

## THE LIVING CONDITION AND CHALLENGES OF SINGLE MOTHERS

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### **Abstract**

Child upbringing vested with single mothers is challenging due to death, divorce, and separation from spouse. According to a UN report in 2019, 4.5 percent of all Indian households are run by single mothers, drawing attention to the country's significant number of single-parent families. Thus, the researcher has taken up the study to know the economic challenges single mothers face in raising their children. The study adopted a descriptive research design and used semi-structured interviews to collect data on the socio-demographic profiling of single mothers. The study collected data from 40 Kanadamangalam and Vanur block village participants in Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. The investigation observed that most participants were agricultural workers and earned less than five thousand rupees monthly. The lower level of education made them engage in daily agricultural wages, which is distressing in their economic status, which leads to upgrading their children's settlement and secure life. The researchers suggested that the local industries can develop their welfare scheme through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by finding the needy to benefit single mothers' development. The Government also relook or create a new welfare program for strengthening single mothers families.

**Key Words:** Single Mothers; Socio-Economic Status; Poverty; Living Condition,

### **1.INTRODUCTION**

The condition of women is one of the primary indicators of a country's progress. Over the past few decades, the socioeconomic status of Indian women has been continually changing (Topimin et al., 2021). The life shifts of becoming a parent can be particularly stressful for those who are more vulnerable (Agnafors et al., 2019). The civilization and culture of the nation elevate the status of women in society (Topimin et al., 2021). The position of a mother is highly respected in a society where men predominate, which improves the status of women in one sense (Zhang,

2022). The role of a mother is more prominent than that of a wife. Care, security, and protection of children by the mother are the reasons that make her occupy a prominent place in society. The Position of a mother is filled with mixed emotions and feelings and much love. Single mothers may find it difficult to get by since they typically lack academic achievement, professional skills, and social connections; additionally, they are viewed as among the least fortunate social groups in society and have less chance to participate in job opportunities (Topimin et al., 2021). As a result, single mothers struggle to support their family's needs and become financially independent. The experience of motherhood is different for all mothers. However, as mothers nurture their children, they encounter joys, sorrows, grand dreams, and expectations. The aspiring mother struggles with personal experience in these changing and conflicting situations and various places in the social world (Chodon, 2020).

With the expansion of short-lived spouse rates and growing up of divorce and separation in India, family life has become more underdevelopment with huge parent families. Single mothers 'have taken charge of being more responsible than single fathers and have become the head of single-parent families. Due to various social and cultural restrictions and care for their child's development, women could not make other decisions and were not allowed to implement their views. The main issues of single mothers are connected with the rearing of children, their future, and setting down in life (Gadsden et al., 2016).

The mother had to support herself and her family due to divorce, separation and widowhood. A Single mother is also responsible for home management, caring for her children and their education. If the woman has a sizeable income, it is not a problem, but a woman with a low income and no social security has to face many problems.

The Progress of the World's Women of UN Women's (Women, UN, 2019) reported that worldwide, there are 101.3 million single mothers living with their children based on 89 countries and territories data. The global share of single-parent households is 7.5 percent. Most of these households are led by women (84.3%).

There were about three and a half lakh widows under the age of a long time in India in 2011, and more than half of them were under the legalized age of marriage of 18 years. It is disturbing to note that the number of such young widows has expanded over the decade. The substantial number of young widows gives rise to exceptionally particular issues that are more intense and more complex than the issues of elderly widows (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2018). According to the Government of India census 2011, the widows population in Tamil Nadu there are around 46,29,094 (8.54 %) in the total population.

The economic issues are the science that considers human behavior in relationship with close and rare implies that have elective employment. In other words, it bargains with the issue of choice (Chen & Edwards, 2022). The financial problem that faces all social systems is how to produce and manage limited or uncommon assets. Despite the limited assets available to meet demands, there is a financial problem.

