

Problems Faced by Single Mothers

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ABSTRACT The role of single parent is challenging one especially when the family is headed by a women. Problem of single mother are linked with the up bringing of children, their future and setting down in life. Till the time children get married and or get jobs they are dependent on the single parent. After that the problems are considerably reduced. The present study like, to study the problems faced by single mothers i.e. social, emotional and economic, a sample of 50 single mothers were selected by snowball sampling technique. The results of the study revealed that financial problem was the main stressor for majority of the single mothers. The emotional life of the single mother was also affected by their single status. Majority of the single mother reported that they felt lonely, helpless, hopeless, lack of identity and lack of confidence. In social sphere majority of single mothers tried to avoid attending social gatherings and had changed their dressing style due to depression they had develop poor food and eating habits. Majority of the single mothers found it hard to maintain discipline among the children due to absence of male members. The mothers complained about loneliness, traumatic and depression and found it difficult to handle the responsibility of childcare and to establish a routine for her children.

INTRODUCTION

Single parent family may be defined as “A family comprising of a single mother or father having their own dependent children”. The single parent family is created in a number of ways, death of one parent, divorce, separation and desertion. In the mid-twentieth centuries, most single-parent families came about because of the death of a spouse. In the 1970s and 1980s, most single-parent families were the result of divorce. In the early 2000’s, more and more single parent never married and was the primary contributors to single parent families in the world. Single parents in India are mainly women who are widows. Willicox (2003) in a study on “The Effect of Widowhood on Physical and Mental Health, Health Behavior and Health Outcome,” found that women who were recently widowed reported substantially higher rates of depressed mood, Poorer social functioning and lower mental health and physical functioning than women who were widowed more than a year.

Sarah et al. (2006) studied “Divorce Leads to Poor Psychological and Physical Health in Women” in Iowa on a sample of 416 rural mothers. The results revealed that divorced women have a higher susceptibility to chronic illness, especially over a period of time compared with married women. A stressful life event has also shown to have affected the psychological health of these women after the divorce. Divorced mothers experienced a greater number of stressful events

such as demotions, layoffs, accidents, critical illnesses and problems with their own parents than did married women. Divorced mothers are also trapped in a vicious cycle of financial problems and other stressful life events.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A sample of fifty mothers was selected through snowball sampling technique. An interview schedule was framed for data collection. It was pre-tested on 10% sample and necessary modifications were made in the interview schedules. The respondents were contacted by home visits to elicit the required information. Each respondent was visited at least 2-3 times for data collection. Flexibility of questions was maintained, if the respondent was not able to respond accurately, then the same question was asked in a different way. Responses were recorded on the basis of interview schedule as well as observation. Data were tabulated and results were given in numbers and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is clear from Table 1 that almost 56% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 40-50 years, 32% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 30-40 years. Twenty-eight percent of the women were illiterate, 22% were middle pass, 20% were metric pass, 18% were primary

Table 1: Background Information of the mothers.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1.	Age (years)		
a	20-30	1	2
b	30-40	16	32
c	40-50	28	56
d	50-60	4	8
e	Above 60	1	2
2.	Qualification		
a	Illiterate	14	28
b	Primary	9	18
c	Middle	11	22
d	Matric	10	20
e	Intermediate	2	4
f	Graduate	4	8
3.	Occupation		
a	Working	24	52
b	Non -Working	26	48
4.	Residing Area		
a	Rural	41	82
b	Urban	9	18
5.	No. of Children		
a	1-2	6	12
b	2-3	20	40
c	3-4	19	38
d	4-5	4	8
e	Above 5	1	2
6.	Family Characteristics		
I	Type of Family		
a	Nuclear	41	82
b	Joint	6	12
c	Short stay home	3	6
II	Size of the Family		
a	2-3	6	12
b	3-4	20	40
c	4-5	19	38
d	5-6	1	2
e	6-7	3	6
f	7-8	-	-
g	8-9	1	2
III	Monthly Income of the Family		
a	Below Rs. 1000	7	14
b	1000-3000	34	68
c	3000-6000	4	8
d	6000-9000	3	6
e	Rs. 9000 and Above	2	4

