



# The Quintessential Single Working Mother: Studying the Impact as a Female Head of Household

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**FINAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROFICIENCY**

It is to certify that we have read the research proficiency paper by Isra Arif Zia. It is our judgment that this paper is of sufficient standard to warrant its acceptance by Bahria University, Islamabad for the award of degree (BSS)

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to-

My Single Working Mother who has carried the weight of the world on her shoulders, yet has always had time to embrace us with her love, showed us how to be strong, and filled our home with laughter.

My Single Working Father, who has time and time again proven that giving up is never an option and that faith in oneself is what truly makes you succeed.

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# Introduction

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## 1.1 Background of the Study

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Pakistan is a developing country which has seen a rapid increase in female participation as part of the labor force, in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. However, women generally are not recognized as being a significant fraction of the working economy, and more so, the different categories of female employees such as single working mothers are inherently side tracked and not taken into account with regards to economic and social contributions.

Pakistan faces economic and political upheaval; these problems are deeply intertwined with social, cultural and religious overtones which is why it is so difficult to overcome economic, social and political issues in their entirety (Azid, T et al 2010). It is in this social climate that the role of women has become tainted; through religious and cultural interpretations and patriarchal re-enforcement that women are seen as dependant, economically inferior, and incapable of being in the head of household position. However, it is undeniable that women make up a significant number of paid laborers in Pakistan; there is a slow societal shift towards de-stigmatizing women working outside of the household.

There are many factors which could contribute to this trend- the economic cost of a single household earner is a damaging reality with the increase in inflation, taxation and expenses. The burden on only one family member to earn an income poses unrealistic expectations on the household. There is also an undeniable influence which stems from the West, where women have

been supported legally to assume authoritative positions in the workplace as well as in the household and have become an equal and integral part of the decision making process.

Single parent households are on a rise (Chant 1997) - it is more publically acknowledged in countries such as the USA, Canada and the UK, and they are deemed more socially acceptable in comparison to countries in the developing world, with better opportunities and chances to be socially integrated within society without negative repercussions which can lead to emotional and psychological damages. There is still a greater stigma or taboo attached to those single parent households which are led by women. Single working mothers are a segment of society which faces many problems such as shouldering the double burden of responsibility of earning for the family as well as raising children and keeping the household in check. (Ypiej, 2005)

In this Introduction, we will briefly explore the meanings behind the term 'Single Mother' and that of the 'Working Woman. It is important to define these terms separately before using them as a conjoined term. This is because both terms represent variations on a similar issue. For the purpose of this study, 'Single Mother's' refer to women who are raising their children primarily as a singular parental unit, without spousal support emotionally and financially. Females as heads of households are on the rise (Chant 1997). Spousal units can be broken due to divorce, separation, death of a partner, and or abandonment. Single mother families can include alternative forms of co-existence such as 'living apart together' (Ypiej, 2005).

Similarly, for the purpose of this paper, 'Working Women' can be identified as those women who obtain formal or informal employment in the public and private sectors after completing a certain degree of formal education. A working woman does not necessarily have to be married or

unmarried. The status of a woman's relationship in relation to her employment status is mostly seen as a cultural and societal norm and tradition. (A, Toseef, 2010)

This paper will aim to study the two terms in a conjoined manner; 'Single Working Mother's' - immediately identifying some of the characteristics (Single woman, working and providing for offspring) - that will be explored in depth, over the course of this research.



## 1.2 Significance of the Study

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This study is significant as it studies the two terms, ‘Single Mother’ and ‘Working Woman’ in a conjoined manner, which alters the definition and also changes the course of the discussion. A ‘Single Working Mother’ faces problems that both a single mother and a working woman face. A Single Working Mother may be challenged in the public and private sphere: economically, socially, and psychologically.

There are many stigmas attached to those familial units which are primarily headed by females. Mothers as a single unit, though these family units are on the rise, are cast on a separate plane from the traditional two parent unit (Jahaan, R, 1996).The cause of estrangement can include divorce, separation, death, and abandonment, and can become of great concern to the society and can lead to diminishment of character. (Mugheri,R, 2012)

There is no census definition, with respect to the term, ‘Head of Household’, and the change in roles for a ‘Single Woman’ would greatly be the motivation of economic responsibility for their own and their children’s wellbeing. ‘These are women who because of marital dissolution, desertion, abandonment, absence of spouse or male marginality are structurally placed in a situation where they are economically responsible for themselves and their children.’(Bouvinic, M, 1978)

Women in Pakistan, especially Working Women face many challenges, ‘Socially they are outcast. Economically they are deprived. Politically they are underrepresented. In policy-making they are given less priority. Their urban counterparts meet the same fate as geographic variations and societal composition make little difference when it comes to treating women.’ (Pervez, S et

all 2015) It is apparent that male chauvinism is not merely disposition; rather it has assumed a form of socio political and socio economic order in Pakistan.

