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PARENTING PRACTICES, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND CHILDREN EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF SINGLE AND MARRIED WORKING MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was carried out to compare the perceived parenting practices, family environment, and children's emotional problems of single and coupled working mothers in Lahore, Pakistan.

Place and duration of the study: The study was carried out at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, from January to October 2019.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Sample and Method: 50 coupled and 35 single working mothers ages between 26-55 years, having at least one child of age 6-15 years were selected through the purposive sampling technique. The recruited samples mean age was found to be 37.68 and Standard deviation was 7.25. A Demographic Information Sheet, Parenting Practices Questionnaire, Child Emotional Problem Questionnaire, and Family Environment Questionnaire were administered to assess study objectives.

Results and Conclusion: Coupled mothers scored high on measures of the family environment than their counterparts. Whereas single mothers significantly scored high on measures of parental practices. Furthermore, results also demonstrated that single working mothers feel more rejected as compared to coupled mothers. On the other hand, single working mothers use distressful and disciplined parenting practices to rear their children.

Findings suggest the need for awareness of the importance and significance of family environment, exercise of parenting practices, and regularly monitoring and managing children's emotions

Keywords: Working Mothers; Parenting Practices; Family Environment; Children; Emotional Problems.

INTRODUCTION

The central and most prominent figure in any family is the mother, on whom the family depends on many responsibilities, particularly child development. Her prime responsibility is to take care of her children, rear them well, make wise decisions, and make them responsible and productive in life. Every mother tries to bring up her child as a productive member of society. However, achieving the goal is not an easy job (Honig, 2002).

Insufficient child care options are a substantial barrier for working mothers, specifically single working mothers (Cattan, 1991). For many decades, it has been widely documented that families with single mothers suffer the consequences of less social support, parental supervision and attention, and fewer finances to manage their lives. Single working mothers are burdened with many conflicts, including long and rigid working hours, staying away from home, staying fatigued, and preoccupied with work responsibility. They are usually irritable from work to family and family to work (Pleck, 1985). As the number of single-mother families increases, maternal employment has also increased over the past few years. In recent literature, the impact of employment and family setup on single mothers' children's well-being has the focus of attention. Several studies have suggested the impact of family structure and parental characteristics on children's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Anderson, 2014; Kumar, Kroon & Laloo, 2014; Lee & McLanahan, 2015; Morris, Criss, Silk & Houlberg, 2017).

According to the literature, mothers' employment and their psychological functioning depend on their marital status. Studies have found that single mothers with employment do not feel reduced stress than married working mothers despite the increase in their income. Single mothers being the guardians of their children and the only family income source, may have to experience high-stress levels because of multiple responsibilities (Taylor & Conger, 2017). In continuation, the relationship between maternal employment and home/ family environment depends on the mother's role and ability to maintain balance. Though suggested by work theories, work experiences can affect parents' emotional well-being, influencing their family environment. Literature also suggests that a mother's employment can significantly impact her family's atmosphere by limiting the time she spends with her children, monitoring them (Heinrich, 2014).

Past literature asserts that single working mothers may likely increase their stress, guilt, depression, and anxiety, resulting in less organized, less emotionally warm, and more demanding parenting practices than married working mothers (Lian & Tam, 2014). Moreover, single mothers are believed to create dysfunctional children and families, are challenged, bear at a more significant socio-economic disadvantage (Whitehead & Holland, 2003), tend to be more insecure emotionally, and use a more authoritarian parenting style than married mothers (Pinquart, 2017) (2017). Child-rearing is continuously compromised due to the time spent working to support children in single-mother families (Kendig & Bianchi, 2008). Single mothers who are frequently under stress engage in more ineffective parenting than married counterparts (Segal & Wozner, 2005).

It is believed that both parents' families provide a more stable family environment to their children than single mothers as both parents assist each other in their children's upbringing. Further, coupled rather than single parenting increases the probability of positive rearing and growth (Bauserman, 2002). Literature suggests that the experiences of children growing in intact families are different. It also suggests how differences in family structure affect children's emotions and behaviors. Single parents and their children have to face several challenges. Depending upon circumstances, children may be beset with feelings of rejection, abandonment, entitlement, and self-blame (Healthy place, 2014).