Families with single mothers typically earn less money and have less access to healthcare services. Taking care of careers and kids can be socially and financially restrictive (Agnafors et

al., 2019). Economic emergencies may be a standing circumstance for most single mothers' families. It becomes difficult to assemble the fundamental needs of the children, such as nourishment, clothing, school expenditure, maintaining the past standard of living, and meeting personal expenses. This research study focuses on socio-economic challenges among single mothers.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants
- To find out the present social status of Single Mothers
- To reveal the economic challenges, single mothers face in running their families.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study conducted by (Liang et al., 2019), many single parents were mothers and faced difficulties in managing the family due to a lack of a good job or income and suffered from economic and psychological problems. Pointed out that the health of single parents and their offspring is negatively impacted by a variety of factors, including low educational attainment, unemployment, reliance on aid, bad economic situations, having many children, and being young (Neises & Grüneberg, 2005). Therefore, more prominence is given to such women in development programmes. According to another study, more than 80% of single parents were widowed, and 70% were women (Zagel & Hübgen, 2018).

Generally, widowhood is a significant cause of single parenthood. However, due to divorce, the number has been increasing in recent years. An Increase in such families and their effect on society and their children are to be noted. Here, a single mother manages the home and children without help from her husband. The Disintegration of joint families and the increase in divorces also add to the increase in single-mother families (Sekgale et al., 2021).

To measure the quality of life of single mothers, we need to know the positive and negative evaluations of their social life, culture, and the environment in which they live (Chen & Edwards, 2022). However, this study (Kim et al., 2018) will look at several aspects of single mothers' lives, including their social and economic standing, mental health issues, emotional and sexual abuse, and government-provided resources. Being a single mother involves a variety of connected experiences. There are numerous possibilities for mothers suffering from physical and mental ailments. The inadequate treatment facilities, ailments, psychological problems, and depression cause unfavourable results. All these stresses and physical illnesses may result in severe sicknesses and even death. Mood disorders in single mothers are significant (Lee & Allen, 2021), which has been proven through various studies. A single mother will struggle significantly in a society that does not permit young girls to live socially and economically independent lives. As a result, many single mothers experience desperation, inferiority, and loneliness.

Moreover, since they do not get suitable job opportunities, they find it challenging to lay a strong foundation for their economic status. So they will also face economic and emotional problems (Khan et al., 2022). Finally, the Government must provide specific welfare and rehabilitation programs to improve mental health and well-being. In Singapore, the National

Council caters to the needs of mothers by providing social services, mental health, and emotional empowerment, intending to support and promote the mental and emotional well-being of single-parent families towards stability (Nahar et al., 2020)."

The place/position given to a person in the family and society can be termed social status. In the social sphere, single mothers did not seem to have many problems, and they had cordial relationships with neighbors, relatives, and nearby community people. Social factors like education, caste, and economic factors such as occupation, salary, income, and expenditure determine the status of a person (Agnafors et al., 2019). Nevertheless, studies have shown that for single mothers, factors like life stresses and the burden of looking after the children also influence their status (Theng et al., 2022). Studies have proved that single mothers face more economical and occupational pressures. Quarrels with husbands and other family members, the pressure of single living, and loneliness hinder the social status of single mothers and lead them to economic problems (Harkness, 2022). Single mothers with children outside marriage face more problems than married, single mothers. Generally, due to a lack of education and a good job, they will have to depend on others for help. Children of unmarried mothers are brought up by the mother alone and therefore face insecurity, poverty, and social and emotional problems; they even experience loneliness and harassment. Therefore, society should understand the problems of unmarried mothers and provide their children with minimum basic needs (Taylor et al., 2021). According to some study reports, unmarried mothers have less contact with their families; they neither have friends nor mix with their neighbours, and the help they get from society is less than that obtained by married, single mothers (Harkness, 2022). Since there is a lack of help and support from society, the economic condition is poor, and they suffer from various psychological problems. Another report states that pregnant teenage girls face the danger of death due to poverty, lack of facilities, and ill health. Single mothers avoid social gatherings and celebrations and even change their dressing styles.

