

Mental Health and Work-Life Harmony among Single Mothers

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Abstract: Single mothers frequently have to deal with several aspects of work, child care, household management and financial security, which can be quite demanding emotionally and psychologically. This study explores the mental health and work-life harmony of a single mother and the difficulties she faces in her life as she attempts to balance work and family responsibilities. Mental health is addressed in aspects of emotional health, stress, anxiety, and psychological resilience, while work-life harmony is discussed in the context of role balance, flexibility, satisfaction and the integration of work and family roles. Excessive workload, small social support networks, financial constraints, expectations of work and the lack of time for personal needs were all identified as factors that could have a detrimental effect on the psychological health of single mothers. Meanwhile, positive work policies, flexible working options, childcare support, family support and coping mechanisms may help to improve work-life balance. The study aims to identify what helps boost the well-being of single mothers and make it easier for them to function in all their roles. The results will be used to inform debates about inclusive workplace practices and social support systems for single mothers. The study emphasizes the importance of employers, families, communities, and policy-makers working together and coming to a consensus in promoting mental health and work-life balance.

Keywords: Mental Health, Work-Life Harmony, Single Mothers, Psychological Well-being, Work-Family Balance, Social Support, Workplace Flexibility

1. Introduction

Today the topic of mental health and work-life balance has become a growing concern in society, especially for women with significant family responsibilities and also working in a job. Single mothers frequently face a unique array of personal, social, economic and occupational issues among these. Often, they must take the place of a partner in the roles of provisioning for the family, raising children, organizing household activity, and making key decisions for the family. This often leads to significant stress and can affect their emotional health, satisfaction at work, family dynamics and life quality.

Work-life harmony is the capacity of an individual to handle his/her work and personal lives in a way that enables them to co-exist with a reasonable level of balance and satisfaction. Single mums are often more likely to struggle to find balance as their responsibilities to work, children, household and themselves can all be competing priorities. As a result of these stresses, some single mothers may feel emotionally exhausted, anxious, stressed, lonely, less confident in self, feeling unwell with others, and other emotional problems.

Psychological well-being is closely linked to how a person does in the face of demands and challenges that occur in the course of their day. Single Mothers' psychological health may also demand that they have a supportive work environment, child care, family and friends, financial stability and social networks. A positive work environment, flexible working arrangements, understanding supervisors and supportive colleagues can contribute to minimizing pressure in the job, allowing mothers to balance work and family responsibilities. Conversely, certain kinds of discrimination at work, overwork, the need to be on call 24/7, and lack of leave can cause psychological stress.



However, the experiences of single mothers also differ by their employment status, their income, their educational attainment, the number and ages of their children, social support, and working conditions. Therefore, from an individual as well as a societal/organisational level, it is important to assess their mental health and work-life balance. Appropriateness of workplace practices and social support mechanisms which reflect the needs of single-parent families is relevant in understanding these factors.

In this backdrop, the present study is more concerned with mental health and work-life harmony of single mothers. It aims to gain insight into the psychological difficulties faced in the management of work and family life, and to explore the factors that can enrich and/or impede the balance between the two. Study will be important due to the positive repercussion of improved health of single mothers on the health of their children, workplaces and communities. The study can raise awareness of their lived experiences and the levels of support required can inform policies and practice in the workplace which are more inclusive and supportive of their psychological wellbeing and quality of life.

2. Background of the study

Mental wellness is becoming an essential part of an individual's health and wellness, particularly in case he has numerous reasons behind him. Within various family groups, single mothers may experience some unique emotional, social, financial and occupational stressors. Single mothers may have to be responsible for child care, housework, work, money, and their personal hygiene, among other things, with little assistance. These roles are mutually dependent, and can negatively affect their mental health and their ability to enjoy a positive work-life balance.

Also single parenthood may be a result of divorce, separation, widowhood or any other reason, and each of these circumstances could be experienced differently by women. However, there are some regular problems encountered by single mothers, which are financial stability, childcare, societal roles, time management. It's a heavy burden when it comes to providing a place for kids to grow up in, a place that is safe, educated and emotionally healthy. Fatigue, emotional stress, anxiety, lack of personal time and relationship problems are some of the potential problems that mothers may face when their work needs and family commitments are competing for their time and energy.

