

## “Perspective of single mothers as a choice”: The challenges in livelihood

IKA INDRAWATY HAMZAH

School of Education and Modern Languages (SEML)  
College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia

FAUZIAH MD JAAFAR

School of Education and Modern Languages (SEML)  
College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia

### **Abstract:**

*This paper explores the perspective of single mothers as a choice and the challenges in livelihood. Single mothers participants are selected based on the following criteria: (1) single mother aged 35-50 years; (2) single mothers who are divorced, separated or abandonment by the husband, and widow; (3) mothers who have two or more children. Participants of single mother coded representing (P-ITU), namely P1-ITU, P2-ITU, P3-ITU, P4-ITU, P5-ITU, and P6-ITU. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six participants. The interview session takes 20-30 minutes for each participant and interviews are recorded by voice recording device. Semi-structured questions were used then transcribed and analyzed with Nvivo11 software. The results of the study report that early feeling as a single mother is that they experience emotional stress associated with feeling of pain or distress. Emotional stress is also related to finance. The study found that the reason for choosing a single mother is because of the importance attached to children such as attention and love, the child does not follow a difficult life, the husband does not conceived the idea of leaving work, and accepts sincerely as a fate. In addition, the study discovered that the challenges of single mothers namely: working alone in the financing of all family dependents, social*

*problems and child discipline, a father's attention to the child, and the negative assumption of the surrounding community.*

**Key words:** single mother, challenges, semi-structured, in-depth interview, Nvivo 11 software

## INTRODUCTION

Going by the statistic of single mother in Asian countries to be specific Japan, Malaysian, and Indonesia. Past record shows that in Japan the number of single mothers increased by 31 percent in 1986 from 600,000 to 788,000 in 2006 (Takada, 2011). While in Malaysia statistic show an increase in the number of single mothers from 444,000 in 1980 and 895,000 in 2000 (Hew, 2003) respectively. However, in Indonesia an increase in the number of single mothers has reached 12.3 percent consisting of divorce and death by 2015 (Statistics Indonesia, 2016). Based on these data, the single mother's state is formed in various ways. According to Hew (2003) noted the term single mothers refer to widowed mothers, not through legitimate marriages, separation or divorce from spouses, unmarried women but adopted children. While Takada (2011) argues that they include women in the care of children aged under twenty years. According to Doherty and Craft (2011) are those who do a sperm donation for heterosexual women or women in a relationship between two lesbian parents. In addition, those who belong to this category are married mothers and have children under twenty-fifth years (Chairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003). Previous researchers, Graham (2014) explains that single mothers of choice are generally women who are highly educated and have professional jobs who have become mothers through their 30s or 40s. In addition, according to Trimbenger (2005) reported that the reason they chose single mothers because they do not have the ability to care for children. Similarly, Herzt (2006) notes that single mothers are

considered a taboo culture to have a child without the help of a man. In addition, Weissmberg (2007) reported that they chose sperm donations when they did not have to make partners. Based on these reasons, single mothers can cultivate a very satisfying, loving, cooperative, guarding and unfulfilled familiarity at work or in relationships with adults (Trimbenger, 2005). However, Graham and Braverman (2012) and Hertz (2006) reported different opinions that the majority of single mothers did not have the choice, they did not have spouses and their time was up to have a child.

Therefore, the effort to bear young children and have troubled children is a challenge that is often experienced in single mother's life in the absence of husband. Based on previous study, single mothers show low economic and work enforcement and strict discipline to their children (Sturge-Apple, Sour, & Skibo, 2014). It is found that single mothers have experienced often rejected by families and communities in that experience such as difficulty in sleeping (*insomnia*), moodiness and self-destructive thoughts, unstable living, and social pressures (Welch & Hong, 2013). The results showed that they were also often dependent on other family members and sensitive to problems (McCreary and Dancy, 2004). It was found that single mothers were considered more permissive or "crazy" (Menvielle & Tuerk, 2002). They also face a lot gender stereotypes (Haire & McGeorge, 2012).

The problems experienced by single mothers can have an impact on their children. The condition affects the psychological symptoms of children (Kelly, 2000). Children of single mothers have choices with parental decisions by themselves show differences with those who accidentally find themselves in these conflict of choice with parents and lower economic difficulties or maternal psychological problems from marital disorders (Hertz, 2006; Jadva, Badger, Morrissette, & Golombok, 2009). In fact, the results of Murray and Golombok (2005) studies reported no

differences in children born to single heterosexual mothers and married, all with babies conceived by donor insemination.

