

Exploring the Socio-Cultural Impediments on Single Mother Quality's Life: Evidence from District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan



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Abstract: Single-mother are replacing two-parent households at an alarming rate across the world and researcher stimulated to know undeniable link between single mother, society, and culture. Justifiably, this research study aims to analyse the specific socio-cultural challenges faced by single mothers residing in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in their day-to-day lives. This entails a comprehensive exploration of the various obstacles, biases, and discrimination that these single mothers encounter within their social and cultural contexts. The study also seeks to explore the influence of social support systems and community structures on the quality of life of single mothers in this region. Understanding the role of these external factors can provide insights into the potential avenues for improvement in the lives of single mothers. From methodological point of view, the current study is confined to interpretivism philosophy orientated to qualitative research methods. Used interview guide for data collection, trace single mother based on snow ball sampling technique and sample 15 single mother from District Peshawar. In analysis portion, researcher max the primary and secondary data based on thematic analysis method. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the majority of single mother encountered socio cultural difficulties: bears the whole load of child care, earning a job, parenting, financial instability, stigmatization and social isolation due to prevailing cultural and society may hold negative stereotypes about single mothers, leading to judgment, discrimination, and a lack of support. To improve single mothers' quality of life, study contemplate these such recommendation where to build a strong support network with friends, family, or local groups for emotional and practical help. Assist in budgeting and finding financial aid to ease their financial stress.

Keywords: Single-mother, Households, Culture, Impediments, Social stigma, Interpretivism

Introduction

Research on the challenges faced by single mothers and its significance for their quality of life is of paramount importance. The rapid changes in family structures led by single

mothers, as well as the socio-cultural factors at play in every society, have prompted researchers to investigate how these factors affect the quality of life of single mothers, particularly in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and District Peshawar. Single mothers, in this context, are defined as divorcees, widows, or women whose husbands have been absent for an extended period. Quality of life, in this context, refers to an individual's overall well-being, extending beyond mere material prosperity and income. After a thorough examination and investigation, certain common themes have emerged academically regarding this vulnerable segment of society. Additionally, some religious leaders have addressed the issue of the quality of life of single mothers in their congregational messages. Furthermore, while exploring existing literature, researchers have identified studies related to dowry, including those by Malik et al., (2022), Shakil et al., (2020), Malik & Irshad, (2012), Qureshi et al., (2021), and Sultan et al., (2020). However, there is a noticeable gap in research focused on understanding the socio-cultural impediments affecting the quality of life of single mothers in District Peshawar.

This study focuses on District Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, where the majority of the population is Pashtun. It is evident that Pashtun culture traditionally holds single mothers in high regard, yet the prevalence of single motherhood is increasing (Khan et al., 2022). According to the Local Government, Elections, and Rural Development Department, (2023), in District Peshawar, over 30% of husbands work abroad, resulting in about 34% of mothers being single in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Furthermore, data from the United States Census Bureau indicates that single mothers with children account for 13% of all parents globally, indicating a growing trend (Vespa, et al., 2013). Given these statistics, this study aims to explore the socio-cultural factors influencing the quality of life of single mothers, design tailored interventions, bridge academic gaps, and pave the way for future research. The researcher's personal interest in this topic is fuelled by their experience with two single mother relatives and interactions with various single mothers within the community.

Statements/Justification

The research is justified by several significant factors. Firstly, it addresses an important social

issue concerning single mothers, a vulnerable and often marginalized group in Pakistan's patriarchal society. Single mothers face various socio-cultural impediments that affect their quality of life, and understanding these challenges is crucial for the formulation of effective policies and support systems. Secondly, the research is justified by its geographical focus on District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as this region may have unique socio-cultural dynamics that influence the experiences of single mothers. Exploring the context-specific challenges faced by single mothers in this area can lead to more targeted and contextually relevant interventions. Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the specific socio-cultural factors affecting the quality of life of single mothers in Pakistan. By providing evidence-based insights, it can inform policymakers, social workers, and organizations working to improve the lives of single mothers. Ultimately, this research has the potential to bring about positive changes in the lives of single mothers, promoting gender equality and social inclusion in Pakistan.

