

Challenges of Single Motherhood in Socio-Cultural Context: A Qualitative Study in Rural areas of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The growing number of divorces and separations induces the frequency of single mothers facing challenges in the mainstream socio-economic realities in Bangladesh. Past studies focused on structural aspects, economic hardship, and psychological issues of single mothers, mainly in the urban context. Nevertheless, the challenges in rural settings vary from urban single motherhood, and this aspect remains understudied. This qualitative narrative aims to analyse the challenges of single mothers in rural settings in Bangladesh. Twenty-eight in-depth interviews and ten key informant interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines. Thematic analysis identified four major themes of the rural single mothers' challenges, social, economic, cultural, and psychological, leading a single mother to become dependent on other family members or relatives. The underlying factor of the challenges was the deprivation of property, patriarchal social structure, and social stigma. Rural single mothers face more complex challenges than urban ones because of the lack of income opportunities, insecurity, and self-dependencies. Findings will contribute to recommending and formulating a policy for the single mother considering the local realities of the rural single mothers in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Single Mother; Rural Areas of Bangladesh; Patriarchy; Bangladesh

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Introduction

This study aims to chart the challenges single mothers face in rural Bangladesh. In this study, by single mothers, we refer to either divorcees, separated or widows. Over the past decades, single parenting has been increasing all over the world because of the higher rate of divorce and separation (Alvarado & del Carmen Vilchez, 2015). As a result, single parents brought up their children single-handedly without their partners' help. Similarly, widows, divorced women, and unmarried mothers are all examples of single mothers (Nahar et al., 2020). However, divorce is a significant factor for single motherhood, where the primary reasons for divorce are marital conflicts. Locally reports in Bangladesh suggest that 55.80% of women get divorced or separated from their husbands for matrimonial disputes such as extra-marital affairs, second marriage, and physical torture (Tajmim, 2019).

Similarly, in neighbouring countries, for instance, Pakistan, the primary reason for separation is also divorce. It is estimated that more than 100 cases of divorce are registered in family courts in Pakistan every day (Ali et al., 2019). Nevertheless, single-parent experiences, especially for women, are more complex than for men. A study identified that women are suffering more than men in terms of child-rearing alone (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2013). Globally, the number of single parents with children is 13%. In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of single mothers with children, which is 32% of the total population, and 84% of all women aged 18 to 60 have children younger than 15 in their households (Crabtree & Kluch, 2020).

Moreover, in the United States (U.S.), out of about 11 million single-parent families with children under 18, 80% were headed by single mothers (United States Census Bureau, 2020). On the other hand, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reported that the number of single mothers inclined to 10.8% from 9.1% in 2014, and divorce applications increased by 34% in the past seven years (The Economist, 2019). More

recent studies claim that the number of single mothers in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, has been steadily increasing. Dhaka City Corporation revealed that the number of divorce petitions had risen recently, with females filing more petitions, about 70 % (Sourav, 2019). Therefore, the number of single mothers is increasing fast without any remarkable change in the socio-cultural and economic aspects. Furthermore, the current socio-economic condition has increased the suffering of single mothers.

Significant challenges faced mainly by most single mothers are economic hardship. In addition, socio-cultural stigmatisation causes psychological problems such as coping with child-rearing. Child-rearing for single parents becomes more difficult because of responsibility, tasks, and emotional overload; these result in problems for the single parent, including loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Kim et al., 2018). It is to be noted that women in both developed and underdeveloped countries suffer because of single parenting. However, women in developed countries suffer differently than those in underdeveloped countries because of their circumstances. A single mother in a developed country predominantly suffers from economic hardship. Australia, the USA, and other Scandinavian countries have the higher rate of lowest income group of single mothers, in Australia and the USA, respectively, sharing 64% and 56% of single women in the lowest income group (Crabtree & Kluch, 2020).

