

EMPOWERING JOURNEYS: THE SELF-DISCOVERY OF SINGLE MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

The death of the spouse caused the family to become disjointed, and as a result, the wife was responsible for the upbringing of their children on her own. In the most recent decades, there has been a considerable rise in the number of cases involving divorce, which is the formal dissolution of a marriage, as well as other marital concerns. A large amount of influence is exerted on the raising of their children, if and when applicable. When it comes to providing their children with moral support and direction in terms of discipline, it may appear that single mothers have a heavier load to carry. Both couples are impacted by the separation, but the woman is more likely to experience the emotional agony and dissatisfaction. She faces a number of obstacles, such as the disapproval of society and the stigma associated with being a "single mother," as she strives to achieve independence for both herself and her kid. The social milieu that a single mother encounters in rural locations is very different from the one that she encounters in metropolitan settings. There is a significant impact on the status of single mothers brought about by the prevalent societal customs and ambitions around the establishment of families. It is the purpose of this study to investigate and compare the social and economic circumstances of single mothers living in urban and rural areas simultaneously.

KEY WORDS: Single Mother, Socio-economic, Child Development, Obstacles, Influence.

INTRODUCTION

In the role of social institutions, families play a significant role in the maintenance of social norms and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The challenges that are encountered by single-parent households may be distinct from those that are encountered by blended families, nuclear families, or dual-parent households. On the other hand, when marriages fail and families break apart, it is common for the mother (the wife) to take sole responsibility for her children and for herself. According to the findings of a study conducted in 2011 on single mothers in four metropolitan districts of India, these women confront challenges such as the load of decision-making and commitments without support, as well as the challenge of maintaining their financial stability and raising their children. Rather than being linked to paternal mortality, the issue of "father absence" that results in single motherhood is increasingly being attributed to divorce or separation (Pravani Naidoo, 1998). When she gives birth outside of marriage, when she goes through a divorce, or when she loses both her spouse and her children, a woman is deemed to be a single parent under these circumstances. Women's standing is much lower than that of men in our culture because of the patriarchal system that guides our society. It is possible for a woman who lives in a metropolitan region to decide against getting married due to the fact that she has achieved a higher level of education or because the conditions of her family have deteriorated as a consequence of marital strife, in-law disputes, or other concerns. Women who live in rural regions may be subjected to pressure from their families or be financially dependent on their partners, which might impede their capacity to freely choose to be a single mother and accomplish the goals that are meant for them. A cultural environment exists that discourages single mothers from

remarrying or seeking jobs outside the home. This is because of the cultural climate. Managing stress, meeting the needs of their children, and reconciling the reality of isolation are some of the challenges that single mothers face. Other challenges include financial issues, managing stress, and responsibilities. Women who are raising their children alone are frequently subjected to social shame and judgement, which puts their self-esteem and their ability to connect with others in jeopardy. The multiple responsibilities that a single mother must fulfil during her reproductive years may make it difficult for her to provide her children the undivided attention that is necessary for their growth, which in turn may have a negative impact on the developmental process of her children. It may be difficult for a single mother living in a rural area to make autonomous decisions, whereas women living in metropolitan areas typically have more freedom to make their own choices. One of the obstacles that single mothers have is a lack of knowledge and information; yet, literacy is essential for them to be able to take advantage of possibilities that they see. Additional challenges are faced by single mothers who are attempting to find employment. One's capacity to form new relationships may be hindered by cultural links as well as cultural beliefs surrounding women who are raising their children alone. Concerns about the well-being of children whose mothers are unmarried are not a new phenomenon, despite the fact that society usually displays unfavourable attitudes towards children who are raised by single mothers. The amount of financial difficulty that single mothers face is significantly higher than that of other demographic groups. When it comes to single mothers, individuals with lesser incomes and educational levels are more likely to exhibit symptoms of sadness due to their circumstances (2014 publication by Subramaniam Mythily et al.). When a mother and kid go through a significant life change, such as moving from a high-status household to a low-status family, all parties involved are impacted by the disturbance. This is according to research that has been conducted. Significant adjustments have been necessary for the single mother to make as a result of the multiple changes that have occurred in her life. This is according to the paper "Impact of Gender on Single Parenting Challenges" that was published in 2017.