pass, 8% were graduate and only 4 % were intermediate. Eighty-two percent of the respondents were living in rural areas and only 18% of the respondents were living in urban areas. Forty percent of the respondents had 2-3 children, 38% had 3-4 children and only 2% had more than 5 children. Eighty-two percent of the respondents belonged to nuclear family, 12% of the respondent's belonged to joint family and rest 6% of the respondent stayed in short stay home (NGO named Neha Ghar). Forty percent of the respondents had 3-4 member in a family 38% had 4-5 members and very few had more than 5

members is a family. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were working whereas 48% of the respondents were non-working. As for monthly income of the family is concerned 68% of the respondent had income between Rs. 1000-3000, 14% below Rs. 1000 and very few had income above Rs. 3000.

Figure 1 depicts that majority 88% of the respondent were widows, 6% were divorced and equal number were separated from their husband.

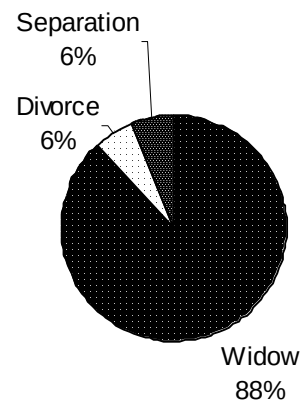
**Fig. 1. Reasons for single parenthood.**

Table 2 depicts that almost 58% of the respondents had spent about 0-8 years as single parent, 30% of the mothers had spent 8-16 years and 12% of the respondents spent over 16 years looking after the family single handedly.

Table 2: Number of years spent as single mother

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1	0-8 years	29	58
2	8-16 years	15	30
3	Above 16	6	12
Total		50	100

Emotional Problems Faced by Single Mothers

Single mothers tend to suffer from a feeling of rootlessness and lack of identity after divorce/ widowhood. This is especially true of women whose identity was formerly associated with that of their husbands. In many women, feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, anger and anxiety about future are so dominant, that they bring out personality changes. Data was collected in order to determine information regarding experience of mothers following death of spouse, emotional

problems faced by single mothers and strategies adopted to overcome emotional problems.

Figure 2 depicts that 62% of the respondents were depressed or suffered from traumatic grief due to early death of their husband, 44% of the respondents went into shock when they heard about their husbands unnatural deaths in road accident, heart attack, snake biting, brain hemorrhage, 4% of the respondents stated that they were mentally prepared for this situation due to prolonged illness of their husband. Chen (1998) found that widows experience traumatic grief following the death of a spouse. Dave (2000) revealed that single mothers have higher incidence of major depression.

Table 3 Depicts that majority 80% of the respondents felt helpless and hopeless and at times did not want to carry on with the tedious and monotonous role, 80% suffered from loneliness. This was more for women who lost their spouses due to accidents and heart attacks, 72% women lacked confidence in dealing with the new challenges of life. Forty-six percent felt lack of identity and thought their life was no longer meaningful and 40% stated that they suffer from emotional imbalance i.e. they have become

irritable and short-tempered. Jayakody (2000) found that single mothers lack self confidence.

Figure 3 depicts that 50 % of single mothers coped up with strain by spending more time with their children, 44% tried to keep themselves busy by getting more involved in household chores, 40% used to read, watch TV and listen to music, 38% meditate and perform puja, 34% overcome their psychological problems by talking with their friends/relatives, 14% release their pent-up emotions by crying.

Financial Problems Faced by Single Mothers

Financial crises is a standing situation with most of the single parent families. It becomes difficult in meeting the basic needs of children such as food, clothing, school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expense. Data was collected to determine information regarding earning prior to marriage, financial problems faced after husband's death, present source of income, present financial problems faced by single mother, help reeked during financial crises. Table 4 shows that majority (98%) of the single mothers had never worked before marriage.