### **Single mother**

Previous studies have described a single mother has been troublesome set of people. The problems associated with single mother often appear and described as "strange experiences" because of fear, hopelessness, disappointment and low self-esteem, and do not encourage the care of families (Keating-Lefler, Hudson, Cambel-Grossman, Flock, & Wesfall, 2004). There are similarities with previous studies, for example single mothers are less accepting of public awards for their humiliation and harm to their welfare (Grahame & Marston, 2012). Merewether (2010) notes that single mothers are considered a troubled person and a threat to society. The results show that they avoid social relationships that can lead to alienation and despair (Welch & Hong, 2013). Thus, single mother are also often rejected and isolated due to factors such as lack of self-confidence and identity (Welch & Hong, 2013). They can be viewed as people who lack social support and financial difficulties (Crosier, Butterworth, & Rodgers, 2007).

### **Single mother problems**

#### *a. Children's Behavior*

Factors that cause problems often arise from single mothers due to divorce and separation of parents is damaging children, family, economy, and society as a whole. Based on preliminary studies, for example, Mooney, Oliver, and Smith (2009) reported that children had a poor increased risk. In particular, it affects the behavior of children aged 5 and 6 years (Stadelmann, Perren, Groeben, & von Klitzing, 2010). Existing studies reported poor impacts on children such as dropping out and disciplining children (Arkes, 2013), delinquency (Singh and Kiran, 2012), as well as issues of fitness (Tein, Sandler, Braver, & Wolchik, 2013). In addition, the results of study indicate that

the problems associated with adjusting children are conflicts between parents and children (Amato, 2000, 2005). Children's behavioral problem stem from marital conflicts and distraction. This shows that the family as key child behavior system (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Furthermore, Zill (2002) says that children from single families are concerned with children's anti-social behavior issues including temper tantrums, bullying, fighting, cheating, lying, and stealing. McCord (1982), poor parenting with delinquent behaviors can lead to behaviors such as lack of compassion, lack of supervision, and little supervision of their children's development.

According to Miller and Marx, 1990; Vandell and Posner, 1990; Astbury and Cabral, 2000, reported that emotional disturbances that occur will make it difficult for parents to consult and interact with their children. Children spend more time with friends who can understand it, especially children at the age of adolescents spend time after school hours. They can go looking for alternatives to release their stress and potentially against the risk of immoral behavior.

#### *b. Economics*

Research shows that family income appears stronger with regard to the abilities and achievements of children than emotional ability. Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) argue that single mother economic problem are related to the basic needs of children such as food, clothing, and school payments, maintaining a standard of living, and fulfilling personal expenses. In addition, based on previous research, some single mothers experience the financial crisis and their lives are considered poor, therefore, causing their children to experience stress (Larson & Gillman, 1999). For example, single mothers find it difficult to get out of trouble after the death of the husband in particular to meet basic needs. These difficulties include the financial need to buy shoes, school uniforms, bags, payment of tuition fees. The financial aspect is a common

aspect faced solely with regard to not having enough income and feeling inadequate in meeting the needs of their children (Cakir, 2010). In fact, single mother financial tension are more likely to be more anxious, depressed, and overwhelmed in parenting (Azuka-Obieka & Uchenna, 2013).

*c. Social*

The single mother faced many social problems in her life. Social problems are concerned with avoiding social gatherings, changing the way people dress, developing bad food and food habits, being unable to make decisions about their children's education, lacking the right knowledge and guidance, blaming poor finance, being lonely, traumatized, depressed, difficult to handle the care responsibilities of children, and difficult to maintain discipline (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009). Also found lack of social interaction, no appetite, sleeping problems, mood changes, impairments in thought and suicide (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Peterson and Forgatch (1990), found that lack of monitoring and monitoring of children can affect for their behavior in the classroom, school and may involve misbehavior and disciplinary behavior compared to complete parents.

*d. Psychology*

Studies have shown that divorced parents are more at risk for the symptoms of moodiness (Amato & Gilberth, 1999; Ronal, Simon & Johnson, 1999; Forenhard, Wierson, Thomas, Armistead, Kempton & Neighborts, 1999). In addition, according to Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009), reported that single lonely mothers, trauma, and depression find it difficult to handle childcare responsibilities and build routines for their children. One aspect is the poor parenting patterns that show negative effects and emotional transition to the children. According to hart, Jones, and Field (2003), states that the lack of monitoring of children, especially depressed mothers. Symptoms of depression derived from parents can lead to the

existence of the mothers. Also, Abdul Jalal (2005) argues that students need professional help as a psychological trauma and family divorce. Emotional problems relating to feeling lonely, helpless, desperate, lack of identity and lack of confidence.

