CHAPTER - 4
DISCUSSION

The present study has been undertaken to assess family life experiences and psychosocial well-being among adolescents in female headed single parent urban families. Presenting a profile of adolescents along with their single mothers in India and also looking at the experiences of adolescents and their single mothers in the United States strengthen the findings of the study. The discussion is substantiated with findings of previous research studies in this area.

In the following sections the results are discussed according to the objectives of the study. The first section deals with presenting a comprehensive profile of single parent families in India and then discusses findings of the US data on single parent families as a contrast. Wherever applicable, result findings in the Indian section are substantiated by verbatim quotes of the children and their mothers in the sample to depict the intensity of their feelings. The second section discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the two cultures as regards the single parent family situation and comments on the main issues and trends emerging from the results. Finally, the third section presents policy implications and guidelines for program planning on single parent families in India. In the concluding section recommendations are provided for future research.

A Profile of the Single Parent Families in India and the United States

India

In the Indian section discussion is based on reports of the adolescents and their mothers in the present study. Trends in the results section indicate the following: First, single parenthood creates a number of stressors for children and the mothers. Second, the stressors associated with single parenthood can sometimes lead to adjustment and academic problems among the children. Third, despite the increase in risk, there are reports of greater
coping skills and bonding for the members in the single parent family unit (both in nuclear and extended/joint families). Fourth, there are important individual differences in the psychological adjustment of the children and mothers in a single parent family. In all these above instances, particularly so in the Indian situation, gender of the adolescent, marital status of the mothers, and family structure are seen to have a crucial influence on the experiences that individual family members have and are, therefore, discussed in detail.

I begin my discussion with the first observation that single parenthood creates a number of stressors for the children and the mothers. These stressors can be in areas of emotional trauma for the children, the mothers, and the immediate family members; troubled relationship with the parent; and financial hardship (Emery, 1999). In the present study the adolescents sometimes face stress within their families, in their measure of well-being, and certain areas of mental health. The stressful situations for single mothers are related to stressors in the area of social reintegration due to which they experience feelings of lowered states of well-being, certain conflicts within the family life, and perceptions related to the availability of social support to them. I will now discuss each aspect.

**Stressors for the adolescents within their families**

In the present study the stressors that the adolescents report within their family can be classified into three categories, namely stressors related to, (1) the family environment; (2) experiences in the family; and finally (3) financial constraints.

**Stressors related to the family environment.** Adolescents in the present study report average states in areas such as feelings of togetherness, encouragement to have an equal say in the family decisions, emphasis on following the family rules, spirit of competition, and feelings of independence within the family. Further, important differences are revealed within gender, family structure, and marital status of the mothers. Girls when compared with the boys, adolescents with divorced mothers as compared to adolescents with
widowed mothers, and adolescents coming from joint families as compared to nuclear families report lowered states of feelings. Figure 24 (a, b, & c) maps the perceptions of adolescents from the present study. Overall, adolescents with divorced mothers in a joint/extended family setup are found to have the lowest values on their perception of the family environment.

![Figure 24 (a). Gender differences among adolescents from single parent families regarding their perception of competitiveness in the family](image)

![Figure 24 (b). Differences in perception of family life experiences of adolescents with divorced mothers when compared to adolescents with widowed mothers](image)
For understanding the average experiences of adolescents in single parent families, it is crucial to look at the socialization process in the Indian family and then link it up within the single parent family framework. A typical child growing up in an Indian family is socialized to be conforming and dependent with an encouragement for mutual interdependency with individual members (Bharat, 1997). Further, the mother is seen as the primary agent of socialization and close mother-child bonding in the Indian family favor dependence behavior among the children even when they grow up as adults (Kakar, 1978). Results of the present study do not show a high perception of independence and encouragement to have an equal say in the family among the adolescents, rather they display average feelings (see Table 2, page 48). In a single parent family unit with single mothers there is a possibility that with the loss/separation of the fathers, the mothers may encourage an even greater dependence among their children to feel emotionally more secure, thus, explaining to an extent the finding of the present study.
Going further and discussing gender differences in family environment from results of similar studies, Dube (1988) and Kakar (1978) support the findings by elaborating that Indian families operate to a large extent in terms of the gender of the child. There is male supremacy and the male child is given greater power and authority than the female child who is often given lesser privileges. Further, the prevailing cultural scenario in India, that already has a strong male bias, encourages females, across social classes, to be interdependent with a high value placed on the sacrificial self (Anandalakshmy, 1991; Saraswathi, 1999). The findings from the present study also indicate, in accordance with related literature review, that boys perceive greater encouragement to put in their best in varied spheres and feel greater motivation for competition by family members. This may have to further do with the perception of single mothers and other elders in the family who look upon the growing up boys as the main and eventual breadwinners and, thus, have higher expectations from them and allow them to have the decision making power when compared with the girls.

Along with gender differences in the perception of family environment of the adolescents, marital status of the mothers is also seen to have a crucial influence. In the present study, adolescents with divorced mothers report lower feelings of experiences in their family when compared to adolescents with widowed mothers. Therefore, it is important to understand the possible reasons behind these results keeping in mind the status accorded to single women in the Indian family and society. As pointed out earlier, in the Indian family, the mother is the central figure of socialization for the children. However, other family members in the household, even in a nuclear family setup, assist mothers in this caregiver role from outside. These caregivers are usually the mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and the mother’s own mother (Ross, 1961). Observations made by Saraswathi and Dutta (1988, 1990) suggest that sharing of responsibility of child rearing by a support network enhances a nurturing family environment. Among the widowed women, support is usually available from both the in-laws and the maternal side to the single mothers and their children (even in a nuclear family) as compared to the divorced women who
usually have support just from immediate family members. This is mainly due to the legitimate status accorded to the widowed mothers whereas the divorced mothers (Bharat, 1991) are even now, in many instances, not socially well accepted or appreciated (Sureender, Reddy, Baburajan, 1992). In these circumstances, there is, thus, a possibility that there will be a better perception by the adolescents with widowed mothers regarding their family environment where they might be better accepted in the family as compared to adolescents with divorced mothers.

Type of family structure is also emerging as a crucial variable influencing the quality of family environment for adolescents. The findings are related with possible consequences on the single mothers and their children living in a joint family setup. Sinha (1984) reports that due to the small size and limited number of adults in nuclear families there are closer bonds and intense parent-child relations. The children also enjoy greater autonomy, independence, and are allowed more initiative. Studies by Gore (1968) and Ross (1961) indicate that family solidarity and cohesiveness are traits that are upheld by nuclear families where the younger members are treated as individuals rather than as family members. Conversely, in a typical joint family, in the Indian scenario, family experiences promote symbiotic relationships and inhibit separation and individuation.

Coming back to the present study it is, thus, understandable why adolescents from a joint/extended family might experience lesser independence and cohesiveness when compared with adolescents from nuclear families (Code No. 004: “I don’t get along with my grandparents since they are always expecting me to do things according to their wishes”; Code No. 043: “I sometimes don’t get along with my cousin in my family since he first tells lies and beats me up and then puts name on me”). The experience of perceiving lesser independence may be especially pronounced in cases where the adolescents have to move in to a joint family setup from an initially nuclear household after the demise/separation of their father. In the present study 20 percent of the single mothers and their children report, that in order to be able
to cover the finances they have shifted in with their parents/in-laws after becoming single. Although the positive side of such an arrangement is that it provides financial and emotional security for the single mother and her children, there are associated implications too.

The adolescents with divorced mothers might be facing more stressors due to preexisting norms that still remain regarding the divorced women. These norms along with a desire among the joint family members to conform to the already existing functioning of the family might be rendering the young adolescents at a greater stress (Code No. 163 – an adolescent boy with a divorced mother staying in a joint family – "My grandfather and uncle are forever interfering in my life and putting restrictions. I have to prove my worth to them"). Conversely, in a nuclear family setup there is a greater encouragement for development of autonomy that may further encourage and assist in channeling positive thoughts for the adolescents.

The above discussion points out to some of the stressors that are present in the adolescents’ life related to the family environment in a single parent family with single mothers. Variables that further influence the perceptions have also been discussed. I will now elaborate on the stressors for the adolescents related to the experiences in the family.

**Stressors related to experiences in the family.** The adolescents in the present study were addressed with certain issues related to the family through in-depth interviews that addressed issues related to their perceptions of the emotional support that they get and the relationships that they share with their parents, extended relatives, siblings, and peers. Results indicate both the costs and benefits of staying in a single parent family. Keeping in synchrony with the sequence of presentation I will first elaborate on the costs.

Some of the costs for the adolescents in the present study include having to sometimes take on adult roles at an early age such as being involved in income generating activities to add on to the family income and becoming caught between family disputes. As an example, a percentage of the adolescents report having disagreements with close relatives (Code No. 001: "I
find it difficult to get along with my uncle since he does not treat my mother well), sometimes get to hear negative things about their mother, and have ego problems within the family Code No. 135: "My grandmother is very strict with me but not with my cousin"). These findings are more prevalent in the case of children staying in a joint family setup.

To understand the possible reasons behind stressors prevalent in joint families I will like to explain the results in terms of the hierarchical patriarchal setup in the Indian family system where clear distinctions are made between the roles and responsibilities of the parents, sons after marriage, and daughters after marriage. Amato (1994), in a study on Indian divorced women, makes the observation that many single mothers, especially with children, are most likely to return to their family of origin after the demise/separation of their husbands. However, within her own family a single mother and her children, if not economically independent, must make demands upon her male kin that are not sanctioned by Indian customs or tradition and may also interfere with a man’s primary role obligation, that of economic support of his own spouse, children, and in some instances elderly parents. As pointed out in an earlier section also, 20 percent of single mothers in the present study returned to their family of origin after becoming single. The main reason as cited by them remains the financial instability and insecurity, which they feel, resulted after becoming single. Financial burden on the other family members may, thus, become a source of added burden. As a result of that the single mother and her children may not, as a long-term plan, be accommodated within the already existing family norms without considerable tension both for the mothers and the children.

