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**“AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON SINGLE PARENTS WORKING AS IT PROFESSIONALS IN AND AROUND PUNE CITY, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA.”**

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**Abstract-**

There are serious problems faced by Single Parents. Such parents are virtual reality due to competitive, harsh and unemotional aspects of the social system.

It is an obvious off-shoot of marriage failures and unstable family. The nuclear families and unstable or short-lived marriages, unfortunate death of one of the parents are few of the causes.

The multifaceted impacts are on both the parent himself/herself and the child/children being raised.

The no of divorce cases, sudden deaths of one of the parents are increasing, resulting in either of the parent nurturing his/her child all alone. Solutions are needed to normalize the complex set of working conditions and social aids.

Researcher has conducted a pilot study. The literature available online is providing insight of the problems faced by single parents worldwide. Especially, in USA and UK. There are efforts undertaken to mitigate the issues arising out of such complexities.

**Significance:** Focus is on an untouched area of social dilemma faced by the single parents.

**Objectives:**

- a) To understand the meaning and implications of the term “Single Parent.”
- b) To explore causes of being a Single Parent.
- c) To ascertain the complexities of the parent vis-à-vis the work place and home front.

**Key Words:** Single Parent, Complexities, Nuclear families, Multifaceted, Raising a child



**Methodology:** Structured questionnaire for pilot study and unstructured interviews of the respondents and different stakeholders.

**Expected outcome:** It attempts to provide the solution/s, a checklist and a holistic framework to encounter the issue at various levels.

**Main text:**

Parenting is challenging all over the globe, leave alone single parenting in India. In a society where duties are divided between parents with strong gender bias, jumping the hurdles in the path of single parenting can be more:

A **single parent** is an uncoupled individual who shoulders most or all of the day-to-day responsibilities for raising a child or children. A mother is more often the primary caregiver in a **single-parent family** structure that has arisen due to death of the partner, divorce or unplanned pregnancy.

Over the past to three decades, single-parent families have become even more common than the so-called "nuclear family" consisting of a mother, father and children. Today, all sorts of single parent families: headed by mothers, headed by fathers, headed by a grandparent raising their grandchildren are becoming common.

A survey was conducted to get rough estimate about the awareness level of the respondents few facts emerged out of the responses received and answers to unstructured interviews.

**Few facts for pondering:**

1. Being responsible, making all decisions for a child without support is not easy, especially in a society where children look to parents for making decisions.
2. Indian children can't accept their parents dating or going into a new marriage.
3. Single parents are bombarded with solutions (marriage proposals) from people who pretend to be well-wishers.
4. Since most children remain dependent emotionally, physically and financially on their parents for a longer period, the parent may have lost youth by the time he/she is free of the responsibility of bringing up the children.
5. Life becomes an art of juggling multiple tasks and schedules without much-needed support from the other parent, especially during demanding situations.



6. In case of divorce, children may end up blaming the parent for their separation from the other parent.
7. Many single mothers face problems with admissions in educational institutions if the fathers' income certificates are missing.
8. Single dads may not be familiar with the duties moms would usually carry out since they avoided them earlier due to societal pressure.
9. Financial challenges force single parents to go out and work, while people around them make them feel guilty for not being there for their child.
10. Finding trustworthy and certified babysitters or care-takers is almost impossible.
11. When one leaves one's child with a relative, there is a high risk of them instigating one's child against such single parent.
12. Every time a single parent takes some 'ME' time and tries to enjoy life, loads of guilt is dumped on him/her.
13. Friends of single parents will be oblivious to the challenges since they haven't been there or done that ever.
14. It is difficult not to allow the bitterness, frustration or anger to affect the child.
15. Many families try to make the single parent status a shameful secret thus creating chaos for both parent and child.
16. Indian society has a narrow minded and biased view of single parents, especially single moms. This is in spite of truths being propagated through saga or epics such as Mahabharat. The stories include Karna-Kunti relationship. Single parenting doesn't necessarily require the event of divorce or death of a married partner. It could also exist because of employment exigencies such as employment in army/navy/air force or such other transfer-prone employment conditions. Either parent working in such employment will induce the other partner to play the role of single parent per se.
17. People tend to ask invasive questions without giving it a second thought, embarrassing the single parent in front of their children.
18. The child will be grilled about the missing parent at functions or festive occasions without showing any consideration for the emotional aftermath.
19. Bratty children can emotionally blackmail a single parent to give in to their demands.



