in communities who always become the negative central topics in neighbors under the perspective of Chinese society. In comparison to a single-mother family consisting of only one mother and one child, this single-mother family, which is discussed in this paper, with overlapping and compounded identities is more intricate. Moreover, the mental health problem of the family member made the situation more sophisticated. According to Marmorstein and Iacono [1], the presence of conduct disorder (CD) or major depressive disorder (MDD) in adolescents was found to be associated with higher rates of MDD in mothers and antisocial behavior in fathers. Both CD and MDD in adolescents were directly linked to higher levels of parent-child conflict. Furthermore, the association between mother-child conflict and psychopathology in the child was related to the mother's history of MDD.

2.1. Mother-Daughter Interactions in Single-Mother Households

Typical phenomena that occur between the mother and daughter in the family discussed include verbal conflict, behavioral control, and depressive symptoms. Daryanain found that single mothers were more likely to engage in psychologically controlling behaviors, which predicted that their adolescent offspring would experience higher rates of depressive symptoms and externalizing disorders [2]. However, the daughter in this special family did not have any mental diseases despite her mother having suffered from MDD for many years. The likelihood of a high-risk child developing depression, perpetuating a depressive episode, or experiencing relapse can increase due to exposure to high rates of maternal criticism [3]. Primarily, daughter-mother involvement in politics has been a tradition, whether within or outside of the university setting, as educators, scholars, or members of labor unions, either as individuals or as part of a collective. Thus, it may be argued that the daughter as a student is indeed her mother's daughter, although not necessarily in every aspect. Furthermore, the term "trouble" is one that they both embrace with pride [4].

In addition, Ferrar and colleagues found that although some links between emotion and behavior were consistent with previous research (such as attacking/asserting when frowning or upset, and withdrawing/conceding when sad), there were several differences that emerged depending on the specific relationship type (such as sibling versus mother-adolescent) and the position held within the family (such as adolescent versus mother). In this study, the verbal conflict behaviors and affect of family members were continuously coded, and sequential analyses were used to identify temporal associations between individuals' affect and their own, as well as their partners', verbal conflict behaviors [5].

2.2. Single-Mother Families and Forced Divorces

Single mothers are disproportionately more likely than other mothers to experience poverty, financial stress, and food insecurity (Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, 2004). Given their circumstances, it is understandable that many single mothers aspire to achieve financial independence to better provide for the well-being of their children. Additionally, single mothers in francophone-minority communities face unique challenges that require tailored support. Providing high-quality early childhood services is crucial to prepare children for school and to foster their French language proficiency and francophone identity development. The need for improved services in these communities to address the specific needs of single mothers and their children is highlighted. By providing targeted support, policymakers and service providers can help reduce the burden of poverty and improve the long-term outcomes of single mothers and their families.

To better understand the developmental outcomes of children in single-mother households, it is essential to examine both the structural disadvantages faced by these families and the psychosocial dynamics that shape their children's adjustment. Peer networks represent a significant source of bridging social capital, which helps explain the occurrence of youth violence and the association between family structural (dis)advantages and youth behavior [6]. Collective parenting practices mediated through peer networks are thought to play a key role in this relationship.

Research has shown that children living with divorced single mothers perform similarly to children from intact families [7]. In cases of high conflict persisting years after the divorce, higher levels of shared parenting have been found to correlate with poorer child adjustment. This was typically not observed in samples that assessed conflict during the divorce process or in the two to three years following the divorce. The effects of shared parenting on child adjustment in the presence of high conflict differ by gender. Moreover, high-quality parenting by at least one parent is associated with better child adjustment in high-conflict divorces [8].

Moreover, the incidence of psychological disorders is higher among children exposed to violent environments with a high potential for conflict than among children from families that have experienced a breakdown. Children in violent environments often exhibit specific features associated with insecure attachment, which may include a profound neglect of their needs for safety, order, and affection. Such features are more frequently observed in children exposed to violence than in those from families that have undergone separation or divorce.

The negative resolution of family conflicts has enduring consequences and increases the likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms [9]. Women are especially susceptible to these effects, as are single mothers with a history of verbal aggression and those who have encountered threatening behaviors from their partners.