In underdeveloped countries, for example, sub-Saharan single mothers face the highest poverty rate. These women tend to have a shorter life expectancy and more children; consequently, they spend much of their lives raising children (Crabtree & Kluch, 2020). In the U.S., single mothers of both working and the middle class have to move to tiny houses and unexpected neighbourhoods following separation due to low income and financial scarcity (Wekerle, 1985). When the support of a child through economic incentives comes, single mothers still suffer. According to the court-ordered rule for child support, the non-custodial parent has to give

financial support to the custodial parent, but they provide less than half of the expense for supporting a child, representing about 10% of the non-custodial father's income which does not offset the financial deprivation faced by single mother, as most of the time mother gets custody of the child (Barone, 2016). However, divorced women face different negative attitudes, varying with geographical location. In Turkey, women get blamed for separating from marriage and breaching social norms, as they see divorce as a negative attribute (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2013). Such stigmatisation and negativity prevented single mothers from getting social recognition as formal families, leading them to stress and fail to become an integral part of society. In Pakistan, single parents and their children are stigmatised in society; solo parenting is frowned upon, and living with a parent of the opposite gender is considered taboo (Ali et al., 2019).

Moreover, culturally single mothers face discrimination, rejection, and blackmail from society and religion, and single motherhood is not appreciated in the major religions (Essien & Basse, 2012). In many countries, culturally, women get the blame for early widowhood. It is seen as a curse rather than a blessing. It is often attributed to ill luck, spells, or witchcraft, especially when one passes the expected marriageable age (Nyoro, 2004). In the case of a husband's death, generally, single mothers do not remarry and get deprived of inequality in terms of property distribution, as male successors get guardianship till the children come of age (Bhattacharyya and Singh, 2018; Essien & Basse, 2012).

Bangladesh has similar challenges for single mothers, although the socio-cultural condition plays a vital role in vulnerability. Due to the practice of solid patriarchy, women tend to be dependent on their male counterparts. In Bangladesh, over 54% of women fall into economic crises such as workload, social humiliation, and financial stress (Tajmim, 2019). Another problem they face is anxiety, mostly related to the financial crisis. The study shows that, overall, 48.8% of single moms had

depression or anxiety disorders, with 17.3 % bearing a depressive disorder, 21.2 % suffering from an anxiety disorder, and 10.3% suffering from dual diagnosis (Nahar et al. 2020). On the other hand, rural challenges of a single mother though look similar at first glance from a significant point of view, but if one digs in deep, one can identify the differences.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the structural aspect of a single parent, such as the positive and negative consequences of a single parent. In contrast, a more recent study concentrates on the processes of single-parent families, which is interaction within the single-parent and double-parent families and the relationships within them (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2013). However, very few studies about this topic have been conducted in the rural context, especially in the Bangladeshi rural setting, where the circumstance is very diverse; as a result, the challenges of the single mother are also diverse. Although the structure of significant challenges of a single mother is might familiar to past studies, there are apparent differences in the rural settings that can make the challenges of single mothers more vulnerable. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the challenges the single mother faces from the rural perspective.

This study adopted the theoretical lens of phenomenology to understand the challenges faced by single mothers living in rural Bangladesh settings. A number of conceptual models can be used to describe the bio-cultural life of single mothers, including phenomenology. This model has, however, mainly been employed to comprehend the concepts of "individual in situation" refers to pre-existing cultural conceptions, "[t]he world to the individual," and "texture of meaning" refers to originating in human activities between one's own and others (Santiago-Delefosse, 2015, p. 1266). This study explores the single mothers' bio-cultural 'texture of meaning' from society and individuals' socio-economic, cultural, and psychological struggles through the lens of phenomenological concept.

Phenomenology as a distinguished concept came in the early 20 century. Alfred Schütz's

(1899-1959) work can be placed within a phenomenological tradition in the Social Sciences and Humanities (Santiago-Delefosse, 2015, p.1266). Schutz's main focus was to analyse the structure of the life-world, which is grounded on understanding the actions of individuals in the social world that must perform a reflective act of attention, using the connections between themes in day-to-day experiences as a guide (Embree, 2011).

