

**Perceived Life Satisfaction of Institutionalised
Single Mothers and Recommended Social
Work Intervention in Karnataka State**

Harish. K¹ & P.G Aquinas²

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Abstract:

The research on life satisfaction among single mothers (SM's) often highlights that they are generally an unhappy group. The study views by assessing how institutions shape the satisfaction with life of SM's. Changes in demographic characteristics, social and economic status have shifted the direction of care of SM's. The present study is aimed towards understanding the satisfaction with life of institutionalised single mothers located in the rehabilitative institutions like Swadhargreah, in Karnataka State.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the measurement tool developed by Diener, Emmons Larsen and Griffin (1985), was used to assess respondents' satisfaction with life. Descriptive research design was applied for the study. Institutionalized SMs within the age group of 15 to 39 were enrolled for the study. The study's findings reveal that institutionalized single mothers are falling behind in nearly all areas, including education, income, and employment. It was observed that institutionalized single mothers are generally dissatisfied with their overall quality of life, as indicated by the studied population.

Keywords: *Satisfaction with life, Single Mother, Widowed, Divorced, Separated, Unwed Mothers.*

Introduction

Institutionalized single mothers (SM's) represent a growing demographic feature within societies worldwide, embodying the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors that shape modern family structures (Murray, 2016). The term "institutionalized" in this context refers to the systemic factors that contribute to the prevalence of single motherhood in which societal structures accommodate or marginalize the group (Galabuzi, 2004). Single motherhood, once considered an exception, has become a prevalent and enduring aspect of modern family life (Mack, 2023). The institutionalization of single mothers reflects not only a shift in societal norms but also the consequences of diverse factors such as changing gender roles, economic pressures, and evolving attitudes towards marriage and

relationships. As women increasingly participate in the workforce and gain financial independence, the traditional nuclear family model has undergone significant transformations (Dowd, 1995).

Economic factors play a pivotal role in the institutionalization of single mothers. Financial strains, whether due to divorce, separation, or the choice to raise children alone, can compel women to navigate the challenges of single parenthood (Brown, 2004). The lack of adequate support structures, both in matters of childcare facilities and workplace policies, often exacerbates the challenges faced by these mothers as they strive to balance the responsibilities of work and family (McLanahan, 1989). Social attitudes and stigmas surrounding single motherhood also contribute to its institutionalization. While we can see improvements that challenge outdated perceptions, lingering stereotypes and judgments can impact the well-being of SM's and their children (Brandwein, 1974). Addressing these societal biases is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes and values the diverse ways in which families are structured.

Government policies and social programs play a vital role in either perpetuating or alleviating the challenges faced by institutionalized single mothers. Adequate access to affordable healthcare, education, and childcare services can significantly impact quality of life for both mothers and their children (Fuller, 2002). As societies grapple with these issues, the institutionalization of single mothers becomes a focal point for discussions on equality, family dynamics, and the broader implications for social cohesion (Ziehl, 2003). The phenomenon of institutionalized single mothers is a multifaceted and dynamic aspect of contemporary society.

1.1 Single Mother Family

To comprehend the challenges faced by single-mother families, it is essential to understand the societal position of women (Bharat, 1986). Single mothers often find it difficult to care for their children (Ketteringham & Kristin). Additionally, a single mother who is also responsible for her parents and other family members faces even greater challenges, particularly if she has teenage children (Laveena, Govindaraju, & Meena, 2016). The study (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2011) on SM's in Four Metro Cities of India, specifically targets Socio-economically disadvantaged SM's in Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. The study focuses on elucidation of the struggles and challenges faced by SM's, with the consequent goal of establishing an accessible support system to bring about positive changes for disadvantaged SM's within the family, society, and government interventions.

1.2 Scenario in Karnataka State

In Karnataka, India, there are no official estimates regarding the number or percentage of single mothers in the population (Ministry of Women and Child Department, 2011). However, data from the Sample Registration System (SRS) of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India

provides information on the population's sex composition by marital status. As of 2011, 5.2% of India's total population comprised single mothers. This indicates that rural areas of Karnataka have a higher concentration of widows, divorcees, and women separated from their husbands compared to urban regions. In the US, 80% of single parents are women. (Sanford & Dornbusch, 1985). As per the 2001 Census of India, there were 34.8 million widows and 2.34 million divorcees or single mothers.