The significance of this study lies in the vast area between the ‘Single Mother’ and the ‘Working Woman’ that has not been researched in depth, specifically, in the capital city of Pakistan. This research will aim to collect and analyze data from households headed by Single Working Mothers and determine the differences they have to the traditional parental unit socially, economically, and psychologically as well as analyze the impact of the newly emerging households that are headed by women in a predominantly patriarchal society.

## 1.3. Objectives of the Study

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1. This study aims to study the impact on living and wellbeing of the households in Islamabad, Pakistan that are headed by Single Working Mothers.
2. This paper will also explore the impact of socio-economic issues on Single Working Mothers in Islamabad, Pakistan.

## 1.4. Operationalization of the Study

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1. What criteria can define a Single Working Mother?

For the purpose of this research, a Single Working Mother will be employed in the formal or informal sectors of the economy. She will receive a fixed salary at the end of every month, not withstanding savings, inheritance money or external financial support.

She is recognized as or assumes the role of Head of the Household.

2. For the purpose of this study, we will study the social, economic, physical, and psychological impacts on the Single Working Mother.

## 2. Literature Review

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Migrants to Netherlands: This research article explores the difficulties faced by women who are the heads of households, with no emotional or financial spousal support are finding employment in order to provide and raise their children. This is made significantly more difficult as these women are migrants. The women discussed in this paper are mostly of Caribbean origin, which have migrated to the Dutch welfare country for various reasons. This paper also explores the different concepts of single women households; Living apart together relationships, unmarried partnerships and reliance on extended female family support systems. Another interesting aspect of this paper was to identify that although the sexual division of labour had altered, the traditional norms of gender roles were still largely prevalent within the society. (Ypiej, 2005)

In a paper published in the International Journal of Social Economics, the concept of female employment and the challenges faced by women is deeply explored with social and economic connotations. Decision making in a Pakistani household typically lies with the male head of household. Women that participate in the labour work force were seen to strengthen their position within the household and society as well as increasing their financial capacity, which in turn has an effect on economic development. However there is a lack of adequate opportunities for women to achieve vertical mobility. It is also seen that there is an increase of women involved in economic activity pre marriage, and this number decreases once a woman gets married, as priorities are forced to shift towards household domestic activities. This shift is expected by society and family. (Azid, Toseef, Ali Khan, Rana Ejaz, M.S Alamsi, Adnan, 2010)

In another paper discussing the plight of working mothers in Pakistan, the theme of patriarchy and limited decision making authority explores how these aspects prove to be a hindrance to

women in the labour force. Women are often crushed under the pressure of multiple responsibilities of not only their spouse and children but also the high probability that elders of the family are also dependent on the duties performed by the woman of the household. The paper also differentiates between the urban and rural woman; there are differences in education, access to health, living standard and employment opportunities, however the seed of traditionalism with respect to responsibilities of a woman remain largely the same. The woman's domain is primarily the domestic one, whereas the man's domain is the public sphere. The biggest question which steps in the way of women in the labour force is that of childcare- a responsibility which by societal and cultural norms is essentially that of the woman. (Aamir, N, 2004)

The viable economic opportunities present for women in Pakistan are limited. As part of the government service, women may be able to find employment as a teacher, nurse, sweepers, attendants, or computer operators. Socially, working women are not wholly accepted, economically, they are unable to achieve great financial heights and politically, women are largely under-represented. Most research papers discuss the double burden on working women of housework and formal employment work. It is also seen that respect to working women is more freely given in the metropolitan cities of Pakistan which include Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad; where working women are able to influence the career planning of their children. (Pervez, S., Zia-ur-Rehman, M., Javed, J., & Raza, I. 2015)

In a research paper titled, 'The Elusive Agenda: Mainstreaming Women in Development', researchers argue that women are reclaiming their position in the public sphere. The changes in awareness, expertise, policies, laws and women's voices have been brought about by the many efforts by different women's liberation movements as well as national governments and international aid and donor organizations. Women's movements raised their voices on issues of

gender equality which were adopted into the policy making process by national governments and international organizations, thereby changing the direction that development as a process took. There are still many gaps which need to be re-evaluated between policy creation and implementation, however, it is still a positive sign that work is being done in the right direction, with emphasis on gender equality and inclusivity of women. Some researchers argue that the progress of women's equality is elusive as the women's agenda has not been clearly defined. In order for the women's movement to truly transform development, burden sharing must happen on multiple levels- within the family, the nation and then globally. (Jahan, Raunaq, 1996)

