

# Challenges of Single Parenting: A Sociological study of single mothers based in Dehradun City

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study focuses on the challenges faced by single mothers and the methods adopted by them in overcoming the challenges to raise their children without a partner. The study uses qualitative research methods to analyse the social issue of increasing single parenthood and the challenges faced by the single mothers. The area of study is Dehradun city. The sample size is 15 single mothers interviewed face to face through snow ball technique. Questions were asked to the respondents through an interview schedule with both open ended and close ended questions. The interview was followed by discussions on life experience, challenges and coping strategies. The data was collected through primary as well as secondary resources that contain journal, newspaper articles, government reports and research studies. The findings of the present study revealed that the single mothers faced several socio-economic challenges in the initial years of separation/divorce or widowhood. Learning by experience, economic stability, etc. were some of the major factors in creating a stable life for the single mothers and their children.*

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## 1. Introduction

Parenthood comes with some of the basic expectations like rearing and caring of the children. Socialisation of the child is an essential task for parents to make a child aware of his/her social responsibility and role. Majority of families in India are nuclear but new forms of families are emerging (Niranjan, Nair, and Roy 2005; Shah 2005). The factors responsible for the emergence of new family structure are increasing urbanization, higher education, and participation in formal labour sector. Increase in divorce rates and separation have led to changes in the structure of family that includes increasing levels of living alone in many countries (Demey et al. 2013; Park and Raymo 2013). The traditional family structure of husband, wife and their dependent child/children is facing challenges to sustain. In recent years, there is a rise in "alternative family" such as single parent families, cohabitation, gay and lesbian couples, and also singlehood (Macionis, 1997). The 2011 census data of the United States shows that 12.9 million families in the U.S. were headed by single parents in 2006 alone. 80% of which were headed by a woman. Globally, one-fourth to one third of all families is headed by single mothers. This indicates the crises of sustainability of the couple headed families (Anthonia M. Essien and Agapetus A. Basse, 2012). However, the changes in the family structure globally have not fundamentally altered the family structure in India but there are instances of increasing alternative families in India. The marriage, family and Kinship institutions are contributing in maintain the sanctity of the family structure of India. The pressure from the society is one of the major factors that have performed the role of maintaining the family structure. Besides, it is projected that, by 2020 India will have fourth highest number of One person household after USA, China and Japan (Dommaraju, 2015). The growing number of divorces results in single-parent families. It also steadily increases the number of women in the

work force. Thus questions arise about whether the sustainability of the family institution is in crisis. The conventional or nuclear family is being lost. The role of the father as a sole economic provider and that of the mother as the homemaker bearing responsibility of socialization and nurturance of children is also declining (Scanzoni, 1983).

## 2. Single Parenthood

Single parenthood is a form of parenthood where a sole parent cares for child/children without the help and involvement of the other parent (Ward, 2001). Thus, a single parent family is a form of family where the child or children are nurtured by either a father or a mother. Such a form of family is also called as father or mother headed family (Igba, 2006). Single parenthood can result from various factors. Causes of single parent families in the US are majorly divorce and death of one of the parent (Tassoni, 2002). A study conducted by the New York Times in 2004 revealed that in the southern part of Africa poverty and teenage pregnancies poverty led to a rise in single parent families (New York Times, 2004). Single parenthood has a slight difference in developing and developed countries. In the developed countries where women are economically empowered the decision of being a single parent is independently taken by them but in some African countries and in the East Asian countries including India, the decision to be a single mother among the middle class group is forced and comes with several challenges. Single parenthood can result from divorce, death, separation, or by choice. There is no official data on single mothers available with government of India. Single parenthood comes with numerous challenges to the women headed families. In India, divorce and other form of marital separation are socially not accepted easily. Even today widows suffer social discrimination. During the last in India decade there has been an increase in divorce rates. According

to the census data there is an increase of 39% single women in India. In 2001, 51.2 million women were single whereas in 2011 the number of single women rose to 71.4 million. This includes widows, divorcees and never married women (The Wire, 2015).

