

A Study on the Role of Social Capital of Single Parents in Chennai

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Abstract:

Objectives:

This study aims to have an overview of the social capital of single parents in Chennai and analyses the support provided by their support networks in child rearing. It also looks into the changes in the strength of social capital of single parents over time.

Background:

With changes in each individual's interests and preferences, family structures evolved. The adaptive purpose and the change in such structure is concerned with welfare of children or the parents. Because of the cultural and regional differences in India, single parenting is considered as a social stigma or does not have a very high social status. Society often regards single parent households as fundamentally defective and deficient entities, it is the primary cause for the variations in social capital before and after marital dissolution. But recent studies show a surge in single parent families even if it is not socially acceptable. This is predominantly because they are less economically and socially disadvantaged now as their self-reliance, economic support, and social support improve.

Method:

The study used semi-structured interview with 30 single parents who were widowed, divorced or separated in the city of Chennai.

Results:

Social interaction and contacts of single parents expanded with time, changes

in employment status and location, building a new base for the available social capital. Familial support is seen though there was withdrawal from the kind of support they previously received or perceived to receive. Almost all single parents find having a trustable support network to be beneficial during the child's primary socialization. Government schemes for single parents specifically are less in number and did not effectively reach the target population.

Conclusion:

This study highlights the impacts of differences in single parents' social capital and how reinforcement of sexual division of labour affects single fathers and single mothers contradictorily. Social relationships of single parents are seen to have an influence of economic impediments, lack of familial support and social stigma. This study covers other socio-economic factors that helps in having an expansive view on social capital.

Keywords: Single parents, social capital, child rearing, support network, impacts

Introduction:

A parent who lives with a child or children with no spouse is called as a single parent. According to World Bank, social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. It should also be noted that the aftermath of divorce, separation or widowhood shows withdrawal of single parents, especially single mothers from social gatherings and reduced participation in social life, according to the pervious researches conducted (Lucy, A Joesphine 2013). According to their resources and support system, the forms of help people get might be either instrumental, moral, or emotional. It is significant to point out how social networks of single parents convince them in decision-making regarding their children's needs and their own needs. Sources of such support is noticed as to come from extended family, close kins, friends and workplace acquaintance. Yet, not all parents are exposed to that sort of support structure, and as a result, there are variations in the patterns of how each parent manages various aspects of parenting. When we think about how the support system influences parenting, it is obvious to see that there are differences in the perceived level and actually received level of social support. The gaps in it involves putting in extra efforts to earn themselves a living and ensure a stable livelihood compared to those who have a strong support network. The focus of the study is to have an analysis of the social capital of single parents after disintegrating from their marital bond in India. It depends on the given system one lives in, their relevance to other members in the society, and the cultural situation. It also aims at studying changes in their social network and the extent to which it helps them in the process of child rearing. Single parents frequently experience issues with visitation, custody or dealing with ongoing struggle of disintegration, cutback in the opportunities for parents and kids to interact, effects of the split on kids' academic

achievement and relationships with their peers, strains in their ties within the extended family and issues brought on by the parents' connections and new relationships. The function of an effective support system serves as a facilitating element to handle parenting and diverse demands of the children at the same time when compared to two parent households. This in turn can influence the social capital of single parents and its advantages may be identified over time.

Background:

The findings of the study conducted by Moses Llim (2022) discovers that single parents are faced with enormous challenges, but the most common one is the financial challenges. The study conducted by Kleim Klamer and Sylvia (2022) aims to show that social status has an impact on health, precisely because different status groups have different social relationships. The study conducted by Elsa Olaru and Emma Bolger (2022) assessed the support that single parents require to overcome any perceived barriers to employment to enable them to manage childcare responsibilities and achieve their career goals following the pandemic. Research conducted by Lucy. A. Josephine (2013) with reference to single women in Chennai found that their social life is found to be terribly impoverished merely on account of their marital separation. Because others speak ill of them, single mothers themselves hesitate to participate in social gatherings such as marriage, puberty rite functions etc.

Objectives:

1. To study the social capital of single parents.
2. To analyse the support network of single parents in child rearing.
3. To understand the changes in the strength of social capital of single parents over time.