Objective of the Study

The research study aims to analyse the specific socio-cultural challenges faced by single mothers residing in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in their day-to-day lives. This entails a comprehensive exploration of the various obstacles, biases, and discrimination that these single mothers encounter within their social and cultural contexts. The study also seeks to explore the influence of social support systems and community structures on the quality of life of single mothers in this region. Understanding the role of these external factors can provide insights into the potential avenues for improvement in the lives of single mothers. Lastly, the research aims to formulate evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and relevant stakeholders with the ultimate goal of enhancing socio-cultural conditions and support mechanisms for single mothers in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Literature Review

The ligament that traditionally kept males and females together in marriages is eroding as a new family structure emerges but in today worldwide, there has been a considerable increase in single motherhood as most families' transition from two-parent to single-parent households due to increase in marital instability (Kim et al., 2018). According to Tacconelli et al., (2018), single moms are defined as divorcees, widows, or women whose husbands have been away for an extended period of time. As a result, single parents raised their children without the assistance of their partners, similarly, widows, divorced women, and moms who have lived alone for an extended length of time without a spouse are all instances of single mothers. According to Ross et al., (2012), quality of life is a multidimensional topic impacted by a variety of socio-cultural elements. More women choose to raise their children on their own, it is critical to explore the influence of socioeconomic and cultural variables on their overall well-being. Single mother encounter a variety of obstacles, which typically result in a lesser quality of life than two-parent homes (Plascak et al., 2007). Economic hardship is one of the most significant obstacles that most single mothers experience (Nawaz et al., 2015). Furthermore, socio-cultural stigma generates psychological issues such as coping with child-rearing (Nahar et al., 2020). Responsibility, chores, and emotional overload make child-rearing more challenging for single parents, resulting in difficulties in the form of mental disturbance which indirectly destroy the mental peace single mother (Malik, 2017). Such stigma and hostility inhibited single moms from gaining social recognition as formal families, causing stress and inability to integrate into society, mothers in this Pakistani culture endure many unwanted things (Ali et al., 2019). Unfortunately, on a culture level, women are blamed for early widowhood in many nations, and frequently linked to bad luck, charms, or witchcraft, especially after reaching the marriageable age (Ahmed, & Khan, 2020). In the event of a husband's death, single mothers often do not remarry and are deprived of

property distribution inequalities, as male successors get guardianship until the children reach the age of majority (Abowd, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Glen H. Elder Jr. is often considered one of the founding figures of the Life Course Perspective in social science and his work, particularly Life Course Perspective published in 1974. Elder's research focused on how historical events and social contexts shape individuals' life trajectories and experiences over time. This perspective looks at how individual lives unfold over time and in different social contexts. When applied to single mothers, this perspective can help researchers understand the trajectory of their lives, including transitions into single motherhood, educational and career paths, and the impact of these factors on their overall quality of life.

Methodology

Methodology is the systematic and structured approach or set of principles and procedures used to conduct research, investigations, or any organized study (Newman, & Benz, 1998). It outlines the methods, techniques, and tools employed to gather, analyze, and interpret data in order to answer specific research questions or achieve particular objectives (Bryman, 2016). The following methodology is used during the study:

Research Design

A research design, as described by Ryan, (2006), represents a comprehensive blueprint that encompasses all facets of a prospective research inquiry, from the inception of the research problem to the eventual dissemination of its findings. This research aligns with the interpretivism school of thought, adopting a broad perspective within the qualitative paradigm, grounding its beliefs in nominalist ontology and epistemology. It asserts that the most effective means of comprehending the world is through a subjective lens (Kaboub, 2008). Furthermore, this study adheres to a cross-sectional design, wherein the researcher gathers information from the selected respondents in a single instance. A cross-

sectional design is a research method that collects data from a sample of individuals or entities at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of their characteristics or behaviors at that specific moment (Killam, 2013).

Potential Respondents

Single mothers in District Peshawar are a vital group of participants in our study, which focuses on understanding the socio-cultural barriers impacting their quality of life. Including single mothers in our research is pivotal for several compelling reasons, greatly enriching the depth and comprehensiveness of our investigation. To begin, their lived experiences offer unparalleled insights into the intricate challenges of raising children, managing households, and maintaining financial stability in the absence of a partner. These narratives provide unfiltered and authentic glimpses into their daily realities. Additionally, as integral members of the District Peshawar community, single mothers occupy a unique vantage point from which they can offer insights into the local socio-cultural landscape. Their perspectives illuminate the specific norms, values, and expectations that shape their lives, providing a valuable contrast to broader cultural norms.