2. Literature survey on the topic

The study (Herbst, 2013) suggests that Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reforms have significantly enhanced the welfare of SM's, contributing to higher life satisfaction, increased optimism about the future, and improved financial stability. These reforms have provided better access to resources, empowering single mothers to achieve greater self-sufficiency and economic security. Especially, these effects on confidence level, were achieved without compromising mental and physical health. The research study reveals that a significant number of single parents in the target area are confronted with financial challenges, primarily attributed to the scarcity of well-paying employment opportunities, as highlighted by informants. Consequently, many of these single parents find themselves categorized within the low-income family bracket (KudengaMugove, 2017). Study emphasizes the imperative to invest in the education of women, specifically focusing on single mothers with children. This targeted investment is crucial for empowering them to enhance their economic status (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Individuals raised by a single mother throughout their childhood, and to a lesser extent those who experienced parental separation, showed a gradual yet persistent decline in life satisfaction in later years, even when controlling for childhood socio-economic status (Richter & Sakari Lemola, 2017). Families play a crucial role in providing support, particularly when government-sponsored welfare programs are insufficient, especially for mothers facing financial difficulties after marital disruption (Swain, 2005). Given the significant prevalence of institutionalized single mothers, there is a scarcity of studies examining perceived life satisfaction among them in India. Notably, much less research has been conducted on SM's in the state of Karnataka. The gap, which lies between effectiveness of present institutional measures applied and lack of interventions from the relevant government authorities is highlighted in existing studies.

3. Materials and Methods

Descriptive method is used by the researcher, as they seek to examine and interpret life satisfaction among institutionalized SM's in Karnataka. The study focuses on single mothers who are widowed, separated, or divorced, within the geographical scope limited in the state of Karnataka, India. Data specifically related to single mothers in Karnataka is considered, and the sample was filtered based on inclusion and exclusion criteria to target institutionalized single mothers residing in Swadhar Greh,

one-stop centers, and Santhwana centers. The study includes mothers aged between 15 to 39 years who have one or more children.

Sample determination table (Krejcie & Morgan, n.d.) was used to calculate the sample size for this study. A total sample size of 104 was proportionately distributed across eight districts based on the population within the four administrative divisions of Karnataka state, using cross-multiplication. The researcher employed a probability sampling method, ensuring that all respondents selected for the study were random samples. The independent variables include Socio- demographic characteristics such as age, education, income, occupation, total members in family, ownership of house, total years spent as single mother, age at marriage, age at pregnancy and total number of children. In order to investigate in to single mothers' life satisfaction, this study utilizes the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). The SWLS is a short 5 item tool of 7-point scale designed to determine global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life.

Self-developed questionnaire was used in order to determine the socio-economic category of institutionalized single mothers recorded. Reliability test was conducted on the life satisfaction interval data. Other than these, descriptive analysis, chi-square tests are also used to find out if there is any associations between socio-demographic variables and satisfaction with life of institutionalized single mothers. Software like, IBM Statistical Package for social studies 15 (SPSS) is utilized for descriptive and non-parametric analysis of this study.

4. Results

Table 1: Social, economic, demographic profile of SM's in Karnataka (N=104)

Profile	Frequency	(%)	Years of being single		
Age (years)			1-2	67	64.4%
15-19	20	19.2%	3-5	32	30.8%
20-29	48	46.2%	More than 5 years	5	4.8%
30-39	36	34.6%	Type of Marriage		
Income			Love marriage/Self Arranged	38	36.5%
No Income in Rs.	17	16.3%	Traditional / Family arranged	66	63.5%
3000 to 5000	53	51.0%	Marital Status		
5001 to 10000	13	12.5%	Below 18 years	46	44.2%
10001 to 15000	21	20.2%	19 to 20 years	35	33.7%
Education			21 to 26 years	23	22.1%
Illiterate	17	16.3%	Age at pregnancy		
Primary	29	27.9%	Below 18 years	12	11.5%
Secondary	32	30.8%	19 to 20 Years	45	43.3%
Graduation/Post Graduation	26	25.0%	21 to 22 Years	22	21.2%
Occupation			23 years and more	25	24.0%
Unemployed	29	27.9%	Reasons for single mother		
House wife	26	25.0%	Divorced	29	27.9%
Private employees	29	27.9%	Widowed	15	14.4%
Other working	20	19.2%	Unwed Mother	7	6.7%
			Separated	53	51.0%

