



CHALLENGES FACED BY SINGLE MOTHER'S PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION IN SINDH PAKISTAN: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

In any society Single mothers are facing a lot of issues and specially those who are pursuing higher education. This paper discusses the challenges faced by single mothers pursuing higher education. The main research question of the study was What are the challenges faced by single parent mother students in Sindh? More specifically the research aims to investigate what specific challenges do single mother encounter in pursuing higher education and how does the presence of a support network effect the educational experiences of single mother students in higher education? The study was qualitative in nature and used phenomenological research method as methodology of the study. The population of the study includes all single mothers residing in Sindh and pursuing higher education. Using, using convenience sampling, 5 single mothers were selected. Interview was used as a data collection instrument and Interpretive Analysis was used as a data analysis technique. Findings of the study showed that single mothers struggle with increased risks to their and their children's wellbeing. they experience difficulties maintaining enrollment and graduating in higher education. Single mother scholars focused on their parenting deficits versus their educational deficits, endorsing challenges with parenting due to their participation in higher education. They further expressed significant social support and challenges with multiple roles, finances, peer/staff interactions, and childcare. Educational institutions, child welfare agencies, and human service agencies can do a better job of addressing the needs of children and single mothers through advocating for the equal accessibility of higher education to all individuals, especially single mothers by taking an anti-sexist stance. It was concluded that single mothers faces a lot of issues and challenges in pursuing higher education. It was recommended that higher education institutions may device policies to cater the needs of Single mothers

Key words: *Single Mother Student, Higher Education, Challenges*

Introduction

The number of single mothers pursuing higher education is on the rise, forming a growing segment within the realm of higher education. In September 2017, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) released a briefing paper that shed light on this particular group. As per the IWPR analysis, the data from U.S education department, approximately 2.1 million single mothers were enrolled in undergraduate programs in 2012. This accounted for 11% of the total undergraduate population, signifying a significant increase compared to the years between 1999-2000 and 2011-12, where the presence of single student mothers in colleges and universities had doubled (Figure; II WPR 2017). It highlights a positive trend in educational participation among single mothers, which has implications for policy, support services and institutional planning in higher education.



The Institution for Women's Policy Research specified that 89% of single mothers in college come under low-income support (IWPR 2017). These factors impact single parent students pursuing higher education. In 2015 only 31% of single mother students in United States held bachelor's degrees (Kruvelis, 2017). The Michigan Partners Project (MPP) highlighted that higher education institutions have failed to identify and support this population of students (MPP, 2016). More ever single mothers spend many hours away from home, their children and also deal with emotional distress. It highlights reflect the economic, emotional, and institutional challenges faced by single mothers pursuing higher education.

Single-parent families, especially those who are headed by single mothers, face uphill struggles. Recent studies highlighted that single-parent families are significantly more at risk of living in poverty than two-parent families (Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015), that single mothers earn significantly less than single fathers (Kramer, Myra, Zuiker, & Bauer, 2016). Moreover, the number of single mothers around the world has grown significantly over the years. For example, 80% of about 12 million single-parent families with children under the age of 18 in the United States are headed by single mothers (Lee, 2013), whereas about 3% of the total population of about 32 million people in Malaysia are single mothers (Mulia, 2017). It highlights socioeconomic challenges and global prevalence of single mother household specially it emphasizes greater risk of poverty, Gender income gap and Global Growing trend.

Every year Millions of students get admission to get higher education. For example, a group of single parent mothers identified among all students who are attending colleges in united states (Cruse, 2019) the data highlighted that 3.8 million are parenting students while 1.7 million are single mothers more ever including fathers this number approximately increased 2 million. (Gaffney, 2020) Single parent student face more challenges than compare to single students.

Duquaine-Watson (2017) Identified that single parents have unique needs that are not characteristic of all single student, parenting, or low-income students. Students as a single parent mother face uphill's challenge to gain financial support, accountability for their academic progress, and responsibility for caring their children by finding adequate healthcare, housing, and childcare. There are multiple roles and responsibilities being student and single parent which are highly stressful Swingle (2013).