Sampling and Sample Size

The researcher possesses the option of choosing between two distinct sample approaches: probability and non-probability. In this study, a deliberate decision was made to adopt the philosophy of non-probability sampling. Specifically, the snowball sampling method was employed for the selection of respondents from the study's target population. Through this process, 15 carefully selected participants were amalgamated, providing a holistic and nuanced representation of the quality of life experienced by single mothers.

Data Collection Tool

An interview guide is an indispensable tool in qualitative research, meticulously structured to facilitate the acquisition of valuable insights from participants (Barriball, & While, 1994). Typically, this study comprises two main sections in interview guide. First,

sociodemographic section initiates the interview with a welcoming introduction to establish rapport, followed by the critical step of obtaining informed consent. This section study gathers essential background information about the respondent, encompassing demographics, educational and occupational details, marital status, income, and geographical context to provide a contextual backdrop for the research objectives. Subsequently, the research objective section smoothly transitions to questions directly aligned with the study's goals, commencing with inquiries that lay the foundation by exploring the participant's background knowledge and experiences related to the research topic. Central to this section are the core research questions, meticulously crafted to elicit in-depth and open-ended responses. Follow-up questions further probe specific aspects or seek clarification, ensuring a comprehensive understanding. As the interview concludes, expressions of gratitude are extended to the participant, along with an invitation to share any additional insights.

Data Analysis

As per study design and tools used for data collection the information is analysed qualitatively, where thematic analysis method employed in this study is a potent tool, uniquely suited to unveil the layers of complexity, legal subtleties, and contextual factors that interlace the intricate world of contracts. By distilling and identifying themes, the researchers craft a lucid, all-encompassing understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of contracts. Thematic analysis functions as a bridge that connects the raw data to meaningful insights, providing a window into the genuine nature of contracts and the myriad influences that shape them. (Edmondson, 2005). In particular, this approach shines when the goal is to comprehend the intricate tapestry of contracts and their implications across diverse contexts, spanning legal, business, and societal realms (Henry, 1990).

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis and discussion section of the study "Exploring the Socio-Cultural Impediments on

Single Mother Quality's Life: Evidence from District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan" delves into the grave examination of the findings. This section provides a platform for dissecting and interpreting the data collected from single mothers in District Peshawar, offering insights into the multifaceted socio-cultural impediments that effect their quality of life.

Socio-Economic Status of Single Mother

Most of the respondent's belief that, single mothers may encounter stigmatization and societal judgment, adding emotional stress to their already demanding lives. According to Abdullah et al., (2023), single mother might also have limited time for social interactions and self-care, potentially impacting support networks, like reliable childcare or family assistance, can be pivotal in alleviating some of these burdens. On economic side most of the potential respondents argue that single mothers might experience restricted career opportunities and have to juggle between work and childcare responsibilities, which can hinder their professional advancement and earning potential. Khan et al., (2023), argue that as a result, single mothers often find themselves in jobs with lower wages and fewer benefits, making it hard to secure a stable financial future. One of the potential respondent's stress her view regarding her socio-economic status:

"Being a single mother I face socio-culture barriers that highly affect my socio-economic status where people have strong traditional norms and values which often limit my access to higher education and good jobs. Along with this, the lack of socio-economic support to empower single mother's socio-economic status and overall wellbeing"

Socio-economic status refers to the positions of an individual or a group in society based on a combination of factors such as income, educations, occupation, and social standing and for single mother often faces challenges due to live alone. One of the other potential respondents also stated that:

"I experience that many single mothers

work really hard to provide for their families, but they might face difficulties due to having only one income. This can sometimes lead to financial struggles like not having enough money to for everything family needs. A support system can provide emotional and practical help, making it easier for single mothers to manage their responsibilities"

In the above respondent's argument author argue that socio-economic status of single mothers as crucial, include affordable options, paid family leave, access to higher education and job training, and anti-discrimination measures in social life. By addressing both economic and social dimensions, society can strive to create an environment where single mothers have equitable opportunities to enhance their socio-economic status and provide a brighter future for themselves and their children.