The Schutz model of phenomenology initially emphasised five main factors (Santiago-Delefosse, 2015). They are—i. the individual in the situation (pre-existing ideas of culture about motherhood); ii. the world to the individual and the 'texture of meaning' (originated in human actions between one's own and others); iii. The 'I' and the 'other' (single mothers' relation with others influencing process to be controlled from surroundings interactions and actions); iv. typifications and meanings (the challenges of the single mother are typifications that are not unique to each person but are shared by members of a society generated through divorce, widowhood) and v. inter-subjectivity (an intersubjective world where common influence and work, understanding others through common sharing).

The study begins with a brief description of the methods and materials employed. A critical discussion of the findings follows this.

Methods and Materials

This qualitative study used in-depth interviews (IDIs) with the single mother and key informant interviews (KIIs) with the chairperson, school teacher, and member of the government—representative (locally elected), religious leaders, and media representatives. We conducted interviews over six months, from October 2021 to March 2022. The data for this research was collected from three villages, namely Doshpaika, Chandpur, and Kaliyanpur, under Bishwanath Upazila in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The study areas are located about 35 kilometres far east of Sylhet town. We used a purposive sampling strategy to select our study participants. The first author hails from one study area and has good knowledge about the

community. The locally elected representatives helped us locate the single mother because the majority of them get a widow allowance provided by the government. We included single mothers, divorced or with husbands who died, living with their children. All the single mothers agreed to participate in the study voluntarily. We selected 38 study participants following the data saturation principles where no new data theme was found (Irvine et al., 2013; Miah et al., 2022). Among 38 participants, ten were key informants, and 28 were for an in-depth interview.

To conduct this fieldwork, we formed a team composed of four members. All team members graduated in anthropology and have vast qualitative research experiences. We developed semi-structured interview guidelines and consent forms in a participatory way. The interview guidelines were field tested before conducting interviews. Feedback from the field test was incorporated, and the potential barriers to access to the field were discussed. The research assistant received two-day of training on research objectives and interview guidelines. The researcher read out the research objectives and consent form before conducting the interviews and ensured voluntary participation. The IDIs' average lengths were 40-50 minutes, and KIIs were 45-60 minutes. Interviews were recorded using the android mobile phone. Both written and verbal consent were ensured before starting the interviews.

The audio data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English (see, Das et al., 2020). All the transcripts are printed out for repeated reading to understand the data patterns. After that, data were coded manually following the open code list under major themes and sub-themes. We used the cross-checking and triangulation techniques to remove data confusion and misunderstanding, extracting meaning from it to increase data quality. After editing, the final data has been tabulated for analysis and classification based on their characteristics and thematic analysis was conducted on the collected data (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015; Kabir et al., 2021).

We followed the ethical issues ensuring that no harm to the study participants was guided by the Helsinki declarations (World Medical Association, 2018). This study also maintained the privacy and confidentiality of the data and identity, that only their experiences would be used in this study, not their identity.

Results

The study participants’ ages were between 26-35 for IDIs and 36-50 for KIIs (see Table 1.). From gender and religious backgrounds, most of the participants were females and Muslim by religion. It is noteworthy that most single mothers were homemakers and attended primary education.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants		
Characteristics	Methods	
	IDI n=28	KII n=10
Age Group	7	1
16-25	12	4
26-35	9	5
36-50		
Gender	28	8
Female	0	2
Male		
Religious Identity	20	7
Muslim	8	3
Hindu		
Profession	3	2
Permanent Job Holder	11	3
Temporary Job Holder	10	2
Homemaker	4	1
Entrepreneur	0	2
Locally Elected Representative		
Education	7	1
0	10	3
1-5	6	4
6-10	5	2
10+		
Total	28	10
Source: Authors		

Thematic analysis

Our findings consist of four major areas regarding the challenges of a single mother from the rural context. These are social, cultural, economic, and psychological. The above-described four factors are interlinked with each other. For instance, social stigmatisation influences economic factors, such as the negative impression of a person created by social stigma leads to the hardship of getting employment and addressing economic crisis. On the other hand, any economic enrichment of a

single mother makes rural society think of stigmatisation—economic and socio-cultural crisis effects on single mothers’ cognitive development.