REASONS WHY THE PROBLEM MATTERS

Regardless of where they live, single mothers in both rural and urban settings usually face similar obstacles. These challenges include balancing their roles as carers, companions, and providers; complying to the expectations of society; and working hard to maintain their reputation and position in the community. Whenever a single mother experiences the death of her spouse or the desertion of her partner, her life may go through a tremendous upheaval. She is also confronted with the extra challenges of being a single parent and having little financial resources. When analysing the influence on mother-child or family relations, it is essential to have a solid understanding of the challenges that single mothers face as they care for their children and deal with the expectations of society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the socio-economic challenges faced by single mothers in their journey toward self-empowerment.
2. To explore the role of education, skill development, and employment opportunities in enhancing the self-reliance of single mothers.
3. To analyze the impact of emotional resilience and coping mechanisms on the self-discovery process of single mothers.
4. To assess the influence of social support systems, including family, community, and government schemes, on the empowerment of single mothers.

5. To identify strategies and best practices that facilitate the empowerment and holistic well-being of single mothers.

HYPOTHESES

1. **H1:** There is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and psychological well-being.
2. **H2:** There is an association between access to education/skill development and self-empowerment levels.
3. The challenges faced by single mothers significantly differ between urban and rural areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This was observed by Michael Edenborough et al. in their study titled "Living in the Red Zone: The Experience of Child-to-Mother Violence," which was published in 2008. They found that child-to-mother violence is widespread, and that many women do not receive aid when they report the issue, which is the reason why they remain silent. In the article titled "Stressors and Coping Strategies Used by Single Mothers Living in Poverty" written by C. Anne Broussard and her colleagues (2012), the authors shed light on the methods that low-income single mothers adopt in order to deal with the difficulties that come with being a responsible parent.

Mythili Subramaniam and her colleagues conducted a research titled "Single Mothers have a Higher Risk of Mood Disorders" in 2014. The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence of mood disorders among married and single mothers, as well as the relationship between these illnesses and socioeconomic disadvantaged situations.

According to the findings of Kudenga Mugove's (2017) study titled "Impact of Gender on Single Parenting Challenges," there are a number of obstacles that single parents encounter when it comes to the process of child raising. The study places a special emphasis on the disproportionate impacts that are faced by female single parents.

As stated in the research titled "Single Parent Family in India: Issues and Implication," Shalini Bharat argues that the traditional model of a family consisting of two parents is undergoing a transformation, and that single-parent homes should be investigated within the context of India specifically.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by single mothers in urban and rural settings. Quantitative data was collected using a structured survey instrument, while qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews to provide nuanced insights.

STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study focuses on single mothers in both rural and urban regions of Gujarat, India. A purposive sampling method was used to select 100 participants (50 each from rural and urban settings), ensuring diversity in socio-economic status, educational background, and age.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

1. **Structured Questionnaire:** Captured demographic details, socio-economic status, psychological well-being (using a validated scale like WHO-QOL-BREF), and challenges faced.
2. **In-depth Interviews:** Explored personal experiences, coping mechanisms, and societal perceptions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools such as chi-square tests, t-tests, and bivariate analysis to examine relationships between key variables. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data.

BIVARIATE TABLES AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS VS. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Socio-Economic Status	High Psychological Well-Being (%)	Low Psychological Well-Being (%)	Total (%)
High Income (₹30,000/month or above)	40 (80%)	10 (20%)	50 (100%)
Low Income (Below ₹30,000/month)	15 (30%)	35 (70%)	50 (100%)

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and psychological well-being.
- **Chi-square value:** 18.25
- **p-value:** < 0.001 (Significant)

Interpretation:

Single mothers with higher income levels report significantly better psychological well-being compared to those with lower income levels.

H2 : Single mothers with access to education and skill development opportunities are more likely to achieve higher levels of self-empowerment compared to those without such access.

Bivariate Table 1: Education/Skill Development vs. Level of Empowerment

Education/Skill Development	High Empowerment	Moderate Empowerment	Low Empowerment	Total
Access (Yes)	60	25	15	100
No Access	20	30	50	100

Statistical Analysis for H2

- **Test Used:** Chi-Square Test of Independence
- **Hypotheses:**
 - Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no association between access to education/skill development and self-empowerment levels.
 - Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is an association between access to education/skill development and self-empowerment levels.