2.3. Recent Research (Research Gap and Objective)

Numerous research studies focusing on single motherhood have extensively investigated the experiences of single mothers and single-mother families, shedding light on various aspects such as their employment challenges, academic disadvantages, economic difficulties, and mental health concerns [10]. Some studies have delved into the multifaceted effect of depression in single-parent households, exploring the complexities and unique circumstances faced by single mothers [11]. The research literature on single mothers has identified the barriers they encounter in the workforce, including limited job opportunities, insufficient support systems, and the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities [12]. Additionally, studies have examined the educational disadvantages faced by single mothers, highlighting the impact of their parental status on their educational pursuits and the subsequent implications for their career prospects [13]. Economic difficulties have been a central focus of narrative research, with studies exploring financial instability, poverty, and the struggle to meet basic needs within single-mother households. These investigations have shed light on the socioeconomic challenges faced by single mothers and the implications for their overall well-being and that of their children. These studies emphasize the importance of understanding and addressing the mental health needs of single mothers to enhance their overall quality of life and the well-being of their families.

Research on single mothers and single-mother families provides valuable insights into the various dimensions and challenges associated with single motherhood, contributing to a deeper understanding of their experiences and informing interventions and support services aimed at improving their circumstance [14,15]. The resolution of mother-daughter conflicts in single-mother households is rarely discussed in the literature. However, addressing these conflicts, which stem from the various difficulties single mothers

face in many aspects of life, is meaningful and offers an opportunity for better family education. Moreover, there is a special case in this study that has rarely been addressed in the literature. Additionally, the positive consequences of divorce and single motherhood, which have not been sufficiently discussed, deserve further exploration.

3. Method

3.1. Narrative Inquiry: Valuable Experiences from Narratives

Narrative inquiry is generally an important qualitative methodology which is used for understanding participants' experience in particular themes. Narrative research, often employed in anthropology, is particularly sensitive to contextual shifts, making it a useful tool in family conflict studies. Rather than merely describing participants' subjective experiences, narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of reporting actual events and facts which have implied more significant meanings and consequences of the study. The situation and status of the narrators, especially the significance of their practice and experience, are suggested to be placed importantly by the researcher. The frame of a narrative is connected to gather information of the events that people value about and believe in, and the hope and intentions which are guided by experiences. Within this paradigm, the narrator of this study will be assumed as the key roles of her mother-daughter storyteller, both educator and characters within her experiences and the experiences of transgenerational family education. The daughter in this single-mother household did not exhibit any negative effects from her mother's depression or from the intergenerational transmission of depression. This is a positive case that differs from most situations, and currently there is no adequate theory to explain this phenomenon. Therefore, the essence of this case can only be explored through narrative inquiry.

3.2. Sampling of the Narrative Inquiry

The sampling for this study is convenience sampling, involving participants who are most readily available to the researcher. The daughter is the researcher's cousin, and her mother, who was forced to divorce and suffered from MDD for many years, was known to have this condition by all close relatives, including the researcher. The daughter's narrative of the mother-daughter conflict resolution forms the main part of this study. However, this represents only half of the mother-daughter pair, as it remains crucial to explore the mother's narrative, despite her passing. The researcher then combined the mother's story, as well as events shared by the daughter and other close relatives, making the participants of this study include the daughter and the mother's close relatives.

This study focuses on a mother-daughter dyad. The mother, a single parent who was forced to divorce twenty years ago and suffered from depression, passed away prematurely at age 49 due to myocardial infarction. In contrast, her daughter, a new bride, has experienced single motherhood for seven years after divorcing due to emotional abuse and financial pressure from her former husband. Currently, she has found a right man to spend the rest of her life with and has fulfilled her mother's last wish.

In a comparative analysis of mother-daughter relationships, the older and younger generations demonstrate significant differences. However, these two cohorts possess completely distinct notions of family education, which can result in conflicts and contradictions arising within the family lives of single mothers.

Effective conflict resolution is essential for fostering a harmonious family environment, but it requires a targeted approach. In single-mother families, the bond between mother and daughter is often profound, which can lead to more noticeable contradictions and conflicts. This study examines a specific mother-daughter relationship to identify effective strategies for resolving conflicts in family education. The findings of this study can provide practical guidance for single mothers struggling to maintain a positive family dynamic. Additionally, this research can serve as a foundation for future practical applications in the field of single mother family dynamics.

