

## **Child Wellbeing: Impact of Parenting by Single Mothers**

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### **Abstract:**

Parenting is a major responsibility shared by both, the mother and the father. Being a single parent can be really difficult especially for a woman living in a patriarchal society. It can lead to several vulnerabilities both for the mother as well as the child. The study mainly focuses on finding out the challenges and the difficulty faced by the single mother to deal with the educational, social and economic development of their children. The study focuses on the wellbeing of the child, in consideration with their socio-economic background, parenting styles and the social risk factors of the widowed, separated or divorced mothers and their children.

A quantitative study was conducted in rural and urban areas of Calicut district of Kerala with 50 participants as the sample size. The findings of the study make it evident that single mothers face different challenges in both rural and urban areas respectively, in regard to their parenting style. The child wellbeing is discussing mainly on the wellbeing of child in four different domains. Environmental, Physical, Psychological and Social wellbeing of the child are discussed in this study. This study tries to understand the child wellbeing by accessing the mode of parenting style and socio demographic details of the participants. It is visible in this research that effective intervention for both the child and mother will improve the parenting practice and child wellbeing.

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**Keywords:** Child wellbeing, parenting style, parenting challenges, single parenting.

### **Introduction**

Single mothers are a population that is facing a lot of problems and challenges to deal with the development of their children. Single mothers for this study are defined as either separated from her partner, divorced, widowed or having children without a marital relationship. The single mothers have several issues, in regard to socio-demographic challenges, socioeconomic challenges, physical and emotional stress. Single parents face challenges regarding decision making, discipline and guidance when raising their child without support of another adult (Taren & Dittrich, 2000). In single mother families, the mother is taking care of the emotional and physical need of a child. The absence of the male parent is affecting the child wellbeing (Nelson, 2006). The major role of the single mother without the presence of a male parent is to address the needs of her child.

### **Parenting Styles**

Parenting style is a contribution by the development psychologist Diana Baumrind through her observation, interviews and analysis in 1967. She came up with the concepts of authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting style. Each parenting style consists of their own specialties according to the situation of the parent and also the behaviour of the child. The three different types of parenting styles have different characteristics according to the mode of action and execution in parenting intervention. Authoritarian parenting style consists of highly demanding and low responsiveness. Both the male and female parent with the authoritarian parenting style has high expectations from the child (Ishak, Low & Lau, 2012). The authoritative parenting style has a state of parenting where the parent and the child are getting equal space for the development. The parent is practicing alterations in the child's behaviour by giving proper guidance and warm regards. In the permissive parenting style, the parents have less involvement in the role of parenting (Carter & Welch, 1981). This parenting is the type of parenting in which fewer demands with

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high responsiveness. These types of parenting consist of low responsibility for maturity and discipline of the child. This study is mainly trying to find out the impact of parenting style by considering the socio demographic factors and how it is affecting the child wellbeing.

### **Child wellbeing**

Child well-being is often associated with developmental transitions between different stages in life. In the context of child indicators numerous efforts have been made to define the concept of child well-being. In developed countries much of these efforts are rooted in western culture. Especially among young children, the standards for development are based on a preferred adolescent or adult outcome, implying the need to prepare children for their transition into later stages in life or to monitor the developmental process (Binder, 2013). The concept of Child Wellbeing in this study is looking upon the different domains of well-being that can contribute to the development of the child. The domains are mainly focusing on environment, psychological well-being, social relationship and physical health. The physical domain is mainly trying to find out the physical wellbeing in doing daily activities, the energy of the participant, sleep, discomfort, mobility and pain- rest and working capacity. The domain of psychological wellbeing is mainly looking upon bodily images and appearance of the participant, negative feelings, positive thoughts, self-esteem, spirituality and religion, thinking, learning, memory and concentration. The social relationship domain is focusing on the personal relationship of the participant, social support and the sexual understanding of the participant. The environmental domain is pointing on the financial resource of the participant, freedom, health and social care, home environment, social care and health, accessibility and quality, leisure activities and recreation, physical environment and transport. These domains will give a clear understanding of how the child is dealing with the well-being of his or her life and challenges for wellbeing.

### **Objectives**

The study focused on three objectives listed below:

- To study the Socio-economic profile of single mother and their children
- To study the Parenting Style variations in rural and urban population.
- To study the difference between rural and urban children on child well-being.