20. Single parents cannot have friends without people making assumptions.

Respondents also perceived that the single parents have to face different flavours of hardships in their individual lives...

### **Challenges Faced by Single Parents**

- Parenting is a not easy and single parenting is tougher as it entails added responsibilities. A single parent has to face continuous newer challenges every day. A proper schedule or elements of time management are strictly adhered to will make the task much easier. There are some common challenges faced by single parents and the ways to overcome them.
- Giving birth and raising a child is always a challenge. People all over the world are maintained when faced with the responsibility of parenthood. But when one has one's spouse at one's side one feels a lot confident as one is assured of the presence of an emotional support. Single parenthood is a huge challenge in itself as one has to deal with the situation where he/she has have lost his/her loved one and at the same time, he/she needs to take up the responsibilities of rearing the child and life as a whole. The challenges get multiplied by themselves.
- An important challenge is to deal with the family all by oneself, where one needs to fulfill the responsibility of both. One needs to make all the decisions all by oneself, one needs to ensure that all the requirements of one's family are met, one needs to deal with the overload of tasks that too efficiently, meet one's career responsibilities and above all, deal with one's emotional over load, not to overlook the emotional requirements of one's baby.
- For a single parent, these challenges appear in a series, in combination or even alone. Whatever the situation, there is no denying the fact that single parenting is full of challenges. He/She needs to seek out options where one finds a solution to deal with these challenges as they can easily lead him/her to anxiety and depression.

### **Common Single Parenting Challenges**

Let us a quick look at the common challenges briefly explained.

**Time management & Scheduling** - As mentioned earlier, a single parent is flustered with heaps of responsibilities. They are thus required to juggle them all through a hectic schedule. Keeping afloat with the schedule is in itself a huge challenge.



**Work and life at home - Balancing** – A single parent has to balance work and home all the more. Workplace is a whole new world of professional responsibilities. Then one needs to take care of the child, provide him/her/them with all that they need, including sharing one’s time and at the same time teach him/her/them to evolve as a disciplinarian by being a friend to them is an added challenge.

**Financial** –Financial problem is perhaps one of the biggest challenges faced by a single parent. One cannot be a stay at home just as a mom or dad as one needs to think of the expenses. Thereby one cannot spend all one’s time for rearing the child even if one believes that staying with the child throughout his/her/their growing up years is important. The challenge magnifies if one is not very well off. It is a tough job to plan one’s entire expenses and yet have a savings through a single paycheck.

**Child-care support** – Since one needs to go to work he/she needs to make adequate arrangement for a child minder. The person needs to be reliable as well as competent. It is indeed a challenge to find such a person especially when one does have a proper support system from your extended family.

### **Being There for the Child**

Apart from juggling with the regular household chores, one must be there when his/her child needs him/her. It is a challenge to adjust one’s schedule and be completely involved with one’s child’s school activities. One’s parenting skills, patience and understanding will constantly be put to test and it is a big challenge to instill discipline in the kids while one has to spend most of the hours outdoors.

Further, one (He/She) needs to ensure that the child does not feel isolated or ignored as it can spell doom for their all-round development. But as the child grows up, his/her difficulties will fade away with the decrease of certain responsibilities which he/she can share with the child and as his maturity level develops, he will also act an emotional support that a single parent so desperately craves for.

Single parenting is tough both for the child and the lone parent. Let us have a look at some single parenting tips for walking the fine line of single parenting with an ease.

Being a single parent has become more usual and acceptable in our society today. About a couple of decades ago it was something that was frowned upon. Today people have come to accept and appreciate single parents. There are a number of support facilities available today which help the single parent to raise their family alone.



As observed from the data collected from administered questionnaire and the unstructured interviews conducted to pen down the causes or reasons for single parenting are:

**Causes/reasons for single parenting:**

The reasons for a person being a single parent usually are:

- a) Death of a spouse
- b) Divorce
- c) Teenage pregnancy
- d) Through adoption
- e) By choice out of wedlock
- f) Transferable job of either of the parents

**Its aftermath:**

Families headed by single woman parent are particularly vulnerable. This is because despite economic and social development the social status and position of a woman is always considered to be weaker than that of a man. Hence, single mothers have to face the challenge of gender bias in getting employment and at the same time cope with raising a family all alone.

In addition to economic realities, children living with single parents often have behavioural issues, disadvantages in terms of psychological functioning and poor academic performance.