A Pakistani single mother has to suffer a lot of bashing and pressures as compared to coupled mothers. They are forced to go for second marriage because of the perception of not bringing up their children single-handed. In Pakistani society, taking care of children alone and bearing their expenses is not an easy task without having a well-paid job. A single mother is expected to be capable enough to perform household, office, and children duties. Though literature is available on coupled and single working mothers from the West, the local context lacks literature than single and coupled working mothers concerning the discussed variables. Therefore, the present study was carried out to have a comparative analysis of the perceived family environment, parental practices, and emotional problems of children of Pakistani single and coupled working mothers with their Children's Emotional Problems in Lahore, Pakistan.

The objectives of the study were to compare the family environment, parental practices, and children emotional problems of single and coupled working mothers. Based on the literature review, it was hypothesized that, there would be

a significant difference in a perceived family environment, parenting practices, and emotional problems in children of coupled and single working mothers.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 50 coupled and 35 single (further distributed as widow = 7, divorced = 20, & separated=8) working mothers age ranging from 26 to 55 (Mage=37.68, SD= 7.25). Participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques from academic and banking domains as these two are the most common domains served by working mothers.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

To control the study confounding variable, specific inclusion/ exclusion criteria were also devised.

Working married and single mothers were included in this study with following characteristics;

1. Have at least one child of grade 4 and above, ranging in age from 6-15.
2. The minimum education of mother was masters
3. The coupled mothers are not married more than once.
4. In single mothers, only those mothers were selected who are divorced, widow, or separated and bearing the expenses of their child alone and rearing them in the absence of their fathers.

Working married and single mothers were excluded from the study if;

1. Psychologically disturbed or diagnosed.
2. Seeking psychiatric treatment.
3. Financially supported by their families.
4. The child whose behavior they had to rate was special or having other significant psychological problem.
5. Working mothers having a part-time job along with a regular job were also excluded.

Measures

Informed Consent Form

This form carried information about the study's purpose, and the participants were informed and requested for their voluntary participation. The form also included the participant's written agreement to participate in the study. Participants were also assured that no physical, psychological or social harms are associated with the study.

Demographic Information Form

It included basic demographics of the sample, including the age of mother and child, birth order and gender of the child who is rated, academic qualification of mother, job specification, years of marriage, marital status, years of separation in case of a single mother, family setup, number of children, number of siblings, and monthly income of mother.

Parenting Practices Scale (PPS; Strayhorn & Weidman, 1988)

It was developed by Strayhorn and Weidman (1988) and translated by Anjum and Malik (2002) in the Urdu Language. PPS contains 44 items with a four-point rating scale ranging from always=4, often=3, sometimes=2 to never=1. This scale consists of four subscales; (i) warmth/ involvement, (ii)- harsh/physical punishment, (iii)- appropriate/consistent discipline, and (iv)- distressing / bullying that specify domains of parenting practices. The item-total correlation of measure is .36, Cronbach's alpha coefficient 0.78. Moreover, Test-retest reliability is 0.79.

Family Environment Scale (Moos, Insel & Humphrey, 1974)

This scale is developed by Moos, Insel and Humphrey (1974) and translated by Irfan and Kausar (2002) in Urdu. It consists of 68 items measuring responses in dichotomous options, Yes or No. It contains three basic subscales that cover further dimensions; (1) relationship dimension which includes (a) cohesion 0.92, (b) expressiveness 0.88, (c) conflict 0.84 and (d) acceptance and caring 0.86. The second dimension is 'Personal growth', which includes (a) independence 0.70 and (b) active recreational orientation 0.48. The third

dimension is system maintenance, including (a) Organization 0.75 and (b) Control 0.48. The overall test reliability coefficient is .95.

Emotional and Behavioral Problem Questionnaire

This scale developed by Saleem and Mehmood (2011) covers six different factors covering school-going children's emotional and behavioral problems. (a) anxiety (b) Academic Achievement (c) Aggression (d) withdrawal Symptoms (e) feeling of rejection and (f) Somatic Complains. It consists of 44 items. Test-retest reliability is .79, and split-half reliability is 0.89.

Procedure

At the first brief introduction to research was given, and permission was taken from the director of the institutes and heads of the concerned departments. After the approval, both coupled and single working mothers were approached. They were provided with the informed consent form for their verbal and written permission of voluntary participation in the study. Participants responded to the self-administered Demographic Information sheet, Parenting Practices Scale, Family Environment Scale, and Emotional Problem Questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistic was applied to determine frequencies, mean and standard deviation of demographic variables. An independent sample t-test was applied to find out differences between coupled and single working mothers among variables. Data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS; V. 21).