Adolescents with divorced mothers from the present study report facing conflicts in certain instances with immediate family members due to a tendency of relatives of the divorced mother to occasionally say negative things about them (Code No. 165: "I don’t get along with my father and his family since they are responsible for a lot of tension and fighting in the household") and their occasional discrepancy in treatment (Code No.162: "My grandparents and my mama are always trying to tell me what to do and want me to contribute a lot").
The negative costs for children with divorced mothers that are constantly emerging from the results of the present study, and also previous related researches, has more to do with clichéd stereotypes that the society has about the divorced mothers and their children and as a result of that, the way the society reacts to them also gets influenced. The nearsighted focus of the culture and clichés involve assuming that the children of the divorced women will be victims and the divorced mothers will be lonely and inept along with being financially dependent (Goodrich, Rampase, Ellman, & Halstead, 1988). As a result children in a single parent family with divorced mothers might face anxiety from the immediate family, if staying in a joint family setup, and from the extended relatives, if staying in a nuclear setup. Since the support system is a part of the society that has been conditioned with this belief of single divorced mothers being at a disadvantage, it can well be expected that they will be sometimes differential in their treatment also.

Another crucial cost emerging for adolescents in single parent families as reported in the present study is lack of ample time to spend with their mothers mainly due to the non-availability of time on the mother’s side (Code No. 156: “She is working stitching clothes...so always busy”; Code No. 123: “No one at home...no one has time”). A high percentage of mothers in the present study were employed (almost 79%). Studies on working mothers indicate that because of both, household and outdoor responsibilities, there is greater stress and lesser available time for leisure with family members (Rani & Khandelwal, 1992; Ramu, 1987; Rao, 1990; Verma & Larson, 1999). In a single parent family, with the added responsibilities, the mothers might sometimes find it difficult to balance their time between children, family responsibilities, and their work (Sethi, 1994). Adolescents from the present study also voice their wish to change certain traits in their mothers such as wishing their mother to be stronger (Code No. 110: “I wish she could be more stern and stronger and learn to talk to my grandparents when they trouble her sometimes”; Code No. 69: “I wish she would not remain so tensed”); having lesser interference (Code No. 119: “I want her to give me more independence”); and wishing parents to...
be together again (Code No. 169: "I wish we could be one family again"), especially with divorced mothers. Similar results are reported by Bharat (1988b) who found that children from single parent families value happiness, presence of both parents, and the absence of scarcity of any kind.

**Stressors related to financial constraints.** Regarding stressors related to financial situation, adolescents in the current study report facing economic problems, particularly after the separation/demise of their parent. The areas that they express concern deals mainly with expenses related to daily expenditure and pursuing of leisure activities and shopping (Code No. 45: "I feel in areas such as buying clothing, shoes and other such things"; Code No. 43: "Yes, my mother discourages me to buy lot of things"). Further a small percentage of the sample also reports contemplating taking up part time jobs in order to have extra pocket money and also due to pressure from the family to earn extra (Code No. 156: "I am already helping brother part time in business"). The results are further supported by studies carried out by Bharat (1988b), Singh and Gill (1986), and Upadhyay (1996) who report that there is a greater possibility of children from single parent families to suffer consequences in the financial area due to the prevailing Indian norms where the husbands are considered to be the main breadwinners and have the role of the provider. So consequently, after the demise/separation of the husband the women feel a greater stress to return to financial stability with implications for children as well.

Thus, as reported above the adolescents in single parent families sometimes face certain stressful situations within the family after the demise/separation of their father. In certain instances independent influences of marital status and family structure are seen to dictate the kind of experiences that these adolescents have. However, gender as an independent factor influencing the perceptions that adolescents have regarding the relationship that they share with their mothers, the treatment that they receive from the other family members or their perception of the financial situation has not emerged significant. I will now move further and discuss the impact on the mental health status, perceptions of well-being, and certain personality characteristics that are reported as stressful by adolescents.
Stressors for the adolescents in the areas of mental health, well-being, and certain personality traits

Mental health of the adolescents from single parent families. Mental health as defined by Malhotra (2003) is "a positive concept, that encompasses feelings of well-being, living in harmony with the self and between the environment" (p.3). Harmony with the self and the society remains one of the fundamental tasks of the growing up adolescent. However, overcoming the transition period from middle childhood to adulthood, the various stresses and strains that the adolescents might encounter, need to be considered and understood.

Single parent family lifestyle has support from literature studies that caution about certain costs that adolescents might encounter. As indicated by the results of the present study, in the mental health dimension, the adolescents report somatic disorders, that is, they show problem behaviors in areas such as feeling dizzy, tiredness, and complaining of aches and pains. The subjects also report borderline symptoms of hyperkinesis (poor attention, distractibility) and emotional disorders. Studies conducted by Reddy (1987) and Srinivasan and Raman (1987) provide support to the results by reporting that the mental health status of children with just one biological parent is at a risk of being significantly lower when compared with children who have both the biological parents living with them. Also, the children from single parent families are at a greater risk of exhibiting symptoms of psychopathology. The results of these studies also bear similarity when compared with researches conducted in the western countries. Lansdale, Cherlin, and Kiernan (1995) and Dawson (1991) report that children from single parent families are more likely to display symptoms of emotional problems and conduct disorders than children of two-parent families.

Further, as opposed to earlier results of this present study that reveal that adolescents with divorced mothers show greater problems in areas related to their experiences in the family life, in the case of mental health area the adolescents with widowed mothers show significantly greater problems. Also,
adolescents with widowed mothers and staying in a nuclear family setup display greater problems when compared with rest of the comparison group (widowed-joint, divorced-nuclear, and divorced-joint). In an informative study carried out on a Western sample by Amato and Partridge (1987) on reported differences between widows and divorcees with dependent children, the results point out that while the divorced mother and her dependent children is more likely to suffer from economic consequences the widowed family is more likely to suffer consequences in the emotional areas.

The finality of death and coming to terms with the associated bereavement is a great challenge for the widowed mothers and their children. After the death of a spouse, a widow continues to have a strong multi-determined attachment to the lost person. This prior bond of loyalty and mourning may consequently have an impact on the mental health of not only the mothers but also on the children. A subject of the present study, with a widowed mother, and revealing problems in the emotional disorder area of mental health very poignantly reports, “As soon as I got to know that my father is no more I just became stiff...absolutely stiff. I still get that feeling of stiffness and dizziness whenever I think of the events surrounding my father’s death” (Code No. 29).

The results from the present study also point out that the adolescents with widowed mothers and staying in a nuclear family display lower states of mental health. If the widowed mother and her children are already in a setup where they reportedly feel lonely and emotionally insecure, their staying in a nuclear family is likely to enhance their chances of feeling at a greater risk and also lowered mental health (Sethi & Sharma, 1980; Sethi & Manchanda, 1978; Sharma & Srivastava, 1991).

**Well-being of the adolescents from single parent families.** The subjects of the present study report average states of feelings of well-being. However, a significant association is reported between the mothers and adolescents. As will be discussed in a later section, the mothers report below average states of feelings of well-being. Hence, these subjects who already are at a borderline of average state, are at a risk of exhibiting symptoms of lowered
well-being, in case the mothers also feel so, since a positive significant correlation has been reported, in the present study, between the well-being of the mothers and that of the adolescents. Chen and Dreze (1992), in an interesting article on the health of single women, indicate that single women and the associated helplessness associated with them may also have an influence on the health and well-being of many other people other than the women themselves, particularly on their children. This is particularly so, since the dynamics in the family have an important bearing on the well-being of the children and in case there is stress in the family environment it is likely to reflect on the children as well (Jain, 1997). Further, as experienced in the family environment, adolescents with divorced mothers and staying in a joint family exhibited the lowest levels of well-being.

Relating findings of the present study with the theoretical model as proposed by the Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner & Castellino, 2002), it becomes clearer why the experiences and perceptions of well-being that adolescents have in a single parent family are so dependent on the mother’s own experiences and perceptions. The Developmental Theory proposes, in a broader perspective, that the inner and outer worlds of the adolescents are fused and dynamically interactive. Thus, the experiences and perceptions that adolescents formulate in any life circumstances, single parent family in the present case, cannot remain in isolation with the rest of their environment. There is a constant interaction pattern and a dynamic dialogue that exists between the adolescents and their mothers. Therefore, any stress that is experienced by the mothers is likely to have a fall back on the adolescents too.

Going further and elaborating on the personality characteristics of the adolescents as a possible source of stress, particularly while growing up in a single parent family unit, the results from the current study indicate that some of the subjects feel changes in their personality after the demise/separation of the father. Certain problem areas that they feel are related to the feelings of having become shy (Code No. 154: "I think a lot these days", Code No. 004: "Have become quieter and think a lot these days"), careless, and aloof (Code No. 123:
"I feel less loved by fathers relatives now"), sometimes aggressive, and also short tempered.

Kumthekar (1991), and Reddy (1992) have elaborated on the impact of single parenthood on personality characteristics of the children and report that many a times the psychological consequences of being single for the mothers also gets reflected in the personality of their children who exhibit certain traits such as enhanced loneliness and moodiness (also see Table 27, page 99). The stressors in the current study are revealed more in the case of adolescents with divorced mothers as compared to those with widowed mothers. Aseltine (1996) indicates that the main reason for parental divorce leading to emotional vulnerability and likelihood of personality changes is because divorce is a source of numerous secondary problems and stressors that are causally related to the likelihood of emotional trauma in children. However, no gender differences have been reported for the subjects in the present study, both in the area of mental health and well-being. This is likely due to the universality of the feelings and consequences following the demise/separation of the father irrespective of gender.

The above section has dealt with certain stressors that the adolescents might face while in a single parent family with single mothers. I will now discuss the findings of my present study and others researches in light of the possible stressors that the single mothers might face.

**Stressors for the single mothers in the process of social reintegration**

One of the difficulties that single mothers in the Indian context face after becoming single is that there path to social reintegration becomes stressful. Their status is one that is not easily acceptable by the society because of certain existing dogmas and thought process regarding single women. The concept of social reintegration, particularly for the single mothers, encompasses their being reintegrated and accepted into the immediate family following the demise or separation of their spouse. It also includes being accepted completely by the extended network of relatives, peer group, religious
services, and the employment sector and being provided all kinds of support – emotional, financial, work related, and services related – for the single mothers and their children as was available to them prior to being single. Social reintegration is, thus, envisaged as the continued support and status offered by the society at large to the single mothers to assist them to lead meaningful and productive lives after the emotional upheaval in their married lives.