Work-life balance used to be a matter of a person being able to perform his or her tasks and fulfill his or her family obligations at the same time without neglecting one while prioritizing the other. But work-life harmony is a more encompassing concept. Achieving work-life harmony is not necessarily working half the day, taking a break for the rest of the day; it is about the opportunity to connect the different roles of life in a meaningful and sustainable way. Good time management, supportive work environments, secure childcare, flexibility at work, financial security and social support are all important factors for single mothers to achieve this balance.

There is a close relationship between mental health and work-life harmony. Psychological stress can be harmful if related to chronic work stress, excessive work hours, low job security, low organizational support, and/or family related stress. In the meantime, the low mood may have a negative impact on concentration, motivation, productivity and the capacity to carry out normal activities. This can create a negative spiral whereby issues in one aspect can exacerbate issues in another. Thus, in order to develop an adequate support for single mothers (should they wish to have one), it is important to be cognizant of this interaction.

The family and the role of women in the family have also changed as woman has become more involved in paid employment. While a job can be a source of financial stability, social engagement, professional identity and fulfillment, it can also add to stress if there are insufficient support mechanisms. Single mothers may be more prone to role overload since the workload is likely to be in one family. Flexibility, parental support, reasonable working hours and understanding supervisors are therefore important workplace policies that can help to minimize work-family pressures.

The other important variable that affects the welfare of single moms is social support. Practical and emotional support and help to reduce feelings of isolation can be provided by friends, family members, colleagues, community

groups and employers. Psychological stress may on the other hand be aggravated by social stigma, social misunderstanding and access to unreliable support. Financial insecurity also plays a significant role as it can raise worries regarding housing, education, healthcare, childcare and other basic household requirements.

The experiences of single mothers are not only defined by their employment and family duties, but also by social and cultural norms related to motherhood and women's roles in the Indian context. Preconceived notions can leave the burden of childcare and home maintenance on women even in the case of a working woman. This contributes to the stresses that single mothers may experience not only in the workplace and at home but in regards to social acceptance, family expectations, and children's health. In the social and economic environment they live in, their experiences should be taken into account.

Though the experiences of women at work are beginning to receive recognition, these experiences of single mothers need to be given more attention. Categorising women might fail to recognise the specific burdens on women who are primarily responsible for running their households. By conducting a targeted evaluation of mental health and how the work-life balance may be impacting the single mom, we can broaden our understanding of issues that may be occurring and what could support a healthier single mom.

Therefore, the present study entitled “Mental Health and Work-Life Harmony among Single Mothers” is aimed at examining the relationship between mental health and work life harmony of single mothers. The importance of the study is that it may provide employers, policy makers, social groups and families with information regarding more flexible support structures. Addressing mental health and work-life balance among single mothers can not only enhance their well-being, but also help foster healthier family relationships, engagement in the workplace and social and economic benefits to the single mother.

Justification

Single mothers are likely to have many roles to fulfil, such as those of a mother, housekeeper, worker, financial manager, and health care provider. These requirements may generate significant emotional and psychological stress especially when other support systems such as social, monetary and working are not in place. While work-life balance has increased in importance in modern research, the experiences of single mothers need to be examined more deeply, as their family and work obligations are likely not to be fulfilled in a partnership.

Mental health is a significant part of wellbeing and can impact a person's ability to undertake activities and live life to the full, manage responsibilities, maintain relationships and deal with the day-to-day challenges. Single mothers often experience anxiety, emotional exhaustion, feelings of loneliness and diminished life satisfaction due to chronic stress at work, related to income, maintaining childcare duties, societal norms, and having less personal time. The demands of family and career life can negatively affect mental health and create a vicious circle where stressors in one life domain can affect the other.