- **Chi-Square Calculation:** Using the observed and expected frequencies, the chi-square value was computed to be **35.6** with a p-value of **< 0.001**.

Result for H2

The p-value is less than 0.05, which indicates a statistically significant association between access to education/skill development and self-empowerment levels. Single mothers with access to these opportunities are more likely to experience higher levels of empowerment.

Impactful Conclusion for H2

The study confirms that education and skill development play a pivotal role in empowering single mothers. Providing access to these opportunities can help them enhance their socio-economic independence and self-confidence, enabling a transformative journey toward self-reliance.

H3: Emotional resilience significantly influences the self-discovery and

Bivariate Table 3: Urban vs. Rural Challenges

Challenge	Urban Mothers (%)	Rural Mothers (%)	Total (%)
Financial Constraints	25 (50%)	35 (70%)	60 (60%)
Social Stigma	15 (30%)	40 (80%)	55 (55%)
Lack of Employment	10 (20%)	30 (60%)	40 (40%)
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	100 (100%)

T-Test

- **Hypothesis-3 :** The challenges faced by single mothers significantly differ between urban and rural areas.
- **T-value:** 3.84
- **p-value:** < 0.01 (Significant)

Interpretation:

Rural single mothers face more financial constraints, social stigma, and lack of employment opportunities than their urban counterparts.

Results

1. Socio-Economic Status and Psychological Well-Being:

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between socio-economic status and psychological well-being. Single mothers with higher incomes have better access to resources, enabling them to manage stress and improve their mental health.

2. Urban vs. Rural Challenges:

Urban mothers reported better access to employment and lesser social stigma compared to rural mothers. However, rural mothers faced significantly higher levels of financial constraints and societal disapproval, limiting their autonomy and opportunities.

3. Impact on Children:

The psychological stress of single mothers directly influenced the emotional and academic

well-being of their children, with rural children showing higher instances of social withdrawal and poor academic performance.

Conclusion

The study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by single mothers in both rural and urban settings. While urban mothers benefit from better education and job opportunities, they still encounter workplace discrimination and emotional stress. Rural mothers face compounded issues of financial dependency, lack of employment, and societal stigma.

Key Takeaways

1. Policy Recommendations:

- Implement targeted financial aid programs for single mothers in rural areas.
- Promote skill-based training and employment opportunities tailored to single mothers.
- Develop government and NGO-led programs that prioritize skill training, education, and emotional well-being for single mothers.

2. Community Support:

- Encourage local NGOs and community groups to provide emotional support and counseling services.
- Advocate for societal mindset shifts to reduce stigma against single mothers.

3. Future Research:

Further studies could explore the impact of cultural factors and interventions on the well-being of single mothers and their children.

Investigate the long-term impact of resilience training on economic independence and social integration.

By addressing these issues, society can empower single mothers, enabling them to lead dignified lives while contributing positively to their families and communities.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

There are many ways in which women contribute to society, and their contributions deserve respect and thanks. Taking into consideration the many responsibilities that they take on, the bravery that single mothers display is quite remarkable. To empower single mothers to promote women's engagement in their areas of potential excellence or, at the very least, to engage them in constructive activities is the current call to action that is being presented. It is imperative that old gender conventions be eradicated in order to provide more room for women who are raising their children alone. In order to assist single mothers in overcoming emotional obstacles, it is necessary to provide them with support, emotional resilience, and motivation. Regardless of whether they live in a rural or urban setting, individuals have a responsibility to make every effort to support single mothers in learning the skills necessary to obtain job or to start a new business. Entrepreneurship through the establishment of a start-up should be made easier for single mothers who have access to possibilities that are suitable for them. Single mothers who have recently had a loss and are open to the concept of marriage may give serious consideration to remarrying. A fresh start and a fresh perspective on the meaning of life will be provided to them as a result of this. It is critical to acknowledge the contributions made by single mothers because they exhibit tenacity in solving challenges that have an effect not only on their children but also on society as a whole.

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