### **Methodology**

Quantitative study with descriptive cross sectional research design is used in this study. The study focused on understanding the socio demographic profile and parenting patterns of single mother and understanding the child well-being through a descriptive analysis by considering socio demographic profile and parenting styles. Purposive sampling technique is used in this study. 50 single mothers from divorced, widowed and separated marital status from Calicut district, Kerala are included in this study. In those 50 single mothers, 25 are from the rural background and 25 are from the urban background to understand the child wellbeing in both rural and urban sector. Self structured questionnaire was used to find out the socio – demographic profile of the single mothers and their children. Parenting style questionnaire, Based on Robinson, C., Mandleco, B., Olsen, S. F., & Hart, C. H. (1995) with authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting practices are used to understand the parenting styles of single mothers from both rural and urban background. Word Health Organizations- Quality of life, Brief scale consists of 26 items used in this study to understand the child wellbeing of single mother child from both the rural and urban sector. The child wellbeing is measured through this scale mainly consists of four domains of wellbeing. Physical, Social, Educational and Environmental domains are used to find out the wellbeing of children having single mother parenting. Single mothers with children in the age group of 13 to 16 years old and the age of the single mother should be between 30 to 45 years old are included in this study.

**Results and discussions**

Education of Single Mothers			Marital status of single mothers		
	Rural	Urban		Rural	Urban
School Education	48%	36%	Widow	32%	32%
Under Graduates	32%	48%	Divorced	36%	60%
Post Graduates	12%	16%	Separated	32%	8%
No education	8%	0 %			
Total	100%	100%	Total	100%	100%

Job/Employment			Number of family members as support syste		
	Rural	Urban		Rural	Urban
Working Full time	28%	88%	No One	24%	40%
Working Part – Time	40%	12%	More than 2	44%	32%
Unemployed	32%	0%	More than 5	32%	28%
Total	100%	100%	Total	100%	100%

The socio- demographic details of single mothers and their children are explaining about education of single mothers, marital status of single mothers, job/employment and number of family members as support system available inside the family. The socio-demographic profile is mainly looking on these 4 domains. The inference that can be drawn from the table 1.1 is that, education of single mothers varies, in terms of rural and urban areas. The result shows that only 48% of single mothers in rural areas have school level education. This can be a challenging situation for them in respect of getting a

better job and overcoming economic vulnerability. The single mothers having less income jobs can add maternal stress and anxiety in families they head (Choi, 2010). On the other hand 32% have completed graduation and 12% post-graduation. These challenges can influence the parenting styles of single mothers. In regard to urban areas, 36 % of the single mothers have only school level education. But nearly half (48%) of the single mothers have completed graduation and 16%, post-graduation. On comparing rural data and urban data, one can easily infer that urban areas provide better opportunities, in terms of employment but at the same time the rural mother are struggling to take care of their financial needs and hence are a challenging situation (Bergger, 2007). Table 1.1 also highlights the marital status of single mothers in both rural and urban population. The study shows that 32% of the participants in rural areas are widows and 36% of the population in rural areas are divorced and 32 % of the population is of separated single. Divorced single mothers will get less social support among other categories of single mothers (Bainbridge, Meyers & Waldfagel, 2003). The divorced single mothers having poor social support according to the studies are facing lack of confidence and having poor parenting styles (Dufur, Howell, Downey, Ainsworth & Lapray, 2010). On the other hand majority (60%) of the participant in urban area is divorced and others are widows (32%) and separated (8%).

Table 1.2 shows the job, activity and engagement done by the single mothers in both rural and urban population. The data shows that in the rural population only 28 % of the single mother participants are working full time. 32% of the single mothers are unemployed also and 40% has a part time job. These results point out that the rural population is having high economic vulnerability compared to the urban population. It is an important observation that almost 88 percent of the urban single mothers have job or some other engagement to deal with the financial requirements of their family. This will reduce the stress and risk situation related to the economic requirements of the family.

Table 1.3 is a comparison of parenting style single mothers in rural and urban areas. The results show that 32% of single mothers have of authoritarian

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Table 1.3. Parenting Styles of Single Mothers

Parenting Styles of Single Mothers – Rural and Urban Sector		
	Rural	Urban
Authoritarian	32%	48%
Authoritative	60%	20%
Permissive	8%	32%
Total	100%	100%

parenting style, 60% have authoritative parenting style and 8% have Permissive parenting styles. The result shows that the majority of single mother population in the rural area follows the authoritative parenting styles. The reason behind the authoritative parenting style is because of the social support from other members of the family. The dynamic and the demographic advantages of the single mother are contributing to the improvement of their children’s wellbeing and development in physical, environmental, social and psychological domains. The table also depicts that 48% single mothers have of authoritarian parenting style, 20% have authoritative parenting style and 32% have Permissive parenting styles. The most prominent parenting style that is practiced in the urban population is consisted of authoritarian parenting styles. The authoritarian parenting has of high demanding and low responsiveness from the parent. They always have high expectation from the child and force him/her to meet those expectations with hard measures and strict parenting interventions. This situation will affect the child very negatively and can contribute to the collapsing of wellbeing domains in their children (Aunola and Nurmi, 2005).