Work-life harmony isn't simply about dividing up the time between work and personal life. It's a matter of realizing a viable and meaningful interconnection of the spheres of life. This balance can be especially difficult for single mothers to create, as work and family life go hand-in-hand. Understanding how these women deal with and react to the competing demands may provide valuable insights on factors that facilitate or hinder their health.

The present study is therefore justified because of the need to analyze the relationship between mental health and work life harmony of single mothers. The results can be used to detect main stressors, work and family stress management issues, and what factors can help promote better and more sustainable lives. The study may also offer helpful suggestions to employers, families and family support programmes, social organisations, and policy makers for creating flexible working arrangements, childcare support, counselling services, etc., that meet the needs of single mothers. The study aims to make a contribution to the understanding of this group, which is under-represented in psychological research literature, in light of their psychological well-being and their attempts to find a balance between occupational and personal duties.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the general mental health of single mothers in terms of their personal, family and occupational responsibilities.
2. To explore the work-life balance of single mothers and how they cope with work and family demands.
3. Identify key issues that affect the mental health of single mothers such as workload, money responsibilities, social support, childcare responsibilities and workplace conditions.
4. To examine the correlation of work-life harmony with mental health of single mothers.
5. To investigate the relationship between occupational stress/load and psychological health of single mothers.

3. Literature Review

The fields of mental health and work-life harmony are significant areas of research due to the fact that single moms are often balancing paid work, childcare, home duties and finances without much assistance. There is mixed evidence regarding the link between employment and psychological well-being of single mothers, as highlighted in the literature. Employment can offer financial independence and social identity and sense of achievement, whereas work conditions, lack of child care, financial insecurity and competing family responsibilities may add to psychological strain.

Turner (2007) studied the association between employment, chronic stress and psychological distress among 508 U.S. rural single mothers. The study illustrated that employment might have a protective and a stressful aspect. The financial, childcare and rural-residence related stress levels of employed single mothers were lower than those of unemployed mothers. Results suggest that the concept of work being a source of stress is too narrow, as stable and supportive employment is also a potential source for enhanced well-being through the alleviation of economic stress.

Dziak, Janzen, and Muhajarine (2010) examined the psychological factors, financial strain, work-family conflict, and psychosocial aspects of work quality of employed single and partnered mothers and found that single mothers were more likely to experience psychological distress, financial hardship, work-family conflict and poorer psychosocial work quality. Importantly, differences in income adequacy, psychosocial work quality, and work-family conflict significantly accounted for the association between single-mother status and psychological distress. Their conclusions illustrate that family structure is not the only factor to consider when looking at mental health: employment conditions and economic circumstances also play a big role.

Mosley and Robinson (2018) conducted a systematic review of literature about the work-family interface of single mothers and pointed out that there had been relatively little research into the work-family interface of partnered mothers. The review concluded that the unique circumstances of working alone as a mother might lead to different problems for the mother who works alone in balancing work and family duties, as she has fewer opportunities to share childcare and household tasks with another adult. Robinson said there was a need to do more research on the experience of Robinson's sole mothers in the paid labor force and not extrapolate findings from partnered working mothers.

In the systematic review done by van den Berg and colleagues on the impact of lone parenting on health, well-being and welfare-to-work experiences, the importance of childcare and work conditions becomes evident. The review identified that work demands often conflicted with childcare duties and low paying and insecure work were linked to stress, fatigue and depressive experiences. Meanwhile, job opportunities and suitable training might boost self-esteem. Social support was found to be an important determinant that could help lone parents to cope with work-related conflict and increase their feelings of control.

The study of work-family conflict has begun to spread in the literature, and work-family conflict has been recognized as an important pathway between the demands in work and mental health. Liu et al. conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies with over 112,000 individuals in 2026. The researchers discovered that WFC was correlated with depressive symptoms, burnout and overall psychological distress, and FWC was

correlated with depressive symptoms and burnout as well. The results support the notion that the problems experienced in balancing work and family roles may impact psychological health beyond the experience of stress.

Research on family side of work-family conflict was summarized by Reimann et al. (2022), who highlighted that family demands and family circumstances play an important role as antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict. Their review shows that it is important to look at work-family relationships in both directions – work can affect family life and family life can affect experiences at work. This is especially important for single mothers, as childcare and household duties may be focused in one parent home.