Single mothers are at an increased risk of physical and mental health problems. Psychological disorders like stress, depression, and hopelessness are common in single-mother families. Some studies found a high risk for other mood and anxiety disorders seen to a great extent in single mothers. Studies proved that single mothers face more immense mental stress than married mothers. Creating a single-mother family is the primary cause of the stress experienced by single mothers. Since she is the breadwinner, she must balance the family's expenses, which leads to economic pressure. The formation of their family and economic pressure pushes her into a psychological crisis. It has been scientifically proven that single motherhood is the primary cause of all psychological distress. So, the need for psychological counseling for their psychological problems, irrespective of their economic backgrounds, is mandatory. Responsibility of the entire family, the break-up of a relationship with the husband, and other economic problems may also cause such consequences.

Psychological discomfort is another possible outcome for low-income single mothers (Pino Gavidia et al., 2022). In this state, single mothers face more psychological pressure than married mothers. According to a study, single motherhood leads to several psychological upheavals,

economic problems, lack of social support, unemployment, insufficient income, etc. Such problems are two-fold in nature in single mothers, as it doubly traumatizes them compared to 13 married women, according to a study by (Hashim et al., 2018). A Psychiatric disorder can also contribute to divorce. Divorced mothers may be more exposed to and more vulnerable to chronic stressors, which has been identified among single mothers.

Some studies (Mathur, 2010) state that economic difficulties are a factor in the rising number of single moms who live with living partners, parents, or other family members. Causes for economic problems in single mothers are Women's relatively low wages, the lack of economic support from a spouse, and a great need for income. As stated by single mothers, unemployment is the major challenge they face in their family's welfare. Unemployed single mothers run one in every five families (Senan, 2022). Similarly, deficient economic standards and lack of social support are seen in single mothers. It is observed that a lack of sufficient money and support from society causes stress and other problems in single mothers.

It is seen through various studies that single mothers face various kinds of problems in life. The absence of a happy home environment, social distancing, physical and mental health issues, and financial difficulties are common among unmarried women who choose not to work (Heller & Kaushik, 2020). Compared to women who live with their husbands, 70% of single mothers' husbands have had an untimely death. Suicide, violent behavior, and alcoholism seem to be the reasons for death. The number of them who died due to violence seems very small. Several single mothers who have lived alone for many years get admitted to the hospital for their mental stress. It is also noteworthy that divorced women got very little help from Another study; it was observed that single mothers took to extreme smoking, less exercise, low living social 19 standards, and poor economic standards, forcing them to work for several hours.

Single mothers are at a greater risk of psychological problems and ineffective parenting than married mothers. The study investigated the reasons for differences in single-parent functioning. The study found that there are two ways of poor adjustment in single parents, the first is the result of inadequate resources, and the second is the result of anti-social attitudes. Less educated single mothers have limited access to social media support, and those living under high economic pressure have reported higher incidents of adverse events and less social support. Negative life events and inadequate social support were associated with psychological distress and the use of ineffective parenting methods. The attribute of anti-social behavior is related to the quality of upbringing. It indirectly influences the level of psychological stress through its positive relationship with economic stress and adverse events (Katikireddi et al., 2018). They have conducted a survey (Kim & Kim, 2020) to investigate the financial status of the families of single mothers and the marital status of the mothers, focusing on income and expenditure. Single-mother families are increasing in proportion to all families with children. Compared to married couples, the economic status of these families is much lower. Career training and education programs for single mothers can be one way to improve their economic condition.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This methodology enables the researcher to clarify what the study will give as its result at the end of the proposed attempt. It constitutes the blueprint of the entire research work. For the present study, a Descriptive research design has been used as the researcher attempts to explore and interpret the quality of life of single mothers in Tamilnadu. Primary data collection is based on the semi-structured interview. Specifically, the study will be focused on quantitative data, and the researcher has conducted a few case studies to strengthen the present study.