3.3. Data Collection: Immersing in Stories and Editing Field Texts

The primary method of data collection in this narrative inquiry study involved two rounds of multi-faceted semi-structured interviews with the daughter and the mother's close relatives. The first round of the interview focused on fundamental information about the mother-daughter relationship, and the second round of the interview paid more attention to the deep feelings and significant events about the conflicts happened to the pair of mother and daughter. Researchers must construct the experiences and narratives of their subjects within a specific context. Interview materials, memoirs, field notes, and personal diaries can serve as the primary sources for researchers to compose field texts. The use of a semi-structured approach enables the researcher to adapt to the circumstances, the evolving perspective of the participant, and fresh insights related to the subject matter [16]. Once the daughter agreed to participate in the study, all rounds of face-to-face communication were conducted under an oral secrecy protocol. The daughter had the right to review all the interviews about her mother and was allowed to adjust the structured interview questions to address sensitive topics and privacy [17]. I formulated the interview questions based on the background of the study and relevant research. As well as the concepts that would be included and discovered in participants' dialogues compose the date of this study.

3.4. Data Analysis: Convert Field Texts into Research Texts

Researchers should be well-prepared when writing research texts derived from field texts, utilizing their personal perspective. In this study, I used the narrative inquiry methodology to analyze the field texts and identify social themes or common perspectives in the daughter's narrative. The goal of converting field texts into research texts was to extract general significance from personal experiences. To activate this approach, I undertook the following steps: transcribing the interviews after substantive data collection and conducting the analysis of the narrative using the constant comparative approach [18]. This approach encompassed the acquisition of fresh insights or data, which were then juxtaposed with previously collected data from the study. This method proved particularly valuable in integrating and contextualizing the data by juxtaposing it with the daughter's previous statements and accounts provided by relatives. Ultimately, I classified the data into distinct categories, guided by the emerging themes and constructs identified through the analysis of narrative data.

4. Results

Conflict resolution is a crucial aspect of interpersonal relationships and has been the subject of extensive research in various fields, including psychology, sociology, and communication studies. It provides insights into the nature and dynamics of conflicts, shedding light on the factors that contribute to their occurrence. Research has identified several common conflict bases, including differences in interests, values, goals, power dynamics, and interpersonal relationships [19,20]. Different conflict bases may require distinct approaches and strategies to effectively address and resolve the conflicts. Research has shown that conflicts grounded in power dynamics often require negotiation and mediation processes to restore balance and reach mutually acceptable solutions [21]. On the other hand, conflicts based on differences in values or goals may necessitate compromise and finding common ground through open communication and understanding [22]. For instance, conflicts rooted in interpersonal relationships, such as personality clashes or unresolved past issues, may exhibit higher emotional intensity and be more challenging to resolve compared to conflicts based solely on divergent interests [20]. Understanding the specific conflict basis can help mediators, counselors, and individuals involved in conflicts to tailor their conflict resolution strategies accordingly.

4.1. Conflict Basis

4.1.1. Different Difficulties

The mother and daughter had different difficulties in their single motherhoods. The daughter primarily faced economic difficulties, while the mother primarily struggled with neighborhood gossip and stigma. However, the daughter hardly cares about the gossip targeting their single-mother family. Conflicts between mother and daughter occasionally arose when the mother heard negative comments about her daughter. The mother would become sad and anxious, but the daughter, unconcerned, often argued with her mother about her reaction to the gossip. "She did not solve her problem and was suffering from depression. She avoided these problems by playing mahjong. But my solution is to ignore what other people speak ill of me behind my back, I just live the life I want. It is shame and totally wrong to judge others' life with mean words, I wouldn't pay any attention to the mistakes that they have done."

For a single mother like the daughter, employment hardship and discrimination were the most significant challenges, especially when the single mother had a divorced and unemployed mother. Single mothers who find individual solutions, rather than relying on public childcare arrangements, are more likely to achieve a balance between work and family life. In terms of institutional determinants, welfare benefits have a negative impact on the labor market participation of women in low-paid jobs [23]. The pressure and judgment from society did not overwhelm the daughter, as she faced many survival challenges. "I have always wanted a good life, but I am bound by worldly expectations. Resulting in nothing being achieved in the end. After finding a job that I enjoy, I eventually resigned due to a relapse of depression due to poor interpersonal relationships."