It is clear from Table 5 that half of the

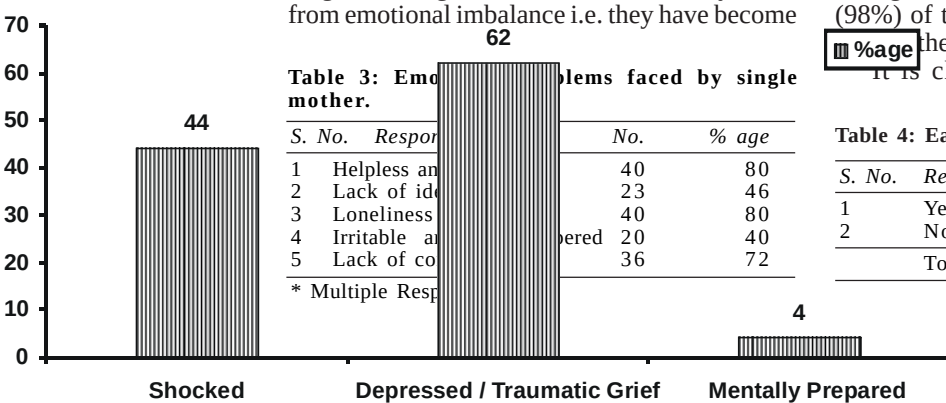


Table 3: Emotional problems faced by single mother.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1	Helpless and hopeless	40	80
2	Lack of identity	23	46
3	Loneliness	40	80
4	Irritable and short-tempered	20	40
5	Lack of confidence	36	72

* Multiple Responses

Table 4: Earning prior to marriage.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1	Yes	1	2
2	No	49	98
Total		50	100

Fig. 2. Experience of mothers following death of the spouse

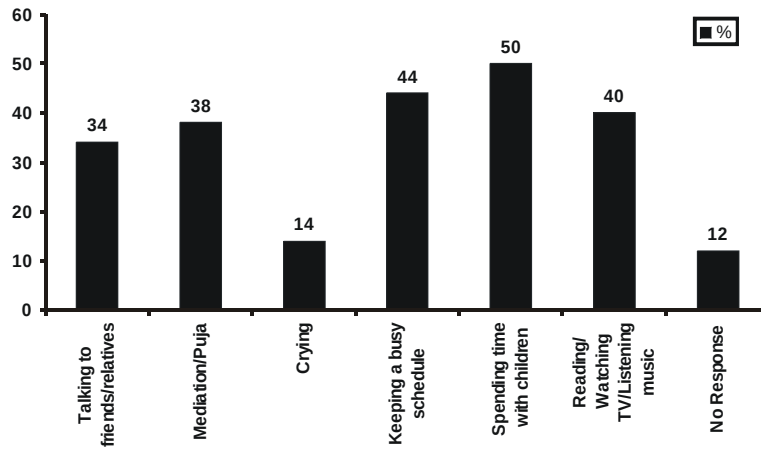


Fig. 3. Coping strategies

respondent's immediate financial problem after husband's death was to fulfill basic needs (i.e. food, clothing and shelter) of the family and her personal expenses. Forty-four percent of the mothers faced problem related to studies of the children. It was difficult for them to pay the school fee. Forty-two percent stated that it became difficult for them to maintain their previous standard of living. Only 6% of the respondents did not face such problems, as they were financially sound. Thus it is clear from the above table that a financial crisis was a standing situation with most of the single mother families. The situation was that of economic helplessness. With the limited resources it was difficult for single mothers to meet the basic needs of children such as food, clothing and school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expenses.

Single mothers had become the primary wage earners after the death of their husbands. They were forced to shoulder responsibilities of their

husbands. It is clear from Figure 4 that 32% of respondents were working in Government and Non-Government sector (8% were engaged as 4th class employees in govt. jobs, 4% working as health collector and craft teacher and rest of the 21% were working as a maids) and 26% of the women were involved in agriculture. Twenty six percent of women had started their own business (shops, boutiques, dairies) 14% of women were getting help from their children, who were working as vendors, shopkeepers and constables. For 6% and 4% the source of income was rented property and bank balance. One of the respondents was dependent on her parents.