Methodology:

This research uses descriptive research design for conducting the study. It includes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Sample population and sample size:

The target population only comprised of individuals who had no spouse, and had children of their own. In simple words, it took into account of those who did not take up partnered parenting. It only took into account of those who are widowed, divorced and separated from their marital bond. The study only focussed on Chennai, so the sample population was taken to be the single parents of Chennai only. The sample size included 30 respondents. There was no problem with the responsiveness factor of the sample. The research did not look into gender in particular.

Sampling technique:

The sampling technique followed was purposive sampling a type of non-probability sampling where the samples have the characteristics we need and are selected on-purpose. The main goal of purposive sampling is to identify the cases, individuals, or communities best suited to helping in answering the research questions. Snow-balling

was also used as the samples which were already the part of the research were used in recruiting more new samples.

Tools for data collection:

The procedure of collecting data was carried out only after promising confidentiality of the respondents and the responses were analysed numerically. Interviews were conducted both in-person and telephonically in accordance to the availability of the interviewee and their consent. 17 interviews were conducted in-person whereas, 13 were done telephonically over a call.

The questions for the interview were divided into three sections,

1. Basic information (containing questions that for basic data like age, sex and the number of children they had)
2. Socio-economic factor assessment (containing questions that inquired their residential status, employment status and other demographic factors)
3. Support network assessment (containing questions about the social relationships before and after, efficiency of social capital and the changes in their interacting patterns)

Interview: Interviews carried out were semi-structured. Modes of interviews varied between telephonic and in-person. Though the questions that was already constructed dominated the interview process, the questions were altered based on the respondents' available condition to get an expansive view of their status.

Data collection procedure:

After a pilot study, data collection with the population was conducted. The interview questions were pre-decided based on the need for the study. They were set in such a way that the respondents find it comfortable to understand and were explained to them if they failed to comprehend. The responses from the respondents were recorded roughly in a notebook and were later tabulated on excel sheets for further analysis.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

The collected data is reviewed, tabulated and summarized. It is interpreted qualitatively and data that required quantitative analysis are presented numerically. Visual representation of data made it easier to analyse the collected data to arrive at conclusions. Differences in the findings from previous research can be distinctively noticed in this chapter.

Table 1.1: Sex of the respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	25	83.33
Male	05	16.67
Total	30	100

During the sampling process, it was found that since the majority of the male members who were widowed, divorced, or separated during chose to remarry, we can deduce from the above table that 83% of the population was female and only 17% was made up entirely of men. As a result, the number of single fathers is significantly lower than that of single mothers. In this case, we may also include societal socialisation variables such as family, which offers mutual agreement for remarriage, their relationship with other members, and their economic or social position, which varies from that of single mothers in a cultural environment such as India

Table 1.2: Age of the respondents

Age of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage
31-40	09	30
41-50	12	40
51-60	07	23.33
61-70	02	6.67
Total	30	100

Age is a socially constructed and accepted degree of measurement. People's duties, obligations, and advantages throughout various stages of life are all affected by societal institutions and age acts as a major determinant.

Age group varied significantly between 31 and 70 years of age. Majority of them fell within the age frame 41-50. There is also a diversity found in the mode of separation between different age groups also. 30 % of the respondents fell within the age group of 31-40, 40% of them fell within the age group 41-50. 23.33% of them constituted the age group of 51-60 and 6.67% of them fell between the age group 61-70.

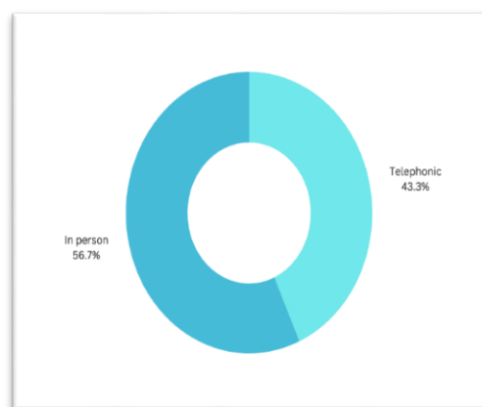


Figure 1.1: Mode of interview

This pie chart shows the mode of interview used in data collection. It was either telephonic interview or in-person interview. 43.3% of the respondents were interviewed

via telephone and 56.7% of the respondents were interviewed in-person. The mode chosen was based on the comfort and accessibility of the sample population.