Single mother students are in a specific condition, while enrolled in higher education. And they face multiple types of challenges to continue higher education. Access to higher education may cause overwhelming difficulties to single mothers, who must meet the both roles mothers' and students'. The aim of this study is to examine the needs of single mother students who face challenges in higher studies. Increased awareness about the barriers these students may have implications for supportive policies for government and educational institutions. Previous studies (as cited in office of community college research and leadership, 2015) noted that if higher commission education can understand these needs and challenges face by single mother students, they can develop policies and programs to help this population achieve more equitable outcomes in terms of degree completion.



Background of study

Past research indicates heightened rates of psychiatric distress among single mothers (Jayakody & Stauffer, 2000). Qualitative studies on single mothers within post-secondary and undergraduate programs exist, but little research has been done by the researcher on those obtaining graduate level degrees. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of single mothers pursuing higher education. Past studies have discussed the experience of single mothers within postsecondary and undergraduate programs (Adair et al., 2007; Hale man, 2004; Kates, 1996). It is important to highlight what is known and unknown about various subgroups within this domain. More specifically, it is important to know more about the populations that face great obstacles to achieving these degrees. Single mothers are a historically disadvantaged group that must overcome great challenges to obtain graduate level education. Literature highlights their overrepresentation at and below the poverty line (Kates, 1996; Zhan & Pandey, 2004).

Rationale of the Study

The literature on studies in higher education notably overlooks single mothers (Vyskocil, Gina M., 2018). There is a lack of understanding regarding the challenges faced by single mother students in their higher pursuit of education and liberation from poverty. The existing literature inadequately addresses the situations, difficulties, and financial constraints that effect the educational journeys of these mother students. These Qualitative studies allow single parent mother students to express their unique needs for support in higher education. Their perspectives are valuable because educators and researchers typically lack insights into the personal struggles of single parent mother students with their dependent children. Through this qualitative can raise voices of single parent mother students and identify the areas where support can be enhanced to promote degree completion.

Statement of the Problem

The beginning of higher education in America, focusing on when and how women started participating in higher educational pursuits in the united states. During the American revolution, there were nine collages in what later became the United States. (Rudolph, 1962) he described these institution as a both religious and intellectual pursuit in the wilderness. The education institution was inspired by 130 individuals, who had been educated in early 1770s and 80s at Cambridge oxford, with the goal of cultivating culture individuals and ensuring that the youth of England received areligious and intellectually enriched education in good letters and manners.

Over the course 250 years since their founding, the collages experienced transformation in how they were governed, structured, financed, and their overall objectives. The most significant shift takes place in 1867, a moment characterized by (Rudolph, 1962, p. 241) a breaking point in the solid traditions of the past, signaling arrival of new era. This was the time when woman finally allowed access to higher education institution that had previously excluded them.

Today there are high enrollment of women in undergraduate programs compared to men. women are now participating in higher education at levels never seen before in American history (Arsand, 2015). California State university reports that 62% are female students. In 2015 37% women earned bachelor's degrees, surpassing 35% are men (United States Census, 2011; Educational attainment in the United States, 2010). In 2003 for every male who graduate with a bachelor's degree, there were 1,35 females who did the same, while in 2005, the ratio of enrolled



men to women was 43/57 (Marklein, 2005). In the modern world countries are now closely connected through the global economy and society.

This study intends to explore the gap of lack Institutional support and engagement for single mother students. Policies are typically designed with the childless tradition student in mind. Low-income mothers, who struggle to balance childcare responsibilities, and classes are quite different what is considered the ideal college student (Dodson & Deprez, 2019, p. 39).

