



PARENTAL STRESS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SINGLE MOTHER AND SINGLE FATHER OF JAMMU DISTRICT

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Abstract: Stress is very familiar condition faced by single parents when they are unable to bear the risk involving higher home work. A single parent usually refers to a parent either mother or father who has most of the day to day responsibilities in the raising of the child or children, which would categorize them as the dominant caregiver who is not living with a spouse or partner, or those who are not married. The objective of the study was to assess and compare the parental stress of mother and father of single parent families from urban and semi-urban areas of Jammu District (J&K), India. Multistage sampling technique was used to collect the desirable data of the study. Data was collected by using interview schedule (self devised) and Stress Index for parents of Adolescent (standardized) from 60 parents (30 single mother and 30 single father) purposively selected. The data entering was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 17.0. Findings showed that the total mean age of the parents were 46 years. They were studied in higher standard and were working from outside the home. The mean score of father personal monthly income was higher than the income of mothers. Most of them were belonging to joint family. Death was the main reason of their singlehood and they were spent 3-5 years as a single parent. They had 2 children. Mothers showed more parental stress than fathers. There was significant differences were noted in all domain of parental stress between mothers and fathers except in relationship with spouse. Overall mothers showed higher mean score in parental stress than fathers. In adolescent domain, fathers show higher stress than mothers. In parent domain, mothers scored higher mean in parental stress than father. This highlights that single mother was felt more stressed with their single life than father.

Index Terms: Parental Stress, Single parent families, Jammu District, India

INTRODUCTION

Parenting can be simply defined as “the process or the state of being of parent”. Parenting is the process of developing using the knowledge that is helpful in giving birth, rearing and providing care for offspring. This definition implies that parenting start when there is a plan for it and it involves not just bringing up the children but also care for them. There are several characteristics of parenting. First of all, with the advancement of medical knowledge and technology, parenting becomes a choice in life. Secondly, being a parent is a life- long commitment. Thirdly, it involves responsibilities, as parents are responsible to take care of their children physically as well as psychologically. Lastly, parenting involves not just the couple but all the family members since the birth of a child affect the whole family. Parenting is the practice of supporting and encouraging the physical, emotional, social and academic development of a child from birth to adult. Thus, parenting is a complex process involving much more than a mother and father providing food, safety and succor to an infant or child, parenting involves bidirectional relationships between members of two (or more) generations; can extend through all or major parts of the respective life spans of these groups (Ellen and Boyle, 2001).

Parenting can be very stressful. Whether you are a stay at home parent or a working parent, a single parent or a married parent, mother or father, parent of one child or several children; remaining cool, calm and full of energy can help get you through the day. Society says children should be raised in a two-parent family. Although, in most cases raising a child or children in a two-parent family is best, there are situations where children are better off living and being raised by one parent i.e. single parent. Single-parent family, the parent may be either the mother or father who assumes the responsibility for the children after death or divorce or the birth of an illegitimate child. Single parent family is a family where parents care for one or more children without the physical assistance of the other parent in the home. Single parenthood may vary according to local laws of different nations or region (Ellen and Boyle, 2001). Azuka-Obieke (2012) sees single parenting is a situation in which one of the two individuals (i.e., mother or father) involved in the conception of the child becomes solely responsible for the upbringing of the child. Single parenthood arises when either the male or female parent decides to produce and raise a child or children outside of wedlock. It could also come about as a result of divorce, separation of various kinds or death of any of the spouses. Thus, it means leaving the responsibility of raising the children to the ‘surviving’ partner. In other word, Single parent families may refer to diverse situations wherein single parenthood might be an outcome of divorce, child birth outside marriage or untimely death of any parent. However, the scenario of single parent families in south Asian countries especially India is different from the West Asian countries i.e. USA, France, Nigeria, West Africa etc. While, the prevalence of single parent families in the West has been a result of divorce and child births out of wedlock, in South Asian countries where family ties are comparatively stronger, divorce rates are less due to its patrilineal kinship (Gupta, 2010) and occurrence of child birth outside of marriage remain uncommon till date (Yeung & Park, 2016), single parenthood possibly emerges due to absence of any one parent either due to labor migration (mainly male members) or death. Today, worldwide statistics point out that 16% of the families can be classified as Single