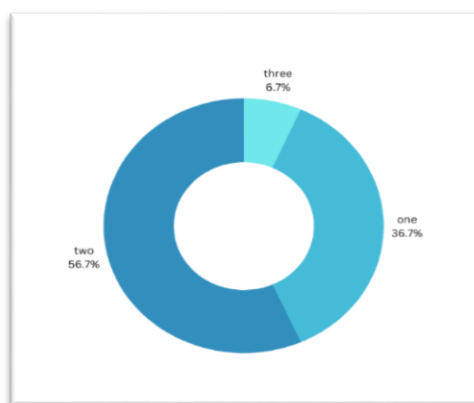


Figure 1.2: Number of children

Number of children is one other factor that had an impact on the social background of the respondents. 56.7% of the respondents had two children, 36.7% of the respondents had only one child, and 6.7% respondents had three children.

Table 1.3: Marital status of the respondents

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Divorced	06	20
Separated	09	30
Widowed	15	50
Total	30	100

Marital status is also an important factor that can be considered to have an impact on one's social capital. 20 % of the respondents were divorced, 30 % were separated and 50 % were widowed. We can infer that the separated percentage is more than that of the divorced. By which, it is conclusive that not many of them were legally separated. The ancient sacrament which defines marriage as an indissoluble union of husband and wife is no more strictly followed, partners as parents separate or get divorced in accordance to the collective welfare of themselves and their children. Legal provisions for divorce in India which includes alimony to a specific period for rehabilitation are also not taken into account followed in case of separated single parent families.

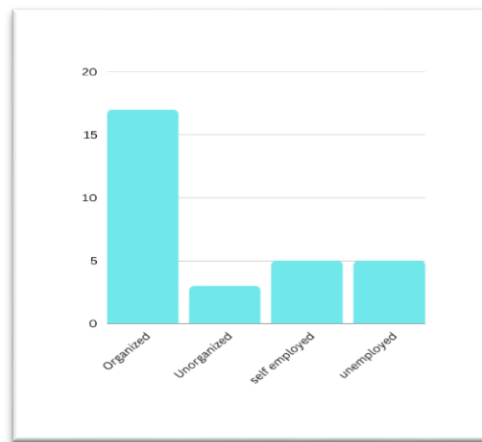


Figure 1.3: Current employment status of the respondents

56.67% of the respondents belonged to organized sector, while 10% belonged to unorganized sector, 16.67% were self-employed and 16.67% were unemployed. From this, we can infer that diverse income groups were included and it eased studying them from different angles. Most of them belonging to organized sector gives us an idea of their educational level which in turn gives them the independence that can be considered as a main determinant for them choosing to single parent their children.

Table 1.4: Employment status before disintegration

Employment status before separation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	53.33
No	14	46.67
Total	30	100

From this table, we see that 53.33% of them were employed and 46.67% of them were unemployed before disintegration but only 16.67 % of them were unemployed currently with reference to Fig 4.3. We can thus conclude that there is a significant change in their roles with respect to their occupational changes, which may have also expanded their social networks and connection.

In addition, respondents were asked if they were financially reliant on anybody else after separating from their marital tie. The replies indicated that even individuals who were employed at the time were dependant on others to some level for a short period of time. Some were completely reliant on others. Their financial aid contacts can be classified as bank loans, first-degree kin, in-laws, savings, pensions (if widowed), friends, and money-lenders. It is worth noting that two of the respondents got considerable sums of money from religious organisations for their children's schooling. One of the respondents indicated that they had received partial sponsorship for their children's education from a charity trust (Christian Mission Charitable Trust) CMCT.