Again, we find that researchers explore the dual burden faced by women in Pakistan with regards to working outside the home or either staying home in order to raise children and fulfill household chores. Many are of the opinion that the formative years of a child are crucial for a child's future, therefore that time period is essential for mothers to focus their attention towards the children. However, the view that counters this belief is that working women instill in their children a sense of responsibility and the value of the quality time spent with parents. The current economic state of increased inflation and growing poverty is one of the main motivators for women to integrate themselves into the economic workforce. Many of the interviewees agreed that it was essential to household finances that both parents find employment and that the benefits of a mother working for financial reprieve outweighed the benefits of having a stay at home only mother. It was also found that children reacted positively to working mothers, the mother and child bond being made stronger due to the quality of bonding rather than quantity of time spent together. The main difference between a working mother and a stay at home mother was found in the eyes of society, where one type of mother was deemed more acceptable than the other. It was also seen that a mother's confidence had a direct relation to the self confidence of

the children. Moreover, it was seen that working mothers did not differentiate in favoritism between sons and daughters, which added to the self confidence and competency of the children. (Almani, A. S., Abro, A., & Mugheri, A. A. 2012).

# 3. Methodology

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## 3.1 Research Design

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Qualitative research is primarily and essentially an exploratory study into a certain trend, issue or phenomenon. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent.

One advantage of qualitative methods in exploratory research is that use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are: meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, rich and explanatory in nature. Another advantage of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use “probes” to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

For the purpose of this study, which is to understand the comprehensive impact upon living and wellbeing of the female head of household after the instance of divorce/separation/death of



spouse, qualitative research is the most relevant method of collecting the appropriate data. This is due to the fact that several different factors attribute to living and wellbeing; often these factors are intermittently overlapping and cannot be separated for a valid or reliable quantitative study.

It was also imperative to follow a qualitative research method in order to assess and gather information regarding emotional and psychological struggle, which is not always accurately portrayed in a primarily quantitative study.

## 3.2 Sampling Method

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Snowball Sampling is a qualitative research method that has been widely used in order to study sociological trends. The use of this method is beneficial as it yields a study sample group through a chain cycle or referrals. The referrals are made among people who share similar characteristics and who know of others who are of interest to the research area.

This process is based on the assumption that a ‘bond’ or ‘link’ exists between the initial sample and others in the same target population, allowing a series of referrals to be made within a circle of acquaintance.(Biernacki, P 1981)

Snowball sampling can be applied for two primary purposes. Firstly, it can be used as an ‘informal’ method to reach a target population. If the aim of a study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive, then snowball sampling offers practical advantages. Snowball sampling is used most frequently to conduct qualitative research, primarily through interviews.

Secondly, snowball sampling may be applied as a more formal methodology for making inferences about a population of individuals who have been difficult to enumerate through the use of descending methods such as household surveys (Atkinson, R 2001)

With regard to this study, Snowball sampling has been most effective in gathering respondents which fit the criterion for this specific research. Due to the fact that there is a social stigma attached to women who are divorced, widowed or separated- social tolerance is low. This can result in women often finds themselves befriending other women also in similar circumstances.

Respondent 7 refers to the time when her 7 yr old daughter came home from school one day in great excitement. The reason of this exuberant behavior was that she has apparently found the

most perfect 'friend' for her mother. It was a class fellow's mother who was also a 'Single' mother.

Though this example is one of childish naiveté, there is important subtext- women of the same conditions are often linked together and form a special connection, and a form of emotional support.

## 3.3. Semi Structured Interviews

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Semi Structured interviews are beneficial as they allow the respondent to explore issues in a conversational manner. The researcher was able to keep and maneuver the discussion in order to remain on topic; it is a method that is flexible and allows the respondent to freely answer and communicate intangible variables such as emotion and social impacts.

The Semi Structured Interviews are partially structured, in order to yield the most data by creating a comfortable environment.

This research created interview guidelines with questions that are open ended, but custom created to fit the defined demographics of a Single Working Mother.

The general structure that the interview guideline followed was based on a chronological order, as a means to ease into the conversation. It began with childhood and upbringing, education and notions of marriage. The interview then explored the pre-marital time, marriage, when problems started to arise, and then the marital estrangement. At this point, the research turned towards the initial difficulties of spousal estrangement, and issues that were faced, be it social, economic, psychological, physiological and emotional.