In the present study, however, there are several factors reported that make the process of social reintegration stressful for the mothers. These are related to the quality of relationship, the family environment, and the experiences that they have in the family. Because of the tendency and likelihood of the family members to not accept the situation in a mature way, the single mothers report low levels of personal well-being and sometimes feel financially insecure. In the following sections the main reasons behind the difficulty in the process of social reintegration that the mothers face are cited.

**Stressors for the single mothers within the family.** In the present study the single mothers report having intermediate experiences in the family environment. Differences have been reported within the two groups of marital status (between divorcees and widows) and family structure. Divorced mothers when compared with the widowed mothers and single mothers in joint families when compared with their counterparts from nuclear families report lower quality of family experiences. This is especially in the areas related to their perception of being able to express their feelings in the family, their belief in God, their organizational capabilities, feelings of cohesiveness in the family, and feelings of independence. These findings have been documented and analyzed through the responses as provided by the mothers through the Family Environment Scale (Vohra, 1997).

As mentioned earlier on also, divorced mothers in an Indian society suffer more the consequences of being single when compared with widowed mothers. This is due to the stigma that is still associated with the divorced women, where instead of giving them a fair chance for revival after marital disruption, the immediate support group usually places the blame on the
women for being independent, ambitious, and unable to make compromises, and adjustments (Kumari, 1989). This trend has also been observed in other Asian countries, particularly in Taiwan, where the divorce rates are among the highest in Asia (Walsh & Huang, 2003). Researchers attribute this to the changing roles of women in the Taiwanese society who now enjoy a higher autonomy when compared with the previous times. But such individualism and feminism is in conflict with the traditional family structure in Taiwan and, hence, is attributed to the increased divorce rate and consequent implications on the overall well-being of the family members (Walsh & Huang, 2003). In the Indian scenario, studies by Chaudhary (1988), Leela (1991), Mehta (1975), Pothen (1986), and YWCA (undated) do indicate that although divorced women are most likely to come back to their parental home following divorce, the divorcees might sometimes have low status in the household and may not be welcomed with open arms, consequently leading to further tensions. Thus, the independence and equality that the women enjoyed prior to the marriage is not the same after they become single and return to their homes (paternal/in-laws).

The main cause of conflict for the mothers remains that they sometimes find it difficult to get along with their in-laws. Even though the divorced mothers report such conflicts, the widowed mothers face more. Singh and Gill (1986) attribute this to the fact that in an Indian society there are a lot of superstitions associated with widowed women and many a times the in-laws blame the widows as being responsible for the death of the husband because of their ill-fate and also criticize them on many occasions. The divorced mothers in the present study mainly face problems from their ex-spouse and his relatives. The main reasons as given by the mothers for the cause of stress with these people remains reasons pertaining to financial and household and property issues, differences in opinion, attitude problem, indifferent nature of the people, people sticking to the past, spreading rumors, backbiting, and generation gap (Code No. 124: “I am having lot of problems with the in-laws- his brother and sister due to the ownership of the house”; Code No. 156: “The family of my ex-husband..they are not increasing the alimony money despite our facing so
many problems”; Code No. 159: “my ex-husband and his mother..constant threats and scenes at home. They still want me to get back. I will never do that”) (also see Table 22, page 84).

As mentioned in an earlier section, that because of lack of adequate support from the family members to encourage the single mothers to come to terms with their loss, the mothers might face lowered levels of personal well-being. The mothers in the present study suffer from consequences in the area of well-being since they report below average feelings. Further, a positive association has been reported between the well-being of the mothers and their adolescent children. In-depth interviews carried out with the mothers reveal that, within the one month of the study that the mothers participated in, they sometimes felt so depressed that it completely ruined their day and also faced stress regarding their jobs along with having disagreements with close ones. Though the percentage of report was high in both the groups, the feelings of depression, disagreements with close ones, and stress regarding job front has been reported significantly more among the divorced mothers when compared with the widowed mothers (see Figure 25).

![Figure 25. Percentage values depicting stressors that the single mothers report in one month prior to the study](image-url)
To explain the findings of lowered well-being among the single mothers, certain cultural factors that play an important role in the feelings of well-being for the single mothers are elaborated upon. Indian society, that has a male dominance, considers the status of single women to be deviant from the normal mode and thus, places greater restrictions on them. The basic kinship system, particularly in North India, that favors patrilocality and patriliny has very strong implications for the conditions of women in general and of widows in particular (Chen & Dreze, 1992). Greater the inequality between men and women in a given society, the more detrimental is the impact of being single on the women. Thus, because of certain social attitudes, symbolic ideas of a cultural system that gives expression in ritualized patterns (Chakravarti, 1995) and varied expectations of the role of single women in India little effort is made to understand their inner feelings and well-being and many a times they suffer from consequences related to depression and lowered feelings of well-being (Nathawat & Botre, 1998). This is particularly so because of the sometimes agonizing process of social reintegration that the single women in India often face where limited opportunities are provided to them for their emotional and vocational stability, thus, having a consequence on their personal well-being.

**Stressors for the single mothers due to the existing law practices in India.** The Hindu Woman's Right to Property Act, 1937, Section 3(3) and Hindu Succession Act, 1956, maintain, that in case of the widows, their interest in the family property remains the same as that of the deceased husband. The Hindu Law also states that every member of the household by virtue of birth is entitled to a share in the natal property. Thus, legally widowed women have an equal right on property of the in-laws and their parents home and the divorced women have an equal right on the parents property even after the dissolution of their marriage. However, there continue to remain large gaps between the theoretical and practical aspects of the practice of law in India. In a study by Chen and Dreze (1992) a high percentage of the respondents were involved in serious custody battles with their in-laws over the property and land. In my
study also the trends report that almost 16.4 percentage of the mothers (more in case of the widows) were involved in financial and property issues with their in-laws after the demise of their husbands. All these stressors make the reintegration of single women difficult where on the one hand they should be thinking of getting their life back into normalcy after becoming single and on the other hand they are involved in the denial of their basic rights in serious custody issues related with finances and property.

Chen and Dreze (1992), on the issue of property inheritance for single women, mention that the social support that the single women in India, particularly widows, receive in their in-laws home is extremely limited and as a result, many single women are deprived of the support that they need to stay happily in their husband’s home. The authors further point out that once the woman gets married in an Indian society, her legal and social status undergoes changes, particularly on her right to property inheritance. However, in the case of dissolution of marriage the property rights of the single women come under sharp scrutiny of the family members and even though they have financial claims and there are traditional and modern laws that protect the claim of single women to inheritance there are many a times differences in the actual practice followed and the claim to inheritance is often violated.

Because of the faulty legislature system the mothers in the present study also report facing financial difficulty. The divorced mothers report to be at a significantly greater disadvantage when compared with the widowed mothers regarding their finances. Agnes (1992) makes a very interesting observation in her article on the economic consequences of divorce for mothers in India. The author observes that the Indian legislature system is so structured that the economic security that a marriage provides is always considered as the more attractive proposition. Further, the maintenance provided by the Indian courts for the divorced women and their children is minimal and often child support by the husband is severely contested by the husbands’ side of the family. In the present study as low as 10 percent of the divorced mothers were getting child support. Similar results have been reported by Chaudhary (1988),
Pothen (1986), and YWCA (undated) in their studies on mother headed single parent families in India. The main reasons given by the single mothers, as reported by the findings of these studies, for not pressing the husbands for child support was that they did not want to maintain contact with abusive husbands or because they were afraid that the fathers will try to gain custody of children. Further, the results from the present study also indicate that state support such as provision of husband’s pension, job reservations for the single women and their children, in case of widows, and free counseling services to the single mothers are very low and women have near negligible knowledge about them.

Stressors for the single mothers due to the process of social change. Changing trends in family structure do not necessarily indicate change in thought process regarding the status of single women in India. In earlier times, single mothers and their children were the responsibility of the extended family members. But due to the changing family structure and composition certain changes in the structure and composition of the family have taken place (Bharat, 1986). The weakening of familial bonds has further altered the situation. Regarding the feelings experienced by the mothers in the present study on the structure of family, there were different stressors for different situations. Mothers staying in a nuclear family setup faced difficulties regarding their finances, loneliness, insecurity, an increase in the workload, and lack of an elder person to look after the children. Thus, even though the single women might be in nuclear family setup, lack of adequate services and support provided by the society renders it difficult for them to find time beyond the daily chores and, therefore, makes it all the more difficult for them to maintain a regular and normal lifestyle.

For women in the joint family setup, stressors are faced regarding interference by in-laws in personal matters, disagreements about joint finances/property feuds, and certain adjustment problems. Chen and Dreze (1992) report that most often women perceive in-laws to be more as a source of harassment than of support. Even the single mothers living separately from
their in-laws receive very little support from them. Further, in the case of joint families the authors mention that that a joint family provides protection, especially in the emotional area, to single mothers is a myth. This is a feeling that is expressed by the authors but as I shall point out in a later section support by parents and in-laws also provide a buffer to the stress that accompanies being single for the women in my study.

The above discussion reveals that because of pre-existing notions of the Indian society towards single women there are certain stressors that they face. Even though the kin and law acknowledges single mothers in India and act as an immediate anchor for them, there is a lack of an effective contingency plan that makes the reintegration of single women in the mainstream difficult and discourages to a large extent their being remarried.

This above mentioned two sections have dealt with certain stressors faced by adolescents and the mothers due to single parenthood in India. As is reported, the difficult circumstances are many times dependent on the marital status of the women, i.e. whether they are divorced or widowed and also on the type of family structure that they are residing in along with their children. However, a matter of concern is that because of the attitude of people in particular and the society in general, there are certain costs that are associated with being single both for the mothers and the children. Certain literature studies describing negative stereotypes on the status of single women such as “for the widow, life may not seem worth living and she may look forward to her own early death” (Patil, 2000, p.22); “the curse of being a widow, the problems and agony of being a divorced and separated woman” (Sethi, 1994, p. 17, p.18); “Forever Autumn” (Reddy, 1992) and such articles further add on to creating certain myths and an environment that is not the most congenial for single women and their children and make their social reintegration a doubly difficult task.

