

Social and Professional Support for Single-Parent Families: Urban–Rural Disparities in Perceptions of Inclusion Policies

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Single-parent families represent a structurally **vulnerable** social group, exposed to heightened risks of poverty, social exclusion, and labor market marginalization. These risks are amplified by **territorial inequalities**, particularly between **urban** and **rural** areas, where access to social services, professional support, and institutional resources varies substantially. Although social inclusion policies aim to mitigate these disparities, their perceived relevance and effectiveness remain uneven across socio-geographical contexts.

Aim: This study investigates urban-rural differences in perceptions of social inclusion policies and social and professional support programs addressed to a sample of single-parent families from Romania.

METHOD

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed using a self-developed questionnaire consisting of 22 items. The instrument assessed perceived accessibility, adequacy, and effectiveness of social inclusion policies, social support services, and professional support measures targeting single parents.

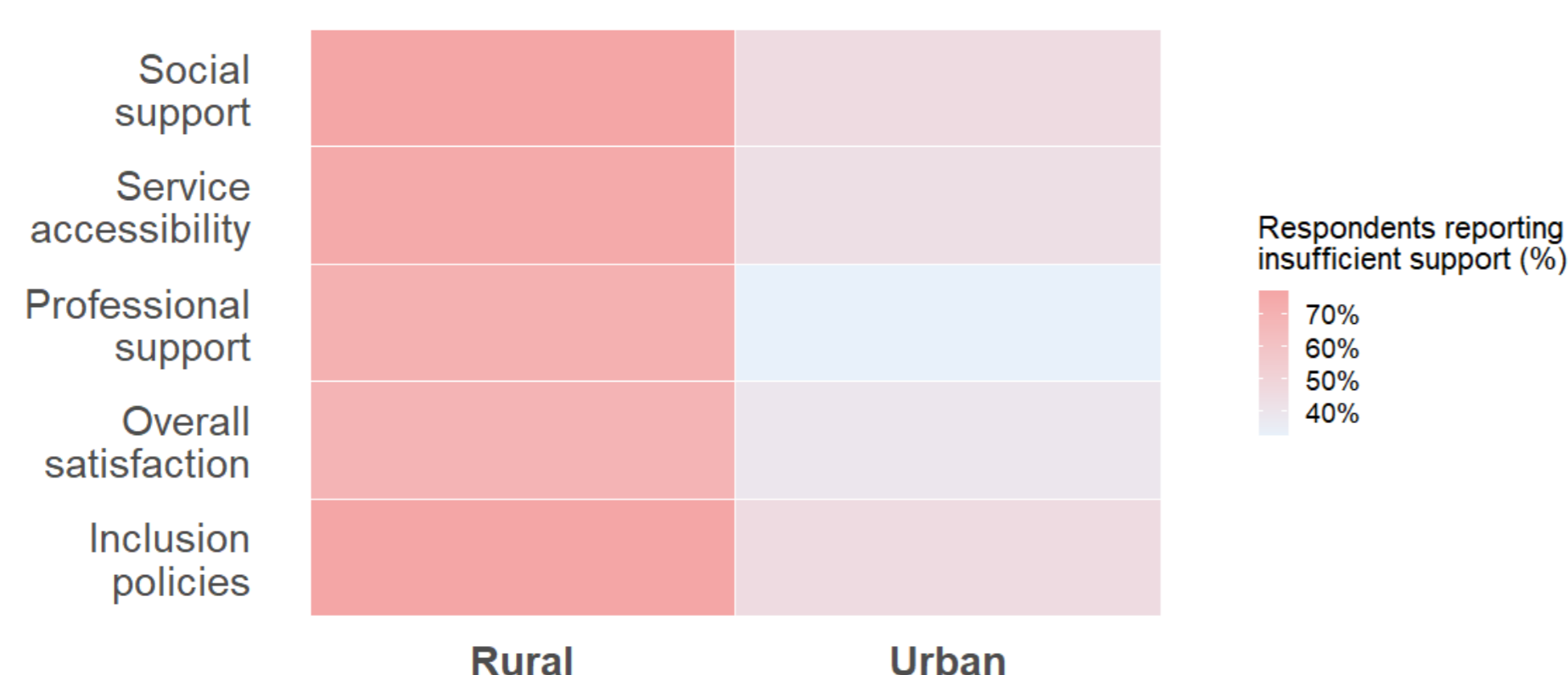
Participants: The sample included 95 respondents (urban = 47; rural = 48), aged between 19 and 50 years ($M = 28.71$), with a predominance of female participants.