Social

Field data revealed that the rural area’s social structure impacts the livelihood of single mothers. The social structures of the rural area are based on patriarchal and masculine settings. The locals highly value the patriarchal ideology and anything derived from it are highly valued by locals. Men engage in this, and women promote

the same beliefs. This observation bears resonance with the findings reported by Bhattacharyya (2015; 2016). As one educated participant said:

I am an educated woman, and I learned to resist injustice. My husband used to beat me; that is why I decided to divorce.

After separation, I went to my father’s house and started living there. Nevertheless, my society’s people started blaming me for the whole situation for both the separation and not marrying again. Even my mother tried to convey that it does not look good if a girl stays in her father’s house.

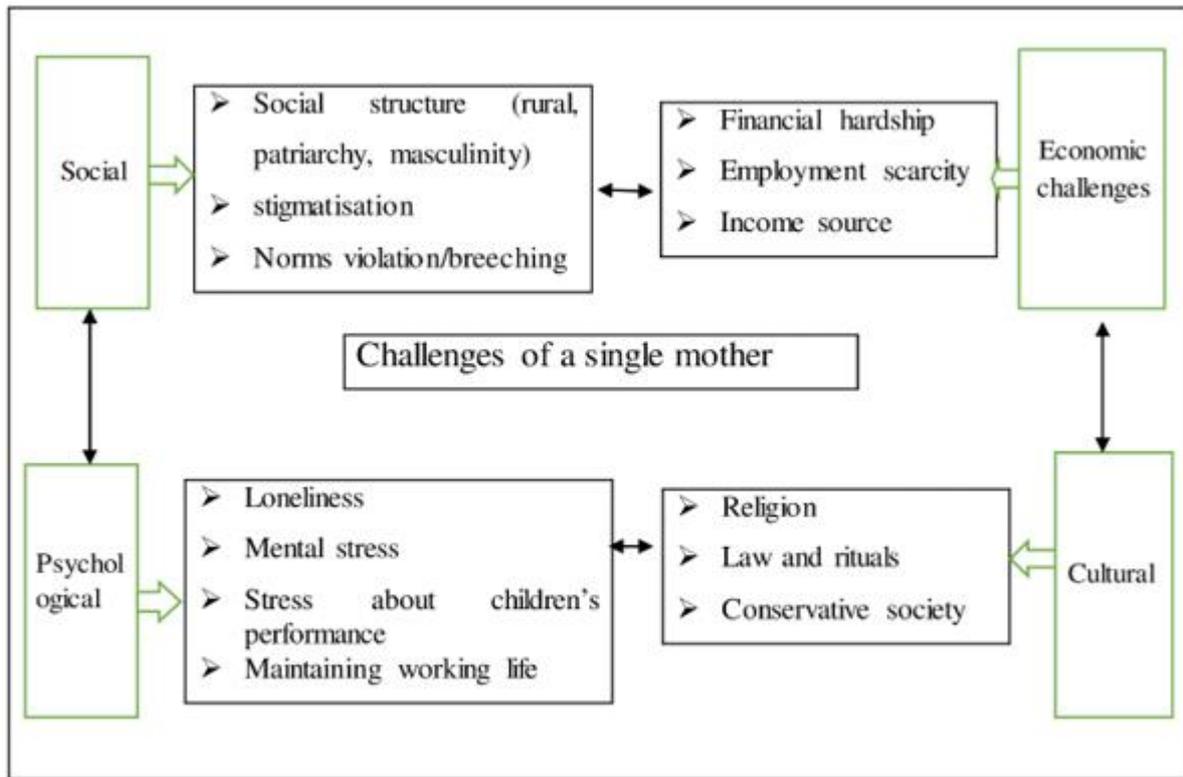


Figure 1: Challenges of a Single Mother-Themes and Sub-themes

Participants further revealed that the social structures of the rural area play an essential role in stigmatising single mothers in society. People have a strong bond as they live together, and most of them share blood relation; as a result, any discourse can be spread in society very easily and turns into truth. For example, a participant reported this in KII:

In the rural area, all the people live together, and they share every issue that occurs in society; as a result, the rumour spreads very easily. For this reason, all the stigmatisation came from social rumours”.