## 4. General Overview

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### Respondents

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#### **Respondent 1**

Mishal Khan

D.O.B. Oct 12 1969

Income: Above 50,000 (fluctuating)

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000

Number of Dependents: Previously 6, now 4

Age of Marriage: 18

Age of Divorce: 30

Number of kids: 5

Level of Education: Bachelor's in Business Administration

Job(s): HR + self owned business

**Respondent 2**

Ayman Khan

D.O.B: 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1978

Income: Above 50,000 PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000 PKR

Number of Dependents: 1

Age of Marriage: 20

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 29

Number of Kids: 1

Level of Education: Master's in Special Education

Job(s): Special Needs Therapist

**Respondent 3**

Fatima Khan

D.O.B: 4<sup>th</sup> May 1971

Income: Above 50,000 PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000PKR

Number of Dependents: 1

Age of Marriage: 25

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 27

Number of Kids: 1

Level of Education: Bachelor's in Economics

Job(s): Family Business

**Respondent 4**

Shama Khan

D.O.B: 24<sup>th</sup> March 1956

Income: Above 50,000 PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000PKR

Number of Dependents: 2

Age of Marriage: 24

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: First Separation: Age 45. Second Separation: Age 50

Number of Kids: 3

Level of Education: Bachelor's marketing

Job(s): School Administrator

**Respondent 5**

Arifa Khan

D.O.B: 13<sup>th</sup> April 1976

Income: 50,000 PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000 PKR

Number of Dependents: 2

Age of Marriage: 22

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 36

Number of Kids: 2

Level of Education: MBA Finance

Job(s): Education (Teacher + Administrator)

**Respondent 6**

Mehr Khan

D.O.B: 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 1962

Income: Above 50,000 PKR



Household Expenditure: Above 50,000PKR

Number of Dependents: 2

Age of Marriage: 26

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 31

Number of Kids: 2

Level of Education: Bachelor's Hotel Management

Job(s): Restaurant Owner

**Respondent 7**

Arooj Khan

D.O.B: 31<sup>st</sup> July 1969

Income: Above 50,000PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000PKR

Number of Dependents: 4

Age of Marriage: 22

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 40

Number of Kids: 4

Level of Education: Bachelor's in Psychology

Job(s): Prev School Administrator, present: Corporate Training Systems Customer Relations  
Manager

**Respondent 8**

Amna Khan

D.O.B: 30<sup>th</sup> October 1974

Income: Above 50,000PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000PKR

Number of Dependents: 2

Age of Marriage: 23

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: Widowed at age 34

Number of Kids: 2

Level of Education: PhD Library Sciences

Job(s): Consultant for WHO

**Respondent 9**

Sadaf Khan

D.O.B: 10<sup>th</sup> June 1985

Income: Above 50,000PKR

Household Expenditure: Above 50,000

Number of Dependents: 1

Age of Marriage: 23

Age of Divorce/Separation/Widowed: 29

Number of Kids: 1

Level of Education: Master's Development Economics

Job(s): Financial Consultant

# Background- General Findings

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The data collected reveals that the respondents all descend from a similar background and childhood. The minimum level of education attained by the respondents is Bachelors level.

Through collection of date, it has also been found that the minimum income incurred by the respondents was 50,000 PKR. Subsequently, it was also determined that the Household incomes of all the respondents are above 50,000 PKR.

The respondents all reside within central Islamabad areas.

It was also found that the respondents came from families that encouraged their daughters to attain a solid education and academic progress to the minimum degree of a Bachelor's level education.

Through the interviews, it was also deduced that the respondent's family back grounds consisted of working middle class families as well as some being upper middle class.

The level of emotional impact differed between the marriages which were arranged and those that were love marriages. There was also a significant co-relation between financial dependence and affect on the respondents physiologically.

It was also seen that all the respondents found themselves in an emotionally similar place in the time leading to the divorce/separation. Out of the nine respondents, only one is widowed, as such her emotional state of mind differed- it consisted of grief and bereavement- rather than the psychological and emotional insecurities that impacted the other respondents.

There was also a noticeable change in emotional response with relation to financial dependence on their respective spouses. Those who were financially dependent were able to gain more psychological strength to take the step of separation/divorce. Those respondents who were completely reliant on their spouse's income and allowance, found it to be a greater barrier and bone of contention between the couple, resulting in more tension. It also impacted the relationship on a psychological level, where the upper hand was gained by the financially strong spouse, thereby resulting in a dominating power play tool.

Out of nine respondents, only one was seeking psychological help. This is despite the fact that the remaining eight respondents were vocally agreeable to the prospect of external therapy. The main hindrance was the lack of time, confidentiality, and lack of sufficient funds.

The respondents also voiced their opinion on religious influence upon their decisions within the marriage and post divorce/separation/death of spouse. Many sought solace in religion, believing they too have become spiritually secure and strong.