Table 6 depicts that majority (80%) of the single mothers still faced problem in providing the basic education to their children. Sixty percent of the respondents stated that they found it difficult to provide proper medical facilities to their children, 40% of single mothers faced problem in meeting food and clothing needs of the family, 50% of the mothers found problems in

Table 5: Immediate financial problems after husband's death.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1	Fulfilling basic needs of the family and personal expenses	25	50
2	School fee	22	44
3	Maintaining previous standard	21	42
4	No problem	3	6

*Multiple responses.

Table 6: Present financial problems faced by single mothers.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1.	Education of the Children	40	80
2.	Food Items	20	40
3.	Medical Facility	30	60
4.	Clothing	20	40
5.	Paying of Electricity/ Water Bills	25	50
6.	House Rent	3	6

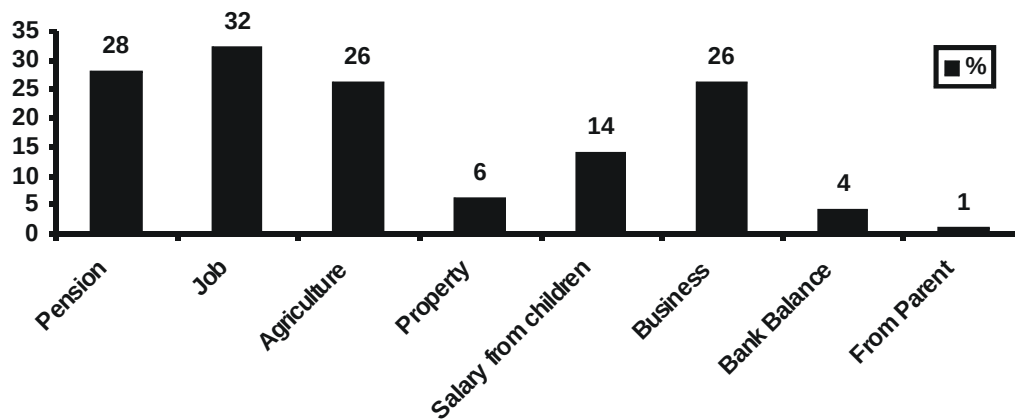


Fig. 4. Present source of income

paying of electricity/water bills and only 6% of the mothers faced problem in paying house rent.

Figure 5 shows that 36% of single mothers took the help of their relatives at the time of financial crises, 22% of them did not approach any body for help because they thought that it might hurt their self-respect, so they tried to solve their problems on their own and sometimes it led to depression, 20% of them approached their parents, 16% their neighbours, 6% their friends and 6% took help of Non-Governmental Organisations. Only 2% approached their in-laws during financial crises. Mcloyd (1994) in his study also revealed that financial strain led to depression in single mothers.

Social Problems Faced by Single Mother

Single mothers soon discover that there is

little place for them among married couples. Most of the widow's social life is centered on activities with other women. If she is economically handicapped, then she is unable to participate in many community social organizations. Data was collected to determine participation of single mother in social gatherings/function, change in life style of the husband's death or divorce, decision making regarding children future, problems faced by single mother in disciplining the children.