A participant reported that the problem faced mainly by single mothers is getting less support from society, such as being abused by the people

of the society by stigmatising them as characterless. A single mother claimed that people often generalise about them and throw questions about their character:

Had their husband not been present for any reason, how could they meet their physical needs?” They say the answer must be the extra-marital affair.

Another single mother stated:

I am a widow and single mother in a low-income family; I have two young children, one boy and one girl. After my husband’s death, I used to work as a maid in a rich family. After working there for several months, a rumour spread that I had an illegal extra-marital affair with the

landlord. Though the landlord's character was not good as he had several extra-marital affairs with the maid before me; thus, people generalise about me that I do not have a good character."

These types of rumours and hearsay of course create several social challenges for single mothers in rural scenery. Moreover, most single mothers return to their parent's house after separation. More than three-quarters of our participants have minimal dependency on their parent's family and other distant relatives in terms of financial and other kinds of support in the dimension of social percussive. The gossips produce misunderstandings among the people, often blaming single mothers for that. As another participant reported:

As a Muslim woman, I could not go to the market often, so one of my distant cousins usually assisted me in getting necessary items from the market; my neighbours often criticised me. They thought I had an illicit relationship with him."

Apart from social structure, society's norms violation has also been reported as a crucial factor for stigmatisation. For example, one of society's norms here is sticking with marriage, whatever happens, whereas separation means breaching the norms. Therefore, if separation occurs, women are blamed, and these things negatively impact the next phase of their life, such as it is hard for them to get married again. One participant explained:

My husband was very violent; he used to drink and beat me daily without any reason. I tolerated his torture for seven years for the sake of my only child. But one day, he reached the extreme level of torture and tried to kill me, and that day I left his house with my child. However, my suffering still existed because the separation was not taken positively in my society, and they blamed me for the separation.

This reflects the marital violence in Bangladeshi society (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Das et al.,

2015; 2016; 2020), which does not cease with a divorce or a separation. In fact, a single mother in Bangladeshi society faces a similar quandary.

Economic

Our data revealed that employment opportunity is one of the critical reasons for increasing poverty rate in pastoral areas. More than four-fifths of the family's primary earning member is male in the countryside. They go outside to bring bread and butter for the family, and females are meant to maintain household activities. Except for this dependency, most women cannot imagine working outside and earning money. As a result, single mothers fall into massive trouble without a husband in the financial sector. As a respondent reported:

In village area, work opportunity is very few for a woman; before getting a divorce, my husband worked in farming land, and he used to get 3-5 US\$ for a day, and it was used for buying food for the family. So now I had to find work and earn money.

The majority of rural areas hardly offer any industrial job opportunities. A significant proportion of women do household work. A small number of them also work in the agricultural division under the landlord for a small remuneration. Our study found that most single-mother families countenance mild to extreme monetary privation due to job scarcity in rural areas.

There are very few employment opportunities available in rural areas. Most of the time, we had to work on landlords' houses. Some seasonal working opportunities come and end within seasons, such as paddy, mustard, and other crops processing.

A minority of women also try to be self-employed when bound to bear their families.

After my husband's death, I fell into financial struggle because he never had any savings as I do not have any stable income source, so I had to take my brother's support. Next few months, I

learned to tailor and started doing this, and gradually I became financially independent.

A minority of the respondents create their employment using available resources such as being a tailor, stitching Katha (bed coating sheet), doing craftwork, and raising livestock on a small scale.

I have 12 ducks and some hens; if I can feed them properly, they lay eggs more often, and usually, I get 15-20 US\$ selling it. I also do stitching Kathas during winter for selling.

Two-thirds of the single mother is concerned about the sources of earnings, which is found not always sufficient to bear a family; it can be helpful for low-income families alongside male members' earnings. The same participant stated:

My sole earnings are insufficient to bear a family, and work is not always available. I have to work in agriculture during the paddy season.