4.1.2. Multi-Aspect Assistances and Scarce Support

The daughter had more comprehensive support than the mother did in managing household tasks and employment situations as a single mother. The daughter, when she was in her single motherhood, could get the assistant from her mother and close friends who were willing to spend their spare time to look after her daughter.

However, the mother only did all the things in the household by herself when her daughter was an adolescence. The experience of being a single mother differed for the mother and the daughter. The mother perceived the life of a single mother as anxiety-inducing, reminiscent of her own past anxieties. In seeking support, the mother experienced some stigma about her single-mother identity, viewing herself as a failure. The social stigma associated with single motherhood can be categorized into three distinct groups, which include concerns about morality, violations of traditional gender roles, and perceptions of victimization. There were the Insufficiency of community support for single mothers' daily life and social discrimination towards single mother which worsen the sense of shame of single mothers, especially for the elder generation. Due to these senses of stigma and feelings inferior to others, she refrains from discussing her feelings and needs with outsiders. "I guess nothing here for her (the mother). Her parents can seldom give her support because of her distant marriage. Her friends could offer her some comfort. My father, her ex-husband, gave her some financial support."

In contrast, the daughter views her status as a single mother as a path towards happiness, distancing herself from her difficult ex-husband and providing her daughter with better love and education. Accordingly, the daughter is more willing to take on the risks and pressures of her chosen lifestyle, as well as to voice her demands and seek all available help to improve her life. "The support from the company boss has greatly helped me. Because my boss was the middle school classmate of mine, there is much tolerance towards me. If I was employed by other company, I might be fired for many times. Single mothers have too many tasks to manage. My relatives respect my choice of being a single mother without any peculiar comments."

4.1.3. Progressive and Conservative Thoughts About Failed Marriages

The daughter exhibits a more progressive perspective on divorce compared to her mother. She does not believe that marriage is an essential component of life and recognizes that a single incompatible partner does not define her entire experience with marriage, even if the marriage is considered a failure. "My divorce was due to significant differences in perspectives and habits, which could not be reconciled in terms of personality and lifestyle. Honestly, the feeling of divorce was liberating at the time. I was able to escape the shackles of my ex-husband's marriage and truly become myself."

However, the mother expressed her anxiety to close relatives, feeling that her own physical condition (MDD) was a burden on her daughter. She hoped that her daughter would get married and start a new family. The mother did not know how to guide her daughter toward a happier life and felt hopeless about both her own life and her daughter's future. "She (the mother) told me that she failed to have a happy marriage and couldn't move on with peace and joy." Verbal and psychological conflicts carry a higher risk of eliciting depressive symptoms compared to physical conflicts [9].

For single mothers, getting married or divorced can have a more detrimental effect on their mental and physical health compared to other women. In certain situations, the negative impact is even greater than if they had remained unpartnered [24]. The mother, as a single mother forced to divorce, suffered greatly from both mental and physical health issues. She did nothing to address her negative emotions and became addicted to playing mahjong. The mother attempted to start a new relationship through cohabitation, but the situation worsened. "There are too many emotions to avoid for her (the mother), along with a sense of powerlessness towards life, and a loss of patience and confidence in many things. These factors might have contributed to the worsening of her depression."

The daughter, on the other hand, recovered from her last failed marriage by immersing herself in work and seeking professional therapy. She then chose a healthy relationship and eventually remarried. "I chose marriage again because I was simply disappointed with that person in my previous divorce, not with marriage or men in general. I believe that there is such a thing as a good marriage, with the right person."

4.2. Conflict Resolution

Based on discourse analysis, the family conflict between the mother and daughter arises from different sources. Depending on the underlying causes of the conflict, there are various coping strategies and modes of resolution employed by both the mother and the daughter. Throughout the conflict resolution process, the daughter assumes a primary role in reconciliation, mediation, and tolerance. The daughter's role as a child is neutral and can vary depending on the specific circumstances. In the memoirs and research texts written by the researcher, the mother is depicted as passive within the entire conflict resolution mechanism, while the daughter takes on a more dominant role. Different situations and topics can influence the intensity of the conflict and directly shape the approach to resolving the conflict between the mother and daughter (Figure 1) [25].

