

# Exploring the Challenges Faced by Single Mothers in Guyana

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**Abstract:** A single mother is one who lives alone with her children and leads a life without her partner due to death, separation, or divorce. This situation of being a single woman can change the personality and behavior, which can be from within the person's inner sense or from society. This study aspires to show the hustles, tussles, and wrestles of single mothers in Guyana; the challenges, the reason to become a single mother, the management of financial matters, and the stress they go through. The intention of the study is to learn the challenges they face in caring for their children and the struggles in making decisions to run the family. This study also focuses on the personal, emotional, social, and financial challenges in a single mother's life. The objective of the study is the deep pursuit of knowledge for academic achievements and my personal interest in learning about single mothers' life. Samples of 57 single mothers were selected by purposive sampling technique. The researcher selected the participants from different Regions of the country. The researcher made an open dialogue with the participants using an exploratory method. The second type of sampling was collected by fourteen prepared multiple-choice questions. Most of the participants reported that they had regular fights in the family and were cheated by their partners and an unhealthy family environment was created which led to separation followed by financial difficulties and stress. 61% of the participants haven't built and maintained a support network as single mothers. 80.77% of single mothers ignore their children's questions regarding their father and their behavior issues. The findings of the study aim to benefit future researchers who can use this study to contribute to the single-parenthood struggles in society. The results suggest that single mothers should seek financial and professional help from competent and trained counselors.

**Keywords:** Guyana, Single mother, Social, Emotional, Financial Challenge.

## 1. Introduction

The Republic of Guyana is a small South American country that borders the North Atlantic Ocean with its neighbors Suriname, Brazil, and Venezuela. Guyana's population is made up of five main ethnic groups: Indians, Africans, Amerindians, Europeans (mainly Portuguese), and Chinese. Ninety percent of the inhabitants live on the narrow coastal plain where the population density is more than 115 inhabitants per square kilometer (300/sq mi). The population density for Guyana as a whole is low; less than four inhabitants per square kilometer (10.4/sq mi)". "According to the 2022 revision of the World Population Prospects, the total population was 804, 567 in 2021".<sup>3</sup>

Parenthood is a process of raising children from Infancy to adulthood. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide food, clothing, education, and other basic needs to them. It is a great satisfaction for parents to see their children grow, learn and enjoy life. A single mother is not normally a choice. It happens when separation takes place or getting a child out of wedlock or the death of a spouse or adoption. Whatever may the reason to be a single mother, it is a challenge for her especially if she has to work to run the family. Single mothers face psychological and emotional stress to fulfill their physical needs. "The Caribbean is distinguished by the high incidents of female heads of household. According to official statistics, between 22 and 44 percent of women in CARICOM countries are sole heads of households (CAROCOM, 1995)".<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Research Questions

In this study, the researcher aims to attempt to answer the following research questions: What is the experience as a

single mother? What are the challenges faced by single mothers in Guyana? What are the challenges of bringing up children as single mothers?

## 3. Objective of the Study

- To assess the socio-economical and psychological challenges of a single mother.
- To find out the pains, problems, difficulties, and struggles to raise the children.
- To explore the experiences as a single mother.

## 4. Significance of the Study

This study will give significant information about the struggle of a single mother and their difficulty to raise their children. This study also can be used as a resource material for further studies. This research study gives knowledge about single mothers and their challenges.

## 5. Methods and Materials

**A. Data Sources and collection process:** The researcher made a preliminary study about the topics, and made a structured questionnaire for the data collection. The researcher made fourteen questions and distributed them to 52 single mothers at Berbice, East Coast Demerara, and West Bank Georgetown and Karasabai in Guyana. The questionnaire was of multiple choices and they were answered after making personal contact with each of them. The researcher also did the survey of respondents over the telephone by applying the qualitative method. The researcher identified Five single mothers and made a telephonic interview with them. The primary data was

collected from Region numbers 4, 5, 6 and 9 in the Republic of Guyana.

**B. Sociodemographic Questionnaire:** Each participant filled out 14 multiple choice questionnaires with basic information. The following information given by the single mothers is the number of children, place name, Region where they live, the present age of the mother, and the age they became single mothers. The researcher also interviewed 5 mothers to know about their financial, social, cultural, and mental challenges after they became single mothers and raise their children.

**C. Ethics:** The participants indicated the most appropriate answers for their choice for each question. The interview was conducted with single mothers and was very challenging. The tone of the interview was quite clear which would be a very painful experience for the participants. The researcher clearly reminded the participants that the interview will be conducted anonymously and would be used only for research purposes. The participants also were informed of the objectives and goals of the study.