Parent Families (Leman, 2005). According to the Census of India (2011), 9.5% of families in the general population of our country are identified as having lone parents (widowed/divorced/separated). The proportion of single mother families (8.2%) in total population is higher than single father families (2.3%) at the National level. Due to contemporary societies, the families are divided into various types of categories like blended families, extended families, nuclear families, single parent families etc. Further single parent families are also divided into two categories, i.e. single mother and single father. According to this study, Single mother is one who lost their husband due to death, divorce or separation and takes all the responsibilities of their children and family alone. Single father is one who doing all the household chores and upbringing of their children without the help of their wife. Parenting in single parent families is very difficult and stressful. Life as a single mother is often associated with great demands and many challenges. Single mothers are more likely to report higher level of chronic stress and episodes of depression compared to married mothers (Cairney, et al., 2003). Lone mothers with dependent children are the poorest of all demographic groups (Olson & Banyard, 1993).

As a parent, single father faced more stressful life to maintain the same types of parenting roles with their biological children. Divorced fathers do not receive full custody of their children. As a result, maintaining their roles as parents can be difficult due to the diminution in time spent with their children. The single fathers must take on the role of the mother, a role that extends, deep into morality, devotions, and the ability to set up an educational, yet nurturing environment. Dual role and responsibilities caused more stress among fathers. After the singlehood, father faced problem in maintaining a good relationship with their children. Fathers feel more difficult to maintain the household chores and rearing of their adolescents children (American psychological Association, 2012).

NEED OF THE STUDY

Single parenting is a term often heard now days. Single-parent family can be defined as family where a parent lives with dependent children, without a spouse or partner, either alone or in a larger household. In other word, single parent refers to a 'father or mother who cares for one or more children without physical assistance of the other biological parent in the home' (Hanson et al., 1994). Western literature has ample reference to parenting in such families, where as little Indian references are available on the topic especially in Jammu and Kashmir (UT). With this background, the present study was conducted to assess and compare the parental stress between single mother and single father of single parent families.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study population and selection of participants

The target population comprised total 60 one-parent families (either mother or father) in the study area. The sample size was determined using sample size formula. The sample size was further divided into two groups 30 single mother headed families and rest of them from single father headed families.

3.2 Locale of the study

The present research was conducted in Jammu District of Jammu and Kashmir UT. The city of Jammu is also known as the 'City of Temples'. Jammu city actually took shape in 1962 and its municipal limits were extended on both banks of the river Tawi over an area of 16.87 square kilometers. Jammu Municipal Corporation is located in Jammu urban region with a population of 657,314 people. Culturally, Hindus contribute 81% of the total population and the largest religion community and rest of them are Sikhs, Muslims and all other religious communities (**Census of India, 2011a**). The entire sample for the present research work was selected from Urban and Semi Urban areas of Jammu city.

- **Criteria of the study:**

Criteria for inclusion in the study were as follows:

- (1) Only those parent (either the mother or the father) were selected who shared the household alone with their child/children.
- (2) Only those parent were selected who were the permanent resident of Jammu District. (3) Single headed family should exist for at least past one complete year.
- (4) Only those parent were selected who had at least one adolescence aged child.
- (5) Only those families were chosen who were willingness to participate in the study.

- **Sampling Technique:**

The sample for the study was identified through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling technique. Baseline data on 10 single parent families was already available (**Manhas and Riya, 2013**). This baseline data formed the starting point for the present research. The chain referral process was continued until the desired sample of families was obtained. From each family unit identified, the available lone mother/father and one adolescent child in the age group of 10-19 years were selected purposively.