All nine respondents felt that work gave them a purpose and reason to be strong. The utmost important priorities for the respondents were their children, which is one of the primary reasons for elongating the marriage and delaying the divorce/separation process.

Out of nine respondents, seven interacted with legal institutions with regard to court cases for their divorce or 'Khula' process. All nine respondents expected no help from the state with regard to their newly designated status of being a single parent. Nor did they expect any services to be provided to them, in the shape of support groups, state supported therapy, or financial remunerations.

With regard to a social support system, the respondents experiences varied- most found support within their families, however most did not find any support from their families and thus, relied heavily on emotional support from friends. It would seem that it was difficult for parents to accept the new identity of being 'Single'. Out of nine respondents, four did move back into their parent's home temporarily, out of need of financial assistance and support.

## 4.2 Background- Pre Marriage

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The idea of marriage for all nine respondents was uniform in description. They believed in having a loving, respectful partnership. The parents were eager to have their daughters settle down and start their new life.

Respondent 1 had a semi-arranged marriage. Regarding the pre-marriage days, she recalled how everything seemed perfect, gifts and attention, promises of a happy life together. She recalls how attractive her first husband was- and she now believes she mistook attraction for trust and a successful partnership.

Respondents 4, 5, 6, and 8 also had a 'love' marriage, all of them having known their significant for many years, prior to marriage. This perhaps, made it easier for the respondents to believe in a 'Happily ever after life', believing that their choice was made fully informed.

Respondents 2 and 9 describe their marriage proposals as more of a one-sided love initially; they were both courted for a period of time, before approaching the respective parents for a formal consensus of marriage. The respondents describe how it was during the course of courtship; they believed that theirs would be successful marriages because of the fight and eagerness of a marriage union put up by the respective spouses.

Respondent 3 and 7 had arranged marriages, proposals that came through family and friends. These respondents were eager to start their new lives together with their respective spouses, and believed that the ideal marriage mirrored the relationship of their own parents.

None of the respondents believed that divorce or separation were viable options for the future.

## 4.3 Background- During Marriage

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After an initial period of being ‘happily’ married, many problems started to arise in the nine respective case studies.

Respondent 1 was entirely dependent upon her husband for any and all financial support, social support and emotional support. Soon after the marriage, and after having her first three children, her spouse became over protective, over bearing and insecure. He decided to not allow respondent 1 to leave the home, visit her family, leave her with any real financial means. The respondent recalls how the husband took them up to their Murree house, giving her 200-300PKR and saying, ‘I’m leaving for a week, and this should be enough for chicken and vegetables.’ The respondent remembers how helpless that moment made her feel, she feared for not being able to provide for her children, she was not aware how long it would take for her spouse to return.

For respondent 1, her spouse was emotionally and financially unresponsive. He would resort to methods of psychological torture; often separating mother from her children, enrolling the eldest daughter in a convent school, in order to keep mother and daughter separated. Eventually, the psychological methods of torture grew into physical abuse. By this point in her marriage, Respondent 1 had four children, three boys and a girl. During another week she spent at the house in Murree, she decided to leave her husband. With less than 300 PKR, she left the house early in the day, picked up her daughter from the convent school feigning a family emergency and took a bus to Islamabad, where she sought refuge with her family for a little while before moving on to Karachi, selling some gold to sustain her family financially, until she found employment.



Respondent 2 started facing trouble in her marriage early on with conflicting ideologies between the husband and wife. The husband would indulge in alcohol and eventually, respondent 2 found evidence of extra marital affairs. The respondent recalls how her spouse would send her to her parents house for weeks on end, telling her there was no real need for her to return. Soon after, Respondent 2 had a baby boy and it seemed all their problems were slowly easing away. However, a few years after their son was born, it was discovered that he faced a serious of developing problems, and an official diagnosis was given to them a few years after that- their son was Autistic.

Post diagnosis of their son, the problems of alcohol and extra marital affairs was recurring. It was at this time that the respondent believed that separation was inevitable, as the husband would control the finances as well as not being emotionally supportive of the marriage relationship as well as the care needed for their son. After a long drawn out separation process, the husband agreed to give a divorce. However, no formal custody agreement was planned out, nor were there any official agreements regarding financial support as is enabled by the legal system in Pakistan, financial support and custody remains at the discretion of the father.

Respondent 3 was married for a considerably short amount of time before the problems in the marriage started. There was involvement from the respondents in-laws which was extremely intrusive. For respondent 3, the financial situation was reversed. The husband was dependent upon money incoming from Respondent 3's family. This was in the form of cash, gifts, house reconstruction. Respondent 3 had strong emotional and financial support from her family. After the birth of their daughter, the husband became completely uninvolved in the upbringing and care of their child. It created barriers within the relationship, in addition to the intrusive relationship of the Mother –in-Law, respondent 3's family decided to apply for a Khula.