## 6. Review of Literature

It is when the family bond is broken and the parents start to live separately that they become single mothers. The reason for a single parent can be as a result of death, divorce, or having children out of wedlock. Many single mothers become bread earners in the family. Securing a job to run the family is not at all easy for the single parent. As a single mother, many needs are placed in front of her, like food, dress, health care, and education of their children.

Single mothers get into frustration, stress, fear, guilt, sadness, loss of hope, and lack of interest in social activities. Usually, single mothers work long hours, are socially isolated, and have less emotional support and no stable network than married mothers. They go through tension to raise their children. Single mothers face problems to move forward in their life. Once they become single mothers, their responsibilities increase. She has to look after herself and mostly the children remain with her and their needs have to be met. They need to deal with the added pressures of financial, social, and emotional needs.

Studies show that single motherhood is by far the most common instance of single parenting. Single mothers sometimes have a hard time providing for their families. Sometimes, they have the added responsibility of taking care of their parents or other relative. They even encounter less open criticism from the society at present as compared to earlier decades when the single mother was more likely shunned for her choice to raise a family alone. Most of the studies on the issue conclude that they generally have lower - paying jobs, although this income disparity has been decreasing. A single mother fails to graduate from high school and is unable to obtain a college education. Thus, they are not able to have an average wage or income. This is a difficult situation unless there are welfare and health care programmes available to support mother and child.

“Having fewer economic resources, single mothers frequently have fewer emotional resources due to the demands of raising a child without the support of a spouse or co-parent. High stressors, such as everyday hassles, social isolation, and financial strain, result in single mothers having a high risk of emotional distress and disruptions in parenting, and their children are more vulnerable to adjustment problems largely resulting from exposure to poverty, mental depression, and poorer parenting”. “Researchers have consistently demonstrated that single mothers with higher levels of optimism, self - efficacy, and self - esteem have lower levels of internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety, and higher levels of positive parenting behaviors”.<sup>13</sup>

“Single parenting, especially single motherhood, has been widely discussed in the literature and is a focus of public policy concern. Different causes have been associated with single - parenting, including the increase in female labor force, which decreases the gains of marriage (BECKER et al., 1997; MURRAY, 1994), and the low marriage ability of poor, high - school educated men, which would decrease single women’s motivation to marry, especially among lower educated women (BECKER et al., 1997; CHERLIN, 2009; WILSON, 1990”.<sup>14</sup>

Willicox (2003) in a study on "The effect of widowhood on physical and mental health, health behavior and family outcome" found that women who were recently widowed reported substantial. Al higher rates of depressed mood, poorer social functioning and lower mental health and physical functioning. than women who were widowed more than a year.<sup>16</sup>

## 7. Findings

Demographic findings: A total of fifty - two respondents were interviewed by applying the quantitative method. There were eleven respondents between 21 to 30 years of age and eight respondents between 31 to 40 years of age and twenty - three participants between 41 to 50 years of age. Ten participants were above 51 years old.

### a) Motivated to Become a Single Mother

This question was answered by 52 participants.15.38% of participants reported that regular fighting is the reason for becoming a single mother.26.92% agree that cheating by the partner is the reason for the breakup, 23.08% of participants say that unhealthy family environment and 23.08% got various other reasons.

### b) Biggest challenges

Some of the biggest challenges a single mother faced are the financial responsibility for 63.46% of participants, 11.54% said social stigma, and 23.08% bringing up children alone is a challenge. One participant did not answer.

Chart 1.

### c) Management of Finances - 5.77% of participants took loans from the bank to manage their finances as single mothers.69.23% of participants are working people to support the family.25% of them got some other reasons.

d) **Time management for both work and caring for the child**

The researcher raises a question regarding time management between work and taking care of single mothers' children. Many of the participants get help from their neighbors or family members. The percentage is 40.38%. 21.15% of the people said that they cannot give much time to their children because of work. 7.69% of them kept caretakers and 30.77% of them take part - time jobs or their job is flexible.

e) **Strategies for Stress Management**

There was a question about what strategies were found helpful in coping with stress as a single parent. 55.77% of them engage themselves in work, 28.84% of them share their feeling with others and 7.69% of them go to

counselors or therapists. 7.69% of them are involved in spiritual activities.

f) **Decision - making and responsibility of a child**

50% feel responsible when they involve their children in decision - making and responsibilities at home. 13.46% choose them to make a decision. 25% ask their view on the decision and 11.53% got some other answers.

g) **Disciplining and Nurturing of a Child**

Nurturing the children and keeping discipline are not easy for a single mother. 76.92% of the participants agreed that the mother teaches the children discipline and they obey the mother. 15.38% say that the children are responsible for their actions and 5.76% of them have other options for answers.