3.3 Tools used for data collection

Data were collected using a self devised interview schedule and a standardized scale.

1. A **self-devised interview schedule** was used to collect information about the status of the single parent. It includes questions related to demographic variables, causes of single parent family, duration on being a single parent.
2. A standardized scale namely, **The Stress Index for Parents of Adolescents (SIPA)** is developed by Sheras, et al. in 1998 was also used for assess the parental stress of the lone parent. SIPA consists of 112 items which yields score on five domains, namely **the Adolescents Domain (AD), Parent Domain (PD), and**

Adolescent-Parent Relationship Domain (APRD), Life Stressors (LS), and an Index of Total Parenting Stress (TS). Interpretation of Scores of Stress Index for Parents of Adolescents (SIPA)

Percentile score range	Interpretation
95-100	Clinically severe
90-94	Clinically significant
85-89	Borderline
<85	Within normal limits

3.4 Data collection

Data were collected over a period of three months by the Investigator. The investigator contacted respondents through home visits at prearranged time; revisits were made where necessary in order to meet family members. At the initial stage of data collection it was not easy to get the information from the respondents because the topic of contemporary of families was sensitive in nature. Further briefing on the study aims and objectives was done prior to the participants. Interviews with each family were conducted privately and information was not shared with others.

3.5 Data analysis

Data entering was performed by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 17.0 using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Parental stress of mother-headed families and father-headed families were determined and compared. The parents perceived stress from their own life and as a parent of adolescent were measured using mean score and standard deviation. The differences between the parental stress of single mother and single father were calculated using *t*-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Mother-headed families (n = 30)		Father-headed families (n=30)		Total (n=60)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Age in years						
30-40	16	53.3	3	10	19	31.7
41-50	10	33.3	16	53.3	26	43.3
51-60	4	13.3	11	36.7	15	25
Mean ± S.D.	40.86±5.26		51.60±5.34		46.23±7.54	
Educational Status						
Illiterate	2	6.7	2	6.7	4	6.7
Higher	9	30	10	33.3	19	31.7
Secondary	6	20	6	20	12	20
Graduation	9	30	7	23.3	16	26.6
Post-graduation	4	13.3	2	6.7	6	10
Professional degree holders	0	0	3	10	3	5
Occupational status						
Working	19	63.3	26	86.7	45	75
Non-working	11	36.7	4	13.3	15	25

Personal monthly income						
Upton 6323	5	16.7	0	0	5	8.3
6327-18,949	8	26.6	1	3.3	9	15
18,953-31,589	5	16.7	5	16.6	10	16.7
31,591-47,262	7	23.3	8	26.6	15	25
47,266-63,178	5	16.6	16	53.3	21	35
63,182-126,356	-	-	-	-	-	-
Above 126,360	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mean \pm S.D.	23683.0 \pm 14828.0		47233.0 \pm 12255.0		35458.0 \pm 17969.2	
<i>S.D.- Standard Deviation</i>						

The demographic data of the participants from one-parent families are summarized in Table 1. A total of 30 mothers and 30 fathers from single parent families participated in the study. The mean age of parents was 46.23 \pm 7.54 years. Most of the parents were studied in higher standard. Most of them were working in government sector as well as private sector. The mean monthly family income was 35458.0 \pm 17969.2.

4.2 Family Status of Participants

Table 2: Family status of Participants						
Family status	Mother-headed families (n = 30)		Father-headed families (n=30)		Total (n=60)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Type of family						
Joint	23	76.7	17	56.7	40	66.7
Nuclear	7	23.3	13	43.3	20	33.3
Reason on being a single parent						
Divorce	6	20	2	6.7	8	13.3
Death of the partner	17	56.7	21	70	38	63.3
Separation	7	23.3	7	23.3	14	23.3
Years of singlehood						
1-3 years	4	13.3	7	23.3	11	18.3
3-5 years	9	30	17	56.7	26	43.3
5-8 years	10	33.3	6	20	16	26.7
More than 8 years	7	23.3	0	0	7	11.7
Number of children						
1	9	30	9	30	18	30
2	12	40	16	53.3	28	46.7
3	9	30	5	16.7	14	23.3

The family statuses of the participants are summarized in Table 2. Most of the participants were belonging to joint family. Death of the partner was the main reason on being a single parent. 23.3% of the parents mentioned that separation was the main reason of their singlehood. Most of them spent 3-5 years as a single parent. Most of the parents had 2 children whose lived with their existing parent.

