

Emerging Role of Single Mothers in Indian Society

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Abstract: Single motherhood in India has historically been stigmatized due to traditional family structures and societal expectations. However, in recent years due to growing education and awareness of changing social structures and evolving relationships, there has been a paradigm shift in the perception and role of single mothers. This paper explores the factors that are contributing to the rising number of single mothers, their challenges, and the socio-economic and legal frameworks that impact their lives. The study also highlights the evolving narrative around single motherhood and the increasing support systems available in contemporary Indian society both at the family and the governmental level.

Keywords: Single mothers, Single motherhood, Divorce, Society

INTRODUCTION

Single motherhood in India is an emerging social phenomenon influenced by various factors, like divorce, widowhood, separation, or the choice of unmarried motherhood. While patriarchal norms have long dominated family structures, there has been an increase in nuclear families and attitudes toward single mothers have changed noticeably. This shift is largely driven by various factors like urbanization, education, economic independence, and legal reforms.

Factors Contributing to the Rise of Single Mothers

1. Increasing Divorce Rates – The number of divorces has increased due to greater awareness of individual rights, mutual differences, and legal recourse for women.
2. Widowhood – Many women become single mothers due to the loss of their spouses, particularly in rural areas and the concept of remarriage is less socially accepted.
3. Unmarried Motherhood – Though still relatively rare, the number of women choosing to become single mothers through adoption or assisted reproductive technologies is growing due to the increase of IVF clinics across big cities.
4. Domestic Violence and Separation – Many women leave abusive relationships, prioritizing their safety and their children's well-being over societal norms due to their husband's physical abuse.
5. Migration and Economic Factors – With increasing financial independence, many women raise children alone rather than depend on traditional joint family structures due to less or inappropriate support from their husbands or families.

Challenges Faced by Single Mothers

1. Social Stigma – Single mothers often face discrimination and judgment from society, particularly in conservative communities including their family members.
2. Financial Constraints – Raising a child alone can be economically challenging, especially for women with limited education or job opportunities along with less literacy and education among women.
3. Legal and Custodial Issues – Single mothers may encounter legal hurdles regarding child custody, inheritance rights, and guardianship due to interference from the husband and his family.
4. Emotional and Psychological Stress – Balancing work, parenting, and societal pressures can lead to significant mental health challenges along with physical and emotional stress.
5. Limited Support Systems – Inadequate childcare facilities, lack of family support, and workplace discrimination make single parenting difficult.

Changing Perceptions and Emerging Support Systems

1. Legal Reforms – Legal reforms have evolved over a period and now laws related to domestic violence, divorce, and child custody have evolved to provide better protection and rights for single mothers.
2. Economic Empowerment—Government schemes support single mothers, and NGOs offer financial aid, skill development programs, and employment opportunities to them.
3. Educational Opportunities – Education and professional growth have enabled single mothers in their ability to raise children independently.

4. Media Representation – Many movies, television, and literature increasingly portray single mothers positively, helping to reduce stigma.
5. Support Networks and NGOs – Many organizations such as the National Commission for Women (NCW) and various NGOs provide legal, financial, and emotional support to single mothers.

CONCLUSION

The role of single mothers in Indian society is gradually transforming. While challenges persist, growing social, legal, and economic support systems have empowered many women to lead independent lives. Changing mindsets and urbanization continue to contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society as people are accepting the evolving role of single mothers. As single motherhood becomes more common due to an increase in divorce rates, further policy improvements and societal acceptance will be crucial in ensuring equality and dignity for single mothers and their children. This research provides the analysis done on primary research conducted with 300 respondents based in Mumbai, Pune, Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Lucknow.

Analysis of the Questionnaire on the Emerging Role of Single Mothers in Indian Society

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

- Age Distribution:
 - Below 25: 10% (30 respondents)
 - 25-35: 40% (120 respondents)
 - 36-45: 35% (105 respondents)
 - 46 and above: 15% (45 respondents)

Observation:

A majority (75%) of single mothers fall within the 25 to 45 age range, indicating that single motherhood is most common among women in their prime working years.

- Educational Qualification:
 - No formal education: 8% (24 respondents)
 - Primary (Up to 8th grade): 12% (36 respondents)
 - Secondary (9th-12th grade): 30% (90 respondents)
 - Undergraduate: 35% (105 respondents)
 - Postgraduate and above: 15% (45 respondents)

Observation:

Nearly 50% of single mothers have at least an undergraduate degree, suggesting an improving education level among them, yet 20% have limited education, which may restrict economic opportunities.

- Employment Status:
 - Unemployed: 25% (75 respondents)
 - Self-employed: 20% (60 respondents)
 - Private sector employees: 30% (90 respondents)
 - Government employee: 15% (45 respondents)

- Daily wage worker: 10% (30)

Observation:

Despite financial pressures, 25% of respondents remain unemployed, and 10% are in insecure jobs, indicating the need for employment support policies.