There are limited availability of programs designed to address the economic needs of student mother. Including single mother students, encourages single parents to take advantages of the academic and student support structures already available at the college, however these services do not accommodate the schedule and needs of single mother students (Sallee & Cox, 2019). The absence of targeted support for student parents lead to postsecondary settings that do not acknowledge students care giving duties, assuming they are free of such responsibilities (Sallee & Cox, 2019, p. 623).

In this situation there is a need to investigate the e

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To Explore challenges, face by single parent mother students in Sindh

- a) To investigate challenges, do single mother encounter in pursuing higher education
- b) To find out the presence of a support network effect the educational experiences of single mother students in higher education

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to IWPR institute of women research policy. The number of single mothers in college more than doubled in the 12 school years between 1999 and 2012. Nearly 2.1 million students or 11 percent of all undergraduates are raising children without a partner. 30 percent of single student mothers attend for-profit institutions triple the rate of women students without children. In 2015, just 31 percent of single mothers ages 25 and older held a college degree, compared with 54 percent of comparable married mothers and 40 percent of women overall. in 10 women at two-year colleges say that they are likely or very likely to drop out of school due to their dependent care obligations (Institute of women research policy, 2017). It highlights the educational barriers, institutional enrollment trends, and caregiving pressures that affect single mothers pursuing higher education.

According (IWPR, 2017) Single mothers are growing in both absolute number and share in the population growth. They often face time related obstacles and financial challenges that make difficulty to access their higher education. Investing in programs and supports that target the needs of single mothers has the potential to improve their rates of college attainment, and increase earnings, which can lead to a range of multigenerational benefits.

The increase of single mothers attending college exceed did growth rate observed in the overall undergraduate student population by more than two times (42 percent) over the same time. Among female undergraduates, 19 percent were single mothers as of 2011-12. It is important to recognize the challenges faced by women of color in college, particularly when it comes to single



parents, the statistics highlighted a significant disparity in the percentage of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who are raising children without spouse support or a partner while pursuing their college education. This can have a substantial impact on their ability to succeed academically and achieve their goals. Efforts to provide support and resource for these students are essential to address these issues. Women of color in college are especially likely to be single parents (IWPR, 2017).

CHALLENGES FCAED BY SINGLE MOTHERS

1. Childcare Difficulties

Single mothers have to work while attending their higher education program. They have to balance home responsibilities, work and Higher education, while juggling these responsibilities they maintain reliable and safe childcare for their children. Child care one of the most important service for parenting students and obtaining affordable and safe childcare has been a massive hurdle that created challenges for single parents attending higher education program Carlson (2015). It highlights that childcare challenge is a major challenge for single mother students striving to succeed in higher education while managing competing responsibilities.

However, acquiring and maintaining quality childcare has positively impacted student retention and success. It shows that single mothers face numerous challenges, it is difficult to do childcare and pursue higher education, it is difficult to choose either higher studies or childcare, single mother student attention will focus on their childcare and divert their mind from studies, institution can allow and give flexibility to single mother students to bring their children into classroom.

Miller (2011) explained that 90 percent of student are confuse to take decision between childcare and higher education. A separated study on public universities in Georgia reported that students with quality childcare assistance improved both their program and completion of degree program. It shows that access to quality childcare helps students parent to overcome educational challenges. These students explained reduction in financial stress and in parenting, an improvement in staying focused on their coursework, and in increases in the amount of time they could spend on parenting (Quality care for children, 2020). It highlights that quality childcare plays a crucial role in helping student parents succeed academically while the lack of support can create serious challenges and stress.

2. Family Responsibilities

Students who are single parents face conflicts roles, as they try to balance being student and being parenthood responsibilities and usually an employee (Lovell & Scott, 2020). It highlighted that at the same time fulfilling multiple roles and responsibilities are juggling job. previous research has shown these are conflicting roles and highlighted this as a competition for demanding responsibilities.