The above table presents a comprehensive overview of the demographic and socio-economic profile of institutionalized single mothers. In terms of age distribution, individuals between 20-29 years old constitute the largest segment at 46.2%, followed by those aged 30-39 at 34.6%. Income distribution reveals that a majority, 51.0%, falls within the Rs. 3000 to 5000 income bracket, while 20.2% earn between Rs. 10001 to 15000. Education levels vary, with 30.8% having completed secondary education and 27.9% being illiterate. Occupation-wise, the data indicate a diverse workforce,

with 27.9% unemployed, 25.0% housewives, and 27.9% engaged in private factory jobs.

Further, the majority of these single mothers have been single for 1-2 years (64.4%), with 30.8% experiencing singlehood for 3-5 years and a smaller percentage, 4.8%, for more than 5 years. Marriage types are diverse, with 63.5% having had traditional or family-arranged marriages, and 36.5% opting for love or self-arranged marriages. Marital status indicates a significant number of mothers becoming single before the age of 18 (44.2%), with age at pregnancy reflecting similar trends, where 43.3% became mothers between 19 to 20 years. Reasons for single motherhood include separation (51.0%), divorce (27.9%), and widowhood (14.4%), with a smaller percentage attributed to unwed mothers (6.7%). These findings provide a characterized understanding of the living conditions, marital histories, and reasons for single motherhood among the institutionalized single mothers in the surveyed population.

4.1 Satisfaction with life of institutionalized Single Mothers

To measure the satisfaction with life of institutionalized single mothers, five components and their response were taken. Reliability of this construct was measures by Crona Bach's Alpha = 0.816, which shows sufficient reliability. Analysis of these components is specified underneath and adjustment was done keeping in mind of the mean value ranges from 5-35: 5 to 15 as Dissatisfied; 16-25 moderately satisfied; and 26-35 Satisfied. A detailed table and the questions with scores and classification are presented in table number 2

Table 2: Life Satisfaction with institutionalized SM's in Karnataka State

Statements	N	Mean	Std. D	Median	Mann Whitney test Z value	p value	
Most ways my life is close to my ideal.	104	2.88	1.70	3.00	5.425	0.000	HS
Conditions of my life are Excellent.	104	2.98	1.60	3.00	6.299	0.000	HS
Satisfied with my life.	104	3.16	1.88	3.00	6.439	0.000	HS
So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	104	3.22	1.85	3.00	6.907	0.000	HS
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	104	3.27	2.07	3.00	6.172	0.000	HS
Satisfaction with life	104	15.52	5.30	15.50	5.705	0.000	HS

The data provided in the above table reveals range of the satisfaction of life of SM's in Karnataka state. The information includes several statements about different aspects of life satisfaction such as 'in most ways my life is close to my deal', 'the condition of my life is excellent', 'I am satisfied

with my life', 'so far, I have gotten the important things I want in life', 'if I could live my life over; I would not change almost nothing'. The statements indicate overall life satisfaction of SM's along with statistical measures such as mean, standard deviation, median, and results of the Mann Whitney test. When asked about 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal', the data revealed a Mean score as 2.88, Standard Deviation 1.70, Median: 3.00, Mann Whitney test Z value as 5.425, followed with the P Value of 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). The average response to this statement is around 2.88; suggesting that, on average, SM's in Karnataka state feel somewhat close to their ideal life. The Mann Whitney test indicates a significant difference in responses, suggesting that there are variations in how different individuals perceive this aspect.