### 3. Challenges to Single Mothers

Lone-parent families are neither superior nor inferior to two parent families. They are just different. This slight difference can become sources of strength rather than source of failure (West, 1986). Women in India suffer from loss of social status and unacceptance from society with the dissolution of marriage. The male member is considered as the head of the family and wife's role as a head is socially disapproved (Bhandari, 2004). Widows have been socially looked down for ages in India. There are different rules for married women and for a widow. Women usually get limited economic, social and educational resources therefore it is assumed that the negative effect on the family is due to unequal social position of females as compared to males. In particular, children may lack access to essential resources if they live in a female-headed family. Single parent families face enormous challenges. Some of them include; childcare and training needs, child support enforcement and psychological problems (Uchendi, 1996; and Mayer 2009). Most of the problems are faced by the single mother families. In some of the families the gender difference between the parent and the children also become a hurdle in parenting. Children of single mother headed families who have seen the divorce process and the pain of separation build a negative feeling towards marital relationship. The parent who stays with the child faces challenges of fending for the child, ensuring that the child develops as a whole. Playing own role and the role of the missing parent (Mugove, 2017). The single mothers face major parenting problems than the single fathers. In the first few months post divorce most of the mothers are less caring towards their children. Young single mothers have less experience of parenting alone. Single mothers find difficulty in choosing between helping child do their home work or getting the ration or doing the laundry. Young single mothers are less able to parenting effectively thus affecting the academic and emotional development of the children (Kali, 2002).

It cannot be generalised that the single mother headed families have children with less academic efficiency. Lloyd and Blance (1996) studied parenting styles in the sub-Saharan African nations and found that most single parent households have female heads. It revealed that children from single mother headed families have greater education opportunity and attainment than in male headed families (Mugove, 2017).

### 4. Objectives of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges and coping strategies of single parents in Dehradun. Specifically, the study

1. Analyses the socio-economic challenges a single mothers faces in the rearing and caring of the child/ children.
2. Identifies the causes of single parent families.
3. Analyses the coping strategies adopted by single mothers in overcoming the challenges.

## 5. Materials and Methods

**Study Area:** Uttarakhand is the 27<sup>th</sup> state of India. It got separated from U. P in the year 2000. The State is spread over 53,483 sq. Km of land, which is 1.67 percent of the country's total area. The population of the State according to Census 2011 is 1,01,16,752 persons of which 51,54,178(50.94%) are males and 49,62,574(49.05%) are females. Dehradun is one of the oldest cities of India and is declared as the Provisional Capital of newly created Uttaranchal (Now Uttarakhand) State in the month of Nov'2000. The population of the district formed 16.78 percent of the total population of the state of Uttarakhand. The present study was conducted in the Dehradun city.

**Population for the study:** The population of Dehradun is 1,696,694 according to the census of India 2011. The target population was single parents (women) in Dehradun city, who were living with their children. They include widows, divorced/separated and unmarried single women. Single mothers not living with their children at the time of the study were excluded.

**Sample of the Study:** The sample of the study consists of 15 single mothers in the Dehradun City. The mothers were living alone with their children. The age bracket of the respondents ranged between 25 to 50 years of age. Some of them own their own houses and some of them live in a rented accommodation. All the mothers in the study were working mothers. All the respondents worked per day an average of nine to ten hours. The samples in the study were literate women with minimum qualification of graduation and maximum were Ph. D holders. Most of the single mothers had only one child and only two had two children.

**Instrument for data collection:** A one-on-one interview and discussion was developed based on the specific purposes of the study. The interview had questions related to the socio-economic profile of the respondents and also had open ended questions where the respondents were open to present their view. Direct observation was one of the major instruments to analyse the behaviour pattern of the respondents. Snow balling technique was adopted to come in contact with single mothers as is difficult to get authentic data on single mothers.

**Data collection and analysis techniques:** Each interview lasted for two hours. The researcher acted as a facilitator. A tape recorder was also used and the respondents were informed about the recording. The information gathered was summarized.

## 6. Findings

**Age of the respondents:** N= 15

S. No	Class Interval	Frequency	Percentage
1	25-30	4	26.66%
2	30-35	3	20%
3	35-40	2	13.33%
4	40-45	4	26.66%
5	45-50	2	13.33%
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 1

**Marital status of the Respondents**

S. No	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Unmarried	0	0
2.	Divorcee	7	46.6%
3.	Separated	5	33.3%
4.	Widow	3	20%
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 2

**Educational Qualification of the Respondents**

S. No	Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
1	Less than Graduation	2	13.33%
2	Graduation	7	46.66%
3	Post graduation	3	20%
4	Post Graduation and above	3	20%
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 3

**Occupation of the Respondents**

S. No	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Government Service	3	20%
2	Private Service	7	46.66%
3	Business owner	3	20%
4	Not working	2	13.33%
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 4

**7. Interview Responses on the Challenges of Single Mothers**

Of the interview responses made by single mothers it was pointed out most of the single mothers were divorcee. Interviewees revealed that single mothers face economic problems in the initial years of separation/divorce or widowhood but gradually they find out ways to earn for a livelihood. The following illustrations depicted the views:

Excerpt 1: "If you give 100 percent to a marriage and still it does not work then it will never work. It is better to move out from the marriage which has become a toxic for you. I did so for my son and for my better future. I did my doctorate with my 4 year old son. It was challenging but I had to stay strong despite turmoil." Lakshmi (name changed on request), respondent 1.