I will now discuss the costs emerging for the adolescents from single parent families in areas related to adjustment and academic performance.
Stressors for the adolescents from single parent families related to adjustment and academic problems

Stressors related to adjustment. Concern is expressed regarding the adjustment profile of the adolescents in the present study. This is so because the results indicate that the subjects experience adjustment problems related to the home sphere, show submissive social behavior, and many times display a hostile attitude towards others. Differences according to the marital status of the mothers are observed, with children of divorced mothers displaying significantly more problems in the areas of emotional, academic, and home adjustment than their counterparts with widowed mothers.

Since there are not many studies available in the Indian context that relate directly to adjustment problems among the adolescents from single parent families I will provide the comments made by the author of the Adjustment Inventory, Bell (1962) whose inventory the respondents of the present study have completed. The author mentions that difficulties in the areas of home adjustment for the children usually result when there are feelings of parental rejection, persistent tensions in the home, sibling rivalries, fear of parents, a role reversal of the parent, and there has been a divorce or separation of the parent. While many of the reasons cited by the author are not applicable in the present study yet there are two aspects that are prevailing and may be the cause of adjustment stress in the home sphere, namely, the role reversal of parent, and a divorce or separation of the parent (even true in the case of the children with widowed mothers since there is a separation).

As mentioned earlier, the adolescents in the present study show submissive social behavior and many times display a hostile attitude towards others. Bell (1962) explains the concept of submissiveness and hostility by observing that children showing submissive behavior in the area of social development tend to display characteristics that are indicative of hesitation in spheres related to making friends easily and having feelings of self-consciousness and shyness while communicating with others. Hostility, as described by the author, deals with the feeling that people are unfriendly and
the children sometimes report having an attitude problem due to which they find it difficult to get along with people.

Detailed interviews with adolescents in the current study related to their social behavior indicate that many adolescents find it difficult to interact with peers, especially of the opposite gender (53%) (Code No. 135: "I am friendly and an extrovert but my mother doesn't allow me to have friends of opposite sex"). Further, some of the adolescents also indicate that their personality traits are that of feeling shy and that this feeling has been enhanced in some respondents after the demise/separation of their parents (23%) (Code No. 136: "My understanding level is more than others of my age. I thought more for my age even then when I was young. That is what I feel even now. I am friendly and understanding but an introvert and am too critical. I am not much confident, shy before strangers but I am confident of the work that I do"). Results of the present study also indicate that the adolescents display certain amount of hostile attitude towards others. Many of the subjects report not getting along with people because of a difference of opinion with them, interfering nature of the people, jealousies and misunderstanding with friends including differences in attitude (Code No. 014: "I don't get along with my aunt because she doesn't not understand my feelings"; Code No. 161: "My father's present wife, she is the cause of all the trouble that there is in the family", Code No. 135: "I sometimes do not get along with my maternal grandmother, with mother, and we have conflicts sometimes as they are very strict and orthodox").

The results from the present study indicate that the children with divorced mothers are displaying more problems in the areas of emotional, academic, and home adjustment when compared with the adolescents of widowed mothers. As has already been indicated a traumatic experience related to divorce of the parents is likely to cause more stress among the adolescents in the home sphere. Also, emotional stressors tend to be caused by a tendency to have excessive and volatile feelings such as fear and anger and depressive feelings coming from isolation. Sundaram (1993) cautions that
the most deleterious dimensions of divorce are on the well-being and emotional adjustment of the children.

In the present study many of the adolescents report not getting along with people because of a difference of opinion with them, interfering nature of the people, jealousies and misunderstanding with friends including differences in attitude, thus, accounting for their adjustment concerns in certain areas related to social acceptance and getting along with people.

The Developmental Theory (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) proposes that the quality of experiences that adolescents have within their social network (their own and their parent’s peers/extended family network) is likely to have an outcome on their personality, temperament, and behavior. As is seen from the above discussion, adolescents from the present study do display a certain amount of shyness and hostile attitude towards their own friends and their extended relatives. These experiences are likely to have crucial implications on their adjustment pattern and also bear an influence on their temperament.

Stressors related to academic performance of the adolescents

As with adjustment certain costs are evident on the academic and scholastic performance and career plans of the adolescents also. The adolescents in the present study report an average academic and scholastic performance in their respective grades.

Verma, Sharma, and Larson (2002) in their article on school stress in India mention that the Indian educational system is such that there is a high pressure for the students to excel. In the single parent families, there might be an even greater stress for the children to perform well academically from the single mother’s side because of the dual role responsibility that the mothers feel after the demise/separation of their husbands, irrespective of the support available. This can lead to a greater feeling of accountability for the mothers that their children get higher scores. Almost 29 percent of the mothers, in the present study, feel anxious regarding the academic performance of their children and voice having concerns about this, particularly in the one month during the
period of this study. They are, thus, likely to place a greater pressure on their children for academic excellence. Further, even though a small percentage of mothers feel that they cannot cope up with the academic needs of the children (24.9%), yet the percentage of adolescents who are enrolled for tuition after school is very high (61.1%). The main reasons as cited by the mothers for taking tuition by their children include tuition being necessary for competition, the child being careless/weak in studies, unavailability of time to teach, unable to teach, to improve class grades, and school not teaching enough. Similar studies conducted by various investigators on the concerns of parenting as a single parent reiterate that the academic performance of the children remains a big concern for the mothers (Bharat, 1988b; Siganporia, 1993; Singh & Gill, 1986). There is, thus, likelihood that the concerns for higher academic performance by the mothers may get transmitted on to the concerns of the adolescents also.

In the present study, almost 44 percent of the adolescents report not being satisfied with their current grades and also admit to being under pressure for academic excellence. Also, on the question relating to some of the worries, tensions, and daily hassles that the subjects report undergoing as high as 78 percent report facing tensions and worries due to academics and examinations and also face concerns regarding their future (Code No. 35: "main worry is that what to do or adopt a stream after 10+1 so that I know I am in the right path"; Code No. 30: "I often experience worries and tensions regarding my exams"; Code No. 166: "I often worry about my marks – I don’t feel like studying at all"; Code No. 126: "when my parents got divorced I used to think what my friends will think about me, otherwise I am tensed these days about my career"). In fact, the subjects also feel that one of the main reasons for having disagreements with their mothers and relatives is related to their studies (Code No. 130: "yes, I sometimes argue with my mother regarding studies when I don’t want to study but she forces me"; Code No. 46: "I disagree with my mother regarding her carefree attitude towards a few things, my over reaction to a few, and not listening to my mother when she keeps telling me to study").
The main concern expressed with the academic pressure of the subjects here is the repercussion that the adolescents might face because of this stress that is further compounded by examination tension. Documented studies that look at the implications of academic stress for growing up children and adolescents facing the competitive Indian examination system is that the children sometimes report exhibiting psychological and physiological symptoms (Chawla, 1997; Narang, 1994; Verma & Gupta, 1990). In my study since a high percentage of adolescents report facing worries and tensions due to academics, maybe this explains, partly, the reason for their displaying adjustment problems in the area of social and emotional adjustment and also certain problems related in the mental health area.

This section has elaborated on the adjustment and academic performance related stressors that adolescents in the present study report to be facing. As is revealed there are varied factors that might have an influence. That there is a general scenario in India that encourages students to excel and consequently builds pressures on them is well known. But in certain instances, in case of the single parent families, the underlying causes can also be the higher expectations of the mothers for the children to perform well at all costs along with an emotional build up by them to fulfill the un-cherished dreams of the children’s late or divorced father. Also, the trauma that the children undergo after facing the death/separation of their father can bear consequences on the academic performance of the children and also their future career plan. There are 35 adolescents in the study who were in class 12th during the period of this study. The 12th class in India is considered to be the most crucial class in terms of choosing a career and the marks affect the students’ admissions to prestigious colleges and universities (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002). Some of the subjects in the present study report facing stress and tension in their future academic and career plans due to shortage of financial resources and expectations to start earning at the earliest by the immediate family members.

Thus, the combined influence of stress of the school, home, and social networks for some adolescents from single parent families results in their
displaying academic and adjustment difficulties. A similar kind of interaction pattern is observed by Lerner and Castellino (2002) in their theoretical model as suggested by the Developmental Systems Theory and dealing with adolescent-context relations. In the model the authors propose that the cognitive, behavioral, and temperamental adjustment of the adolescents is closely interlinked with the quality of experiences that they have in their immediate network of family, school associates, and peer group.

I will now discuss that along with the stressors there are also many strengths that are revealed by the single mothers and their children while adapting to a single parent family situation. Despite the increase in risk, there are reports of greater coping skills and bonding for the members in the single parent family unit (both in nuclear and extended/joint families).

**Strengths associated with being in a single parent family for the mothers and the adolescents**

Most of the Indian research studies on single parent families tend to overemphasize on the negative aspects and the resulting implications of being a single parent and the possible consequences on the children and undermine the strengths of being in a single parent family. John Cloud (2003, January 20) in a special issue of the Time magazine provides a very interesting insight into "How we get labeled" (p.48) and cautions that a label can sometimes become a stigma. Therefore, an effort needs to be made in understanding the child and the single mother in totality and mention the positive as well as negative aspects of growing up. I will first discuss the positive aspects for the children and then will highlight the strengths that the single mothers display.

**Strengths associated with adolescents growing up in a single parent family.** The good news emerging from the present study is that, though the children do display stressors in areas such as adjustment, emotional problems, and certain areas of family experiences, no where do they match up with the popular notion that is usually associated with children from single parent families that they will not be properly disciplined, will be very troubled,
will be juvenile offenders, will be someone who would be displaying low self-esteem, will be at an enhanced risk of childhood psychopathology, and will display acute mental health related problems (Chopra, 1982; Roy, 1980; Wig, Verma, & Shah, 1969).