Respondent 4 is the only respondent who is still currently married, however estranged from her husband. Her problems within the marriage stem from an extra marital affair, which proved to be a tumultuous situation for the respondent to handle, however as she was deeply in love with her husband, they attempted at a reconciliation, however after attempting to do so for a couple of years, she has now decided to live in a state of permanent separation.

Respondent 5 also had her marriage dissolve because of an extra marital affair and over-involvement of a stifling Mother in Law. Despite attempting for reconciliation, for the benefit of the two daughters, the relationship was unable to do so. Respondent 5 felt betrayed on a matter of respect and trust, as she believes she stood by his side during the tough years of the husband establishing himself as a respectable doctor. As theirs was a love marriage, it was also a betrayal on a deep emotional level.

Respondent 6 was also married for a relatively short amount of time; the reasons of their estrangement were due to conflicts with their business. It was discovered that the husband was using business funds to run small term business deals to gain short term rewards and profits. The situation deteriorated when he tried to take over the restaurant they built together. However, Respondent 6 took legal action at the time and soon after filed for Khula. The respondent stated that she felt secure financially, and also had strong emotional support from her family which gave her the strength to take the step of Khula. She also expressed that it gave her power to be back in control of her life by applying for a Khula, and it helped to be financially independent from the beginning.

Respondent 7 had an arranged marriage, and from early on in the marriage, did not feel ideologically connected to her partner. Right after they were married, they moved away, and as

such, this resulted in loss of a support system in the form of the respondent's parents and family. Very soon into the marriage, the priorities laid out by the spouse consisted of taking care of the house and taking care of the children. During this entire time, the respondent was entirely dependent on the spouse for any sort of financial support. Out of the nine case studies, respondent 7 stayed in her marriage for the longest period of time before applying for a khula. The respondent felt that the need for a divorce was dire as the spouse was going through a period of financial instability and as a result was getting difficult for him to provide completely. The respondent recalls that applying for a job after many years was liberating, and a step taken to take back control of her life. The same can be said for applying for a Khula instead of waiting to be given a divorce.

Respondent 8 is the only widow who is part of this study. She lost her husband to a nine month battle with cancer. As such, her experience of estrangement vastly differs from the other respondents.

Respondent 9 moved to England shortly after her marriage but encountered difficulties with her spouse as he developed an alcohol problem and started slowly to engage in physical abuse. At first the physical abuse was minimal and only under intoxication, however it started to increase periodically, even when the respondent was pregnant with her first child. Soon after he was born, the abuse started again. Psychologically the respondent felt trapped. The spouse locked away her passport, would not allow her to make phone calls, and would lock her in their home and not allow her to go out. However, when the couple fell on hard times financially, he allowed her to work part time. Soon after the physical abuse showed no signs of stopping, the respondent left their home in secret and came back to Pakistan where she stayed with her son at her parents'

home. Soon after, she asked for a divorce much to the ire of her own family, however she persisted and got a divorce.

# 5. Major Themes

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## 5.1 Economic

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Many of the respondents fell on hard times post dissolution of marriage. Some respondents were already working before they were either divorced/separated/ or widowed, however post marriage, the burden increased as the women found themselves as the primary caregiver and provider of their family. They were forced to make a shift towards becoming the Head of Household. As such, the stakes of their employment rose. It was now empirical for the mothers to be working in order to provide for their offspring. However, the situations were unique in nature, respective to each respondent.

Respondent 7 found herself in a situation to apply for a Khula when her spouse decided to sell their home and property in order to pay for business deficits. In that situation, they could either continue to live together in a rented property, or divide the assets of the sale and separate. The result was to divide assets and separate. In this situation, respondent 7 was able to leave the marriage with median savings and not in a situation of total financial strife and struggle. Alongside the savings, respondent 7 was working as a school administrator. However, as respondent 7 had four dependents, it was imperative to progress career wise in order to avoid financial struggle. As there was no formal agreement for alimony or child care, that still remains on the discretion of the ex spouse. When asked which aspects of being a single working mother were most challenging, the respondent answered by saying financial insecurity is the primary

struggle. This is due to the rising cost of living, inflated rents and upkeep of home and children at their integral growing stage.