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was taken from participants, and they had the right to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. The scales taken for the study were used after ensuring permission was granted by their authors. Permission was already granted for use for educational purposes. Before conducting the study, it was approved by the Ethical Review Board, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus.

RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the Sample (N = 85)

Variables	<i>Coupled Working Mothers (n = 50)</i>		<i>Single Working Mothers (n = 50)</i>	
	Percentage		Percentage	
	Frequency		Frequency	
Education Level				
Undergraduate	3	16	6.0	45.7
Post Graduate	47	19	94.0	54.3
Family Setup				
Joint	29	12	58	34.3
Nuclear	21	23	42	65.7
Birth Order				
First	13	11	26	31.4
Middle	27	19	54	54.3
Last	10	5	20	14.3
Socio-economic Status				
Lower	11	7	22	20
Middle	13	23	26	65.8
Upper	26	5	52	14.2

Table 2
Mean difference between coupled and single working mothers on their family environment (N=85)

Variables	Marital status	N	M	SD	T	df	P
Cohesion	Married	50	44.52	5.07	2.10	83	.04*
	Single	35	41.77	6.96			
Acceptance & caring	Married	50	41.04	4.89	2.00	83	.05*
	Single	35	38.66	6.06			
Active recreational orientation	Married	50	29.18	3.99	2.29	83	.03*
	Single	35	26.71	5.91			

Independence	Married	50	29.96	3.80	2.01	83	.05*
	Single	35	28.23	4.06			
Control	Married	50	16.02	1.87	2.67	83	.01**
	Single	35	14.49	3.39			
Expressiveness	Married	50	30.36	8.49	.80	83	.43
	Single	35	29.14	3.63			
Conflict	Married	50	43.18	6.79	1.62	83	.11
	Single	35	40.54	8.15			
Organization	Married	50	7.52	1.42	1.45	83	.15
	Single	35	6.91	2.43			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 3

Mean difference between coupled and single working mothers on their Parenting Practices (N=85)

Variables	Marital Status	N	M	SD	T	df	p
Warmth/Involvement	Married	50	21.94	2.39	3.33	83	.00**
	Single	35	19.51	4.29			
Harsh/Physical Punishment	Married	50	6.58	1.37	-	83	.25
	Single	35	7.11	2.85	1.15		
Distress & bullying	Married	50	7.34	2.86	-	83	.00**
	Single	35	10.63	5.69	3.50		
Appropriate discipline	Married	50	9.12	2.71	-	83	.00**
	Single	35	11.69	4.52	3.26		

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Mean difference between married and single working mothers on their children's Emotional Problems (N=85)

Variables	Marital status	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Anxiety	Married	50	11.86	6.65	-1.03	83	.31
	Single	35	13.31	6.03			
Academic Achievement	Married	50	8.26	4.47	-.52	83	.61
	Single	35	8.80	5.12			
Aggression	Married	50	11.66	5.13	.27	83	.79
	Single	35	11.31	6.72			

Withdrawal	Married	50	5.36	3.43	-1.50	83	.14
Symptoms	Single	35	6.57	3.96			
Feeling	of Married	50	3.74	3.26	-2.12	83	.03*
Rejection	Single	35	5.37	3.52			
Somatic	Married	50	3.20	2.21	-1.06	83	.29
Complaints	Single	35	3.80	3.00			

* $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Findings suggest significant differences between coupled and single working mothers (see table 2). According to findings, with respect to family environment coupled mothers have a high level of cohesion with partners by their side and show more support, affection, and care, give their children acceptance and engage them in active recreational orientation. Father's direct interaction with the children, availability, and arrangement of resources for his child lowers the mother's burden, making her less prone to child-rearing stress and many other emotional problems. In line with this, the empirical evidences that fathers play a significant role in the development of their children's literacy skills by engaging them in intellectual discussions and encouraging their children to read more books (Saracho, 2007). Fathers also have substantial influence on their children's health and development as they get involved in their children across childhood ages (Yogman & Garfield, 2016), and also in the development of Executive Functioning of their children (Meuwissen & Carlson, 2015). Due to such supporting role of father in the rearing of children coupled working mothers enjoy more freedom, independence, and more control towards their family members than single working mothers. The family environment constitutes the basis where a child's development occurs, and the parent's role is primarily to prepare children for adulthood through rules and discipline. This can be done appropriately when both parents have involved in upbringing the children compared to single-mother families where the mother cannot keep the family environment more positive dealing and abide by the rules and discipline, with several pressures and stressors in the absence of the father.