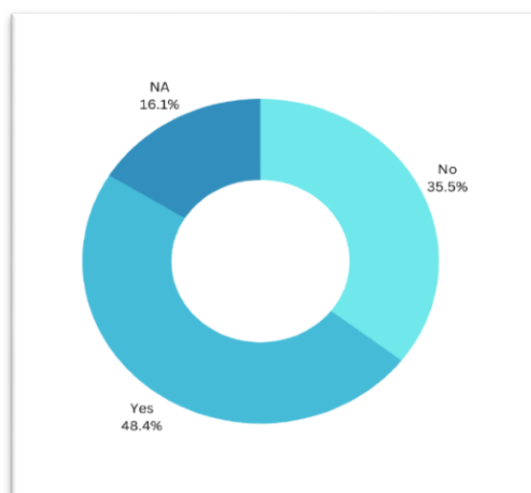


Figure 1.4: Adequacy of money earnt

When the respondents were asked about the pecuniary sum that they earnt supplementing their necessities and their children's necessities, 48.4% of them said the money that they earnt was adequate whereas 35.5% of them said it did not supplement their regular needs. Whereas, the question was not applicable to 16.1% of them as they did not have a job that paid them.

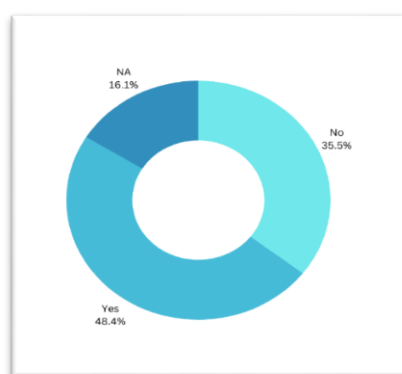


Figure 1.5: Employment flexibility and work-life balance

When asked about their employment flexibility and work-life balance, 48.4% said yes and 35.5% said no, stating that their participation in their children's lives is limited due to work commitments and they are not always welcome in their workplace to miss out or ask permission for their unavailability. As a result, it becomes a duty to be there for their job rather than to oversee the children at times. Because 6.67% did not have a job of their own, this question is inapplicable to them.

Adding on to this, the respondents were also asked if they were given any special benefits or concessions were provided by their employer or their employing

organization to them in consideration of single parents. Most of them, which is 62.85 % of the respondents said they were not provided with any such facilities or considerations whereas, 5.7% organized workers said they get consideration when it comes to transfer under sympathetic grounds and leave extensions. Gender stereotyping is also seen with respect to benefits provided by the employer as single mothers are given more preference than that of the single fathers. One of the unorganized worker, who worked as a domestic help said they provide them with clothing or increments in times of festivals and with monetary help if they are in need of health or education related expenditure.

Additionally, not a single respondent could name any government initiatives that assisted single parents or were more pertinent to them when asked whether they were aware of any. Some programmes offer temporary assistance to families in need and meet their dietary needs. For widows who fall below the poverty line (BPL), the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme offers pensions. Widows between the ages of 40 and 79 are given a monthly pension of Rs. 300, and once they turn 80, they receive a pension of Rs. 500. Those who had taken Government support for any other needs, merely discussed ration cards and provisions, not anything especially linked to single parents. From which we can conclude that, they were ignorant to any such schemes or they were not accessible to it. It is also important to note that Government schemes were more inclusive of girl children and divorced women only.

Table 1.5: Residential status of the respondents

Residential status	Frequency	Percentage
Tenants	17	56.67
Owners	11	36.67
Shared residents	02	6.67
Total	30	100

56.67% respondents were tenants, 36.67% had their own means of residence whereas 6.67% of them shared their residence with their siblings where one mutually shared their rent whereas another did not take up any responsibility to pay rents and was totally dependent on their siblings. From which we can conclude that their primary kins were of extreme help when it came to certain necessary needs in this aspect. This would have eased their child rearing process to some extent.