Cultural Norms and Values and Single Mother

Foremost of respondent's belief that cultural norms and values exert a considerable influence on the experiences and perceptions of single mothers within a society. These norms shape attitudes and expectations surrounding family structures and gender roles, often impacting how single mothers are perceived and treated Hussain, & Ali, (2019), stated that in some cultures, the emphasis on traditional family models may lead to stigmatization or judgment of single mothers, creating challenges in terms of social acceptance and self-esteem. Additionally, Khan et al., (2023), cultural values that prioritize self-reliance and independence might make it difficult for single mothers to seek or accept help, thereby exacerbating their isolation and stress. In this regard one of the single mother share her view:

"In my experience cultural norms and values impact my wellbeing as a single mothers and traditional beliefs and practices can lead to very limited opportunist structure. The local people's attitudes and behaviors can also affect their social interactions and support. To remove these impediments can create a

more inclusive environment that allows single mothers to thrive despite cultural constraints”

One of the study respondents give the following comments:

“Culture norms and values have a significant impact on single mother, shaping their experiences, opportunities, and social interactions in various ways. In some ways, there might be a stigma related with single motherhood, which can lead to judgment and negative perceptions. Single mothers may be viewed as different from traditional family structures, affecting their social standing and self-confidence. Culture norms impact access to education and employment opportunities for single mothers. If a culture values gender equality and women’s rights, single mother might have more chances for education and work. But, in culture that restrict women’s roles, single mother could face limited opportunities”

Conversely, most of the potential respondents argue that culture that prioritize communal support and extended family networks can provide a more inclusive environment for single mothers, where assistance is readily available and the burden is shared. Essien et al., (2021), cultural norms can also impact economic opportunities, as certain societies may limit women's participation in the workforce or restrict their access to education and job training.

Social Support Systems and Single Mother

Social support systems play a vital role in the lives of single mothers, offering a network of assistance that can significantly impact their well-being. Crabtree & Kluch, (2020), detailed that single mothers often face numerous challenges, from financial strains to emotional stress, social support systems provide a crucial safety net and these systems can comprise family members, friends, community organizations, and government programs. Furthermore, Abdullah, (2023), family and friends can offer practical help such as childcare, transportation, and emotional encouragement, which can be instrumental in easing the burden of single parenthood.

“I face challenges in social support system that could lead economic constraints and weakness might hinder access to childcare services and health facilities. Overcoming these challenges requires promoting acceptance of diverse family structures and creating accessible support networks to the needs of single mothers in the region. Social support systems play a circular role in the well-being of single mother, who often face challenges as they navigate the responsibilities of parenting and managing their household on their own. Due to this I often experience feelings of isolation, stress, and emotional fatigue”

One of the other potential respondents claim that:

“Emotional support from family, friends and peers can help to my challenges and I often manage multiple responsibilities, including childcare, work and household responsibilities. Piratical support can come in form of family or friends helping with childcare and household or providing a helping hand around the house”

From author point of view, affordable housing, food assistance, and access to healthcare, can make a significant difference in improving the socio-economic status of single mothers and their children. By strengthening social support systems, society can empower single mothers to overcome the challenges they face, enhance their emotional resilience, and provide a nurturing environment for their children's growth and development.

Access to Facilities of Single Mother

Access to appropriate facilities is a critical aspect of supporting single mothers in effectively managing their responsibilities and improving their overall quality of life. Single mothers often contend with a range of challenges, from childcare and employment to education and healthcare, and having access to well-designed facilities can significantly alleviate these burdens. Choi et al., (2018), stated that accessible and affordable childcare facilities enable single mothers to maintain stable employment and pursue educational

opportunities, fostering their economic independence. Another similar observation was noted in the study of Carbonari, (2013), as a consequence, single mothers often find themselves in lower-paying jobs with fewer benefits, making it difficult to secure a stable financial future. During interview one of the single mother share her view:

“Access to education and employment of single mothers are highly influenced due to various challenges, including limited time, financial constraints, and lack of adequate support systems. Moreover, childcare responsibilities and pursuing educational or career opportunities can be extremely demanding, making it crucial to address these barriers to empower single mothers for a better future”

One of most vulnerable single mother over view that:

“Access to quality of life of single mothers is an important issue that has important implications for both the individual involved and society as a whole. Single mother face challenges as they try to balances their responsibilities as caregivers with their pursuit of facilities from governmental level and career opportunities”

Two of the potential respondents also share similar comments about access to facilities of single mother:

“Single mothers may come across barriers to accessing education due to financial limitation, lack of childcare options and time limitations. They might also face emotional and psychological challenges while juggling their role as a parent and a student. Balancing work responsibilities with childcare can be difficult for single mothers. It’s essential to make sure that single mothers have equal access to job opportunities, promotions and career advancement. Single mothers should receive fair wages for their work. Ensuring they earn a living wage helps provide for their families provide for their families and reduces the risk of poverty”

From author analysis, facilities such as community centers or support groups tailored to their needs offer spaces for networking, sharing experiences, and receiving emotional encouragement, which can help combat feelings of isolation. Azmat, & Mahmood, (2016), adequate healthcare facilities, including maternal and mental health services, ensure the well-being of both the single mother and her children. Workplaces with family-friendly amenities, like nursing rooms and flexible hours, contribute to a healthier work-life balance. Comprehensive access to these facilities not only empowers single mothers to better navigate their circumstances but also cultivates an environment that values their contributions and nurtures their potential for personal and professional growth.

Stigma and Discrimination and Single Mother

Stigma and discrimination continue to cast a shadow over the lives of single mothers, creating barriers that impede their well-being and progress. Most of potential respondents argue that single mothers often face societal prejudices rooted in traditional norms and biased perceptions. Ali, (2021), contend that single mother might be unfairly judged for deviating from conventional family structures, leading to feelings of shame and isolation. Abdullah et al., (2023), also stated that discriminatory attitudes can extend to the workplace, where single mothers may be overlooked for opportunities due to assumptions about their dedication and availability. During interview one of the potential respondents argue that:

“I experience stigma and discrimination in society due to outdated stereotypes and misconceptions and often face discrimination behavior for my family structure, which can negatively impact my self-esteem and mental well-being. To find out these societal biases is important to create a more inclusive and supportive environment, allowing single mothers to thrive without unjust prejudice”

During interview one of single mother demonstrate that:

“Stigma and discrimination against single mothers are significant social issues that can have detrimental effects on both the individual affected and society as a whole. These negative attitudes can manifest in various ways, including societal biases, stereotypes, and unequal treatment. Stigma refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that society holds toward a particular group. Single mother may be subjected to judgment and gossip from peers, family members, and even strangers. This can lead to feeling of shame and isolation”

Two of the potential respondents share similar view regarding their life quality:

“Single mothers might be unfairly blamed for their situation, even when circumstances like divorced, and separation, are beyond their control. Discrimination involves treating individual unfairly due to their perceived differences. Single mothers can face discriminations in various aspects of their lives. Single mothers experience discrimination in the work place due to assumptions about their commitment and availability. They may be passed over for promotions or job opportunities”

With analysis of the above statements author argue that stigma and discrimination perpetuates a cycle of economic vulnerability as they struggle to secure stable employment and financial independence. Moreover, children of single mothers can also be impacted by stigma, facing social exclusion or stereotyping at school or within their communities.

Conclusion

Single mother is a challenging role that comes with its own set of difficulties and obstacles. Beyond the responsibilities of raising children alone, single mothers often face various socio-cultural challenges that can significantly impact their life quality. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the majority of single mother encountered socio cultural difficulties: bears the whole load of child care, earning a job, parenting, financial instability, stigmatization

and social isolation due to prevailing cultural and society may hold negative stereotypes about single mothers, leading to judgment, discrimination, and a lack of support. In some cases, single mothers may have limited access to flexible work arrangements or adequate social services, further complicating the work-life balance dilemma and social well-being. Crenshaw, (2013), belief that intersectional feminist theory offers a crucial lens through which to understand the layered challenges faced by single mothers, this means recognizing that their struggles are not solely due to their marital status, but also influenced by factors like socioeconomic background, and access to resources. Elder, (1998), stated in the life course perspective looks at how single mother’s lives unfold over time and in different social contexts, including transitions into single motherhood, educational and career paths, and the impact of these factors on their overall quality of life.

Recommendation

To strengthen the life quality of single mother, here are some suggestions:

Encourage the single mother to build a strong support network of friends, family, or local support groups to rely on for emotional and practical support can be invaluable.

Assist in creating a budget and exploring financial resources, grants, or assistance programs that may be available to single mothers to ease financial stress.

Encourage her to seek job training or educational opportunities to enhance her career prospects and increase her earning potential.

Advocate seeking professional help or counseling if needed, as being a single mother can be emotionally challenging.

If possible, explore opportunities for flexible work arrangements that can accommodate her parenting responsibilities.

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