An effort, therefore, needs to be made in understanding the varied factors that can have a probable impact on the adolescents in the present study. Firstly, the period of being in a single parent family needs to be understood. A majority of the children in the sample have been in a single parent family for more than five years (55.1%). A popular saying goes that "time is the biggest healer". It might hold some truth while describing the situation of these children. A subject (Code No. 45) while describing if he felt any personality changes after the demise/separation of his father points out that "I don't remember much since I was very young then". Therefore, even though the adolescents in the sample display significantly more problems in the area of well-being in the period of less than one year following the demise/separation of the father, the perception of well-being is seen to improve with a gap in the years of being in a single parent family (see Table 16, page 73). Secondly, in India the family plays an important mediator and does provide an emotional buffer to the children going through the initial trauma of father loss. A uniqueness of the Indian family is that even though there might be stresses and tensions among the family members on various issues and emphasis is put on interdependence, particularly in the joint family, the families rally around for support at times of requirement and stress.

The theoretical model as suggested by the Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) reiterates the notion that adolescents and their families develop and show systematic changes over time. Further, within the adolescents’ context there is a strong influence of the immediate network of school, social associates, and marriage and work network of the parents. Beyond that the support as provided by the community, society, and culture matters. Therefore, for the sample of adolescents in the present study also, systematic changes are observed over a period of time during which their
perception of well-being improves. Further, the support as provided by the social network system to adolescents and their mothers helps them cope better the loss of their fathers.

For adolescents in the present study, many further positive aspects have been noticed. Benefits are also seen through the nature of support available to the adolescents through their mothers, immediate family members, extended relatives, and peers. In my findings, the subjects recognize the importance of the immediate family members as having an important influence in their lives and acknowledge their understanding nature, love, affection, sacrifices made by them, and their ability to stand by their sides during moments of crisis. A young adolescent with a divorced mother (Code No. 133) in the study points out that “I value my mother for her experience, her love, and her boldness. Mummy has not changed at all for us. She is still the same except for the fact that she tries to fulfill the role of a father too. She has changed for our better”.

There always are emotional ups and downs in our daily lives. The respondents face emotional upheavals also. Many times the reasons are due to the strains and stresses of experiencing adolescence and many times it is due to the experience of being raised in a single parent family as has been reported in an earlier section on stressors related to being in single parent families. However, during all these emotionally challenging times a very high percentage of adolescents in the present study report getting a very strong network to share with them their concerns and worries. The mother is recognized as a person who they can turn to followed by the siblings, friends, and grandparents. A majority of the adolescents report being very happy with the kind of relationship that they share with their mother. This is seen as a positive development since a happy relationship with the mother also entails a happier and more congenial family environment. Further, the subjects also report a greater bonding with the family members, being more caring, and understanding with the mother after the demise/separation of the father.

Goodrich, Rampase, Ellman, and Halstead (1988) mention that in contrast to the two parent family where the mother and the father already have a pre-
established hierarchy with father at the top followed by the mother and then the children at the bottom, the single-mother family typically functions as a consensual arrangement. Therefore, there is a greater responsibility, feelings of greater maturity, more cohesiveness, and flexibility. An adolescent girl with a divorced mother reports (Code No. 189): "My mother and I have become more like friends now".

Contrary to the popular belief that adolescents will display aggressive behaviour and primarily negative personality characteristics after being in a single parent family, adolescents in the present study do report certain positive aspects such as having the feeling that they have become more mature, responsible, independent, and relaxed. A young boy (Code No. 085) says that, "I have become much much more mature as I know I have to support my mom", followed by another adolescent boy with a widowed mother, Code No. (091), who says: "Yes I have become more mature, sensitive, and emotional after my father passed away". This positive trend was also noticed far more in the children with divorced mothers than the children with widowed mothers.

The Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) suggests a strong correlation and interaction between the temperament profile, personality, developmental levels, and the values, attitudes, and expectations that adolescents have with the quality of relationship that they share with their siblings and peers. The adolescents in the present study report strong sibling relationships and an even greater bonding after being in a single parent family than earlier (Code No. 86: "Yes, I feel that my brother has become much more caring"; Code No. 86: "We share more things now"; Code No. 130: "Yes, I have noticed a change as earlier we used to fight a lot but now this has decreased").

Regarding peer relationships for the adolescents in the present study, they are comparatively less stressful when considering the viewpoints as expressed by some studies that report children in single parent families to have difficulties in maintaining and continuing friendships. The subjects in the present study report feeling comfortable in interacting with peers and also starting a new friendship. They also consider friends to be good fun to be with.
Positive feelings also relate with having an optimistic feeling of the future. Many of the adolescents in the study feel positive that they are heading in the right direction due to the support that is available to them via their family members and the strong family support that they have. They also feel that because of their support they would be able to achieve all that they hope for.

An important result emerging from the present study, is that despite the fact that the adolescents report facing economic consequences yet all of them are in a position to be able to continue their studies. Also, a majority of the subjects are in a position to devote complete attention to their studies without having to worry about part-time employment. This may be due to the fact that in India a stress and priority is given by the elders for the children to devote complete attention to studies before starting employment. Also, the single mothers and their support network will try their best under all possible trying circumstances to maintain the continuity in life for the children after the demise/separation of the father, both in terms of educational and emotional support. In the Indian context, there is dependence of the children on the parent for being the main provider. In an urban city like Chandigarh, where the current study is based, the standard of education is high. Also, a majority of the mothers in the study report a high standard of education with all of them having had a high school level education and as high as 61 percent being graduates and postgraduates. A high educational background of the mothers, thus, ensures that the children get a priority for education and are encouraged to devote complete attention to their studies and their future goals.

Thus, the main theme emerging from the above discussion is that children report a variety of psychological symptoms after being in a single parent family. However, in most circumstances the children do adapt to the changed family life situation, showing resiliency, and not dysfunction, considering the stressful adjustments that they have to make (Amato, 1993; Emery, 1998). Bharat (1986) asks the crucial question whether children in single parent families are necessarily at psychological risk or is the risk more in the minds of the people because of preconceived notions of the broken family
being ineffective in taking care of the children. The results from my study indicate that though the children do undergo stressors in being in a single parent family yet they have a strong support group with whom they can share their tensions and worries.

**Strengths that the single mothers reveal in a single parent family.** In a similar way as the children reveal strengths, there are strengths and positive adaptations that the single mothers also reveal in my study. They report a strong support group during times of stress. The implications of being in a single parent family have many consequences on the mothers most of all, both positive and negative. However, an emphasis is usually made on the negative consequences of being single, especially the negative consequences of being a single mother. The results from the present study indicate that irrespective of the marital status, both the divorced and widowed mothers have a strong social network that provides them with support when they are single, mostly from the immediate family and close friends (Code No. 085: “my parents, friends, and boss have had the greatest influence in my life. They are supportive, forthright, and always there”). However, in case of the widowed mothers the network also consists of the in-laws side, which seems to be near negligible in case of the divorced mothers.

The support from the immediate family members and in-laws (in many instances) deals with providing support, care, guidance, and affection, and looking after the children when the mothers go out. They also provide emotional, financial, educational, and psychological support to the children of single mothers. This support from the immediate family members and close friends is considered crucial because in the Indian situation people rarely go to counselors to seek professional help during times of distress, both because of the limited number of mental health professionals and also because of the associated stigma that is still prevalent.

Regarding seeking of professional assistance in the present study by the single mothers, only 1.6 percent of the mothers sought professional assistance during times of crisis even though as high as 62.2 percent report feeling
depressed during the previous week of the study. In such a situation it is comforting to understand that the mothers are getting help and assistance by friends and extended relatives to talk out their problems. A high percentage of the mothers also report being satisfied with the assistance received through this support group. Also, as suggested by the Developmental Systems Theory (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) a strong social network of the mothers is seen to have an influence on the cognition, temperament, behavior, attitudes, health, and personality of the mothers, which eventually has implications for the adolescents as well since there is a dynamic interactive process that exists between the parent and the child.

The low incidence of single mothers visiting counselors, even though they report anxiety symptoms, raises a crucial issue in the Indian backdrop. As opposed to the Western countries where undertaking psychiatric treatment is accepted as part of a lifestyle, in the Indian culture there is still an associated stigma regarding visiting a counselor. This is more so because there is an unwritten law and popular proverb that cites in Hindi, “ghar ki baat ghar mein hi rahne do” (let the private matters of home remain private and within the four walls of the home). Therefore, there is always, invariably, the presence of a kind sibling/parent/neighbour/friend,colleague who will listen to the person in stress, in this case the single mothers and who also shares a basic trust with them. Psychiatrists acknowledge the role played by the family members and close associates in assisting the person at distress. In the present study, the mothers also report gaining comfort in being associated with mothers in similar circumstance and together being a support for each other. This support group of extended network of the single mothers is, thus, in a position to work beneficially towards the well-being of the single mothers and assist them in their process to a successful social reintegration.

As reported by certain studies many a times the mothers feel a greater ease after being single and report greater independence and socializing with friends, especially in the case of divorced women. The women generally feel relieved and report an increase in confidence after being out of a bad marriage
(Bharat, 1988a; Pothen, 1989; YWCA, undated). In my study some of the single mothers who are staying on their own in a nuclear family setup feel lowered stress levels due to the fact that there is lesser tension and interference from the in-laws and they are also able to spend more time with their children. For the mothers living in a joint family, they report that the financial, emotional, and social security that they get while living in a joint family always works towards their advantage. Therefore, the mothers also see an advantage for the compromise that they sometimes have to make while staying in a joint family setup.

Even though there is literature evidence that indicates that the single mothers face a lot of economic stress, both for themselves and for the children, in my study the mothers feel that they are able to manage primarily because of the support of the family. A high majority of the single mothers in the present study are working (N=145) but they reiterate the fact that the finances are managed with support from the immediate family. The mothers also have the confidence that during times of a financial crisis they will be able to cope because of the confidence of support from the immediate family members.

Thus, the results have shown that while there are stressors associated with being a single parent there are also people who rally around the single mothers and their children to support. The dynamics of social network are such that if one is absent the other steps in.