Most of the single mothers reported that they considered prime earnings to come from the wages of male members. Female members' income is seen as additional money used for children's education, clothes, and buying other items than food. The single mother has to earn a living, but the scarcity of employment opportunities and low wages compared to the male worker placed the single mother in extreme financial hardship. Even if single mothers get jobs, they fall in trouble because they cannot concentrate on their work as they leave their children at home. If a working woman brings the child with them, it creates more complications in their workplace. As a mother of a four-year-old stated:

If I bring my 4year son with me, my landlord becomes angry because sometimes my son touches things in the landlord's home. They also expressed irritation when they had to give some extra food at lunch.

This study also revealed that single mothers struggle with children's requirements apart from regular living expenses. Single mothers in rural settings fails to afford nutritious food for their children. More than half of the children suffer malnutrition; poverty is the critical driver for malnutrition. As many participants described that for poverty, they need to make sacrifices to ensure children's basic needs. A participant said:

If I work as a helping hand in a house, we get 12-15 US\$ per month, and we had to work two or more houses for minimum needs, and if we work in cultivating the land or in farming, we get 1.50-2.00US\$ per day, but it's a seasonal work not available for a whole year. So we could not manage nutritious food and education expenses for children.

Our study found that poverty is also a barrier to children's education; single mothers cannot afford good schools or provide proper school dress, bags, or other necessary items.

Cultural

Our data illustrate that the cultural barrage is one of the crucial reasons why single mothers are vulnerable in rural areas. When we discuss culture, it includes social norms, rituals, way of life, and religion. Participants reported that all rural areas' social norms, customs, and rituals are conducted according to the religions they believe in. They further narrate that both Muslims and Hindus follow a conservative ideology (Bhattacharyya, 2015). In Muslim culture, women cannot have close contact with people who do not have blood relations. Females are expected to stay home and cannot go outside without a male guardian. In an IDI, one Muslim participant reported the following:

As a Muslim single mother, I could not go to the market alone; one of my distant cousins usually assisted me in getting necessary items from the market as I do not have any siblings. For this reason, my neighbours and relatives pressure me not to be close to him as it is prohibited in our religion.

Participants also reported several times that developmental organisations and NGOs tried to help single mothers improve their lives. However, they did not get access because of the conservative thought that people of the society held. In KII, the participant stated:

Several developmental organisations and NGOs came to me to get permission for a training session on single mothers; I permitted them, but they could not access society because of their religious/conservative barrier. The area's people are conservative and do not permit their female members to go in front.

Moreover, participants believe that religious law and rituals also place challenges before single mothers, for instance, Hindu daughters being excluded from the inheritance of the father's property if the father has a son or grandson (Bhattacharyya and Singh, 2018). In Muslim law, grandchildren do not have the legal right to inherit property if their father dies and their grandparent is still alive. Legal rights on the property are amended based on religious law in Bangladesh; these factors are responsible for producing both children's and mothers' futures uncertain and economically vulnerable. Most of the time, a single mother cannot use their right over their property because of these laws. A Hindu single mother stated that:

My brother inherited a huge amount of land from my father. After separating from my husband, I asked my brother to give me my share, but he refused and told me I did not own any property according to Hindu law. I could send my son to a better school

if I got some property.

Another Muslim participant reported in a similar vein:

As my husband is no more, I am not allowed to go out alone. So, I could not attend my children's school meetings. I live with my late husband's parents. I heard my children would not get any

property from grandparents by law. So, I am worried about their future as well.

Participants thought the cultural beliefs set widows' lifestyle and dress code, making them vulnerable in many situations. Widows have to maintain some cultural rules and rituals, such as widow single mothers cannot wear colourful dresses and have to wear traditional dresses (see, Bhattacharyya and Singh, 2018). Similarly, some other rituals play crucial roles in the challenges of single mothers. For instance, Hindu widows cannot eat fish, meat, or any protein food after becoming widows; it creates mental and physical challenges for single mothers who face similar situations. One Hindu participant stated that:

My children were very young age when my husband died, it was prohibited to touch fish and meat for me so I could not cook and my six months old daughter suffered health issues for that.