4.3 Parental stress caused by adolescent's characteristics

Variables	Mothers (n=30)		Fathers (n=30)		t-value	p-value	Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
MEL	61.03	17.92	80.66	7.31	5.55	0.00	**
ISO	67.93	14.22	82.76	7.81	5.00	0.00	**
DEL	67.63	16.97	76.66	17.62	2.02	0.04	*
ACH	43.83	10.74	78.63	7.28	14.68	0.00	**
AD	62.96	16.42	81.53	6.22	5.78	0.00	**

S.D.- Standard Deviation, MEL -Moodiness/Emotional Liability, ISO-Social Isolation, DEL-Delinquency/Antisocial, ACH- Failure to Achieve or preserve, AD= Adolescent Domain
Significant @ level 0.01, Significant @level 0.05***

The breakdown of information on the parental stress caused by their adolescent characteristics between mother-headed and father-headed families on each of the four adolescent domains is summarized in Table 3. Father from single parent families had higher mean scores than mother from one-parent family in all the adolescent domains. Moodiness/emotional liability (single fathers, mean = 80.66 ± 7.31 ; single mother, mean = 61.03 ± 17.92), social isolation (single fathers, mean = 82.76 ± 7.81 ; single mother, mean = 67.93 ± 14.22), Delinquency/Antisocial (single fathers, mean = 76.66 ± 17.62 ; single mother, mean = 67.63 ± 16.97), Failure to achieve or preserver (single fathers, mean = 78.63 ± 7.28 ; single mother, mean = 43.83 ± 10.74) and Adolescent domain (single fathers, mean = 81.53 ± 6.22 ; single mother, mean = 62.96 ± 16.42). There were statistical significant differences were noted in the mean scores between single mother and single father family in all domain of adolescent domain. This implies that single father was perceived more parental stress caused by the adolescent characteristics than single mother.

One of the excerpts below highlights a father's response:

"I am a single father; I lost my wife 7 years ago due to health issue. My wife suffered from cancer. I did not have enough money for her treatment. After the death of my wife, my children did not behave well with me. They always blamed me for their mother's death. I felt a lot of stress and did not know how to cope with this situation" (Ajeet Singh, Interviewed on 12th December, 2016)

4.4 Parental stress caused by their own life

Variables	Mothers (n=30)		Fathers (n=30)		t-value	p-value	Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
LFR	97.70	0.70	92.20	3.59	-9.71	0.00	**
REL	93.60	7.05	93.03	9.85	-0.25	0.79	@
SOC	98.26	2.79	87.10	14.56	-4.12	0.00	**
INC	98.63	2.00	93.83	5.70	-4.34	0.00	**
PD	99.00	0.00	97.33	2.30	-3.95	0.00	**

S.D.- Standard Deviation, @-Non- Significant, LFR -Life Restriction, REL- Relationship with Spouse, SOC- Social Alienation, INC- Incompetence/Guilt, PD- Parent Domain,
Significant @ level 0.01, Significant @level 0.05***

Data on parental stress perceived from their own life of mother-headed and father-headed from single parent families on each of the parent domains are presented in Table 4. Mothers from one-parent families scored higher in all the domains than fathers. Life restrictions (single mothers, mean = 97.70 ± 0.70 , single father, mean = 92.20 ± 3.59), Relationship with spouse (single mothers, mean = 93.60 ± 7.05 , single father, mean = 93.03 ± 9.85), Social isolation (single mothers, mean = 98.26 ± 2.79 , single father, mean = 87.10 ± 14.56), Incompetence and guilt (single mothers, mean = 98.63 ± 2.00 , single father, mean = 93.83 ± 5.70) and parent domain (single mothers, mean = 99.00 ± 0.00 , single father, mean = 97.33 ± 2.30). There were statistical significant differences were noted in the mean scores between single mother and single father family in all domain of parent domain except relationship with spouse. This implies that single mothers perceived more parental stress due to their singlehood than single fathers.