It is clear from Table 7 that forty-four percent respondents always attended the social functions. The women attempted to compensate the absence of their husbands by performing and participating in the social functions, 44% of them sometimes attended social gatherings. They tried to avoid the functions when they felt low. Twelve percent of single mothers never attended any

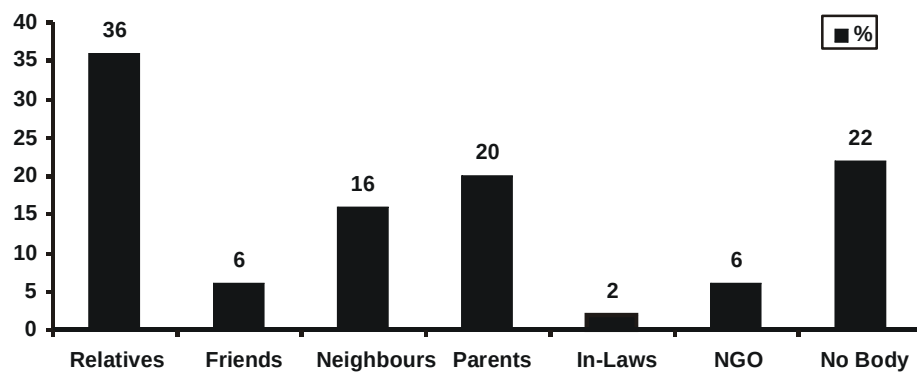


Fig. 5. Help seeked during financial crises

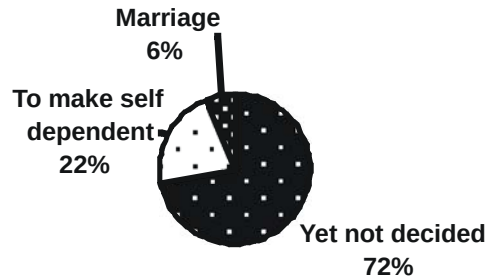
Table 7: Participation of single mothers in social functions

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1.	Always	22	44
2.	Sometime	22	44
3.	Never	6	12
Total		50	100

social functions after the death of their spouse due to the feeling of low self-esteem and lack of identity and financial problems. These women hesitated to make new friends and hence experienced lack of companionship. The problem was that there was no male member to accompany them during night so they avoided late night social gatherings.

It is clear from Figure 6 that the life-style of the single mothers changed after the loss of their husbands; Eighty percent changed their style of dressing, opting for more dull and light colors, 64% of the women decreased their outing like going to social functions, movies etc. For fifty percent of respondents there was a change in their food habits. These women stated that due to depression they developed poor food habits and loss of appetite. Moreover these women had left eating non-vegetarian, which is considered a taboo for a widow in their society and 44% of the single mother were burdened with additional role strain as a parent. In addition to primary wage earner, women were forced to shoulder other responsibilities of their husbands and attempted to compensate for his absence in performing child rearing and other functions.

Figure 7 depicts that majority of mothers 72% could not make a decision regarding future prospect of their children due to lack of finance,

**Fig. 7. Decision regarding future prospect of the children**

little knowledge and guidance. These women were undecided even about the higher education to be provided to their children. Twenty-two percent of mothers wanted to make their children self-dependent as they believed in destiny. These women wanted to make their children self-dependent so that they may not have to suffer like them. They wanted their children to study and find good jobs for themselves and 6% of respondent were planning to marry their children when ever they got a suitable match. Single mothers were entirely responsible for every decision they took and never ever getting a break. Previously things were shared with their husband. Due to prevalence of nuclear family system there was no other adult with whom she could share her decision.

Table 8 depicts that 60% of the single mothers found it hard to maintain discipline among the children due to absence of male counterparts. The mothers became lonely and found it difficult to handle the responsibility of child-care and to establish a routine for their children. They felt that their children were out of control and were

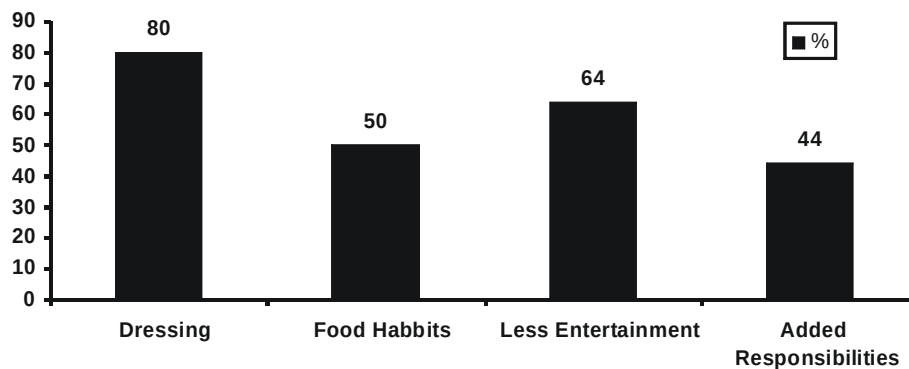
**Fig. 6. Change in Life style after husbands death or divorce**