Psychological

Our findings show that all single mothers in rural areas feel lonely after becoming single mother. Participants reported that though most of them get different types of support from family and neighbours, for instances, while some receive financial support, some get shelter from family, and others get moral support, however, the majority of the participants still feel lonely because of the physical absence of their partner. They think the husband is the complete package of this support, as mentioned above. One of the KII participants reported:

Before marriage, there were lots of friends, family, siblings, and cousins to spend time with; they have never been lonely, but girls from rural areas become dedicated and dependent on their husbands after marriage. The husband becomes the complete package of support, and all the hardwork of women tend to make their husband happy. So naturally, if the husband dies or divorces, women become lonely.

Our findings further revealed that the single mother's loneliness at a certain point turns into

mental stress. Our statistical data states that two-thirds of single mothers suffer from some form of mental problems spanning from lower anxiety and hypertension to higher levels of depression. The results of our study unravel that most single mothers take medicine for blood pressure daily. In addition, the majority of the participants take sleeping pills before going to bed. The findings also highlight that a high proportion of people suffer from cardiovascular diseases. The majority of single mothers suffer from blood pressure. Data also revealed that anxiety and hypertension lead single mothers to obesity and malnutrition. A participant narrates that:

After my husband's death, I used to feel lonely; there is no one who can support me like my husband. I spent my time thinking about how to raise my two children solely and how I could survive the rest of my life without any support. Throughout the time; I did not know why I used to feel sick and frequently become senseless. So, I visited a medical specialist. He suggested to remain calm and not to get tensed and prescribed me some medicine.

Participants more frequently reported that another reason for single mothers' stress is the poor performance of the children in the academic sector. In rural areas, the lack of authority of mother's over children because of her dual responsibility in managing household activities as well as the duties outside the household, including children's academic activities, creates this drawback. Respondents said there is a proverb in a rural area:

Moms make the child as son/daughter where fathers make them human.

Respondents also revealed that single mothers tend to think that children can take care of them at a particular time if they have a promising career which can be possible only through education. However, our social and economic environments do not always give us a chance, which is why single mothers are stressed.

A KII participant reported the following

In rural areas, the father's authority to control the child is important to perform better in the academic sector where the absence of the father makes it difficult for the mother to control both sides of the household at the same time. Not only is the father's authority important for children's academic concerns, but also financial support is a matter of concern for single mothers, which fathers mostly do in rural areas.

In addition, participants believe that the social environment in a rural setting is a barrier to children's education. As a result, most children leave school early and join various jobs. This is reinforced by one of the participants:

I work as a helping hand in two houses which cost my whole morning to noon. I could not manage time for my child for preparing them to school. So, children would not go to school; rather, they play with other children who have already left school.

The study's findings further reveal that another psychological problem is maintaining the balance between work and personal life. Participants admitted that as most single mothers get the responsibilities of both earning for the family and bringing up their children until they grow up in the absence of their husband, they fall into big problems mentally in case of balancing between work and personal life. One participant stated:

After getting separated from my husband, I had to face responsibilities, e.g., earning money and looking after my family. However, it is tough to keep a balance between work and life. When I was at work, I used to think I was not giving my children proper time. This thing always chased me and used to increase my guilt.

Discussion

To our best knowledge, this study is the first attempt to understand the challenges faced by the rural single mother of Bangladesh. The findings revealed that the single mother mainly

faces the socio-structural aspect of challenges, but what makes it significant is that the rural context of Bangladesh problematises the experience of a single mother because of the existing socio-cultural, economic and structural differences between the rural and urban settings. For example, lack of income opportunity and strong patriarchal practices make the rural single mother more vulnerable than the urban one. The findings further report that a single mother is dictated by the four indicators of everyday challenges —social, economic, psychological, and cultural (see Figure 1).

Indeed, patriarchy and customary norms (Bhattacharyya, 2015; 2016; Bhattacharyya and Singh, 2018) create the unique rural structure of Bangladeshi society that makes single mothers far more vulnerable as they cannot work outside like a man and make a decision on their own. Alongside, close-knit rural society settings spread stigma rapidly about a single mother's character and are blamed for violating social norms. For example, an existing study of Pakistan showed that stigma designated by a patriarchal society, living without a male counterpart is forbidden (Ali et al. 2019). Similarly, in Bangladesh, marriage is one of the customary norms in society, and breaking it is taken negatively in the community, where women are considered to have crucial responsibility for the separation of marriage. This observation bears resonance with a study conducted in other settings where under social structure, women get blamed for the separation of marriage and breaching the social norms (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2013).