One of the single mother shared that:

“I am a single parent and a widow woman. I am not allowed to participate in any ceremony. People think that the shadow of a widow woman is inauspicious for any ceremony or any other important work. This really hurts me a lot” (Kalyani Devi, Interviewed on 9th September, 2017)

4.5 Parental stress due to adolescent-parent relationship and life stressor

Variables	Mothers (n=30)		Fathers (n=30)		t-value	p-value	Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
APRD	65.36	10.83	86.30	4.00	9.92	0.00	**
Life Stressor	85.86	24.42	71.00	25.88	-2.28	0.02	*

*S.D.- Standard Deviation , APRD- Adolescent-Parent Relationship Domain, Significant @ level 0.01**, Significant @level 0.05**

The comparison of parental stress on adolescent-parent relationship domain of mother and father from one-parent families is summarized in Table 7. The mean scores of father is higher than the mean score of mother, i.e. (single mothers, mean = 65.36 ± 10.83 , single father, mean = 86.30 ± 4.00). In life stressors, mother is higher mean score than the father (single mothers, mean = 85.86 ± 24.42 , single father, mean = 71.00 ± 25.88). Statistically procedures indicate significantly different from the scores of mother and father.

One of the respondent single father said that:

“I feel proud of my daughter because of the way she behaves and she is adjusting in all situations. Most of times, she surprises me with her intelligence and behaviour. She has well maintained relations with all relatives and friends. She is just 14 year old but she manages each and everything like an adult” (Rajeshwar Pratap Singh, Interview 10th March’ 2017).

4.6 Total parental stress

Table 6: Comparison of total stress between mothers and fathers of single parent families

Variables	Mothers (n=30)		Fathers (n=30)		t-value	p-value	Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Total Stress	94.40	2.67	90.46	3.03	-5.32	0.00	**

*S.D.- Standard Deviation, Significant @ level 0.01**, Significant @level 0.05**

Table 6 compares the overall total stress of mother and father. Mothers had the highest score (mean = 94.40 ± 2.67) than fathers (mean = 90.46 ± 3.03). Significant difference was noted in total stress between mothers and father ($p \leq 0.01$).

CONCLUSION:

As shown in the study, mothers and fathers from single parent families have similar demographic characteristics such as most of the parents were studied in higher standard. They were working in both government and private sector. Most of the fathers were occupied as a Teacher, Police officer, Bankers etc and most of the mothers were doing job as a Supervisor, Receptionist, Helper, Nurse in private clinic etc. This is consistent with the findings from previous study by (Bansal and Bhatnagar, 2013) who reported that maximum single parents were working in governmental and non-governmental sector. Further, most of the single parents were belonging with joint families and had 2 children. Contradictory result shown in previous study by D'Mello (2016) reported that 82% of the single parent families were lived in nuclear families. Although most of the mothers had spent more time being a single parent than fathers. The average monthly personal income of mothers is lower than the monthly personal income of fathers. Associated, that single mothers lived with more financial burden as compared to single fathers who were financially strong. This is consistent with findings from previous studies shows that Single-custodial-father families are less likely to be poor and more likely to be in the paid labor force than female-headed families (Demuth & Brown, 2004). As revealed in this study, Death of the partner was the main reason of their singlehood. This study supports earlier observation by Sheykhi (2006) and Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) stated in their studies revealed that death of the partner was the main cause of single parent.