For the criteria of inclusion to the study single mothers who are widows, separated and divorced are selected for the study; the respondents selected for the study belong to four villages in two blocks of Villupuram District of Tamilnadu. The study respondent was limited to the age group, above the age of 30 and below the age of 70. Single mothers with children of less than 18 years of age were selected for the study. For the exclusion criteria the study is not focused on single mothers of the age group below 30 years and above the age group of 71 years, and also not the unwed mothers. The study does not include single mothers with children above the age of group 18years.

Data collection tools are the essential techniques used for an efficient research study. The researcher used the self-structured interview schedule to collect information on the present study, which is called data collection tools. These tools help to transform research objectives into specific questions. The data has been collected from forty participants in Rampakkam, Sornavourkeezhpathi, SorappurVeeranam, and Pulichapallam villages of Kandamangalam and Vanur blocks in Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu.

## 5. RESULTS

The following section interprets the result and discussion of the investigated research.

### A) Socio-Demographic profile

The socio-demographic description of the study participants is presented in **Table 1**, demonstrating that their ages ranged from 33 to 69. Further, it is observed that nearly 43% of the participants are 30 to 40 years old, and 35% of the study participants completed their primary level of education. Meanwhile, most respondents reside with their children with one or two siblings.

The study found that more than 53% of the population made an average monthly income of fewer than five thousand rupees and that nearly 75% of study subjects worked in agriculture. In 55% of the population, various health problems contributed to losing a spouse, and alcohol use contributed to 25% of cases.