## **Method**

This research is run by using a qualitative method with case study approach which chooses semi-structured question. The purpose of case study research is to obtain comprehensive, systematic and detailed information (Patton, 2002). A case study approach can produce unique information about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This case study explores single mother perspectives as the choice and the challenges livelihood. Data were collected through individual interviews with six single mothers. Researchers also use purposive sample by selecting participants based on consideration: 1) single mothers due to divorce, separation or abandonment by the husband, and widow; 2) single mothers aged 35-50 years; 3) single mothers who has two or more children. Single mother participants represent Pi-ITU, P2-ITU, P3-ITU, P4-ITU, P5-ITU, and P6-ITU. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six participants. Interview session is 20-30 minutes. Recorded using a voice recording device. Data is analyzed using N-vivo 11 software. First step, towards data analysis is importation of data into N-vivo 11. Secondly, record the interview data carefully and in detail. After the transcription, the researchers need to code the sequence of the interview recorded. Then reports from the N-vivo 11 software such as the single mother perspectives research model as in-depth analysis.

## **Results**

This study illustrates some of the results. The study reported three main themes described below:

*Theme 1. The initial feeling as a single mother*

Most participants reporting initial feelings as single mothers is an expression of emotional stress. Emotional stress that are related to feelings of hurt and distress caused by a state of feeling lonely. That situation has resulted in all work being done on its own. In addition, the emotional stress experienced is related to finances. The financial difficulties experienced are caused by various things. Participants explained that there are demands to finance and raise their own children as well as the obligation to pay the debt of many husbands. The results of the study indicate another prevailing feeling that the decline in income received after becoming a single mother, where financial management is done in order to be adequate for the needs of her child. Moreover, it was found that the participants had to work for their children to go to school, despite their poor lives. Additionally, participants reported financial circumstances that did not require them to work and to buy the family's primary needs. And there are participants reporting to borrow capital when wage work is not sufficient. This is in accordance with the following participants' explanations:

*It was so hard at the time, I was having difficulties with finances. I leave it to God. I think why he did that to me. When he give money, I never complain, well I accepted and do not ask anymore. I never get angry. I did not expect it to be that way. (P1-ITU)*

*Very different, I finance and raise three children. Meanwhile, the husband died living much debt. All the capital I have given is already spent. (P-2-ITU)*

*The first time, I felt bad, imagine income money decrease from 2 million to 800 thousand rupiahs. I usually pay attention to what to do with money. Especially how to manage this money to be enough for my children. (P3-ITU)*

*Very deficient, I really try to buy new goods, because there are two small children. I have nothing, so I have to work for my child to stay in school. (P4-ITU)*

*I see how bitter, like a slap, I follow my husband to this area and consider it as a family but I feel tremendous pain. The burden is deeply felt in the face of the financial burden. (P5-ITU)*

*It's very difficult because my income is limited and I support two children. I have to work for a wage, but if it is not enough then I can borrow from my neighbor to carter for my children at the tender age. (P6-ITU)*

### *Theme 2. The reason for choosing a single mother*

Based on the interview results obtained from the participants report shows that the reasons for choosing single mother is because of the interests of their children. Participants show the desire to see their child succeed. Attempts to achieve that desire, the participants explain that the bad traits of a father like drinking do not follow his son. Therefore, efforts are put in place so that the child has a good future. In addition, participants reported the duty of giving sufficient attention and affection to their children. More so, their children still need financing and single mothers do not want the difficulties to follow their children. This is in accordance with the reality described by the following participants.

*I think of my children, how to triumph like everyone else even though no father at home. (P3-ITU)*

*I left my husband because he did not want to work. For that reason eating alone becomes so difficult, I am tired of seeing a husband who does not want to change behavior. The nature of the husband who always consumes drinking alcohol. So I left home with my children. I do not want my children to follow their life style. I think of my children. (P4-ITU)*

*Very hard, my life is very difficult, especially I have to finance my two young children at that time. I do not want children to past through hard life. (P6-ITU)*

There are several participants pointing out different reasons in choosing as single mothers. The results showed that single mothers were unable to leave long-term jobs and the burden of an elderly family expert in custody review that the husband's request to marry another woman had to be granted by the wife. This is in accordance with the following participants' explanations:

*When the father wants to remarry, he asks for my signature, I grant his request. He said, "Do not feel sorry for me, I want to get married". I cannot just work out of town because my grandmother stays with me. (P1-ITU)*

Participants also reported that the reason for choosing as a single mother was because the husband is no longer responsible and are such he could not provide for a living. This situation requires participants to make life decisions in a way. This is in accordance with the reality described by the following participants:

*The husband went to trade in another city and did not return. So I thought I was not born and need a lot of debt to pay. (P2-ITU)*

In addition, there are also participants who say to put aside the pain that has been experienced by accepting the burden sincerely as fate. This is in accordance with the following participants' explanations:

*I'm in pain, all I leave for God by praying every day that I am accepted to be a permanent government employee. I am sure God is just, and given the right time to receive it. (P5-ITU)*