Unfortunately, single parents frequently find themselves between fulfilling the needs of themselves, while experiencing guilt and a sense of inadequacy in the others. Many students are unable to complete their degree program, (Poindexter 2017). it has shown that family is a big responsibility, this study highlighted 60% participants are responsible for their family



responsibilities that's why they cannot complete their higher studies, these obligations are the main challenges to succeed.

The study of (Poinder) highlights that the family is a great responsibility and it is difficult to seek for higher education, many students specially those students face with dual responsibilities of academic commitments and the demands of family life. Juggling parenting, caregiving, or other family duties alongside academic pursuits requires effective time resilience. Support systems both within the family and through educational institutions, plays an important role in easing this burden.

3. Financial Adversity

According to Stack & Meredith (2017) financial concern have been identified as a crucial reasons many single parents enter a higher education program. More ever it has also been recognized as why many students will struggle to complete their degrees. This financial hardship can be a great hinder from starting higher education program and stops single mother's student from finishing their program. It also follows many single parents even after they complete. Some single mothers never find an adequate funding to begin a higher education program Gunn-Wright (2012).

It highlights that single parents need a support to start their higher education and complete it, for this achievement this group can face many up hills in the shape of financial challenges, institutions can provide support in a shape of scholarships, Stipend, and courses fees to succeed. Some single mothers would sacrifice their needs, including attending education institution to ensure the needs of their children are met (Stack & Meredith 2017). It highlights some single mothers prioritize their children needs over their own, often sacrificing personal goals it showed how parenting responsibilities can limit educational opportunities for single mother students due to deep commitment to their children well-being.

It shows that Single mothers often selflessly and without hesitation make sacrifice for the wellbeing and happiness of their children rather fulfilling their needs they are trying to fulfilling their children needs. Such as feeding, schooling, homework, playing, attention, love and care. A mother sacrifices her sleep, personal care, education, extracurricular activities, social gatherings, campus events and sometimes their job work. Additionally, financial struggles could continue even after graduation as many single parent students borrow more money than non-parenting students. Single mother students loan are two to three times doubled than those students who are without children Pendleton and Atella (2020).

Koh (2017) also highlighted that financial challenges as an emerging theme among single parent students. They investigated children of single parents and provided insights into the child's view of their parent attending higher education. Most of participants highlighted theme of financial adversity. These children knew that their parents work out full day and they can only pay bills but can never come out from poverty. It shows that children are well aware of their single parents challenges and it highlights the financial challenge is one of major challenge for single parents.

4. Academic Struggles

Previous research suggested that single parents may struggle in college or university because they are often less prepared to begin their academic program (MPP, 2016). It shows that single parents struggle academically that they are not academically prepare and confident to restart



their studies again. Previous research has highlighted that single parent student faces academic challenges, there are three main challenges related to technology.

First lack of knowledge, skills related to using technology, second lack of access to computers and technology, third lack of confidence to learn new skills (Henson (2014).it shows that single parents have lack awareness about technology in this 21st century where technology plays important role in higher education. Single parents are less confident about themselves that they can start to learn these skills More ever, single parents must need to know the importance of technology to pursue higher education. Education institutions can give basic training to students for technology use to improve student's skills and develop self-confidence.

However, Landgraf, (2015) as highlighted that it is important to note that previous studies have shown that single parents have less basic literacy skills and it is highlighted that scores and grades of single parents are low than non-parenting students. However previous studies have discovered a positive relationship between improving parent's literacy and increasing developing intellect of their children. It shows that previous research work on both parent and child development. An Additional reason, single parent has less self-esteem and underestimate their ability to succeed. Previous studied focused that single parenting students failed because they were overburdened by the amount of time required for success and had issues with typical classroom schedule.

5.Emotional Struggles

According to Campbell (2016) children of custodial parents and single parents were more likely to experience emotional, mental, and physical problems such as depression, drug, and alcohol abuse and suicide attempts. In my line of work, I have heard firsthand accounts of single parents struggling emotionally to finish their higher education. These accounts have included emotions of anxiety, stemming from feeling overburdened by the amount of responsibilities, as well as feeling of frustration brought on by unsupportive teachers or unorganized classes.