The review of psychosocial factors influencing single mothers' health in the Indian context also concluded that some critical factors were financial constraints, lack of social support, emotional stress, and psychological issues. Sharma & colleagues (2024) reviewed 80 studies and found that single mothers often face multiple psychosocial stressors at the same time, and have to employ various coping mechanisms. The Indian context is of importance as the norms and expectations of the society, economic dependence, family structure and support systems may influence the experiences of single mothers differently from what is reported in the West.

It can also be seen that in the literature, social support acts as an important protective resource. The studies on lone parents indicate that supportive relationships can buffer against the detrimental impact of work-related conflict through heightened sense of control and working with children. Work-life harmony, therefore, should not be thought of as a personal skill set in managing time but also as a factor of organizational flexibility, childcare availability, financial security, family support and other social factors.

Overall, the results of previous studies have demonstrated the meaningful relationships between single parenthood, employment circumstances, work-family conflict, and mental health. There are, however, a few gaps that still exist. Most of the previous studies have focused on psychological distress, psychological stress or work-family conflict, and not on mental health and work-life harmony. In addition, there is limited research on single mothers specifically in India. It could be beneficial to explore the mental health impact of single mothers and how variables like financial security, workload, working hours, childcare responsibilities, perceived work-life balance, flexibility, and social support in the workplace affect it. Filling these gaps could lay the ground for creating policies and social support structures in the workplace that foster psychological and employment sustainability.

4. Material and Methodology

The study titled “Mental Health and Work-Life Harmony Among Single Mothers” used a quantitative research method to explore the correlation between psychological health and work-life harmony of the single mothers. The study concentrated on single mothers who had a paid job and were in charge of caring for and bringing up their children. The design of the study used was descriptive and analytical research to understand the mental health of the respondents, experiences of work, family responsibilities and the perception of work-life harmony. The method of data collection used for primary data was the structured questionnaire that was prepared based on the objectives of the study and the pertinent dimensions from previous academic publications. Items were presented that addressed emotional well-being, stress, work pressure, fatigue, social support, job demands, family responsibilities, and work/family balance. The questions were answered on a Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Purposive sampling was used to select the eligible respondents as per the specified criteria of the study which involves the single mothers, single parent as at when they have at least one dependent child and they are working. The gathered responses were thoroughly screened for accuracy and uniformity before analysis. Demographic characteristics and major study variables were summarized using descriptive statistical techniques which included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The association between mental health and work-life harmony was examined and whether the mental health-related factors significantly affected the respondents' perception of work-life harmony was investigated with appropriate inferential techniques such as correlation and regression analysis. All participants would have been kept anonymous and confidential throughout the analysis process. Respondents were given information about the general purpose of the research before answering and participation was voluntary. The findings have not been presented in such a way as to include personally identifying information. The methodology was conceived to give a

systematic view of the problems faced by single mothers and what factors might contribute to healthier and more sustainable professional/family integration.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results:

The research focused on mental health and work-life balance among single mothers and the challenges they face in fulfilling their employment roles, caring for their children, running their households, dealing with financial matters and having little free time. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. The findings offer an insight into the relationship of various components of work-life harmony with psychological well-being of single mothers.

Table 1. Mental Health Status of Single Mothers

Mental Health Indicator	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Emotional well-being	18.5	52.0	29.5
Perceived stress	27.0	48.5	24.5
Anxiety management	22.5	50.0	27.5
Self-esteem	16.0	49.5	34.5
Psychological resilience	14.5	47.0	38.5
Overall mental health	19.0	51.5	29.5

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents (51.5%) reported having moderate overall mental health, and 29.5% had a high level of psychological well-being. Almost 20% of the respondents were in the low mental-health range. The concern on perceived stress was noteworthy, as 27.0% of the respondents reported low level of stress management and 48.5% were in the moderate category.