**Individual differences in the psychological adjustment of the children and single mothers in single parent families**

Though there is a body of literature that is available that suggests the possible impact of single parenthood (both negative and positive) on the children, on the single mothers, and the family members, yet a word of caution needs to be made while making generalizations. An emphasis needs to be made on understanding the individual differences among the subjects since, as I have mentioned in an earlier section, a label can sometimes become a stigma. The portrayal of the influence of single parenthood on the children and
the mothers is incomplete and does not do full justice to the family life situation because there are immense and notable individual differences in the adjustment levels of the children and the mothers. While some children and mothers emerge from the loss of father/husband with a strong sense of feeling of loss, anger, and despair, others are capable of acknowledging that single parenthood does bring in despair and pain but with some adjustments brings in resilience and greater bonding among the family members. A very crucial question that needs to be addressed at this point is that what determines whether the children are scathed or strengthened after being in a single parent family. The answer to this seemingly easy question is complicated and one that requires a cultural introspection also. Certain factors that are emerging from exhaustive work in the western studies and are important to understand are the nature and quality of the child’s relationship with the parent, the number of additional stressors that accompany and follow marital separation/death of the spouse, and the economic circumstances of the household (Amato, 1993, 1994; Emery, 1999).

Relating the above mentioned observations to the present study I will now present, in brief, a profile of three families (two with widowed mothers and one with a divorced mother) and examine how individual differences can have an influence on the overall well-being of the family members.

**Family 1.** Regarding the profile and background information of the first family, the subject is a sixteen-year-old Hindu boy, studying in class tenth, whose mother has been widowed since the last two years. The mother is a housewife and her educational background consists of a graduate degree. They are living in a nuclear family and the family consists of the mother, the subject, and a younger brother aged eleven years. The source of income for the family is the husband’s pension and interest of money in the bank. They are staying in a rented apartment. Because of the limited income and the non-working status of the mother she feels that their financial situation is uncomfortable.
An in-depth interview with the adolescent subject reveals that even though the mother and brother are the most important people in his life yet he is not very happy with the relationship that he shares with his mother ("I do not have very good relations with my mother"). The subject feels that he does not get enough attention at home by his mother, as she never cares enough about him. The mother, on the other hand, feels that ever since the demise of her husband she has been so engrossed in her belief in God that "I want to leave home and go to Guruji but I cannot leave home as I have two children to care for".

As a result of the tension that my subject feels in the home he feels that his academic performance is suffering. He was not able to clear his previous exams and is repeating a class. The mother voices concern regarding this but is not able to talk directly to her son regarding his grades since she feels he will not listen to her. Before being in a single parent family his academic grades had been average. But the subject does not appreciate advice from mother regarding his academic scores and this is one of the major sources of conflict between them. However, the point to be considered here is that the relationship that the child shares with the mother has been stressful even when the father was alive ("earlier my mother was stricter as she used to beat me but now she only scolds me and does not beat me"). The economic and academic pressures after the demise may have added the stress. Because of these added pressures the child finds it easier to relate and communicate with friends. However he is also aware that the company that he keeps is not very good since he mentions, "I prefer meeting my friends outside because they are not good and may create tamasha at my home which I do not like". Even though the subject is battling issues related to economic pressures, self-esteem, adjustment, certain areas of psycho-social well-being, and does not find the family environment cohesive (as revealed by the scores) he is still optimistic that the future will be better since he says he has started working hard in academics and is also sure that despite the fact that they cannot buy
Family 2. Now I will present a brief profile of the second family by giving first the background of the subject. The subject is a 15-year-old Hindu girl and is the third born in the family. She is studying in class ninth and is staying in a nuclear family along with her mother and two older brother and sister. Her mother is widowed and during the period of study had been single since the last two years. The subject's mother is running her own business and is a postgraduate. They are staying in a rented accommodation and have an annual income of Rs. 100,000/-. The mother feels satisfied with her financial situation and her current job although she is not too happy with the working hours of her job.

The adolescent girl feels that the greatest influence in her life has been that of her mother who has influenced her life positively. Because of the relationship that she shares with her mother she feels that she does not have any major tensions in her life though there is an occasional stress due to academic pressures. She also mentions that in case ever there is an argument with her mother "she will surely change her outlook because mummy is more experienced". The subject also feels that the relationship that she shares with the mother has not changed after the demise of her father and expresses that, "mummy has not changed at all for us. She is still the same, except for the fact that she tries to fulfill the role of a father too. She has changed for our better". She also feels that regarding her personality characteristics she is an extrovert, friendly, outgoing, and always tries to talk things that are humorous. Further, regarding changes that she has observed in herself after the demise of her father she says that, "I have become more caring towards my mother. I never could read the face of my mother. But whenever she returns from the office now, I know what’s in her mind. I have realized my responsibilities better. I feel that I am more self-dependent now as I was earlier with papa".

The subject also shares close bonds with her siblings. The relationship has got strengthened after the demise of her father since they share their substantial materialistic things there is a possibility that the situation will improve because of the likelihood that the mother will get a job at the earliest.
thoughts more often now. She is also academically confident and optimistic about her future since she feels that she has full support and care of loved ones. She prefers spending time with her family when compared to friends since she feels that friends sometimes defy and family is always there. Finally, she feels economically secure and feels that she gets more than her requirements. Her comfort within the family environment is also reflected in her academic grades, positive feelings of well being, and self-esteem (as revealed by the scores).

**Family 3.** The third case study I am presenting deals with the relations that an adolescent girl has with her divorced mother. The subject is 15 years old and is an only child living in a nuclear family that consists of the mother and the child. Her parents have been divorced for a period of more than five years. A striking feature of this family is their immense belief in God, Sathya Sai Baba, so much so that they use "Sai" as a middle name. The mother is an advocate and is doing well professionally with a good monthly income. In her spare time the mother takes the time out to carry social activities and make donations.

The subject considers the influence of "Sai Baba" and her mother as very crucial. Because of her mother's religious way of thinking the daughter is also spiritual in her approach. Job commitments of the mother keeps the mother busy due to which she is not able to spend too much time with her daughter. The mother and daughter report a close bond between each other though the daughter does find her mother to be very dominating at times. However, their relationships seems to have changed for the better after the divorce, as she herself says "before I never used to agree with her. Now I agree with her", "am more attached with mother. Earlier I was not". The young girl takes on a philosophical perspective in life and adds, "As one grows up the household responsibilities increase, mine have also increased". However, there is also an evidence of regret that the girl faces regarding her mother's martial status and prefers meeting her friends outside as she feels, "slightly embarrassed regarding the status of my mother". She also prefers meeting her
friends in comparison with her family since "to spend time with family is boring". This statement can be expected from any adolescent growing up in a two-parent family also who is experiencing the joys of interacting with same age group friends.

The mother of the adolescent girl is a strong believer in God and considers "God to be the most important influence in her life". She also feels that she is lucky to have a strong support from her brother and sister who also help her out financially in times of need. However, staying in a nuclear family, the mother feels lonely and says that there is trouble in decision-making. The mother is also in touch with her ex-husband whenever the need arises.

Belief in God, resiliency, and moving on in life seem to be the striking feature of this family. The mother-daughter relationship seems to have improved after the divorce. Yes, divorce comes along with its emotional baggage of insecurity and added responsibilities, but yes, there is also evidence, as reported by the experiences of this family that with a want to improve things and cope better the results are positive.

With these three case studies I will like to reemphasize that individual differences within the family life influence the family dynamics. Two families have widowed single mothers with adolescent children and one has a divorced mother. All the families are living in a nuclear family setup. But because of differences in the economic background of the families, the resilience as displayed by the mothers, the strengths and weaknesses as revealed by the mothers and their children, notable differences are observed in these three households. A major facilitating factor that works for these families is the social support that is available for them, thus, providing them with the necessary security blanket.

After presenting a profile of the single mothers in India, the discussion now focuses on the single mother and their children in the United States.
The United States

The available data on adolescents and single mothers in the United States was used to profile the experiences that single parent families have in a different cultural set up and provide points of comparison and contrast with the Indian scenario. The discussion is related to understanding and examining the daily lives of the mothers and that of their children and the interpersonal relationships that they share. The financial situation as perceived by the mothers and the relationship of the separated fathers with the children and their mothers is also discussed in context of the custody and visitation arrangements of the ex-spouse and the extent of satisfaction derived by the mothers with the arrangement. The main focus of this section is to be able to provide a glimpse into the running of a single parent household and compare it with findings of studies that have researched into the single parent family unit in the US.

Profile of the children

Academics, finances, and significant relationships of the children.
The findings of the present study in areas related to academics, finances, and emotional relationships indicate that despite the stressful life situation of a divorce the children are coping. In the academic area the results reveal that contrary to a wide body of literature studies on the academic achievement of the children in divorced, mother headed families that point out that children from single parent families are at an academic disadvantage (such as Downey, 1994; Finn & Owings, 1994; and Owusu-Bempah, 1995), the adolescents in the present sample report sound academic records with a majority of them scoring above average grades. Thus, father absence does not necessarily hinder the academic progress of children. Rather factors such as individual ability and educational aspirations have the greatest direct effects on the academic achievement of the adolescents living within female-headed single parent families. Goodrich, Rampase, Ellman, and Hallstead (1988) observe that research evidence indicates that the majority of the single parent families have
children who fare equally well on measures of emotional adjustment, IQ, and scholastic achievement.

Regarding the financial situation of the adolescents in the present study, though not many children report getting a weekly allowance, yet they show resilience by being involved in working at part time jobs in order to be able to meet their finances and have their own pocket money. Also, many subjects assist in running of the household expenses by giving the money that they earn in their part time jobs to their parent. In matters related to personal involvement in a romantic relationship a high percentage report going currently steady.