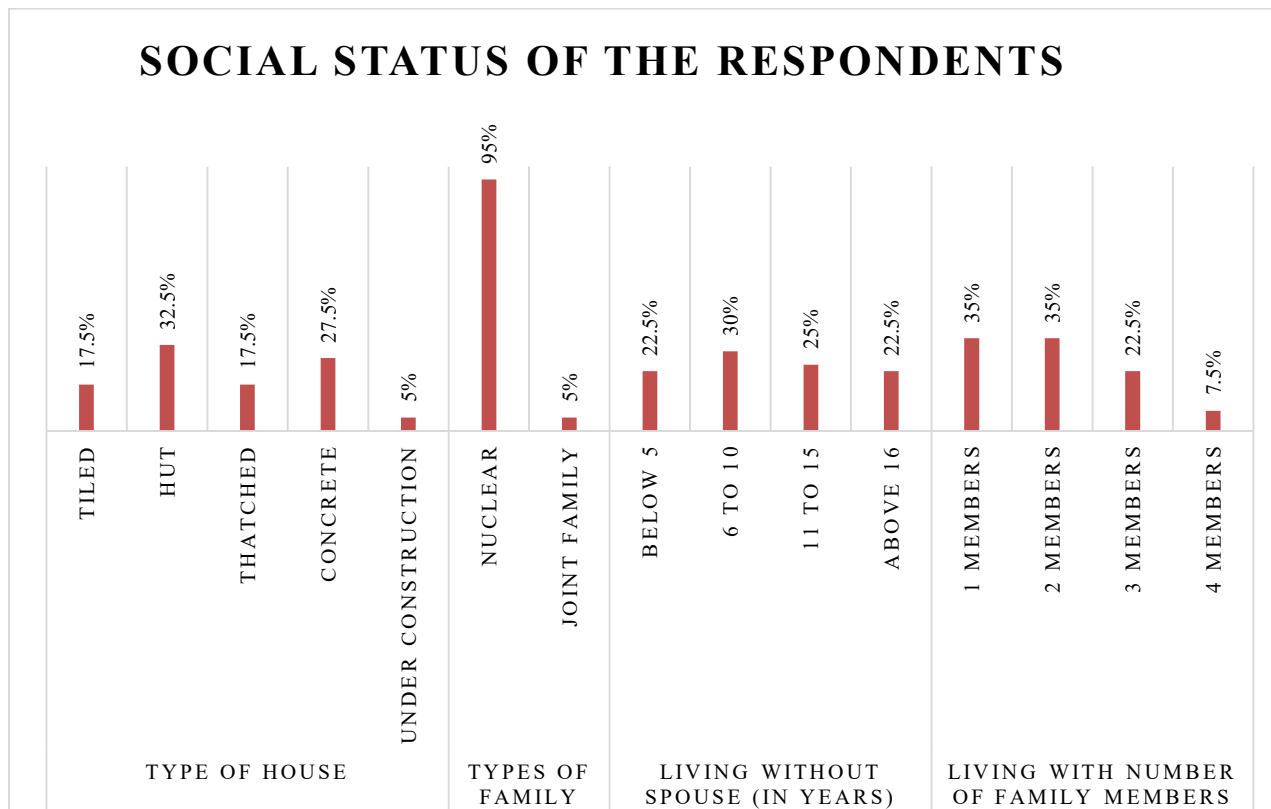
**Table1: Demographic characteristics**

| Demographic Variables | Frequency of the Respondents | Percentage of the Respondents (%) |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

|  |                        |    |      |
|--|------------------------|----|------|
| <b>Age</b>   | 30 - 40                | 17 | 42.5 |
|  | 41 – 50                | 14 | 35   |
|  | 51 – 60                | 5  | 12.5 |
|  | 61 - 70                | 4  | 10   |
| <b>Education</b>                                   | Primary                | 14 | 35   |
|  | Illiterate             | 13 | 32.5 |
|  | Middle                 | 11 | 27.5 |
|  | Higher Secondary       | 2  | 5    |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                              | Widowed                | 37 | 92.5 |
|  | Separated              | 3  | 7.5  |
| <b>Number of Children</b>                          | One                    | 14 | 35   |
|  | Two                    | 14 | 35   |
|  | Three                  | 9  | 22.5 |
|  | Four                   | 3  | 7.5  |
| <b>Occupation</b>                                  | Agricultural Labour    | 30 | 75   |
|  | Private Company Labour | 5  | 12.5 |
|  | Construction Labour    | 2  | 5    |
|  | Not Employed           | 2  | 5    |
|  | Govt. Staff            | 1  | 2.5  |
| <b>Income</b>                                      | Below Rs.5000          | 21 | 52.5 |
|  | Rs.5001-Rs.10000       | 11 | 27.5 |
|  | Rs.10001-Rs.15000      | 5  | 12.5 |
|  | Rs.15001 & Above       | 3  | 7.5  |
| <b>Cause of Divorce, Separation and Widowhood.</b> | Health Problems        | 22 | 55   |
|  | Accident               | 5  | 12.5 |
|  | Family Problems        | 1  | 2.5  |
|  | Due to Alcohol Intake  | 10 | 25   |
|  | Suicide                | 2  | 5    |

### B) Social Status of Single Mothers

The study **Figure.1** showed that more than 53% of the population earned an average monthly income of fewer than 5000 rupees and that nearly 75% of study participants worked in agriculture. In 55% of the population, various health problems led to the demise of a spouse, and alcohol use significantly contributed to 25% of instances. Ninety-five percent of the respondents lived with their children as a nuclear family. The respondents were equally (22.5%) living (in years) without their spouse from the year below five and above sixteen years. The mothers typically responded to a higher level. However, without a spouse, it has tremendously increased in all aspects. Here the above table shows that thirty-five percent of the respondents lived with one to two numbers of family members with her.