The study further reveals that single fathers have more parental stress caused by the adolescent characteristics than single mothers in all the adolescent domains. Single fathers faced clinically severe stress due to affective characteristics of their adolescents such as their sudden mood changes, irritability and short temper, antisocial behavior and lack of persistence in achieving goals. Majority of the mothers had limited stress due to the characteristics of the adolescents. Statistically significant differences were noted in the entire adolescent domain between mothers and fathers. Although previous studies have reported that single fathers, who live with their children, report psychological problems like stress, depression due to children behavior like committed a one-time credit card fraud, use drugs, trouble with the law, distributive behavior, etc (Coles, 2009). Contradictory findings shown by Bansal and Bhatnagar (2013) in their study they reported that majority of single parents reported that

there was very few moral and behavioral problems in their children so that they did not more worry about the behavior problem of their children.

On Parent domain, findings reveals that majority of the mothers had clinically severe level of stress due to their own life than fathers. Singlehood was the main cause of stress among these mothers. Most of the mothers faced financial burden and unable to fulfill all the basic needs of their family. Most of these mothers felt rejected and isolated because they had a lot of life restrictions to participate in the social ceremonies such as marriage, baby shower of expecting mother (*godh bhara*, connoted in Hindi language of India) and other auspicious rituals by society. They considered them as inauspicious or unlucky. Due to this, these mothers always felt helpless, depressed, and lonely and thought that they were ill-fated. They had regret on their singlehood and unable to develop and maintain social relationships. Statistically there was significant differences were noted in the entire parent domain except in relationship with spouse. This shows that both mother and father had similar stress due to their relation with their previous partner. Similarly, previous study stated that single mothers felt more stress due to socially isolated, receive less emotional and parental support, and have more unstable social networks than single father (Bassuk et al., 1996 & (Moe, 1999).

Further result revealed that statistically the mean scores of single father were higher than the mean score of single mother in adolescent-parent relationship domain. Signifying that the fathers felt severely stressed to maintain the relationship with their children than mothers. However, this is not consistent with finding of earlier study by Smith and Smith (1981) who revealed that single father perceive their relationships with their children had become much closer since they had become single parents. Further result shows that single mother had severe level of life stressor that experienced in past one year is higher than single father. But this is not inconsistent with the finding of previous study done by Coles (2009) in his study, he revealed that single father faced stress due to personal and family related problems i.e. serious health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and joint replacements, experienced legal conflicts that required court action etc than single mother.

Statistically procedure indicates there were significant differences on total parental stress between mother and father and this clearly shows that single mother had high level of parental stress than single fathers. Similarly, a study showed that single mothers are more disadvantaged and stressed than single fathers in terms of educational level, job status, economic strain, coping with their multiple roles, support networks, and parenting (Hilton & Devall, 1998).

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings from this study showed that parenting of adolescent is not an easy task especially for the single parent. Majority of the mothers had higher and severe level of parental stress than fathers. Fathers had higher stress due to the adolescent behavior and characteristics. In case of single mother, they felt more stress due to their singlehood. Statistically significant differences were noted in all the variables of parental stress except in relationship with spouse.

However, it is recommended that responsibility of our government and other organizations to keep eye on the conditions of such families.

- There is a need to develop new policies and programmes that target one-parent families (especially women) for socio-economic and psychologically support.
- It is also recommended that there must be availability of some vocational training for those single parents especially mothers who were not working, doing less paid job and less educated, so that they should enhance their capabilities and skills by thus there is a raising the standard of living.
- Due to their clinically severe level of parental stress, there should be some interventions programmes like counselling sessions, therapy, healthy discussion, alternatives ways like mediation, yoga etc to overcome the stress of these parent.
- Encourage these Parents to join and register themselves on some online parental forums that give lectures and training on good parenting skills. Parents need to share their experiences relating their parenting in group discussion and how they cope up with their situations relating their children so that the other parents take advantage of these experiences and help them to cope up with such situations that still they face in their life.

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