There is some degree of moderate stress seen in multiple factors, indicating that single mothers might be under further psychological strain as they learn "how to cope" with the responsibilities. The higher percentage of moderate self-esteem and psychological resilience suggests that the respondents have some strengths to cope with difficult situations. However, it is important to note that there are a significant number of people whose emotional health is less good and this is a reminder that there is a need for accessible support for psychological health, supportive policies, childcare and opportunities for social interaction.

Table 2. Work-Life Harmony Among Single Mothers

Work-Life Harmony Dimension	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Time available for family	24.0	47.5	28.5
Flexibility at workplace	29.5	45.0	25.5
Ability to manage household responsibilities	21.0	51.0	28.0
Personal/leisure time	35.0	43.5	21.5
Work-related workload management	27.5	49.0	23.5
Overall work-life harmony	26.5	49.5	24.0

Table 2 reveals that 49.5% of the respondents had a moderate overall level of work-life harmony, 26.5% a low level and 24.0% a high level. One of the lowest dimensions was personal and leisure time, where 35.0% of respondents indicated they had a low level. The result of this finding indicates that single mothers might often prioritize work and family over individual needs.

There was also only a moderate level of flexibility in the workplace, with 29.5% stating a low level of flexibility. Flexible working opportunities are important for single mothers, as they might be needed to take care of children when they are not school, and their duties at home might interfere with fixed working hours. Likewise, moderate scores on household responsibility management suggest that managing work and home responsibilities continues to be a challenge.

The findings indicate that the work-life harmony of single mothers should not be seen only within the context of the hours they work. It is also shaped by control of working time, childcare and workload, personal recovery and family support. Therefore, a positive work climate can not only benefit job performance, but also psychological wellness.

Table 3. Relationship Between Work-Life Harmony and Mental Health

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlation with Mental Health (r)	Regression Beta (β)	p-value
Family-time management	3.18	0.76	0.46**	0.21	<0.001
Workplace flexibility	3.05	0.81	0.51**	0.27	<0.001
Household responsibility management	3.14	0.73	0.43**	0.18	0.002
Personal/leisure time	2.82	0.88	0.48**	0.24	<0.001
Workload management	2.96	0.84	0.55**	0.31	<0.001
Overall work-life harmony	3.03	0.69	0.59**	—	<0.001

Note: $p < 0.01$.

Table 3 shows that there is positive and statistically significant relationship between work-life harmony and mental health. Overall work-life harmony was moderately strongly positively associated with mental health with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.59$ ($p < 0.001$). In operational terms, the more harmonious the relationships were for the respondents between employment and family responsibilities, the better the mental-health outcomes were.

Individual dimensions had the following correlations with mental health: workload management ($r = 0.55$), workplace flexibility ($r = 0.51$), and personal/leisure time ($r = 0.48$). The results suggest that the psychological effect of extra workloads in work could be significant for single mothers. As the workload increases and becomes challenging to balance with the caring for children and home, chances for rest and emotional recovery may diminish.

Additionally, the regression results demonstrated that individual factors significantly contributed to mental health with workload management contributing the highest ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, workplace flexibility made a significant contribution ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), and personal/leisure time contributed ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that interventions that alleviate the burden of unnecessary workload and give workers more control over their working times can help to achieve positive psychological outcomes.

5.2 Discussion:

Overall, the results suggest that mental health and work-life harmony are related for single mothers. The overall results are at a moderate level for both constructs, meaning that although most people report they're doing several tasks fairly, there is a large proportion of people who report high levels of stress. This can be expected, as single mothers typically are denied a comparable division of responsibilities in the home and are left to handle their own income, childcare, household and self-care.

The connection between workload control and mental health is fairly important and highlights the significance of the part of organizational situations. Emotional exhaustion can be exacerbated by long hours of work, high expectations, rigid work hours, and lack of rest. Conversely, when workloads are under-resourced, single mothers have ample opportunity to devote time to caring for their children and to their own rest and recovery, reducing psychological stress.

There was also a strong correlation between flexibility in the work place and mental health. Employees can have more control over competing responsibilities when flexible scheduling, hybrid work is possible, having family-friendly leave and supportive supervisors. These could be especially beneficial if there are uncertain situations with regards to childcare.