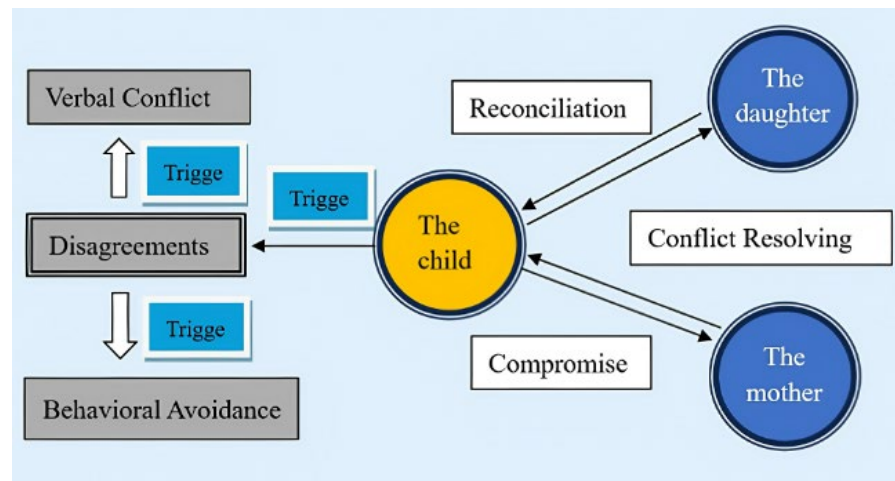


Figure 1. The Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in This Single-Mother Household.

4.2.1. As an Educator in the Family: Self-Identification

The daughter demonstrates significant differences in her approach to her own daughter's education compared to the methods she experienced from her own mother during her time as a single mother. She has developed a strong sense of self-identity and exercises minimal control over her daughter, focusing her expectations primarily on key aspects of her daughter's daily life and study habits. While nurturing her own sense of self-identity, she also encourages her daughter to cultivate autonomy [26]. "I have been paying attention to the development of her behavioral habits since childhood, and she doesn't have any bad habits now. I let her learn to empathize, experience her mistakes firsthand, and develop good habits."

Disagreements within the mother-daughter relationship often serve as a catalyst for verbal conflicts between the two. Verbal conflict includes behaviors such as shouting, derogatory remarks, and verbal abuse. "When she speaks, I just let it go in one ear and out the other. They are usually unresolved. When I try to resolve them, she has her own ideas, and I have mine, and we can't communicate at all. You know, she's the type who doesn't know how to communicate properly."

Research has shown the detrimental effects of verbal violence on individuals' mental health, self-esteem, and family dynamics. The presence of such destructive communication patterns highlights the need for conflict resolution strategies and the promotion of healthier modes of interaction within the mother-daughter relationship. Future research should focus on interventions aimed at reducing verbal violence and encouraging more constructive, empathetic communication between the mother and daughter.

4.2.2. Emotional Manipulation and Behavioral Avoidance

The dynamic between the mother and daughter can be characterized by the mother's ability to provoke volatile reactions in her daughter, while the daughter's behavior consistently elicits worry and distress in the mother. This complex interplay highlights the reciprocal nature of their interactions, wherein the mother's actions or words may trigger intense emotional responses in the daughter, while the daughter's behaviors and choices evoke ongoing apprehension and concern in the mother. The underlying mechanisms of this dynamic and potential interventions that could promote healthier interactions and emotional harmony within the mother-daughter relationship are crucial areas of focus.

Behavioral avoidance is observed in the context of anxiety and familial pressure, where the daughter exhibits reluctance to spend time at home, leading to limited interaction between the mother and daughter. This pattern of behavior suggests that the daughter may be avoiding or withdrawing from the home environment, potentially due to anx-

iety or external pressures within the family system. The decrease in mother-daughter interaction can impact the quality and depth of their relationship, underscoring the need for further investigation into the underlying factors contributing to this behavioral avoidance and its implications for family dynamics. Future research should explore strategies for fostering a more positive and engaging family atmosphere, creating opportunities for increased interaction and connection between the mother and daughter.