Interpreting the findings through Schutz's phenomenological factor of the 'I' and 'other' shows that most single mothers' challenges induce economic deprivation. Women's outdoor work is discouraged by society because of the patriarchal setting; the absence of a husband generates financial responsibility on a single mother. Rural Bangladeshi single mothers struggle to get employment since there are not many jobs available, and they lack education. A study conducted in developed countries showed

that a significant percentage of single mothers belong to the upper-income category (Gallup.com 2020). On the other hand, a single mother cannot provide her children nutritious food, health care and even an education due to extreme hardship. Similarly, a study conducted in sub-Saharan countries shows that extreme poverty is the reason for consuming longer time to rear children and leading them to have a shorter life expectancy (Gallup.com 2020).

The findings of this study suggested that culture plays a significant role in rural areas regarding the challenges of single mothers, who have limited independence and access to society because of religious conservativeness. It emphasises reciprocal roles among the particular individual, the group of single mothers, through the 'texture of meaning' factors and inter-subjectivity factors of their situation. A study by Essien and Bassey revealed that single mother faces discrimination, blackmail, and rejection by society, and major religions do not acknowledge single motherhood (Essien & Bassey, 2012). This study showed that many organisations need to design initiatives to improve single mothers' lives, provide them with self-empowerment and self-development, and lessen their vulnerability. Because of the patriarchal environment and traditional outlook, they could not get entry.

Along with this, the traditional law of religion regarding the division of property also deprives single mothers. Sometimes rituals that are amended from religions have a crucial impact on single mothers' livelihood. Essien and Bassey showed in their study that for the sake of family cohesion, Muslim women require remarrying and staying under the man's protection. Children's property will be taken care of by a male extended family member in case of the father's death (Essien & Bassey, 2012).

Conceptual factors of 'Individual in situation' perceived psychological problems of single mothers start with loneliness. In rural areas, a husband is considered coherent support for a woman, but the absence of a husband makes them the loneliest person in society. This loneliness of single mothers at a particular time

becomes the reason for mental stress, anxiety, and depression. A study conducted by Nahar in Bangladesh shows that about half of single mothers suffer from depression, various disorders such as anxiety disorder and dual diagnosis (Nahar et al., 2020).

The analysis also revealed that children's education and future is another concern for single mothers; financial crisis and lack of authority make it more challenging. On the other hand, developed countries' legislation and the family support act ensure minimal expense of children by the non-custodial parent to the custodial parent, reducing single mothers' stress about the children's education and livelihood (U.S. legislation, Family Support Acts of 1988 and 1994). Our findings also show that Single mothers have to maintain both work life and personal life, which is both physically and mentally stressful; as a result, a high proportion of single mothers are patients with blood pressure and anxiety. Similarly, another study demonstrated that responsibilities and adaption with child-rearing create difficulties for single mothers resulting in anxiety and depression (Kim et al., 2018; Rahman et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore the factors that create challenges for single mothers among the residents of rural Bangladesh. Findings revealed that a broad range of structural factors (social, economic, cultural, and psychological) plays a vital role in the vulnerability of single mothers. Social factors of challenges such as patriarchal and masculine settings, stigmatisation, and customary norms violation impacted the livelihoods of single mothers in rural areas. Moreover, economic factors such as financial hardships, employment scarcity, and source of income are considered significant reasons for a mother's vulnerability. Along with these social and economic aspects, cultural aspects such as religion, law, rituals, and conservative thoughts of rural people were influential in determining single mothers' challenges. Due to the strong patriarchal social structure, limited awareness and knowledge regarding the rights of a single mother

contributed to the suffering of the rural living single mother in Bangladesh. However, local administration should possibly ensure the rights of single mothers and provide practical knowledge to be self-empowered. Therefore, programme intervention must consider social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors to reduce challenges for single mothers in rural Bangladesh.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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Md. Mamun Khan: Conceptualisation, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing the first draft.

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