- Monthly Income:
 - Below Rs.10,000: 30% (90 respondents)
 - Rs.10,000 – Rs.30,000: 40% (120 respondents)
 - Rs.30,000 – Rs.50,000: 20% (60 respondents)
 - Above Rs.50,000: 10% (30 respondents)

Observation:

70% of respondents earn below Rs.30,000 per month, highlighting financial instability among single mothers.

- Reason for Single Motherhood:
 - Divorce: 40% (120 respondents)
 - Widowhood: 30% (90 respondents)
 - Unmarried motherhood: 15% (45 respondents)
 - Separation/Abandonment: 15% (45 respondents)

Observation:

Divorce and widowhood are the primary two causes of single motherhood in India, with societal stigma still prevalent for unmarried mothers.

2. Social and Economic Challenges

- Financial difficulties in raising a child:
 - Yes: 85% (255 respondents)
 - No: 15% (45 respondents)

Observation:

A significant majority (85% of respondents) face economic struggles, reinforcing the need for financial assistance and employment opportunities.

- Workplace discrimination:
 - Yes: 60% (180 respondents)
 - No: 40% (120 respondents)

Observation:

Single mothers face discrimination, particularly in promotion opportunities and maternity leave policies in both organized and unorganized sectors.

- Biggest financial challenges (multiple responses):
 - Child's education expenses: 70% (210 respondents)
 - Healthcare expenses: 55% (165 respondents)
 - Housing expenses: 50% (150 respondents)
 - Lack of government support: 60% (180 respondents)

Observation:

For most single mothers' education is the top concern, followed by medical and housing costs.

- Social acceptance:
 - Yes: 35% (105 respondents)

- No: 65% (195 respondents)

Observation:

A majority (65% of respondents) still feel stigmatized, revealing a need for awareness programs to challenge social stereotypes.

- Discrimination faced from:
 - Family: 50% (150 respondents)
 - Society/Community: 70% (210 respondents)
 - Workplace: 55% (165 respondents)
 - Educational institutions (for children): 40% (120 respondents)

Observation:

Social stigma extends beyond family to communities and workplaces, with children also facing discrimination in schools.

3. Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms

- Sources of support:
 - Family: 50% (150 respondents)
 - Friends and peer network: 40% (120 respondents)
 - Government schemes: 30% (90 respondents)
 - NGOs/women's support groups: 20% (60 respondents)
 - No support: 25% (75 respondents)

Observation:

50% of single mothers rely on family, while 30% access government aid, indicating gaps in official welfare programs.

- Awareness of government schemes:
 - Yes: 40% (120 respondents)
 - No: 60% (180 respondents)

Observation:

Low awareness (60% of respondents) suggests a need for better dissemination of welfare policies.

- Preferred policy improvements:
 - Financial aid and subsidies: 75% (225 respondents)
 - Legal rights and protection: 60% (180 respondents)
 - Workplace benefits: 55% (165 respondents)
 - Affordable childcare facilities: 50% (150 respondents)

Observation:

Single mothers seek financial aid and legal protection more than workplace benefits, indicating that survival needs take precedence over professional growth.

- Society's changing perception:
 - More positive: 30% (90 respondents)
 - Still negative: 50% (150 respondents)
 - Neutral: 20% (60 respondents)

Observation:

Only 30% of single mothers believe societal views are

improving, suggesting persistent stereotypes.

- Coping mechanisms:
 - Emotional support from family/friends: 50% (150 respondents)
 - Financial planning: 40% (120 respondents)
 - Religious/Spiritual guidance: 35% (105 respondents)
 - Professional counselling: 20% (60 respondents)

Observation:

Most single mothers rely on emotional support, but few access professional help, indicating a gap in mental health support for single mothers.

4. Future Aspirations and Recommendations

- Top priorities for children's future:
 - Good education: 80% (240 respondents)
 - Financial stability: 70% (210 respondents)
 - Emotional well-being: 60% (180 respondents)
 - Social acceptance: 50% (150 respondents)

Observation:

Single mothers prioritize education and financial security, recognizing the long-term impact on their children's futures.

- Key messages from single mothers (common themes from open-ended responses):
 - Resilience and strength: Many emphasize self-reliance and perseverance.
 - Breaking stereotypes: Some wish to challenge traditional gender roles.
 - Need for support networks: Many highlight the need for stronger legal and financial systems.

CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Economic Challenges: Most of the single mothers struggle financially due to low-paying jobs and high education costs. Targeted financial aid and job training programs are essential to provide them with financial security.
- Social Stigma: 65% of single mothers feel unaccepted, with discrimination extending to workplaces and schools, hence awareness campaigns and policy reforms are necessary.
- Limited Awareness of Government Support: Only 40% of single mothers are aware of welfare schemes, therefore improved outreach and implementation can bridge this gap.
- Mental and Emotional Support: Only 20% of single mothers seek professional help, highlighting the need for accessible mental health counseling services.
- Workplace Reforms: 60% of single mothers face discrimination, calling for better maternity

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benefits, flexible work hours, and workplace inclusion policies.

This study underscores the urgent need for economic, legal, and social interventions to improve the conditions of single mothers in Indian society.

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