The mother provided her daughter with adequate material support during her childhood, which instilled a sense of safety and security in the daughter's daily life. Consequently, the daughter did not experience a sense of poverty or lack in any aspect of her life. This perception of having sufficient material resources played a crucial role in shaping her educational values and beliefs, which in turn influenced her approach to instilling similar values in her own daughter. "For example, when my daughter wants to buy something that is not practical, I patiently communicate with her and take her to pick up recyclable garbage, making her realize that earning money is not easy."

4.2.3. Disagreements and Reconciliation in Transgenerational Family Education

Conflicts between the mother and daughter arose when disagreements emerged, particularly regarding how to care for the younger generation. The daughter believed that the child should have the freedom and right to do what they wanted, while also understanding that individuals must take responsibility for their actions and face the consequences of their mistakes. In contrast, the mother believed that the elder generation held more power and authority than the younger generation, and thus, the younger generation should adhere to the supervision of the elders.

"She often yells, curses, and criticizes me, comparing me to other children from other families. She has a desire for control and expects everything to be done her way. The elder's arrogance is particularly strong, and she expects both her children and the younger generations to obey her. She never admitted her mistake, even when the facts clearly showed she was wrong."

"She became a negative example for me." The daughter believed that her mother's passing served as a wake-up call, encouraging her to move forward positively. Transgenerational family education is grounded in theory and can be observed through behavioral indicators [27]. The daughter retained a strict part of her mother's parenting style but also grew more understanding and compassionate toward her own daughter. It was as though she was nurturing her own wounded inner child, who had been hurt by her mother's mistakes, and forgiving the "daughter" who had suffered from depression, life failures, and eventually passed away quietly alone.

In family education, arguments, conflicts, and contradictions often stem from deep, unspoken love and concern when the right methods cannot be found. Reconciliation occurred when love and understanding emerged.

After her mother's sudden death, the daughter said, "I used to imagine that when my daughter grew up, I could take my mother on trips around the world." On the other hand, the sudden loss of her mother triggered feelings of having no home, prompting the daughter to end her single motherhood. "She (the mother) was no longer here for me. I have to find someone else (a husband) and start a new family." Seven years of single motherhood had been difficult for the daughter, but the painful memories of household struggles were finally eased by her forgiveness of her mother.

5. Discussion

5.1. Limitations

The representativeness of single-mother families in this study, particularly within the Chinese context, requires further validation. The researchers relied on their own experiences and subjective knowledge framework to analyze the research texts, and the validity of these interpretations needs to be confirmed through practical application. This study

only presents a specific mechanism for conflict resolution within a particular Chinese single-mother family. While this mechanism may be applicable to the family in question, further research is necessary to explore its applicability across a broader range of family dynamics.

There is also the issue of narrative relativity, even when narrative authenticity can be ensured. In this study, there is a lack of authentic maternal discourse, as the primary narrative comes from the daughter, supplemented by accounts from external observers. Future research, if possible, should include a more comprehensive sample that encompasses a broader range of perspectives, including the mothers' own voices.

A limitation inherent in narrative research is how to interpret and understand participants' experiences and stories within the framework of the researcher's knowledge and logic. Given these challenges, my recommendation for future research is to expand the sample size and assess the generalizability of the findings across different family structures.

5.2. Directions for Future Research

Given the limitations discussed earlier, it is essential for future research to address the representativeness of the sample, particularly within the Chinese context. The narrow focus on a single conflict resolution mechanism within one single-mother family requires broader exploration. Future studies should examine whether this mechanism is applicable to other family structures. It would be valuable to expand the sample size and include more diverse family dynamics, with a special emphasis on incorporating the mothers' perspectives, which were notably absent in this study. This could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Moreover, exploring how different cultural norms and social contexts affect the generalizability of the findings is crucial. Future research could examine the interaction between cultural expectations, socialization processes, and conflict resolution strategies in single-mother households.