The other key findings are related to the amount of personal and leisure time available. Emotional stability can be found through rest, recreation, social interaction and self-care in individuals, which are sometimes overlooked in the focus on work and family care. The results accordingly indicate that work-life harmony is not meant to be interpreted as a balance between work and family. Instead, it is an individual who has enough control, support and flexibility to perform multiple roles and responsibilities without constant psychological strain.

The findings overall suggest that an enhancement of work-life harmony might be associated with better mental-health outcomes among single mothers. Complementary measures to boost childcare support, create flexibility, establish employee assistance programmes, support supervisory practices and alleviate unnecessary workload pressures can be undertaken by employers, policymakers and community organisations. These can help in creating a work environment for single mothers to support them in professional and family life and mental wellness.

6. Limitations of the study

The study titled “Mental Health and Work-Life Harmony among Single Mothers” has some limitations which need to be considered while interpreting the findings of the study. The fact that it is based on a limited sample size and that the participants' experiences can vary widely by age, education, occupation, income, number and age of children, family support, and place of residence are limitations of the study. The study makes use of the self-reported responses of the participants, and some participants may not have been inclined to share personal experiences about emotional wellbeing, stress, household duties or employment challenges, which could affect the accuracy of the results. Time can also impact the study—mental health/mental wellbeing and work-life harmony may shift over time, depending on opportunities offered at work, family dynamics, financial stress and significant life changes. In addition, the study gives a specific perspective on the experiences of single mothers in the area of the study and results may not be directly transferred to other single mothers in other regions, professions, or socioeconomic status. The study also predominantly addresses mental health and work-life harmony and does not necessarily reflect other factors that may influence this, such as workplace policies, availability of childcare and social support networks, organizational culture and community supports. Nevertheless, the findings of the study offer some useful insights into some of the issues encountered by single mothers and the importance of workplace and social support systems to their wellbeing.

7. Future Scope

Larger samples with more culturally diversified and geographically varied single mothers across the regions of the country etc., are recommended for future studies on mental health and work-life harmony issues. Deeper understanding of the longitudinal changes in mental health, employment, childcare, family support, financial

pressures, could be gained through longitudinal studies. Further studies could also look at the success of flexible working, parental leave, childcare policies, employee assistance programmes, counselling and workplace wellness policies on the overall well-being of single mothers. A comparative study of the work experiences of single mothers from the public, private, informal and self-employed sectors can be beneficial in determining differences in workplace issues and support networks. Future research may also examine how the use of digital work, working remotely, and the involvement of artificial intelligence in workplaces may either decrease or increase work-family pressures. More focus can be put on social support, resilience, coping mechanisms, workplace discrimination, work career, and financial security as they relate to work-life harmony. This research can inspire the development of inclusive policies within the workplace and community-based supports that recognize the needs of single mothers and the significance of their psychological wellbeing, economic self-sufficiency and contribute to their sustainable employment.

8. Conclusion

A mental health study conducted by the present researcher found that mental health and work-life harmony were felt by single mothers, which indicated the various complexities of the roles women have to undertake in relation to work, child rearing, household duties and self-care. The results suggest that it's possible for the constant juggling of work and family needs to lead to emotional fatigue, stress, anxiety, and challenges to balancing work and home. On the other hand, single mothers are very resilient, flexible and persistent in trying to balance all these multiple roles. Supportive work environments, flexible work arrangements, strong child care networks, reasonable workloads and understanding social networks can be a major factor in alleviating psychological stress and fostering a more balanced life at work. A workplace environment that acknowledges their unique needs can boost the emotional health, satisfaction, productivity and life satisfaction of single mothers. If mental health is to be improved amongst single mothers, it will require a multi-sectoral approach with the involvement of the employer, family, community and policy makers. There are ways for single moms to improve their knowledge and awareness, make mental health resources readily available, create family-friendly workplaces, and strengthen social supports, which can lead to a better life and better outcomes for their children.

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