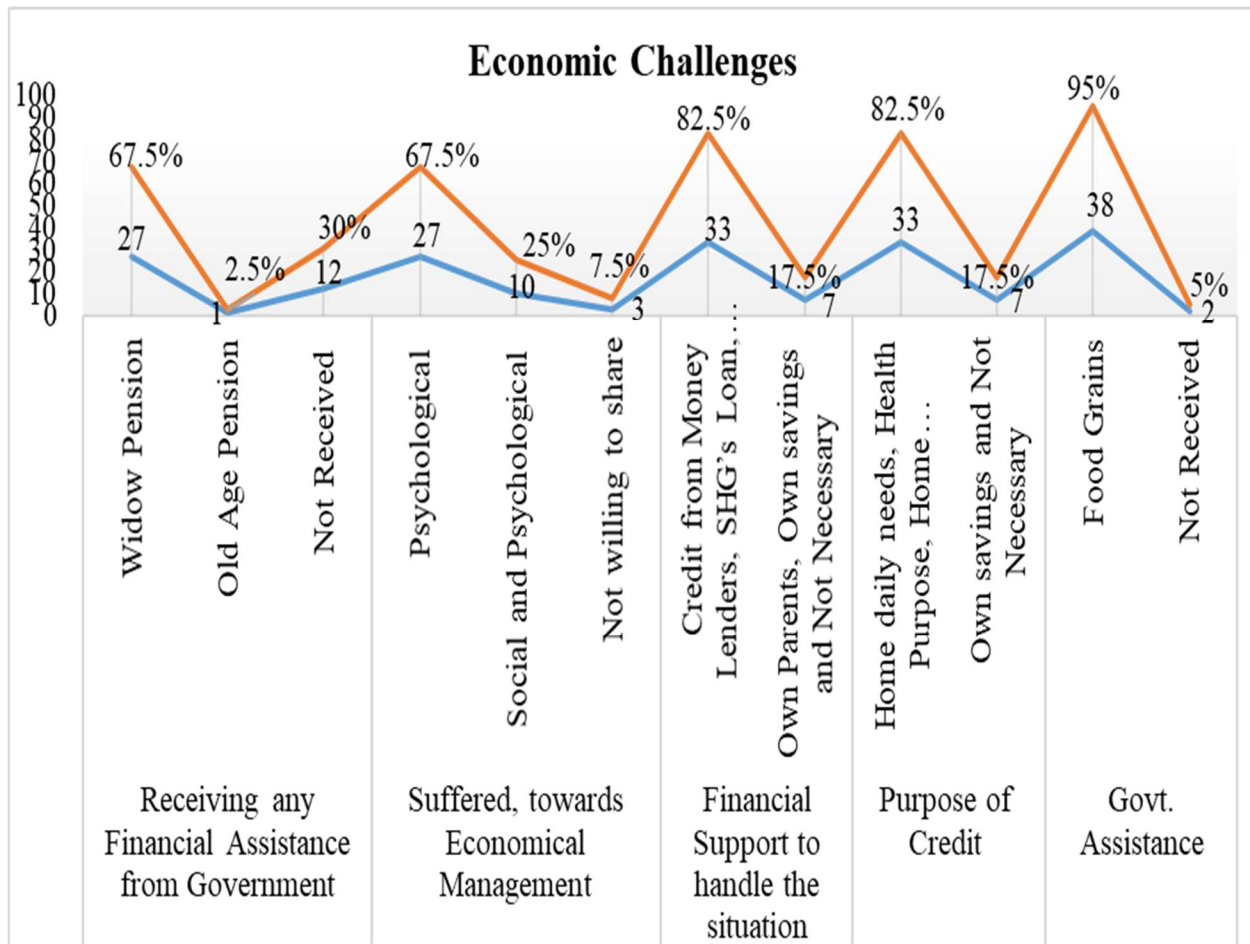
**Fig.1. Social Status of Single Mothers**

### C) Economic Challenges of Single Mothers



**Figure-2** represented below, depicts that more than 68% of the respondents were affected psychologically by economic management and family running. Most participants (88%) needed to receive the grants the corresponding state government appropriately distributed. Furthermore, this research also observed that the participants utilize PDS for their well-being and survival.