**Table 1**

Title	Option	Percentage
Feeling about the stigma and stereotypes	I ignore them.	55.77%
	It breaks my heart.	32.69%
	I feel bad.	13.46%
	Others	1.92%
Maintaining a positive relationship with the child/children's other parents	I believe they are needed for my child so I am compromising for my child	21.15%
	I have no enviousness with the other parent of my child	26.92%
	I have no relationship with my ex - partner	48.07%
	Others	3.84%
Handled difficult conversations or situations with child/children	I ignore their questions.	Nil
	I reply positively.	80.77%
	They don't ask me anything.	13.46%
	Others	5.76%
Built and maintained a support network as a single mother	I have not built any network.	61.54%
	A support network is not much effective in the context of Guyana	15.38%
	The support network has helped in various support like job, sponsor of my children	15.38%
	Others	7.69%
Support or resources readily available to single mothers	Job opportunities	44.23%
	Scholarships for children	21.15%
	Support from family/society	34.61%
	Others	Nil
Support system in the family to help you as a single mother	They help me financially.	30.77%
	They took care of me and my child/children.	30.77%
	I don't have any support from my family.	34.61%
	Others	3.84%
Advice to other single mothers who are struggling	Believe in yourself.	26.92%
	Don't lose hope.	26.92%
	Don't hesitate to ask for any help.	25%
	Others	21.15%

h. Telephonic Interview Responses by the Single Mother: Five single mothers were interviewed and their response is summarized and given below.

**Excerpt from Participant 1:** According to the client, most of the single mothers did not have any work before breaking up their relationship. Therefore, they face financial problems and difficulties in bringing up their children. Most of these mothers tried to do more than one work at different places to lead the family. On the report of the client, after separation, to meet her daily financial needs she has to hunt for a job in different places. This becomes psychological and emotional stress for her. A little financial help from her relative is a consolation for her. A single mother has shared that her social life affected her very much. She kept a distance from all her neighbors and friends and was only involved in church activities and daily earnings. A busy life was a consolation for her from social life. She believes that it is

accepted culturally. Her stress level reduces because of her own sister's support. "My partner was gambling, fighting, and drinking and I lost the peace". The only option is to live with her child.

**Excerpt from Participant2**

The reason for the breakup is cheating and no trust. "It is hard for a mother to look after an infant and at the same time do a job to run the family". "I went through a lot of struggles. Giving education to the children is a financial challenge for the single mother. Her advice to other single mothers is to stay strong and lead a courageous life. There is an also social pressure on the single mothers.

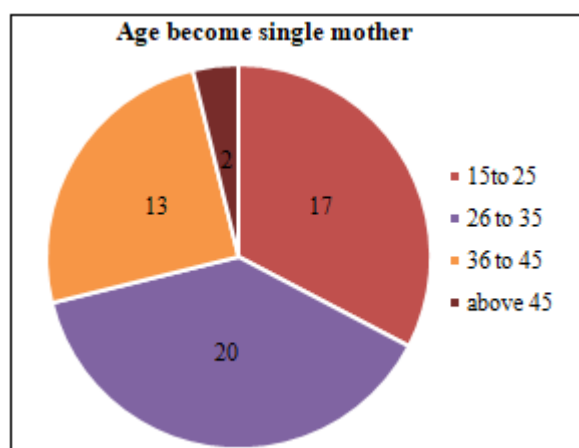
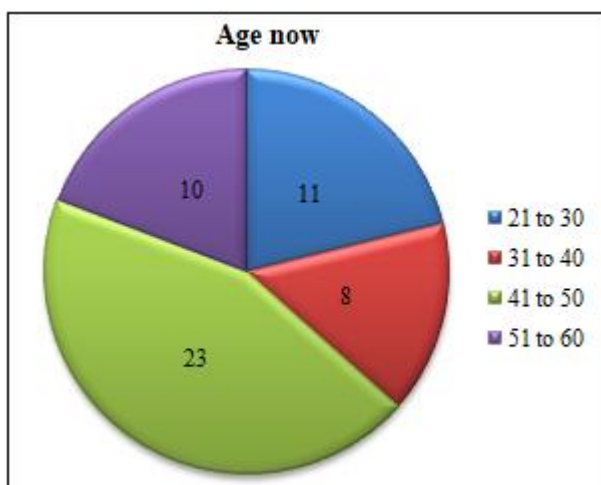
**Excerpt from Participant3**

She got a child at the age of 25 years and her husband left when the child became 9 years old. She believes that it was a disgrace for her and a time of deep sorrow and shame.