**Communication with the ex-father.** A very crucial part of the after effects of divorce remain the communication that the separated parents maintain with each other regarding the bringing up of their children. This interaction will further the chances for long-term bonds to be established between the children and their fathers. As reported in many other studies on divorce and custody arrangements the mothers usually get the full custody of the children after divorce. In the present study also the situation that best describes the adolescents’ current living arrangement is that they are mostly living with their mothers and visiting their biological fathers. The adolescents staying with their mothers feel that there is a fair opportunity for the adolescents to meet and interact with their fathers and a high percentage report visiting the fathers regularly. The fathers stay within reachable distance to their ex-families (usually between less than an hour to 17-18 hours driving distance). Mostly the reasons to visit the fathers by the children is out of a genuine wish to meet the fathers followed by the feeling that they should not hurt the feelings of the father by not visiting or spending time with them. However a matter of concern remains that the custody and visiting arrangements that have been reported at the initial period of divorce have been reported to change over a period of time due to reasons such as the parents moving away to a different town and children and both parents wanting a different schedule.

The subjects in the present study also report a strong desire for the parents to get back together since they sometimes get stressed out with certain
daily conflicts such as those with siblings and the daily running of the household. As with many children of divorced parents the children in the present study also often report that many a times the parents continue to argue with each other even after the separation regarding how the children should be brought up and the kind of rules to be imposed. Because of these arguments the subjects sometimes feel caught in between the parents and get confused regarding whose side to take during times of conflict.

Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (1996) in an informative study on the adolescents after divorce mention that conflict between parents can be especially detrimental to children who continue to spend time with both parents after divorce. The authors also reiterate the findings of the present study, that is, that the adolescents who live in dual residence are more strongly affected by inter parental conflict in terms of their feelings of being caught in between their parents. This is especially true when the parents are in high-conflict. The authors also mention that although the feelings of being caught between one's parents are related to problems in adjustment, particularly depression, the adolescents are not especially prone to adjustment difficulties under situations of high inter parental conflict. Other factors intervene in determining the adolescent's ultimate adjustment, such as, negative effects of conflict and loyalty problems.

The present study indicates that, after being in a single parent household, the subjects report greater shared family responsibility of the household chores being carried out. The subjects carry out household responsibilities in order to ease the pressure on the working mother by carrying out their own/family's laundry, cleaning the house, planning/preparing dinner for the family, doing grocery shopping, and caring for the younger sibling. Goodrich, Rampase, Ellman, and Halstead (1988) mention that in contrast to the two-parent family where the mother and the father establish a hierarchy with themselves at the top and the children at the bottom, the single mother family typically functions more on an arrangement that has the consensus of the family members. There is, thus, lesser conflict and the members feel that they
are able to better manage the routine and resources, even when scarce. Also, for the children the greater responsibility in the household tasks is rewarded with a greater feeling of power and fun especially in situations that require greater participation in being able to decide how the tasks are to be divided, and what schedule suits the needs of the children and other family members the best.

**Relationship of the adolescents with their mothers.** Regarding the kind of relationship that the adolescents share with their mothers it is encouraging to note that the mothers take the time out, despite their hectic lifestyle of doing both outside and household chores, and plan special things for their children during holidays and birthdays. In the everyday routine the mothers' involvement in the house remains related to the academic areas and progress of their children and knowing that their needs are being met. The mothers know fairly often who the friends of the children are and how and where they spend their time with. The children also report a good rapport and bonding with the mothers and feel that the mothers share their worries and concern with them and also look on to them for support. In turn the subjects worry for the welfare of their parent.

Research suggests that children and adolescents adjust better when they have warm, affectionate, and responsive relationship with their parent. Also, the adjustment levels are dependent on ability of the parent to continue making maturity demands on the children, that is, when the parent sets clear and set rules, maintaining expectations for good behavior along with growing input and negotiation on the part of the adolescent (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). However, there are certain times when the family environment gets such that they just do not like being there and want to get away from it. In the present study the adolescents who perceive high conflict in their families also perceive their mothers to be less accepting of them (r=-.42, p<.01) and those who perceive greater cohesion in the family environment perceive their mothers to be more accepting of them (r=.65, p<.01). Also, the adolescents who report
high depression in the family experience lesser cohesion \((r=-.32, p<.01)\) in the family environment.

Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dorbusch (1996) suggest that the closer and more trusting the relationship between parents and adolescents, the more well managed and controlled is the household. Also, the authors, in tune with the results of the present study, mention that when parents have good relationships with their adolescents, they are better able to stay in touch with the activities and concerns of their adolescents, discuss important matters with them concerning their decision making and behaviour. Also, the authors point out that for mother-resident adolescents, closer mother-child relationships are associated with less depression and less school deviance. Further, adolescents who feel disengaged from the residential home, that is, they have a feeling that they don't enjoy being at home, try to spend time away from home or away from the others at home, they are more likely to show indications of poor adjustment and depression which may eventually also indicate higher levels of deviance.

There is, therefore, a need for continued, engaged and involved parenting after divorce for the children. The involvement with the children is seen as one of the most important facilitators of adolescent's feelings of well-being after the divorce of their parents.

**Profile of the single mothers**

*Employment.* Studies related to the daily life profile of the single mothers indicate that a majority of them have to take up employment in order to be able to meet their finances and that not all of the jobs have comfortable timings. In the present study almost all the mothers are employed and among the employed mothers one thirds of the sample have more than one job so as to substantiate the family income. Amato (1994) points out that, in the United States, although divorced women have a relatively high rate of labour force participation, they have less labour force experience than do men, are less likely to be employed full time, and earn less income.
Finances. The main source of finance for the single mothers remains the strong social support group and extended networks group that they have. Hughes, Good, and Candell (1993) mention that the overall network grows in size following a divorce for the mothers and the variety of type of support also increases suggestive of stronger ties being developed and thus, also suggestive of a likelihood of an increase in financial assistance. The mothers who report greater cohesion in the family also report that they have an extended system of social support \((r=.32, p<.01)\). The support group consists mainly of the parents of the mothers and extended family members and friends. McKenry and Price (1991) in a literature review on alternatives for support for divorced women point to the research evidence that indicates that family members, especially parents, often provide substantial support to divorced/divorcing individuals. Further, regardless of the feelings that the parents might have for the divorcing individuals they can be depended on and counted upon for financial assistance, housing, and a wide range of other services including child care and emotional support. This is especially true in the case of the divorcing mothers because women are more likely to have custody of minor children and generally have fewer economic resources than men after divorce. Thus, the divorced mothers are more likely to receive greater economic assistance from parents and relatives. In many instances grandparents may become very important adult figures in the lives of their grandchildren after the divorce and are seen as long term caretakers of their grandchildren, advice givers, and sources of financial support. Likewise, divorced women are also more likely than men to maintain or increase social interaction with their extended kin.

Lesser support is correlated with greater levels of depression among the single mothers \((r=-.45, p<.01)\). Similar results have been reported by Hughes, Good, and Candell (1993) who relate social support with well-being. Banks and financial institutions provide further support to the mothers through easy loans. Further, the ex-spouse also pays alimony to the mother on a monthly basis.
However, the single mothers meet the maximum expenses in areas such as dental and medical insurance of the children, childcare, schooling, and housing for the family. Also, many a times the mothers report that the ex-husbands violate the amount specified by the courts and sometimes pay lesser amount. They also feel that since the formal setting up of the divorce terms there have been alterations in the existing financial arrangement. This is a matter of concern since as high as half the sample of the mothers in the present study feel that there are financial hardships regarding their current living situation and that their financial situation has worsened after their separation. The rise in marital instability in the United States, is therefore, seen to contribute to an increase in the economic vulnerability of women and children.

Studies by Duncan and Hoffman (1985) and Weitzman (1985) indicate that in the United States women experience a substantial decline in the standard of living after divorce. An informative longitudinal data by Duncan and Hoffman (1985) further indicates that the living standards of women and children fall by about ten percent in the year after divorce and, if the mother remains single, living standards remain near that same lowered level even five years later. In contrast, the living standards of married families, fathers, and remarried mothers all rise by about 30 percent, on average, during a comparable five year period. The mothers in the present sample report a certain amount of dissatisfaction with their financial arrangement both that the court has set and also that the husbands are currently abiding with. Only one third of the single women in the United States are likely to receive child support, and two-thirds of the payments are likely to be lesser than what the court ordered (Seltzer, 1991). The author also points out that some of the main reasons for women’s financial decline remains the fact that mothers are more likely than fathers to have the custody of children and that a large proportion of fathers pay no child support or lesser than they should. Further, the subjects of the present study feel a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the legal system of divorce and voice that the current system does not suit to their best purpose.
Because of the stress that the mothers feel regarding their finances they find it difficult to hire outside help to assist in household work.

**Relationship with ex-spouse.** The custody arrangement as reported by the mothers is one that they feel fairly satisfied with. However, the mothers are not always happy during the duration that the children visit the fathers due to certain concerns that they have regarding the feeling that the other parent has too much influence on the child, the possibility of the father being a negative influence on the child, the fathers not supervising the children enough during their visit to them, the fathers being too strict, not giving enough attention on the children’s health habits, and the mothers having objections on the parent’s significant other. Malo (1994) in a paper on the role of ex-partner within the social network of long-term single mothers reports that ex-partners were many a times looked upon by the single mothers as having harmful and resentful behaviour. The author feels that this attitude is more due to the negative feelings that continue to linger and the remaining resentment that the mothers might still have. In certain instances, in the present study, where the mothers themselves feel that they have a drinking problem it has been observed that it is positively correlated with greater anxiety (r=.25, p<.01).

Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) in a study on inter parental conflict found out that in a study of over 1,000 California families who had filed for divorce, one and a half years after the marital separation, 34 percent of the couples had a conflicted co parenting relationship, 26 percent were cooperative co parents, 29 percent were disengaged, and 11 percent were mixed, that is their relationship was both cooperative and conflicted. Even three and a half years after the marital separation, 26 percent of parents in the study had conflicted co parenting relationships, whereas twenty nine percent had a cooperative relationship, 41 percent were disengaged and 4 percent were mixed. Also, the authors point out that co parenting conflict was unrelated to the type of custody arrangement following separation, as no significant differences in conflict were
found for children living primarily with mothers, fathers, or in a joint residential arrangement.