Our findings suggest that coupled working mothers show more warmth and involvement, including sympathy and kindness in their parenting practices compared to single working mothers (see table 3). On the other hand, single mothers show more distressing behavior towards their children. This highlights the negative aspect of single mother parenting, forcing their children to do the

task without knowing their wishes and desires. In order to deal with the pressure of bringing up their children single mothers also use harsh, and consistent parenting style than coupled working mothers. There is contradictory literature available on single and coupled working mothers' parenting practices depending on the country's culture, society, and available resources in which the study was conducted. A study conducted in the UK found marital status to have no significant relationship with parenting styles employed in bringing up the children (Ashiono & Mwoma, 2015). Studies carried out in South Africa also found no significant relationship between single and married mothers' parenting styles. On the contrary, Aronson and Huston (2004) suggested that single mothers more likely engage in harsh, inconsistent, and unsupportive parenting practices. They also suggested that single working mothers do not interact with their children in a stimulating and nurturing manner. A study conducted in Pakistan suggests that single mother's children perceive their parents as authoritarian and had more alienated attachment with them, however, children living with both parents had more trust and better communication with their parents (Idrees, Zahra, & Naeem, 2020). Pakistani coupled working mothers also showed more positive parenting practices than single mothers whose parenting practices are more harsh, distressing, and bullying types. In our culture, married mothers are more socially, emotionally, and financially secure than single mothers. The mixed results from the literature review might result from socio-cultural differences between the locations of studies.

Children living in intact families with biological parents are said to have positive well-being and are healthier than children who belong to broken families. These children have more access to economic and community resources as both parents provide their time, love, energy, and money. The family environment of intact families is more favorable than single-parent families, where parents are more involved in their children's life. Children are best in a two-parent family where the environment is stable, parents are well adjusted, and have developed specific rules and routines for the home. When children are raised in a coupled family, their chances of facing poverty are reduced.

On the other hand, children in a single-parent family have to suffer several conflicts. They have to go through adjustment problems at home and school, a sense of loss of a protector and guide, anxiety, aggression, feelings of rejection, and anti-social behavior (40 Facts About Two-Parent Families, 2019). Table 3 shows that children of Pakistani single and coupled mothers show the difference in their rejection among all other emotional problems, including

anxiety, aggression, and withdrawal symptoms. It means that single mothers' children feel more rejected by their mothers than children of coupled working mothers. They are linking the emotional problem of children with the family environment and parenting practices. Thus, it can be concluded that single mothers' children might suffer feelings of rejection because of their unhealthy family environment, bullying, and distressing parenting practices. Malik, Ashraf, Irshad, and Nasira (2012) also concluded from their study that single parenting might be related to higher degrees of stress, depression, and anxiety among parents and contribute to childhood emotional and behavior problems.

Limitations and Recommendation

There are a few limitations to the study documented with suggestions for future research. Firstly, small sample size as the data consisted of only 35 working single and 50 coupled mothers with school-going children aged 6 to 15. Due to time constraints, and limited resources, the sample size could not be increased, and data was collected through non-probability sampling. The study's findings cannot be generalized to the entire Pakistani population because it is collected from one city only i.e. Lahore. For future research, it is suggested that samples should be gathered through probability sampling from every province of Pakistan to increase the generalizability of results. Similar studies can be carried out in the future with other demographic variables not only on single and married mothers but also on single father families to know the dynamics of such families and their children's well-being. Exploring such families' dynamics can be very helpful in the case formulation and selection of appropriate intervention in family therapies.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, coupled working mothers have a more positive family environment and parenting practices than single working mothers. On the other hand, single working mothers use distressful and disciplined parenting practices to rear their children, who suffer from feelings of rejection. This study will help clinical psychologists plan clinical interventions and awareness workshops for single working mothers and their children, as most single mothers and their children suffer from psychological problems.

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