Data analysis: Statistical analyses comprised descriptive statistics, tests of normality, Mann–Whitney U tests for group comparisons, and Chi-square tests for associations between variables.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION (1)

The findings indicate **significant urban–rural disparities** in several dimensions of perceived support. **Urban** respondents demonstrated higher awareness of existing inclusion policies and services, albeit with a more critical evaluative stance. In contrast, **rural** respondents reported markedly lower confidence in the existence, accessibility, and effectiveness of social and professional support measures.

Figure 1. Urban–Rural Differences in Perceived Support for Single-Parent Families

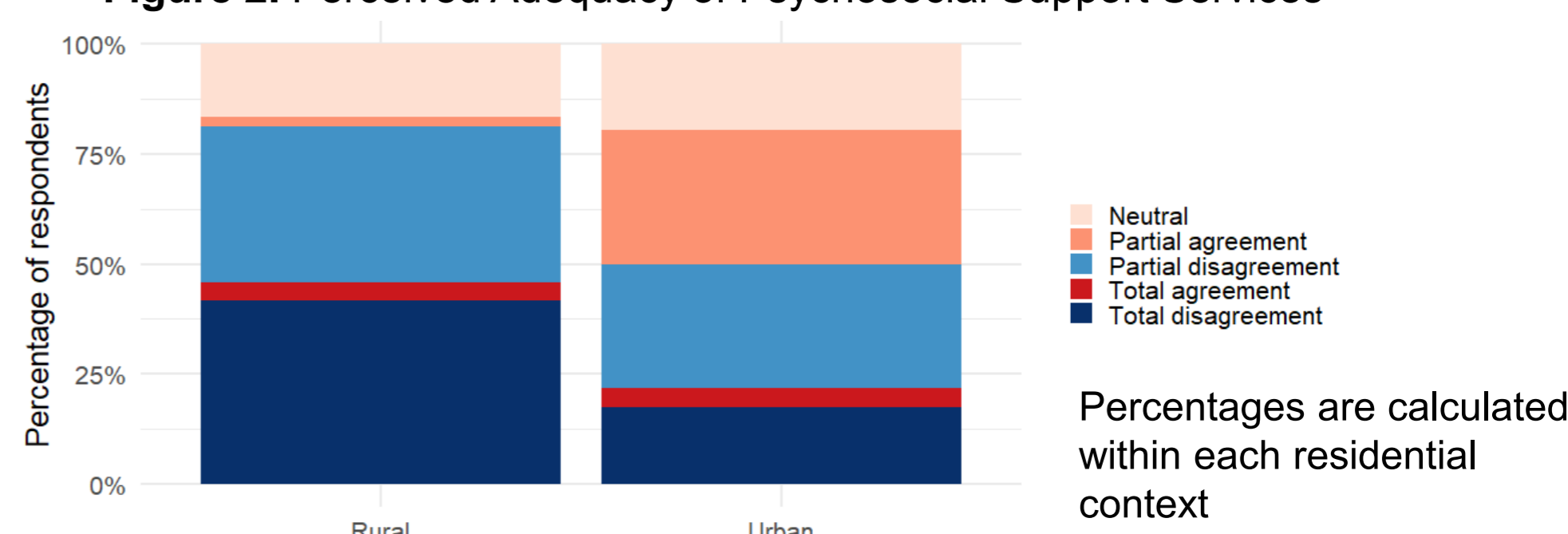


Note. Percentages represent respondents reporting total or partial disagreement with the adequacy, accessibility, or availability of social and professional support measures.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION (2)

Psychosocial counseling services and community-based support were widely perceived as insufficient, particularly in rural areas. Professional support measures—such as vocational training, career counseling, and employment adapted to parental responsibilities—were evaluated as inadequate across both contexts, with significantly higher dissatisfaction among rural participants.