Being a single parent is undoubtedly challenging. However, by taking little extra efforts single parents can ensure that their children lead normal lives like any other children. Raising a well-developed, balanced child can be a great achievement for most parents single or otherwise.

Life in a single parent household, can generally be quite stressful for the adult and the children. There are unrealistic expectations such as family can function like a two-parent family, and may feel that something is wrong when it does not or cannot.

The single parent many a times feels overwhelmed by the responsibility of juggling caring for the children, maintaining a job and keeping up with the bills and household chores. And typically, the family's finances and resources are drastically reduced following the parents' breakup.



Single parent families therefore, deal with many such pressures and potential problem areas that the nuclear family does not have to face.

As an outcome of the pilot study conducted, following are the stress elements faced frequently by single parents:

**Stress elements:**

- Legal issues such as visitation and custody problems.
- Side effects of continuing conflict between the parents.
- Rare/Less opportunity for parents and children to spend time together.
- Consequences/Effects of the breakup on children's school performance and peer relations.
- Trauma/Disruptions of extended family relationships.
- Genuine problems caused by the parents' dating and entering new relationships.

**A normal possible remedy/ies**

The single parent can help family members face these difficulties by talking with each other about their feelings and working together to tackle problems.

Support from friends, other family members and the religious institutions/trust/CSR NGOs, temple, church or synagogue can help too. But if family members are still overwhelmed and having problems, it may be time to consult an expert.

**Problems/Hurdles and their possible solutions:**

Single parenthood can bring added pressure and stress to the job of raising children. With no one to share day-to-day responsibilities or decision-making, single parents must provide greater support for their children while they themselves may feel alone. The following suggestions may help reduce stress in your family:

**Control the finances**

Learn how to budget the money. Know when a paycheck or other income will arrive, and keep track of household bills. Do whatever an individual can to improve the finances. If one needs a job, contact employment and temporary agencies for help. If one needs more education, consider getting high school diploma, a college degree, or other special training.



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### **Take initiative to have a frequent dialogue- Talk Early and Often**

Let the children know about the changes in the family. Sit quietly with the children and allow them to talk about their feelings.

### **Seek support and use it**

Don't try to handle everything on own self. One will need the support that family and friends can give. Get to know other single parents through support groups. A pediatrician can also be a great source of help and information.

### **Take time for family**

Being a single parent can be overwhelming. Set aside some time each day to enjoy your children. Spend quiet time playing, reading, working on arts-and-crafts projects, or just listening to music together. Your time is one of the most important things you can give to your children.

### **Take Time For Yourself**

Time spent away from your children is important for you and for them. Being a single parent doesn't mean you can't have an adult life. Get a babysitter and enjoy some time alone or with friends. Do things that you like. Go to a movie. Find a hobby.

### **Keep A Daily Routine**

Schedule meals, chores, and bedtimes at regular times so that your children know what to expect each day. A routine will help them feel more secure.

### **Maintain Consistent Discipline**

Divorced or separated parents should work together to discipline their children the same way. Check your local library for books on parenting. Local hospitals, the YMCA, and church groups often sponsor parenting classes. Learning good ways to handle your children's behavior will reduce stress for all of you.

### **Treat Kids Like Kids**

Though being a single parent can get lonely, try not to treat your children like substitutes for a partner. Try not to rely on them for comfort or sympathy.





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## **Stay Positive**

Be aware that your children will always be affected by your mood and attitude. They will need your praise and your love through hard times. It's okay to be honest about your feelings of sadness and loss, but let them know better times lie ahead for all of you.

## **Take Care of Yourself**

This is a difficult time for you, too. Exercise regularly, eat healthy, and get enough rest so you can better deal with stress. Visit your own doctor on a regular basis.

## **Find Good Child Care**

Good child care is essential for your children's well-being and your peace of mind. Finding quality child care may be one of the most difficult tasks you will face.

Keep the following in mind:

- Never leave your children home alone. Find someone you trust to take care of them while you are working.
- Don't rely on older brothers and sisters to babysit for younger siblings.
- Be careful about asking new friends or partners to watch your children, even for a short time. They may not have the patience, especially if a child's behavior becomes difficult.
- Children need to be cared for by an adult with proven experience in child care. The best way to make sure your child is getting good care is to visit the child care center or watch your babysitter when he or she is with your children.

## **Tips for Single Parents**

Here are a few single parenting tips which parents can make use of to ensure that their children lead a normal life.