Table 1.6: Presence of a guardian in the parent's absence

Availability of guardian	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	23	76.67
No	07	23.33
Total	30	100

When asked if there was someone else to take care of their children in their absence, most of the single parents said yes, 76.67% of them had a guardian arranged to take care of their children whereas 23.33% did not have any, wherein we can bring in the aspect of double burden or second shift as coined by Arlie Horsechild, wherein, they undertake workload from the organization and at the same time take care of domestic needs. When asked about the details of who the guardian is or who they trusted in their children with, separated or divorced single parents said it was their parents whereas, those who were widowed said it was their parents and their in-laws collectively. It is also important to note that 5.71% of respondents also said it was their neighbours who took care of their children in their absence. We may conclude that people who chose single parenting willingly do not receive much assistance from their in-laws. It is also worth noting that not all widower respondents received help from their in-laws in this circumstance. Those who had no assistance or guardian to care for their children either took their children to work or refused to provide any additional information. It should be noted that none of the respondents arranged for additional assistance or a babysitter.

Table 1.7: The after effects on social interactions and relationships

Effect on social interactions and personal relationships	Frequency	Percentage
Decrease	04	13.33
Same	02	6.67
Increase	24	80
Total	30	100

Single parents who were interviewed were asked if there was any effect on their social interactions and personal relationship after the termination of the marital bond. 13.33 % of them said that it came down in number or they secluded themselves to one particular circle, whereas, 80%, which is the majority, found their social circle and interactions having expanded with their change in location, employment and exposure. One of the respondents have even joined a club at their community which increased the number of friends and contacts they had. 2 respondents say that there is no effect on anything.

They were also questioned if they saw any changes in the family assistance they previously got; there was a wide variety of replies to this question. For example, willingly declining financial support and experiencing an increase in moral support, seeing a huge increase in support than that of what they previously received, finding only maternal relatives support being stable, experiencing some kind of conciliatory attitude, receiving negative remarks for the decision made, and interactions not being the same as always. We can see from this that, although family support varied to some degree, they do provide emotional and instrumental support.

The respondents were also asked if there was any change in the type of family they lived in. The change from nuclear, joint to extended or vice versa do not show any pattern as it was individual specific and irregular in nature. No conclusions can be derived from this, except for those who shifted from nuclear to extended or joint might

have experienced an increase in the social capital and support received.

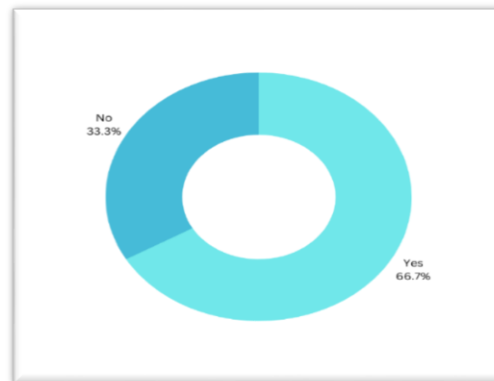


Figure 1.6: Space in communication

The respondents were asked if they had space in communication with their family members, 66.7% of them said yes, 33.3% of them disagreed as they felt being treated with sympathy and not so welcoming, so they say they had a boundary for everything and made sure they stayed with in it and did not actually have a free space in communication.

Suggestions:

Finally, they were asked to suggest or put forward certain considerations for fellow single parents from their experience and circumstances they have been through, the following points were emphasized:

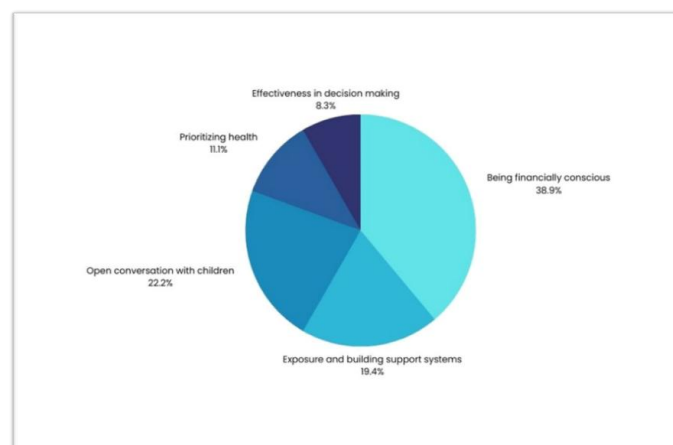


Figure 1.7: Suggestions

There were repetitive suggestions covering the same aspect. The diagram above represents the frequency of such suggestions. They insisted on attaining financial consciousness regarding loans and insurance by contacting people who have good