A survey of previous studies has showed many other emotional challenges that have hindered this group of student's ability to attend higher education and fulfil their roles as single parents. It shows that emotional challenges of students make them feel thoughts like bad moods and suicidal thoughts, rage, weariness, hopeless and loneliness Campbell (2016).

Vyskocil (2018) presented a number of poignant issues from single parents who are pursuing higher education. Throughout these interviews guilt was a key word that came up. Frequently, these guilty thoughts appeared when pupils did not perform well in class or did not attend their kid's activities. Pressure emerged as another word in this study, this strain stemmed from competing obligations in the areas of job, education, and childcare, many thought that being a good student and a good parent were mutually exclusive.

Guilt was also mentioned by Polakow (2014) as an additional source of stress for single parents. These study participants identified feelings of guilt and other negative emotions as results of having their children taken away from them. Moreover, Brooks (2014) examined the emotional experiences of student parents and identified guilt as a motivator as well as an emotional challenge.

Lovell and Scott (2020) also noted a number of emotional challenges related to juggling a college or university degree and a parental role. It shows that at a same time doing both jobs being parent and student are challenging, which affect their health and higher education success.



The top emotional challenges include stress, grief, guilt, isolation, frustration, crying loss of sleep, feeling overburdened, panicking and the inability to ever rest while discussing stress, students feel guilt for not giving attention and time to their children.

6. Network Support Single Mothers Students

According to Chamber, (2020) it highlighted the importance of peer support, sharing the experience of a student who felt a deep sense of community and belonging like being part of family due to the strong bonds formed with classmates. Building strong relationships with faculty and staff helps foster supportive connections and a sense of belonging, which can motivate and encourage student success (Carptner, 2018). It highlighted the discussion that needs of single mothers for flexibility, and more adaptable approaches to class schedules, attendance policies assignments and deadlines to better support students.

Existing literature, such as Kruvils (2017), it highlighted the experience of single mothers in higher education. While this group is one of the fastest growing populations in academia, their specific challenges and needs remain largely under researched. This lack of understanding could affect their enrollment and retention rates. The literature calls for a reassessment of institutional policies to better accommodate and support single mother students. Furthermore, it is essential that single parent students have the opportunity to share their lived experience, challenges perspectives and needs in their own voice.