Table 8: Problem faced by single mothers in disciplining the children.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1.	Yes	30	60
2.	No	20	40
Total		50	100

not responding to their parenting. But 40% of the single mothers stated that their children were easy to handle and were obedient. They adjusted to the routine set by them. They even tried to help their mother whenever they felt low.

Table 9 depicts that majority 88% of the mothers were satisfied with the dual roles. The women stated that being single mother, to play the role of father, homemaker, family provider and head of the household add up to the heavy load of responsibility. But still they were satisfied with their dual roles as they believed that it was for the betterment of their children. Twelve percent women were not satisfied with the dual duties as they stated they were not able to give proper time and guidance to their children.

Table 9: Are you satisfied with the dual roles.

S. No.	Responses	No.	% age
1.	Yes	44	88
2.	No	6	12
Total		50	100

CONCLUSION

The most common type of single-parent family is one that consists of a mother and her biological children. About 70% of the single parents are women. Being a single parent, can be hard and lonely. There is often no other adult with whom to share decision making, discipline and financial responsibilities. The full burden of child care, earning a living and parenting falls on one individual.

The role of single parent is challenging one especially when the family is headed by a woman. It is more difficult when a woman has never previously worked outside the home. The role of a single mother requires that the parent takes on responsibility that may have been shared by their spouse. Single mothers experience additional role strain as a parent. In addition to becoming the primary wage earner, a woman is forced to shoulder other responsibilities of her husband. However, the lack of structure, and inconsistent

enforcement of parental standards, children who are living with single mother have a home life that is different from children living with both the parents.

Problems of single mother are linked with the up-bringing of children, their future and settling down in life. Till the time children get married and or get jobs they are dependent on the single parent, after that the problems are considerably reduced. The results of the study revealed that financial problems was the main stressor for majority of the single mothers. It became very difficult for the mothers to meet the basic needs of children such as food, clothing and school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expenses, with the situation of economic problems and limited resources.

The emotional life of the single mother was also affected by their single status. Single mothers had to go through a lot of new situations every now and then; they were continuously under some tensions. Majority of the single mothers reported that they felt lonely, helpless, hopeless, lack of identity and lack of confidence. Most of the single mothers believed that emotional problems occurred due to condition of economic hardships, worries regarding children and their future.

In the social sphere majority of single mothers tried to avoid attending social gatherings and had changed their dressing style due to depression. They had developed poor food and eating habits. Majority of mothers could not make a decision regarding higher education of their children. For this they blamed poor financial status, lack of knowledge and proper guidance. Majority of the single mothers found it hard to maintain discipline among the children due to absence of male members. The mothers complained about loneliness, trauma and depression and found it difficult to handle the responsibility of child-care and to establish a routine for her children.

So, it could be concluded that majority of single mothers faced economic, emotional and social problems. Single mothers worked hard and tried their best to rear their children. Thus, single mothers deserve greater attention and need intervention and treatment efforts to improve their economic and social outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS

Single mothers may have bitter feelings over

their marital loss. Here are some ways for stressed single mothers to make their life easier.

- Single mother should seek medical and professional help in case of depression.
- She should take stress relievers such as deep breathing and a quick 10 minute hot shower.
- She should get organized or ask for help of a family member in doing so.
- She should keep a family calendar and allow her kids to be in activities.
- She should seek financial advice from experts or friends to overcome constant worrying.

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