Table 1.4 explains that there is a difference in child wellbeing in the rural and urban area. The three out of the four domains have significant difference in their wellbeing score in rural and urban population. Hence there is a strong significant difference in the wellbeing of single mother child in both rural and urban population. The child wellbeing scores shows that in rural area children is having better wellbeing scores in Physical, Psychological and Social

Table 1.4. Child Wellbeing of Single Mother Child

	<b>Domicile</b>	<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>Mann U</b>	<b>p value</b>
Physical Wellbeing	Urban	21.88	222.00	.078
	Rural	29.12		
Psychological Wellbeing	Urban	19.96	174.00	.007
	Rural	31.04		
Social Wellbeing	Urban	21.48	212.00	.050
	Rural	29.52		
Environmental wellbeing	Urban	26.76	281.00	.539
	Rural	24.24		

wellbeing. When we compare the child wellbeing in the rural and urban population it is visible that rural children have better outcomes of wellbeing interventions. The difference is visible because of the socio demographic advantages and better parenting intervention by the rural single mothers. When we are considering the socio demographic details of rural single mothers, it is visible from table number 1.1 and 1.2 that the rural single mothers have effective social support and the marital status of single mothers are mostly widowed and separated. This phenomenon is positively associated with the wellbeing of single mother child in rural area. This phenomenon is negatively associated with the wellbeing of the child. The divorced marital status of single mothers is affecting the support of single mothers from other family members. At the same time the employment and educational status of urban single mothers are higher when we compare to the rural single mothers. But this phenomenon is not helping the single mothers to come up with better parenting interventions. Most of the urban single mothers follow authoritarian (48%) or permissive (32%) parenting styles. This is impacting the wellbeing of child in urban areas. At the same time rural single mothers have good wellbeing scores because of effective parenting interventions and social support.



### **Impact of Socio demographic advantage – disadvantage and parenting styles on child wellbeing**

Different parenting style gives different parenting practices to children. Each parenting styles are associated with child wellbeing (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007). The years of education are influencing the parenting styles of single mothers. Increasing the year of education improves the parenting styles and that reflects on the child wellbeing in rural area. At the same time the increasing year of education in urban area is not showing any major improvements in parenting styles and that is not reflecting on the wellbeing of the child. In rural area, education with the social support of the single mothers improves the child wellbeing in four different domains. At the same time in urban area, education is not providing any improvements in child wellbeing. Here the lack of social support reflects on the child wellbeing of the children. Authoritarian parenting style is higher in the urban area. This high authoritarian parenting style is large among the single mother with divorced and separated marital status in the urban area. The urban single mothers have better opportunities to work and engagement, to deal with the economic need of the family. This improves the environmental wellbeing of the children. The increasing number of family members in rural area helps the single mother to meet her financial needs, safety and security, health care needs of her child. Social relationships and engagement for the children improves the psychological, social and physical domains. At the same time in the urban single mothers, the number of family members along with the mother and child are very less and only has small amount of social support system. This situation makes the urban children more vulnerable in physical, social and psychological wellbeing. The reason for better physical wellbeing among the rural children is they have better social support, number of family members is greater. The absence of a male parent will be taken care of by any other family members. In this situation the burden and the vulnerability of the single mother is also reducing. Here the positive health care needs, safety and security, proper energy and engagement of the children are ensured by other family members though this social

support system. Social support system and family members around the single mother and child, improves thinking, learning and concentration of the child. Also improves the self-esteem, thoughts about body images and appearance. Both the mother and the child have other family members along with them to deal with the positive and negative feelings this improves the psychological wellbeing of single mother child in rural area.

### **Conclusion**

Family is one of the key components for social work practice. Child focused social work models will improve the wellbeing of children with single mother parenting. The single mother and the child are vulnerable population by understanding the challenges and issues faced by both the population. Child wellbeing is a developmental concept for child development by ensuring overall wellbeing of children in different domains. In the case of single mother child, the child wellbeing is associated with the demographic dimensions of the single mother and her parenting interventions. Effective parenting by essential alterations in the demographic dimensions will provide effective wellbeing and development for children.

The child wellbeing of single mother child is different in different demographic areas. The rural and urban demographic challenges are different according to the situation of both the mother and the child. The study shows that in rural population the social support system and the relationships with other family members are good to deal with the risk and emotions of the single mother. This will improve the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of the children. The need of this population in rural area consists of economic wellbeing and development by improving education of single mothers to generate more employment opportunities. This will reduce the financial burden of single mothers and that will improve the child wellbeing. Effective formulation of self-help groups for single mothers in urban areas and social inclusion and interaction will provide better developmental outcome for single mother parenting and that will reflect on the child wellbeing in urban single mother child.

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