Theoretical Framework Marxist Feminism

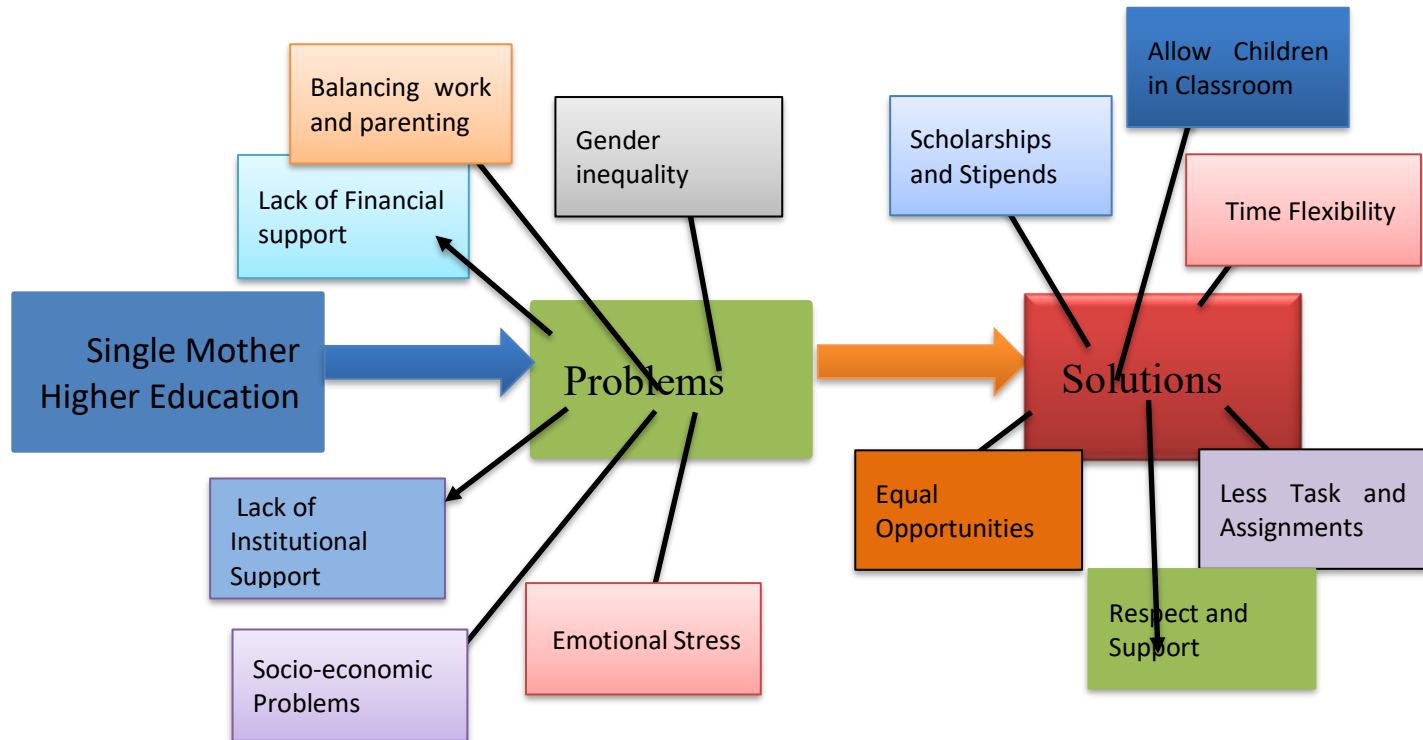
This research employs Marxist Feminism to analyze the subordination of women, especially in the decision making process within different societies. It is widely recognized that women have faced oppression and marginalization worldwide (Henslin, 1996).

Marxist Feminism holds significant importance in advocating for women's rights and addressing their subordination by emphasizing equal access to property and service that women are often deprived of. Karl Marx's (1818-1883) conflict perspective acknowledge the inherent tension and conflict between men and women, which is perpetuated by capitalist structures. The dismantling of capitalism is believed to be a key factor in achieving women's liberation.

In many developing societies, such as Pakistan, women are denied their fundamental rights, including access to education and participation in economic decision making. Engle's Theory (1820-1895) suggests that women's diminishing access to education is primarily due to patriarchal systems that concentrate power and authority in the hands of a few men.

The Pakistani society exemplifies a dynamic where men control the means of production while women are confined to domestic roles, leading to their subordination and deprivation at both family and societal levels. Traditional cultural norms reinforce the empowerment of men and the disempowerment of women, further entrenching women within private property and family structures. Marxist Feminism predicts that women will continue to be marginalized in various sectors, including access to education, due to the male oriented and patriarchal relations that dominate society. The ideology Framework and power dynamics within society align with Marxist principles, supporting the research perspective in this study

The Conceptual Frame Work



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Design used to understand the Challenges of Single Mother Students, through semi-structured interviews, the population for this study are those Students who are single mothers and enrolled in all Sindh universities within the higher education system in Pakistan would be the population under investigation in this study. The individuals in this study, who range in age from 18 to 45, did not live with a spouse, who provided financial assistance. This study intends to include those single mothers who are not living with supportive partner, and live with their parents, laws, relatives, or with their kids. Convince sampling will be used to gather data. The question open-ended format clearly states the subject of the inquiry while giving the interview and the interviewee the chance to go into further depth on certain subjects. Thematic analysis (TA) in qualitative research is based on the premise that qualitative data contains meaningful patterns. It provides a framework for identifying and coding these patterns, allowing researchers to construct a cohesive narrative by integrating key themes.