**a) Parenting Skills** - Just like any other parent, single moms and dads too must do everything they can to learn about new parenting skills. It may be worthwhile to read books on parenting, joining online forums and interact with parents who may have children of the same age. Being a good parent requires a little bit of extra effort which anyone can put in if they really want to.

**b) Discipline** - Single parents out of guilt often let things slip into comfortable, but unhealthy pattern. This is absolutely not acceptable. The absence of a parent can never be made up by giving in to the unrealistic demands of a child. It is necessary to inculcate simple values in children right from the beginning.



Children must learn to be respectful towards elders, help around in the house in case of need and follow household rules like any other member of the family. In case this is not happening irrespective of how young the children are, they should be made to understand the need to imbibe values and follow rules.

**c) Respect** - Irrespective of the kind of relationship the separated parents share with one another, it is wrong to speak about the parent who is absent with disrespect in front of the children. At times single parenting can be really frustrating but it is wrong to vent out frustration by blaming the ex-spouse. Instead single parents must remember to discuss their frustrations, concerns and worries with their friends or adult family members.

**d) Behave Normally** - Although a child may find it difficult to explain the absence of one parent, single parents must make an effort to run the families as normally as possible. Family outings, dinners and parties are things that all children enjoy. Hence, it is important to make time for these and behave as normally as possible for the benefit of the children

It is a misconception that children of single parents by default will become irresponsible and unbalanced adults. In fact by setting a perfect model of self- respect and establishing a support system for the family, single parents can raise children well without much difficulty.

### **Tips for Single Parents to Manage Finance**

**Managing finance seems to be a tough task but if planned well, it can be managed easily. When coping with the loss of spouse or divorce, managing finances seems like an uphill task. All the planning has to be made from scratch keeping in mind the daily needs and some amount to be saved for the future. Read on the ways of managing finances when you are a single parent.**

Managing finance as a single parent is one of the toughest job in the world. When you have lost your spouse or separated from your spouse, you need to earn enough to meet the needs of your family and the situation can get tougher if you have more than one child as you need to plan and provide for the future security as well. Major parts of the world have not yet recovered fully from the economic crises and when the responsibility of the entire family falls on one parent, it becomes imperative that you understand budgeting very well.

### **Tips on Managing the Finance Single handedly**

The very first thing that you need to do here is get a clear idea of what exactly is available to you. In a moment of personal crises, undesired and avoidable expenditures and credit card debts



can only add to your stress. In the beginning, even a \$20 saving can give you a lot of confidence. Have a quick look at the tips for managing finance single handedly.

### **Start by Planning your Daily Budget**

Make it a point that you do not buy things that are not in your budget list, once you do it; you will be ruining your savings plan. Never put savings off to the next month as it will tend to become a recurrent thing and your idea of planning will never materialise, thereby adding to your worries. Ensure that whatever the situation and even if you are on a buying spree, you will be sticking to your budget.

### **Get the Things That are Urgently Required First**

The most important things are the food, education, medical and other household bills. Everything that your family needs should be on top of your list. A balanced diet for your kids, yourself and other members of the family along with the water, electricity, school and telephone bills, every other requirement comes after that.

### **Making Separate Envelops for Every Need Helps**

This might seem childish, but it helps a great deal in management with funds. This envelop should contain the bill and the money that is always ready for payment. This prevents unnecessary hassles for a single parent. These envelops should be stacked at safe places and you should not end up missing the payment due dates.

### **Avoid Procrastination**

Procrastination is a disease and must be avoided at all costs. The moment you receive the bills, keep the required money in envelops and keep them aside. Never postpone the payments as once you do it, you are likely to develop it as a habit and later the situation can get beyond repair. The smooth flow of payments must be allowed to keep on so that the habit eases out any undesired tensions in the coming time.

### **Reduce Budget for Things That are not Really Important**

Once you know that you have to make do on a limited budget and you have no one to support you in times of need, you need to get a clear idea on what is actually required by your family



and what could be well avoided. For instance, you can remove clothes and toys from your regular budget. If your child likes dining out every weekend, make them understand that you cannot afford it every weekend, rather they can have a great outing once a month. Try to share your problems with your kids in a manner that they can relate to it. It will not help them understand that they are on a tight budget, but you too will be in a better position to sort out things.

### **Finally, Savings are not Optional but a Necessity**

As a single parent you must make it a point to set aside a certain amount every month for your savings account. It is a mark of great planning and self-discipline that will keep you in good stead in times of need and help you feel confident even in a situation where you know that you have to spend your life without the support of your loved ones.