Respondent 1 started her journey as a single working mother with a great deal of financial struggle. She was forced to sell what little gold she had in order to relocate cities, in order to escape her ex husband, and start a new life. The respondent describes how the kindness of acquaintances helped her through the initial difficult period of re-settling. The respondent recalls their first apartment which was given to her a less than market value through the kindness of extended social circle. The respondent was also referred to a job by friends, as she was proving unsuccessful in finding employment due to not having worked after completing her Bachelor's. There was a large gap of no work experience, added with the problems of not having someone to look after the children nor did the respondent have her own car. Despite these problems, the respondent started working and slowly was able to progress her career and be in a position to improve her home and start saving. Eventually, the respondent relocated to Islamabad, in order to follow a job opportunity and live with her parents to increase savings and also have adult supervision for her children. The respondent proceeded to taking out her first bank loan in order to buy a car, and slowly she was able to climb up the ladder in her career and was able to move into an individual unit, making the shift to becoming completely independent and assume the role of Head of Household. However, the respondent emphasized that maintaining a certain living standard, fluctuating between upper and middle class, was extremely taxing but was of primary importance in order to give the children a stable home and opportunities for their future.

Respondent 5 was forced to move out of her joint family system post separation, and as such was not in any position to run an individual household unit. As such, she also moved back into her

parent's home for a elongated period of time. The respondent utilized this time to use her salary for the care and needs of her two daughters as the ex husband was restricting financial support.

It was especially difficult for respondent 2 to start independently after her divorce. This is due to economic struggle as well as the level of care required for her autistic son. However the respondent refused to move back into her parents household post dissolution of her marriage and often resorted to threatening her ex husband with primary custody of their son rewarded to him. Her ex husband refused to become the primary caregiver of their son, as it was extremely difficult for the spouse to assume full responsibility of their autistic son. In this way, the respondent was able to extract amounts of money for temporary financial support.

## 5.2 Social and Emotional

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All nine respondents went through their share of emotional strife during the ending days of their marriage and post dissolution of marriage. It was seen by many respondents that family members attempted to change their decision citing reasons of public shame, not grasping the idea of the change in relationship. Respondent 4 has chosen to remain married yet estranged for the very reason of saving face in public. The respondent recalls her husband trying to make her understand, *'Just stay in the marriage, we can live apart. It will be better for the kids in the future'*. Respondent 7 also had many opinions from the in Laws regarding staying in the marriage,

*'Bachon ka kya hoga? Kon Shaadi Karega tumhare bachon se?'*

*'What will happen to your children? Who will want to marry them now?'*

It could be noted that the marriages that happened through love, proved to be more emotionally complex than those that were arranged.

Respondent 5 went through much emotional strife in order to save her marriage from dissolution, she stated, *'I was desperate. I was willing to do anything to get my husband back. I would be the second wife. I would do anything. I just didn't want him to leave me. I considered everything. Even black magic. Anything that would make him stay.'*

The respondent recalls how she did seek advice from religious pirs and any man claiming to be a divine servant of God. She went as far as Black magic, bringing and buying anything and everything that was requested of her. The respondent claims she did it as she believed it was the way of getting closer to God, and believing it to be the only way to get her Husband back. The



respondent shares an extremely harrowing tale of how a Pir Sahab tried to sexually assault her, in the name of getting her husband back. The respondent recalls her emotional state, where she actually considered doing what the Pir Sahab said when all of a sudden she heard her daughter playing upstairs and snapped out of emotional reverie and refused to partake in the Pir Sahabs remedies further.

Respondent 4 and 5, shared a similar consequence in their marriage, both were victims of extra marital affairs. The respondents' responses were similar in emotions- both confronted the other woman, to no avail from their respective spouses. Both the respondents' children were also exposed to the other women, which the respondents believe left emotional scars on their offspring.

Respondent 7 recalls, now amusingly, how she faced strange queries from a potential landlord. Having checked the location and house portion, the respondent conveyed her interest in renting the space, to which she received a puzzled look and the following conversation,

*“Woh tou aapka husband kai saath baat karlenge. Woh kab ayengai?”*

*“Oh, that we can discuss with your husband. When will he come?”*

*“Merai husband nahin hain. Mein divorced hoon”*

*“I don't have a husband. I'm divorced.”*

*“Ohhho, acha, yeh tou barra bura hua.”*

*“Oh no, well, that's really bad”*

The respondent left, never to follow up on the house for rent. She recalls how it made her realize how society viewed single women of a certain age, and without the protection of a man, they were thought of as the weaker sex.

Many of the respondents shared concerns of their children and their future marital status. They shared how they fear other families opinions will be shaped because of parental estrangement. However, mostly all use the opportunity, to teach their offspring how imperative it is to find the appropriate life partner, they also unanimously feel as if their dismantled traditional two unit household can be an advantage for children, forcing them to assume roles of responsibility and understand the importance of compatibility.

For respondent 4 she shares that this was the primary reason her husband cited for being separated and not divorced, so that it could ensure the sanctity of public opinion and so that it won't have negative consequences on the marital future of their children.