FINDINGS

1. The first research question was "What are the challenges face by single parent mother students in Sindh? In this regard it was found that single mother students face many Challenges such as Source and support Challenge, challenges in establishing an Online business, Self-employment, limited Family support and finding of Part-time jobs



2. Furthermore, it was also found that Single Mother Students Primary Challenges including Managing time effectively, caring for children, paying for education, juggling multiple commitments, losing their social life, having insufficient time for self-care, Household responsibilities, Child care needs, Academic obligations, Work-related tasks and Cooking, cleaning, and assisting children with homework
3. It was also found that there are many Challenges in networking with Teachers, Peers, and university. These included Lack of a supportive classroom environment, Judgment and stereotyping from students, teachers, and staff members, Hurtful gossip about their character as single mothers, Feelings of isolation and being made to feel inferior. Avoidance of social interaction due to fear of being judged or misunderstood as a single parent, Lack of respect from peers, teachers, and university staff. Incidents of harassment, including inappropriate relationship offers from teachers

DISCUSSION

In discussing their Source of support for higher Education, according to Poindexter (2017), financial concerns are a major reason many student parents cannot complete university degrees. Many of my study participants named financial struggles one of their top challenges. All the participants of the study highlighted Financial strain as one of Major Challenge for pursue higher education Krueger, (2017).

According to Carlson (2015) he highlighted that daycare is one of the most essential services for students who are preparing to become parents. According to Miller 2011, Almost 90% of the people said that access to childcare is a big reason why they decide to enroll in university. Many interviewees admitted that they would not have attended college if they had not found childcare that could fit their work or university schedules. Many others said they couldn't manage it without help from family and friends.

Many researchers have carefully studied how families play a key role in providing important support to single parent households. (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Richards and Schmiede, 1993; Nelson, 2000; Tran and McInnis-Dittrich, 2000; Lindwall, Bailer and Daly, 2011). It highlights that Families are important in helping single mothers with their daily tasks by providing various types of support, such as temporary financial help, childcare look after, emotional support, a place to live, and transportation. Families also support their children, siblings and other relatives in similar ways.

Time management is an enormous challenge and create conflicting roles between responsibilities and being Student. He also highlighted social isolation and no time for self-care as a challenge for single parents (Lovell, 2020). these participants have multiple responsibilities and conflict roles being a single parent and this population try to balance between work an employee and higher education Students.

Building relationships with teachers and staff, according to Carpenter (2018), fosters 89 connections, support networks and a feeling of belonging that inspires and propels kids towards achievement. When the topic of flexibility was brought up the attendees recommended that the institution be more accommodating when it came up to setting up class schedules, attendance,



guidelines, and deadlines for assignments. Chamber (2020) talked on the advantage of having supportive classmates when one of his research subjects talked about how she felt like she had a family when she entered the program because of her classmates ties the support.

CONCLUSION

1. The first question was about the Challenges face by single mothers. It was concluded that Single mother students face numerous challenges including support, Financial Time management, Child care and House hold Responsibilities and Social Challenges, Judgement and Stigma, negative judgments and misconceptions from peers while pursuing higher education, Network Challenges with Teachers, Peers, and university.
2. It was further concluded that financial issues are the one of the major issues faced by the Single mothers, it includes arrangement of fees of their children, availability of books for kids.

RECOMADATIONS

As it was concluded that there is a need of support mechanism for single parent mothers (Conclusion), a support mechanism is suggested which is as under

1. Reduce the fees of Single parent's mothers and provide free books to their kids. Free bus passes, easy educational loans and may be provided to them
2. These single mothers may provide teaching or administrative jobs so that they can reduce their social and personal challenges.

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