Further, when asked the question, 'The conditions of my life are excellent' the data revealed a Mean score as 2.98, Standard Deviation 1.60, Median 3.00, Mann Whitney test Z value 6.299 with the P Value p value 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). The average response indicates that single mothers tend to rate the conditions of their life as good (2.98). The Mann Whitney test suggests a significant difference in responses, reinforcing the idea that there are variations in how single mothers perceive the excellence of their life conditions. Additionally, when asked about 'I am satisfied with my life' the data revealed, Mean score as 3.16, Standard Deviation 1.88, Median value 3.00, Mann Whitney test Z value 6.439 with P Value as 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). The mean of 3.16 suggests that, on average, single mothers' express satisfaction with their life. The Mann Whitney test indicates a significant difference in responses, highlighting variability in satisfaction levels among the participants.

When asked the question, 'So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life', the data further revealed the Mean score 3.22, Standard Deviation 1.85, Median 3.00, Mann Whitney test Z value 6.907, and P Value 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). The response shows that that, on average, single mothers feel that they have achieved important things in life. The Mann Whitney test suggests a significant difference in responses, indicating diverse perspectives among the participants. Additionally, when asked, 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing'. The data revealed Mean score as 3.27, Standard Deviation of 2.07, Median score 3.00, Mann Whitney test Z value 6.172, P Value 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). On average, single mothers express a relatively low desire to change aspects of their life if given the chance. The Mann Whitney test indicates significant variations in responses.

When looked about the Overall Satisfaction with life, the data revealed the mean score of 15.52, Standard Deviation 5.30, Median score as 15.50, Mann Whitney test Z value 5.705 and P Value as 0.000 (significant at the 0.05 level). The mean score of 15.52 suggests an overall moderate level of life satisfaction among single mothers in Karnataka state. The Mann Whitney test indicates significant

variations in overall life satisfaction levels. The test further suggested that while there is a general trend of satisfaction of life among single mothers in Karnataka, there are significant variations in how individuals observe different factors of their lives. The results of the Mann-Whitney test indicate that these differences are statistically significant.

Table 3: Overall satisfaction with life of Institutionalized SM's in Karnataka State

Satisfaction with life	Frequency	(%)
Dissatisfied	52	50.0
Moderately Satisfied	47	45.2
Satisfied	5	4.8

The data provided in the above table offers insights into the life satisfaction of SMs, detailing the distribution of responses among different levels of satisfaction. The data revealed, Dissatisfied Frequency N= 52, with the Percentage 50.0%. It shows that half of the single mothers in the surveyed group reported being dissatisfied with their lives. This is a substantial proportion, indicating that a significant number of SMs in the sample are experiencing discontent or dissatisfaction with various aspects of their lives. Further, in Moderately Satisfied, the frequency shows N =47, with a percentage 45.2%. Nearly half of the single mothers (45.2%) fall into the category of being moderately satisfied with their lives. This suggests a middle-ground level of satisfaction, where most of the individuals have a balanced outlook on the circumstances' showing room for improvement in certain areas. Further, for the respondents, who are satisfied, the frequency showed N= 5, the Percentage value 4.8%. Showing, a small proportion of single mothers 4.8% reported being satisfied with their lives. While this percentage is relatively low, it indicates that there are individuals within the sample who express contentment and fulfilment with their current life situations.

Overall, the data suggests a diverse range of life satisfaction levels among SMs, with an equal split between dissatisfaction and moderate satisfaction, and a smaller percentage expressing high satisfaction. The substantial proportion of single mothers reporting dissatisfaction highlights the challenges or concerns that a significant portion of this population may be facing. Adding to it, understanding the factors contributing to dissatisfaction or moderate satisfaction provides valuable insights for support programs or interventions focusing at refining the well-being of SM's in the surveyed population. The data provides a subtle shade of expression and view of the life satisfaction of SMs, illustrating both challenges and contentment within this demographic section.

5. Recommended social work implications

1. **Skill-building Programs:** Establish initiatives that concentrate on cultivating tangible life

competencies, including financial literacy, vocational training, and parenting capabilities, with the aim of empowering single mothers.