Figure 2. Perceived Adequacy of Psychosocial Support Services

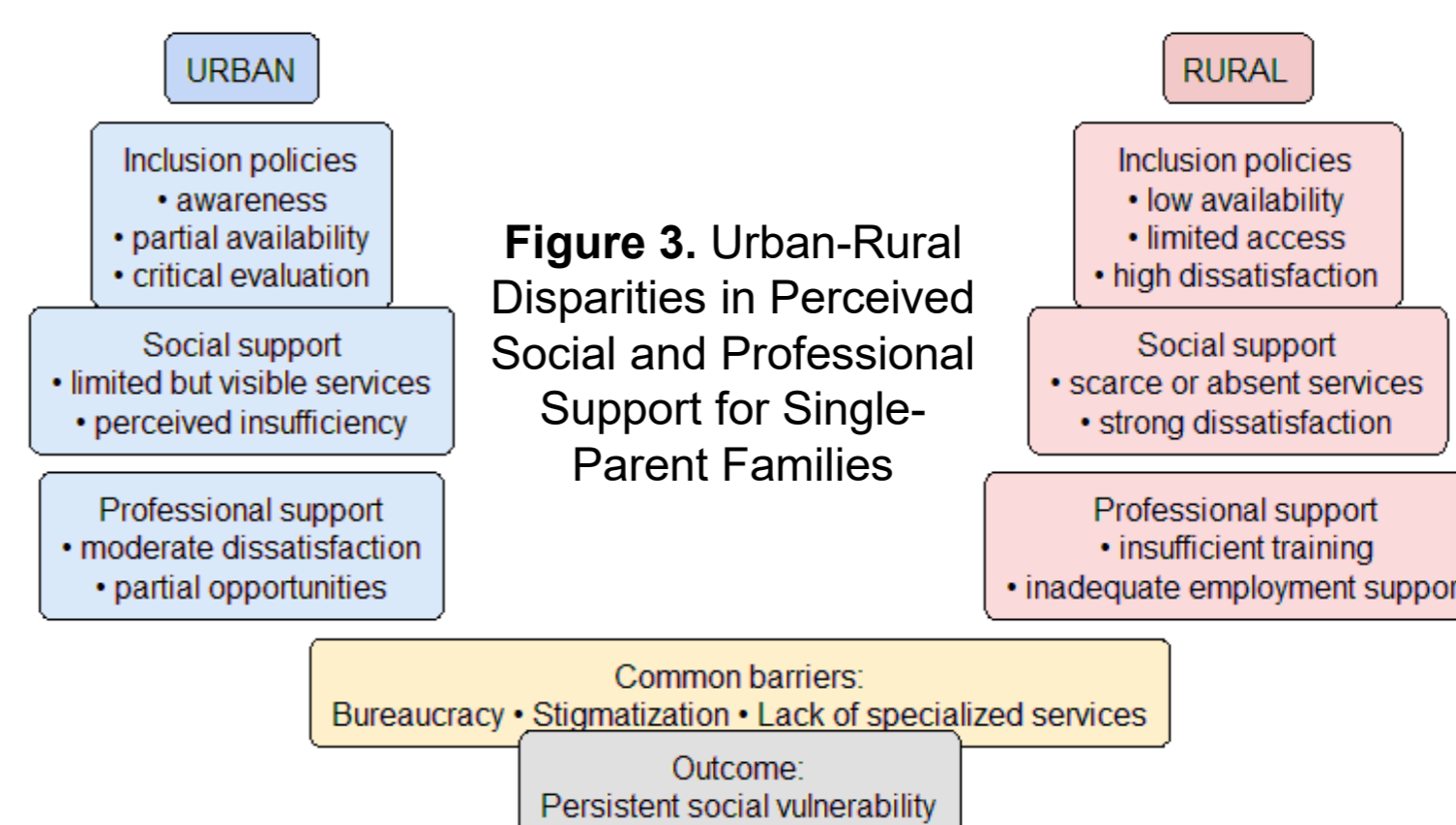


Percentages are calculated within each residential context

Bureaucratic complexity, social stigmatization, and the lack of specialized services emerged as central barriers, suggesting that territorial inequalities intersect with institutional and cultural constraints, exacerbating disparities in access to and perceived effectiveness of support systems, particularly in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that perceptions of inclusion policies and support programs for single-parent families are strongly shaped by the urban-rural divide.



While urban contexts offer greater visibility of services, Romanian rural areas remain structurally disadvantaged, with limited access to both social and professional resources. These disparities undermine the effectiveness of current inclusion policies and perpetuate social vulnerability among single-parent families.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

Further research should integrate qualitative approaches to capture lived experiences and institutional practices, as well as longitudinal designs to assess policy impact over time. Policy development should prioritize territorially differentiated interventions, expanded psychosocial services, flexible employment opportunities, and strengthened collaboration between public authorities and employers.

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