6. Conclusion and implications

In the context of single-mother households, conflicts primarily arise from discrepancies between the mother and daughter, especially concerning attitudes toward marriage, parenting styles, and social skills. These intergenerational differences can be attributed to various factors, including differences in cultural norms, socialization processes, and personal experiences. For example, the mother may hold traditional views on the importance of marriage and adopt an authoritarian parenting style, while the daughter may value independence and practice a more democratic approach to parenting. Additionally, differences in social competence may lead to misunderstandings and conflict within the household. Such conflicts can significantly affect the psychological well-being and development of both the mother and daughter, as well as the overall functioning of the family.

Conflict resolution strategies in single-mother households typically combine behavioral discipline, deep understanding, and forgiveness of past mistakes. Behavioral discipline translates subjective educational arguments into objective, observable behaviors in the child. This often involves setting clear rules and expectations, alongside consistent consequences for noncompliance. Moreover, deep understanding and forgiveness of mistakes are essential for conflict resolution. These approaches are rooted in positive beliefs about marriage, family, and the future, with a strong sense of love and commitment to the family's well-being. Through understanding and forgiveness, mothers can foster a safe and supportive environment that promotes positive relationships among family members and facilitates healthy conflict resolution. The integration of these strategies can help single-mother households navigate conflicts and maintain positive family dynamics.

The daughter's eventual growth and belief in a better marriage were not only due to meeting the right person but also attributed to her mother's "blessing from heaven." This

spiritual phenomenon can be referred to as "intangible love," which describes the belief that fortunate events happen due to the distant love of someone who has passed away. This type of love connects the living with the deceased, making the beloved feel that happiness continues to be shared across realms. In this way, death is not seen as an end, but as an enduring presence, with the faith in this intangible love transforming the unreachable distance into something that feels only a heartbeat away.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the daughter and the relatives who participated in this study, providing valuable insights that were instrumental in gathering effective data for this paper. Their thoughtful engagement and contributions were greatly appreciated. I am also deeply thankful to the mother, who, as a key character in this study, served as a bridge between this life and the next. This paper is also intended to express my condolences to her.

Data Availability Statement: Due to the private nature of the participants' experiences, and to ensure privacy and confidentiality, primary discourse texts and field data are not publicly accessible. Adhering to ethical guidelines and safeguarding the security of these texts are essential to protecting the rights and confidentiality of the individuals involved in this research.