Friends and neighbors used hard words to put her down and she had a stigma. She was also rejected by her family almost for a year soon after the separation. Her parents were scolding her. She was broken and had to look for a job to take care of the child and her needs. She was psychologically and mentally affected due to humiliation and harsh comments from her relatives, friends, and neighbors. These people looked at her as a loose woman. Though it was culturally common in Guyana's society, it was difficult to accept. She strongly believes that her partner had no real love and only used her for his own pleasure.

#### Excerpt from Participant4

A thirty - two - year - old participant had a lot of struggles. She had unbearable problems with the partner and he challenged her to take a radical step to become a single mother. "It was not an easy, but a hard life inevitable decision but made it". She had to provide supplies, school expenses, and other basic needs for the three kids. She never allowed her kids to go hungry. This hard - working woman found a job to run the family. Her husband was abusive, addicted, alcoholic, fighting, and drinking, and did not at all have any respect or responsibility for the family. She suffered a lot of mental struggles and traumas. Socially, she herself felt no shame, no problem, no embarrassment in such kind of a situation. Her family was supportive and welcomed her decision.



#### Excerpt from Participant5

"Put me out" is a painful struggle in life. Drinking and abusing of her husband made life miserable for her with

worries of her children and their life, and she hired a small room to live. Working in a tobacco estate was a bit of consolation for her and it helped her meet the house running expenses and educational expenses of her children. She as a very hard - working woman did not only 12 hours of work but some overtime work to meet the basic needs of her family's expenses. Another consolation for her was her parents' and brothers' moral support. Well - formed children grew up with their mother.

## 8. Discussion

Single motherhood is increasing as modernization take place in the world. It is evident in European countries. "In 1991, although 30.2% of all births in England and Wales were out of wedlock compared to 11.8% in 1980, the proportion of such births registered by both parents rose from 50% to 74% in 1991. Moreover, more than half of these 'out of wedlock' births were registered by both parents living at the same address. Even when this *was* recognized, it was argued that co - habiting couples shouldn't expect to be treated as 'single' recipients of state aid".<sup>1</sup> Single mothers are confronted with many challenges regarding the combination of work and family life. The work environment often fails to be family - friendly, while the aspirations of mothers in their parenthood role often demand a high investment. Therefore, single mothers are prone to find themselves in a conflicted work - family situation.

"The researcher gathered from the interviews that the single mothers were happy to be able to single - handedly bring up their children despite all the challenges that they faced. They seemed to imbibe a lot of confidence and their experiences have made them aware of the strengths that they actually possessed. "There was frustration felt on the part of the mothers when their child would question the absence of a father during specific events or situations. The problems related to the absence of fathers in children's lives and role overload is also found in three of the existing literatures (Cakir., 2010; Hamid, Salleh., 2013; Keswet, Dapas., 2010) ".<sup>10</sup>

"Globally, the trend on single motherhood has taken a geometric increase curve. A change in the family structure from the conventional pattern of two parents to a single one has been identified (Landau and Griffiths, 2007). This is attributable to the anticipated effects of modernization, civilization and globalization as the world has evolved into a global village sharing information, values and culture (Kang'ethe, 2014a). Cultural erosion in Africa and an espousal of a Western lifestyle have corroded the ligament that distinguished Africans from non - Africans. Landau and Griffiths' findings are also supported by Dlamini (2006) who reveal the following unsettling statistics of children living with their mothers: South Africa (34.4%), Namibia (27.3%) and Zimbabwe (26.3%) ".<sup>7</sup>

"There is a good deal of similarity in parenting practices across countries and between couples. They also suggest that varying levels of parental behavioral control may be used in conjunction with high levels of warmth as a child rearing strategy among Guyanese and Trinidadian families and call

into question the general characterization of Caribbean parents as authoritarian and harsh".<sup>9</sup>

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of a single parent is challenging when she alone manages the family. Single mothers in Guyana faced social and economic difficulties to look after their life and children. The emotional life of the single mother affected their personal life. All the collected data shows that a single mother is a bread - earning person in the family despite the many challenges she faces. They have continuously gone through many tensions in life. 76.92% of Mothers teach their children discipline and the children obey their mother in the absence of their father when they nurture the children. Among the participants, 69.23% of mothers find a job to meet their financial needs. The biggest challenge is financial responsibility as a single mother with 63.46%. Single mothers need to have counseling to receive consolation in their life. It is important to get a job and support their family and try to be sustainable financially. They need to get time for relaxing and socializing for better mental health.

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