2. **Parenting Support Groups:** Create support groups to foster a sense of community among single mothers, providing a nurturing space for sharing experiences and offering advice on parenting.
3. **Childcare Assistance:** Offer affordable or subsidized childcare services within the institution to alleviate the challenges on single mothers and promote their participation in educational or vocational programs.
4. **Educational Opportunities:** Enable single mothers to acquire knowledge and skills for enhanced employment prospects by providing access to educational opportunities, including literacy programs and vocational training.
5. **Mental Health Services:** Integrate mental health services within the institution to address psychological challenges and promote emotional well-being among single mothers.
6. **Financial Literacy Workshops:** Conduct workshops on financial literacy to empower single mothers with the knowledge to manage their finances effectively and plan for their future.
7. **Legal Aid Services:** Provide legal aid services to address issues related to custody, child support, and other legal matters that may impact the well-being of single mothers.
8. **Health and Wellness Programs:** Implement health and wellness programs, including access to healthcare services and fitness activities, to promote physical well-being among institutionalized single mothers.
9. **Networking Opportunities:** Facilitate networking opportunities for single mothers to connect with possible companies, trainers, and other support systems within and outside the institution.
10. **Crisis Intervention Services:** Develop a responsive crisis intervention system to address immediate challenges and emergencies that single mothers may face within the institution.
11. **Transitional Housing Support:** Establish transitional housing programs to support single mothers in transitioning from institutionalized settings to independent living, ensuring a smoother reintegration into society.
12. **Trauma-Informed Care:** Train staff to provide trauma-informed care, recognizing and addressing the potential trauma that single mothers may have experienced, and creating a safe and supportive environment.
13. **Access to Technology:** Ensure access to technology, such as computers and internet facilities, to help single mothers stay connected with their support networks and access online resources.
14. **Cultural Competency Training:** Offer staff cultural competency training to enhance their

understanding and appreciation of the diverse backgrounds and requirements of single mothers in institutionalized settings.

15. Advocacy for Policy Changes: Participate in advocacy initiatives to shape policy changes that positively affect the rights and well-being of single mothers, both within institutional settings and in broader contexts.

16. Recreational and Leisure Activities: Organize recreational and leisure activities within the institution to promote socialization, stress relief, and a sense of community among single mothers.

17. Peer Support Programs: Create peer sustenance programs where experienced single mothers mentor and support those who are newer to the institution, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences.

18. Collaboration with Community Resources: Foster collaborations with external community resources, such as local nonprofits, to expand the range of support services available to institutionalized single mothers.

19. Feedback Mechanism: Implement a feedback mechanism that allows single mothers to voice their concerns, suggestions, and feedback regarding the institution's programs and services, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to their needs.

Implementing these social work implications can contribute to a more holistic and empowering environment for institutionalized single mothers, ultimately enhancing their life satisfaction and well-being.

6. Ethical Consideration:

Ethical considerations are diligently followed in the research supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), ensuring the honesty, credibility, and preservation of the rights of all involved participants. Adhering to ethical principles is paramount to safeguarding the dignity and well-being of the research subjects. The researcher places a high priority on safeguarding informed consent from participants, providing them with complete particulars about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Stringent measures are in place to maintain confidentiality, safeguarding the privacy of participants, and handling any identifiable information with the utmost care. The research design and methodologies are crafted with cultural sensitivity, demonstrating respect for local norms and values. Transparent communication and ongoing engagement with participants, coupled with procurement approval from pertinent ethics review boards, are integral components of the research process.

Conclusion

The study on perceived life satisfaction of institutionalized single mothers and recommended social work

intervention in Karnataka State found out that single mothers experienced moderate satisfaction with life in institutions. The satisfaction of life of single mothers exhibits a nuanced narrative characterized by moderate contentment. Analysis of crucial variables, including proximity to an ideal life, excellent life conditions, satisfaction, attainment of essential goals, limited desire for life alterations, and overall life satisfaction, points to a balanced outlook. Despite facing challenges the majority express moderate satisfaction, emphasizing resilience and adaptability. Understanding the intricacies of these variables offers a pathway for targeted interventions. By fostering individualized support programs that address these facets, social work initiatives can contribute significantly to enhancing the overall life satisfaction of single mothers in Karnataka, promoting resilience, and fostering an extra favourable environment for well-being of the community.

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Acknowledgement

Dr. Harish K awarded of ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellowship in the year 2022-23. This paper is largely a product of the Post-Doctoral Fellowship sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusions drawn is entirely of the author.

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