Excerpt 2: "I was very young when I got married. They wanted a baby boy and I gave birth to a girl. This was unacceptable to my in-laws and husband. So he left me to my parent's house. I live here with my 3 year daughter. I work as a maid in one of the famous hospitals of Dehradun." Mohini, respondent 2.

Excerpt 3: "My marriage was becoming a disaster for me and my daughter. My husband had psychological problems. He would hit my daughter without any reason. He was an Army Officer; still such behaviour was beyond imagination from him. I decided to divorce him." Promila, respondent 3.

Excerpt 4: "I waited for 14 years thinking that my husband would become a nice person one day but when nothing happened in all these years my son asked me leave the house because it was affecting my mental health. I was unemployed at the time of divorce." Megha, respondent 4.

Excerpt 5: "My husband was an Air Force officer. His behaviour towards me and my daughter was violent. To protect her from a violent atmosphere I had to take the decision of breaking off the marriage and raise my kid in a healthy environment." Shalini, respondent 5.

Single mothers face more economic problems in the first few years. The respondents were found to be peacefully living after the separation. Most of them took the decision to let off the marriage for the kids because as the children were getting younger they come in contact with the violent and negative atmosphere. The high class people were found equally disturbed in their unfruitful marriages as the low income group women. Employment was the first preference of the single mothers.

**8. Coping Strategies**

The single mothers involved in the study expressed the methods adopted by them to overcome the challenges.

Respondent 1 said, "Confidence on what you are doing is the key to overcome your challenges. Do not depend on people, it is your journey and you have to fight against all odds to stand up again."

The respondents were found to be happy in their decisions which were one of the biggest methods to overcome any challenge. Respondent 5 shared that, "I am a happily divorced mother and if you are happy, then only you can give happiness to your children."

Children's academic performance is another challenge for a single mother. It is believed that children of single parents do not perform well in academics. Borgers (1996) in his study in the Netherlands on single parent families found that education outcomes of children from single father families were better than single mother families. Respondent 3 recalls that, "despite a tense atmosphere in the initial years of separation, it did not affect my child's educational achievement. My daughter is studying in a prestigious college of India. The relationship between a mother and child should be healthy enough to overcome any challenge."

**9. Discussion**

The findings made in the study on challenges of single mothers it was revealed that the young mothers were mostly found to be living with the parents. It was found that the single mothers studied in the current study were supported by their parents in their decision of divorce or separation. Most of the single mothers were not supported by the in-laws. 13 single mothers out of 15 worked harder to get employment and complete their education. Mothers who had a good job profile and good education faced economic issues in the issues in the beginning but gradually the economic condition improved. The difference in the gender of the child and the mother had a very

little effect on parenting. Only 2 respondents felt that a father is needed to raise a son. It was also found that new mothers have more parenting issues than the mothers of adolescents. Young mothers are inexperienced; they need support or co-parenting to raise a new born child. It was revealed by the respondents that the adolescents can be made understand of the situation but a child cannot understand the economic and social issues. Most of the respondents took on an average 5 to 6 years of marriage to decide to take a divorce or get separated. In the social aspect, a divorce or a separated woman do not get same respect from the society as other women in intact family get. The widows get sympathy from the people around but the divorced or separated are judged. It was also found in the research that all of the respondents were happy with their decision to get separated but only the widows were found to be in distress which affects the parenting pattern. Divorced or separated mothers were found to have a healthy relationship with their children because it was revealed by them that their children are their world and never considered them as burden. None of the single mothers felt that single parenting has any effect on the academic performance of the children. The current research data findings concluded that most of the respondents involved in the study were divorcee followed by separated and then widows. The highest numbers of single mothers in the study were graduates. Most of the respondents had private service. Most of them are school teachers.

## 10. Conclusion

The research study made the following conclusions:

1. The biggest challenge for the single mothers was financial crises.

2. Most single mothers were happy with their decision of single parenthood and living alone with their children.
3. Most of the single mothers had healthy relations with their children and their children supported them in their decisions.
4. Most single mothers in the study performed work that was exhausting so that at the end of the day they were so tired that they could not find time for themselves.

## 11. Recommendations

The research study makes the following recommendations:

There is an urgent need for single mothers to be supported in establishing groups to work on income generating projects. The fund generated can be used for providing education to the children and giving them a dignified living.

1. The policy framers should organise groups like SHG for single mothers specially so that women do not hesitate to leave violent relationships.
2. Counselling sessions can be organised for the single young mothers and adolescent children of single mothers so that deviance among them can be minimized.
3. Hostels can be made for such women who do not get support from parents or in-laws after their divorce/ separation or widowhood so that they do not have to rely on others for a shelter.

An urgent need of social acceptance is needed from the society. Support of families and friends can give strength to the single mothers to face the challenges with vigour.

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