References

1. M. R. Marmorstein and W. G. Iacono, "Major depression and conduct disorder in youth: Associations with parental psychopathology and parent-child conflict," *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry*, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 377-386, 2004, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00228.x.
2. I. Daryanani, J. L. Hamilton, L. Y. Abramson, and L. B. Alloy, "Single mother parenting and adolescent psychopathology," *J. Abnorm. Child Psychol.*, vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 1411-1423, 2016, doi: 10.1007/s10802-016-0128-x.
3. J. S. Silk et al., "Expressed emotion in mothers of currently depressed, remitted, high-risk, and low-risk youth: Links to child depression status and longitudinal course," *J. Clin. Child Adolesc. Psychol.*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 36-47, 2009, doi: 10.1080/15374410802575339.
4. S. Weiner and G. Weiner, "'You're trouble you are, just like your mother!' An intergenerational narrative on activism in higher education," *Pedagogy, Cult. Soc.*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 271-285, 2019, doi: 10.1080/14681366.2018.1466193.
5. S. J. Ferrar, D. M. Stack, K. S. Baldassarre, A. Orsini, and L. A. Serbin, "Conflict resolution and emotional expression in sibling and mother-adolescent dyads: within-family and across-context similarities," *J. Early Adolesc.*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 227-261, 2022, doi: 10.1177/0272431621102036.
6. S. De Coster, K. Heimer, and K. Sanchagrin, "Impoverished single mother households and violent delinquency: Bonding, negative, and bridging social capital," *Youth Soc.*, vol. 54, no. 7, pp. 1200-1224, 2022, doi: 10.1177/0044118X211017612.
7. C. Zhang, "Are children from divorced single-parent families disadvantaged? New evidence from the China family panel studies," *Chinese Sociol. Rev.*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 84-114, 2020, doi: 10.1080/21620555.2019.1654366.
8. N. E. Mahrer, K. L. O'Hara, I. N. Sandler, and S. A. Wolchik, "Does shared parenting help or hurt children in high-conflict divorced families?," *J. Divorce Remarriage*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 324-347, 2018, doi: 10.1080/10502556.2018.1454200.
9. M. J. Joo, J. Ko, J. H. Lim, D. B. Kim, and E. C. Park, "The relationship between family conflict resolution methods and depressive symptoms in patients with chronic diseases," *PLOS ONE*, vol. 20, no. 2, p. e0318378, 2025, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0318378.
10. E. M. West, L. G. Miller, and R. M. Moate, "Single mothers' experiences of support at their young children's school: An interpretative phenomenological approach," *Early Childhood Educ. J.*, vol. 45, pp. 379-391, 2017, doi: 10.1007/s10643-016-0802-1.
11. O. M. Kareem et al., "Single parenthood and depression: A thorough review of current understanding," *Health Sci. Rep.*, vol. 7, no. 7, p. e2235, 2024, doi: 10.1002/hsr2.2235.
12. M. K. Dharani and J. Balamurugan, "The psychosocial impact on single mothers' well-being — A literature review," *J. Educ. Health Promot.*, vol. 13, p. 148, 2024, doi: 10.4103/jehp.jehp_1045_23.
13. P. R. Amato, S. Patterson, and B. Beattie, "Single-parent households and children's educational achievement: A state-level analysis," *Soc. Sci. Res.*, vol. 53, pp. 191-202, 2015, doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2015.05.012.
14. Z. E. Taylor and R. D. Conger, "Promoting strengths and resilience in single-mother families," *Child Dev.*, vol. 88, no. 2, pp. 350-358, 2017, doi: 10.1111/cdev.12741.
15. X. Zhou and Z. E. Taylor, "Differentiating the impact of family and friend social support for single mothers on parenting and internalizing symptoms," *J. Affect. Disord. Rep.*, vol. 8, p. 100319, 2022, doi: 10.1016/j.jadr.2022.100319.
16. E. J. Tisdell, S. B. Merriam, and H. L. Stuckey-Peyrot, *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, John Wiley & Sons, 2025. ISBN: 9781394266449
17. C. J. Muylaert, V. Sarubbi Jr, P. R. Gallo, and M. L. Neto, "Narrative interviews: an important resource in qualitative research," *Rev. Esc. Enferm. USP*, vol. 48, pp. 184-189, 2014, doi: 10.1590/s0080-623420140000800027.

18. J. Kim, "Narrative data analysis and interpretation," in *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, SAGE Publications Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2016, pp. 184–225. ISBN: 9781452282787.
19. T. S. Jones and R. Brinkert, *Conflict coaching: Conflict management strategies and skills for the individual*, Sage Publications, 2007. ISBN: 9781412950831.
20. M. Afzalur Rahim, "Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict," *Int. J. Conflict Manag.*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 206-235, 2002, doi: 10.1108/eb022874.
21. M. Deutsch, "The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes," *Am. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 248, 1973, doi: 10.1177/000276427301700206.
22. R. Fisher, W. L. Ury, and B. Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Penguin, 2011. ISBN: 9780143118756
23. M. Hancioglu and B. Hartmann, "What makes single mothers expand or reduce employment?" *SOEPpaper*, no. 446, Ruhr Univ. Bochum, Apr. 1, 2012, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2131118.
24. K. Williams, S. Sassler, and L. M. Nicholson, "For better or for worse? The consequences of marriage and cohabitation for single mothers," *Social Forces*, vol. 86, no. 4, pp. 1481-1511, 2008, doi: 10.1353/sof.0.0057.
25. P. Kaur and R. Singh, "Conflict resolution in single and dual-career families," *Manag. Labour Stud.*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 307-321, 2003, doi: 10.1177/0258042X0302800402.
26. N. F. Russo, "The motherhood mandate," *J. Soc. Issues*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 143-153, 1976, doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.1976.tb02603.x.
27. T. S. Nelson, G. Heilbrun, and C. R. Fegley, "Basic family therapy skills, IV: Transgenerational theories of family therapy," *J. Marital Fam. Ther.*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 253-266, 1993, doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.1993.tb00986.x.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The views, opinions, and data expressed in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of PAP and/or the editor(s). PAP and/or the editor(s) disclaim any responsibility for any injury to individuals or damage to property arising from the ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content.