*Theme 3: The challenges faced as a single mother*

Some participants reported the challenges experienced during being single mother was not having a job to do. The results indicate that participants should work to support families including family dependents. Furthermore, the results indicate a single mother must work out of town and bear the arrears of debt in the bank. In addition, some participants have more than one problem for instance, social issues and child discipline that leads to skipping school and hanging out with children outside the school. Also, participants reported difficulties in staying outside the home and drive into peoples home. In addition, participants expressed their wish that the child under their care can get the attention of a father by visiting his children at home. The participants described the community as negative because they always stayed at home and did not socialize with the community. This is in accordance with the following participants' explanations:

*Often skipping school. She dressed neatly to school but did not get to school, always hanging out with friends who dropped out of school. Also, he was silent, but his stubborn nature will not change. I say "we are poor, do not follow your father who did not complete elementary school". I trade to finance three children and grandmother who is old. All of my dependents. (P1-ITU)*

*People assumed that I gained much assistance from parents. That had made me to work out to another place. Debt is must that need to be settled with my bank and with less supervision. (P2-ITU)*

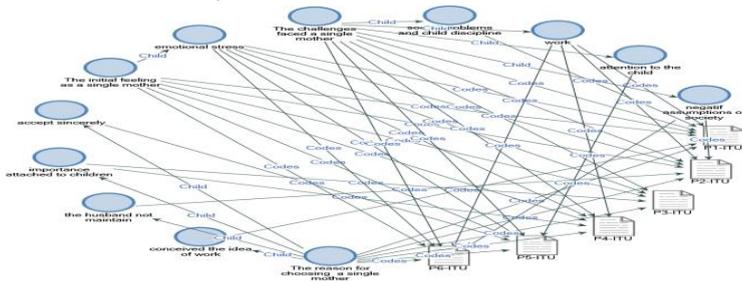
*I felt much worried when my husband's salary change. I say "is this money enough to meet the needs of children?"(P3-ITU)*

*My problem was low financial earning when I just moved. And did not have anything. So I tried to work for my life and the child. I just stay in people's houses and pay for only electricity and water bills. (P4-ITU)*

*I hope he visits his children, also people say that he still care for his children. That’s all (P5-ITU)*

*People say that I am receiving a lot of help from parents, even considered too relaxed and not going out of the house. I think when I leave home then I cannot work and get money to buy basic needs. Also I would like to do another work but no capital and experience (P6-ITU)*

**The model of study**



**Figure 1. The model of study**

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper elucidates several findings. First, the initial feeling of being single mothers and the experience of emotional stress. Emotional stress is associated with feelings of hurt and difficulty because they stay alone. This situation causes all family burdens and responsibility to be carried out on their own. Emotional stress is also related to finances. Participants think about the financial burden they are forced to navigate on their own. A single mother financial burden is self-employed in funding and raising her own children. Nevertheless, the obligation must pay the debt of the abandoned husband. The results showed that income received by single mother declined so required to manage finances in order to be enough for the needs of his children. Also, the results of the study indicate that the participants must work in order to send their children to

school. In addition, participants reported that financial burdens should borrow capital when wages is not sufficient for the child's needs.

Secondly, the reason for choosing a single mothers came from the participants interviewed that some participants explained their children's interests very much. For example, a single mother shows the desire to see her child succeed. The work done is a safety precautionary measures so that the child does not follow the bad traits of a father. Participants expressed the duty of giving sufficient attention and affection to their children. In addition, participants also reported their children still need financing and they do not want the difficulty to affect their children. The choice as a single mother arises because the husband is no longer staying with the family for very long time. Participants provide the excuse that they do not want their children to follow their difficult lives. Other reasons are: unable to abandon long-held work and the burden of an elderly family expert. Moreover, it was found that the participants only accepted the situation sincerely as a matter of fate.

Third, the challenge that single mothers face in general is the job problem. Single mothers should work independently because they bear children and other dependents relatives. Besides that, the results show the participant had to work out of town and bear the payment of debt arrears in the bank. Some participants have other problems, such as social issues and child discipline (for example, skipping school and the habit of gathering with school drop-out children). In addition, participants have difficulties with shelter that cause to move out to live with another people. Furthermore, participants described the lack of capital and experience possessed by single mothers. The study also found participants expressed the desire and expectation of a single mother in order for her child to get the attention of a father, by visiting to see her child at home. Finally, the challenge faced is the negative perception of the

community that single mothers do not socialize with the surrounding community.

## SUGGESTION

Based on the three themes that arise, the parties concerned can provide business capital assistance to single mothers who are poor to establish an independent business. More so, in order to equip their lives so as to survive, to adjust her feelings to live alone. Single mothers need to be given training, and attending courses to have experience and skills in building oneself for the future.

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