**Fig.2 Economic Challenges of Single Mothers**



## 7. DISCUSSION

A recent unexpected pandemic created a massive gap in socio-economic inequality in Indian society. The existing studies showed that the spouse loss of the participants was due to health problems, alcohol intake, and road accidents. Accordingly, the studies observed that single mothers have their education qualification up to the primary level. Meanwhile (Härkönen, 2018) stated that the single parenting system could not provide good education to their family because of the prevailing poverty risks. Coming to the occupation, most of the occupants belonged to agriculture, and very few worked as private concern employees. Adjustment prevails in their day-to-day activities, and they receive debt from self-help groups and money lenders to tackle their daily needs, relative functions, and other family emergencies. Financial help was obtained from

jewel loans, money lenders, friends, relatives, and neighbors. The investigation stated that young single mothers expected decent government jobs based on their educational qualifications. MGNREGS scheme assists the single mother with a reliable approach. Some women could not bear their husbands and lived in hut-type houses and under-constructed houses with improper support and fund unavailability. (Stack & Meredith, 2018) indicated that single parenting possesses elevated psychological distress, stress, and anxiety.

The concern about economic status was confined solely to single women, directly influencing their economic condition. The studies represented that economic and mental stress needs effective reachable government schemes to lift their lives lifting of their life. The upbringing of children is the most extraordinary challenges single mothers face because they are widowed, separated, divorced, and unwed-mother has to struggle to parent singly and look after themselves and their children single handily. A child born outside marital bonds seems to be a disgrace. Children of such single mothers face several problems (Chen & Edwards, 2022). Some find it difficult to adjust to the upbringing of children, especially where the husband is the sole breadwinner and the mother has to struggle to provide minimum basic needs for their children. Children growing up in single-mother families have worse outcomes than two-parent families. Low birth weight, asthma, poverty, untimely death, panic, fear, backwardness in studies, and becoming pregnant at teenage are their significant problems. Children of single mothers with psychological problems also suffer from extreme stress, often leading to social and public health disturbances. Nurturing children, shaping their futures, and obtaining fulfillment in life are the problems faced by single mothers. Children depend upon single mothers till they 20 complete their education and obtain a job. After that, their problems will decrease considerably. Giving good education and training and helping them grow as responsible citizens is the significant responsibility of the family. A study (Nahar et al., 2020) found that children both parents have brought up possess sound health and cordial relationships with others. The equal role played by both parents is the main reason for such a development. However, the upbringing of children by a single mother is strict.

The role of the single mother is a challenging one. Often, problems have to be dealt with single-handedly. The single mother has to take on the role of the breadwinner of the family; finding employment and earning money is one of the biggest tasks all single mothers have to face. Single motherhood has been identified as challenging, with disadvantages including financial hardship and poor mental health. Since facing economic and psychological problems is a tremendous challenge for single mothers, they must play several roles. Employment, good relationship with neighbours, and finding new friends and new life partners are how they adapt to make life comfortable. Lack of social support, 18 lack of interest in social life, and not much contact with friends are seen in single mothers.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Single mothers in India are experiencing social stigmatisation. The quality of life of single mothers differs based on individual personal attributes like health condition, the status of mental

health, social status, economic condition, emotional and sexual exploitation, and general life satisfaction. Single mothers in marginalized communities are observed to be susceptible to various kinds of economic and family-related psychological issues. This study revealed that single mothers must strengthen their lives with solid mental support and hassle-free economic support through reliable government schemes. The government organization needs to provide prominent solutions for implementing its beneficial activities. This kind of improved outlook through corporate social responsibility will indeed help the welfare of single mothers with their structured welfare scheme. Economic sustainability has to be concentrated through various Government aided self-sustainable schemes.

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### **Declaration of Respondent Consent**

The researchers obtained both verbal and written consent from all respondents. The respondents were accepted to participate in the research.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

Nil.

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