## 5.3 Psychological and Physiological

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Out of the nine respondents, only one is currently seeking psychological help. Of therapy the respondent 6 says, 'I love it, it's a new addition in my life, only around 2 years ago did I start seeing a psychologist, but I love it. I wish I had started much earlier, right after my divorce as I had gone into depression and this would have helped me greatly'

In most all the respondents, when asked about their physical health, many said that the years immediately after the dissolution of marriage were most stressful, resulting in panic attacks, severe stress, migraines and anxiety.

Respondent 1 and 7 believe that economic strife has added to their stress more than any other factor post divorce.

It is interesting to note, that the psychological reactions of most all nine respondents were rather similar towards the end of their marriage and right after. The respondents felt their self esteem was low, if not nonexistent. Their respective spouses made them feel ugly, stupid and incapable of completing banal human tasks.

This changed drastically once the respondents were divorced/separated. The respondents gained confidence and self esteem, which is a vast improvement from the responses they would receive from their spouses.

The biggest mental and physiological hurdle faced by many of the Single Mothers was depression. It was an ailment that affected their mental stability as well as also playing an integral role on physical excursions and daily activities. This also triggered hyper-tension, nervous breakdowns, which also contributed to medical problems related to the heart such as

palpitations. These are direct consequences of psychological and physiological ailments felt by the respondents. One of the mothers also has had asthma since childhood, however, post marriage dissolution; it was aggravated to a severe extent.

When asked if their health issues could have been curtailed through psychological therapy, many respondents agreed that it was possible. However, they still maintained the opinion that they did not feel comfortable enough opening up and sharing with a stranger, albeit, even a licensed therapist, as the social norm did not pay great heed to ethical boundaries and many respondents feared being ostracized by public opinion.

For many respondents, these ailments were abetted by economic instability but another constant stress felt on a day to day basis was the constant confused and complicated interaction between the ex-spouse through the children. As custodial agreements varied between the mothers, it was a great majority of the mothers who has primary custody of their children, with the fathers playing a financial role alongside visitation; whether visitation was regular or irregular, depended on the unique natures of each respondent's family.

## 6 Discussion and Recommendation

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There were many differences and similarities inevitably found during the research of this study- many of the primary fears concerning the single mothers were concerning financial matters, followed by the coping mechanisms of their emotional state. Though the circumstances of many of the spousal estrangements varied, the psychological stature of the women was largely identical. The women felt belittled, physically ugly, a burden on their husbands, useless, stupid- these are a few of the words they used to describe themselves during the time in their marriage that ultimately led to marital estrangement.

Work was a positive factor in the lives of the respondents. They felt as if they were given a purpose, they were able to overcome the mental abuse they felt in their relationship, and they described work as increasing their worth, power and position. It was also able to give them financial independence, which for most of the respondents was crucial in gaining perspective and growth.

It was also observed that the respondent's experience of marriage differed on the basis of financial security. It was infinitely easier on those women who were financially strong, separate from their spouses. Often noted that the financially strong women came from affluent families and were also supported by immediate family, thereby providing emotional support at a complicated time.

Financial instability was perhaps the most defining cause of physiological triggers. Stresses, panic attacks, depression, high blood pressure, were only some of the onset features of the emotional trauma. This could also be due to physiological negligence as the respondents often felt as personal care was not a priority.

Religion was a common thread within the research. The respondents felt as if their marital turmoil led them to seek solace within religion, with some going to greater extreme lengths, however, mostly all felt as though religion was a dominantly powerful positive motivator for future decisions.

The respondents all felt as though being spiritually strong gave them strength to carry out the proceeding events of divorce/separation. The respondents also explained how it was a constant struggle to maintain a household single handedly while also being the primary breadwinner and dominant care provider for children. This double burden of responsibility is perhaps, one of the most difficult consequences of divorce/separation/death of spouse. However, the respondents used these difficult situations to create an open dialogue and free safe space in their homes for their children, believing that it was imperative to keep the lines of communication open for healthy and emotionally balanced children.

Recommendations with regard to this research would include recording of all khula and divorce cases in order to document the input of single women households in the economy. A federal record of divorced women would also aid to public acceptance and social inclusion of this segment of society.

Secondly, there should be federal funded access to psychological therapy for women going through the process of a divorce/khula.

Thirdly, there should be support group program initiatives, so that women from similar backgrounds can forge safe spaces to talk about their problems and ease the burden.

Lastly, a great initiative would be to eradicate the need to identify women on identification cards with relation to a man, as it is not possible to apply for or renew a passport or a national identity card without giving the information of a father or spouse. This is an issue worth consideration as it devalues the worth of women if they are to be validated with regards to a male superior figure.

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