knowledge about it or professionals who may guide them. Further, they emphasized on having a reasonable amount of savings in case of emergencies. Prioritization of health was another aspect to be focussed on, single parents are said to experience disproportionately higher range of physical and mental problems compared to partnered parents. It is important to stress on healthy lifestyle and seeking professional help whenever needed. Social participation was necessitated, impoverishment of social life is normal but isolating oneself from everything will only worsen things for them and their children. And so 19.4% of them suggested being participative and the exposure one gets by breaking the said boundaries can give them the courage and confidence to move further. 22.2 % of them suggested explaining and getting to know children's point of view from taking bigger decisions that involve change of expectations in career that may involve more contribution by curbing their personal priorities to decisions on remarriage

Results:

It was discovered that the majority of single parents were females, single fathers were difficult to find, implying that some of them remarried, very few fathers ask for full custody of their children, and in some cases, women are given custody without even visiting the court because the fathers do not demand it. Certain misconceptions, such as women being expected to be carers and care for children and dads being incapable of parenting, are also significant reasons for the large disparity in numbers. We can infer that formal separation was not addressed or that they chose not to carry the status of a divorcee from the fact that there were more split parents than legally divorced parents. Although the interview did not focus much on the causes of separation and divorce, it is clear from their other responses that the majority of them opted to be single parents for the benefit of their children and a secure environment for them to grow in. Parents who are widowed have a completely different situation since they would not have anticipated or desired to be single parents in the long run. Financial independence has increased, and this has had a good effect on people's employment patterns since those who were unemployed and dependent on their relatives, money-lenders and bank loans before becoming single parents are now viewed to have sought for work, whether it was in the organised or unorganised sectors. Here, it is easy to see the time frame and the efforts they made to establish financial stability. Their capacity to seek a source of income to meet their basic requirements is a reflection of their independence and tenacity. It's also vital to note that some parents relied entirely on their close relatives for all of their financial requirements. Bringing in the sex ratio, all the single fathers were seen employed before and after disintegration and it was just the single mothers who were unemployed and sought financial independence after. Looking into the facets of work-life balance and any job-related incentives or amenities that employed single parents can get from their employers or the organisation where they work. Few of them have the required amount of free time to balance job and family obligations. Concessions are often offered by organised sectors, which are also few and not particularly targeted towards single parents. After knowing their degree of dependency for financial needs, it became quite feasible for the single parents to relate it to their social support systems. It was evident that their perceived support network varied from

what they actually received. Their support network included their parents, siblings and relatives. Other than familial bonds, the support also involved friends, neighbours to colleagues over a period of time. Most of them claim to have an available guardian to take care of their children in their absence which concludes that there is an element of trust and mutual understanding involved. From the interviews, it was also conclusive that single mothers were seen less indulging with their in-laws after separation while single fathers stayed in touch with their in-laws. According to W Johnson and R Johnson social interdependence exists when the accomplishment of each individual's goals is affected by the actions of others likewise, there is an adjustment seen among the parents with respect to their perceived goal and their means on achieving it. Not everyone had the same amount of intimacy and cooperation from their close family, and some even admit to have thrived in hostile environments where they were discouraged for their decision. It was also evident that societal stigmas were being perpetuated; some people even came under scrutiny and received disparate treatment.

Conclusion:

Interviewed single parents believed that providing children with a healthy atmosphere and supportive family members may help them find their place in the world. Yet, when the changes in the support system are examined, a difference in the way individuals who were once pleasant, participatory, and supportive of them can be seen. They claim that, despite there were people who assisted them when necessary, there was no room for them to freely communicate or express themselves as it became uncomfortable. Invasion of their private space and overruling of decisions became prevalent which distanced them from the contacts that they relied much on. While not being extremely supportive of their choices or circumstances, their support networks did make investments in their immediate needs, such as housing and the education of their children.

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