The mothers in the present study feel that the only basis for contact with the ex-spouse remains the welfare of the children and during that contact also they feel that there are certain stressors and causes for arguments such as not being a responsible parent. However, on the whole, despite the occasional argument with the ex-partner regarding the children, the mothers do not consider the overall situation to be too problematic and accept it. Malo (1994) says that this is more due to the fact that even though many ex-partners nearly never meet the expectations of the single mothers, many mothers still seem to want the support of their ex-husbands. This is more due to the feeling that the mothers expect that their ex-husbands should take on the responsibility of fathers and expect a fair deal of collaboration in the parenting of the children.

**Relationship with the children.** The mothers report a great deal of comfort level with their children and are generally happy with the kind of relationship and the closeness that they share with them. They also feel that they have a great deal of involvement in their children's lives and feel competent to advice them on matters related to giving advice, making decisions, and talking with their children on matters related to their lives. Maccoby and Martin (1983) comment that, following divorce, the children fare best when their parents are authoritative, a style of parenting that combines warmth with firm but fair discipline. In the present study, the mothers feel the highest involvement with their children when compared with the other groups namely, the mother's current partner, the biological parent of the child, and the current partner of the other biological parent. The mothers' comment on the behavior of their children is that they feel that the children exhibit normal adolescence age expected behavior and though there are instances when they show resistance regarding the tasks given to them, demand attention, or throw a temper tantrum, the mothers feel that these problems have got more to do
with the physiological and psychological demands of the age rather than the children being brought up in a single parent family.

In the profile of the single mothers presented above there are certain issues and trends emerging. Along with these issues there are certain inherent strengths and weaknesses, which are also discussed.

**Single Parent Families Across India and the United States: Strengths and Weaknesses**

The profile of the single parent families presented in the preceding section highlights that there are both costs and benefits associated with being in a single parent family. Similarly there are also strengths and weaknesses that these families display that are many a times reflections of certain cultural beliefs and government policies.

In the Indian scenario, there is lesser empirical work that has been carried out on the single parent families when compared with the United States. Most of the research has analyzed the situation of the widowed single mothers in the Indian context. It is only recently that there has been a concerted focus on recognizing the divorced women and divorced single mothers as a group, considering the alarming increase in the rates of divorce in India.

**Single parent families in India: Strengths and weaknesses**

The results from the present study and previous research suggest that single women in India receive support from the immediate family and friends. The support for the single mothers and their children includes both financial as well as emotional. However, the trends indicate that the same support group that acts as a buffer and strength to the women can also act as a stressor for them.

In the Indian context the home of the immediate family (more likely to be the mothers’ parents) remains the first and foremost place where the mothers and their children are likely to return after the mothers become single. A major strength of the Indian family remains that the family members provide a respite to the single mothers by being emotional anchors and being the financial
supporters after the mothers become single. This is particularly seen as an advantage because of the near negligible state support and beneficiary services that are provided to the Indian single women, especially the divorced mothers. In the case of the divorced mothers, as revealed in the present study and similar studies, many women forego child support from their ex-husbands because they do not want to maintain contact with abusive husbands and also the legal system is such that prolongs justice and overlooks irregularities in child maintenance. In the present study a very high percentage of the mothers report counting upon their family members as a major source of financial stability.

However, the results from the present study also indicate that despite the security that Indian families provide to the single women and their children the mothers staying in a joint family system, especially the divorced mothers, display significantly greater levels of stress than their counterparts. One of the probable reasons is that the other family members see the single women as a financial liability. The middle class women in India feel comfortable in getting a basic education and usually do not have a labor market experience. Also the Indian women face a workplace that is not very open to female labor. Hence, they are not very well placed to become economically self-sufficient in case the need arises. Most of the women, in the present study are working, however, a high percentage of them are dependent on the immediate family to be economically self-sufficient and comfortable. And even, though they feel financially comfortable, this comfort level is generated only through assistance of the other family members.

Thus, the strength remains that the family members provide a support to the mothers and the weakness remains that due to the traditional concepts and certain amount of stigma attached to being single for the mothers, there are tensions experienced within the family setup. This is also due to the prevailing concept where single women, especially with children, are less likely to remarry and get very limited and near negligible state support. There is, thus, a continued and prolonged dependence on the family.
Single parent families in the United States: Strengths and weaknesses

The United States has a comparatively longer history of divorce than India and there are lessons that one learns from the way the US society has geared up to not only accept the single mothers and their children but also has provided an alternate support system. These provisions look at better state services that cover the legal aspects through clearly outlined laws which further assist in financial security for the single mothers and their custodial rights. Also comprehensive programs and counseling for the single mothers and their children help them cope better with the trauma of a separation.

However, even though there is provision for such support, the results from the present study and related literature suggests that there is not a high level of satisfaction derived from the single mothers regarding the support. The mothers feel that the public assistance provides only a modest cushion for the mothers, and only a sub-group of women rely on it for a period of time following divorce. Also, though some women receive economic assistance from their families, and a few move in with their parents following divorce, this is often a stressful and temporary arrangement.

Thus, it remains a fact that in the Indian situation the single mothers usually turn to the immediate family members for support and this support is probably more than what single mothers in the United States might receive from their families. There remains a need to adopt the best practices from both the cultures because as long as a possibility of becoming single remains for the women there is need for getting geared up to this reality through family counseling programs that look at strengthening of the family ties and through state generated funding for the single mothers with a periodic review.

Policy Implications, Program Planning, and Future Recommendations for Research on Single Parent Families

An increasing emphasis in research these days is made on the utilitarian aspect of the findings within the broader issue of the function of knowledge. It is
particularly important for research to have an applied value since it needs to address the multiplex problems of the society and eventually assist in policy planning and interventions in the field of that particular research (Bharat, 1991). The same author also mentions that "even though not every research may have inbuilt and explicit implications, however, several of the findings may be useful to policy planners and practitioners in terms of enhancing their understanding of family problems, causal, and precipitating factors, and the specific needs expressed by the families facing problems" (p.546).

In my study the findings pertain to the fact that the sample of children and their single mothers who participated in the Indian study do display certain stressors, particularly relating to areas such as family life experiences, certain psychosocial and well-being measures. Also despite the fact that they have near negligible state support they have a strong social network, consisting of immediate family members, extended family, and peers. These network groups are seen to provide single parent families with emotional and financial support at times of requirement. In the US sample though a limited percentage of the sample does report getting assistance from the state and through legal support as provided by the father, a majority of the sample reports not getting enough assistance and looks towards the immediate family members for emotional and financial support. However, when comparing the Indian and US situation in terms of the state support given to single parent families the scale clearly tips in favor of the United States.

When planning programs for single parent families, especially in the Indian context where comprehensive programs for the benefits of single mothers in general and divorced mothers in particular are still in the infancy stage, caution needs to be taken while addressing the target group. Since the family for the single mothers holds so much importance and since many a times there are stress levels that are there due to misunderstandings among the members, programs on family counseling need to be made available following the demise/separation of the spouse that look at involving the family
as a group inclusive of the mother, her children, and the immediate family members to be able to cope better.

In India the Government social policies are generally targeted on the male population since many a times the contribution of women remains largely unnoticed and unacknowledged (Desai, 1991). Also, the minimal existing services for the family are such that there are not many beneficiaries of the services due to a lack of awareness, misconceptions, associated stigma, inaccessibility or the associated costs with the service. The author in such a situation recommends a Family Policy instated by the Government that looks at the well-being of individual family members. Further, she elaborates on the goals of the Family policy as one which looks at strengthening the institution of family by "ensuring developmental opportunities, equality and justice to family members, and facilitating socio-economic independence, in order to enrich family functioning and prevent disintegration of the family and destitution of individual members" (p.564).

Recommendations are further made for making categories of families to be considered as high-risk families in the proposed family policy with single parent families, female headed families, and families with marital problems as a special priority group. Certain crucial areas that the policy needs to be covering, as recommended by the author (Desai, 1991) and substantiated with findings from the present study and lessons learnt from the US study are made as those related with the children, the mothers, the family as a whole, the extended networks of the single mothers, and finally by the state.

**Program planning and policy for single parent families:**

- A stress is made on providing adequate childcare that also includes after school child care facilities for the working single mothers, and regular maintenance for the children, particularly with divorced mothers. Further, there is a need for more stringent laws where the ex-spouse maintains an active role in child rearing and sharing of the costs.
Leela (1991) makes the observation that most of the working single mothers who head their families or are single mothers in a joint family system find the dual role very taxing with a consequent impact on their role at home and the workplace. As a result of these pressures, the single mothers choose jobs that are often less paid, less taxing, and less time consuming. The underpaid jobs consequently affect the standard of living of the family. Similar observations have been made in the present study also. Family policy needs to cater to the requirements by allowing flexible timings at place of work for the single mothers.

There is a crucial need for regularized preventive laws by the Government. The preventive laws need to generate more awareness by making freely available Hand Books on Family law that make the general population aware of the acts and regulations catering to families.

In the case of divorce and its impact on the children there is a need for public policy that encourages parents to understand their responsibilities towards their children and consider seriously the obligations of marriage and parenting in order to make major decisions such as divorce a more deliberated process. More stringent policies that do a follow up of the post-divorce family life need to be made that evaluate whether the divorced partners are fulfilling their duties towards their children in terms of maintenance and visitation.

As an extension of the family policy, in case of divorce, there is a need for marriage counselors that look at providing support to the families during times of crisis so that the situation of divorce is seen as a last resort.

Chen and Dreze (1995) recommend a greater say in property rights for single women and a social security that provides for anti-poverty measures, pro-women measures, rehabilitation measures (vocational training, adult education, and awareness camps), and social security measures.
- There is also a need for low cost shared family housing by mother headed families so that the daily hassles that some of the single mothers report with their extended family members can be reduced and greater independence promoted among the mothers.

- Rather than a complete focus on the child there is a greater need for family based intervention and need for considering how the family members can provide greater strength to each other during times of crisis.

- Supportive interventions are especially recommended for children displaying problems because Malhotra (2003) very aptly points out that in developing countries certain mental health related problems may not necessarily denote deep ingrained problems that are considered to indicate a continuing pattern of maladaptation and personality disorders. Many a times in the Indian situation, young children show dramatic and complete recovery without any residue, with simple timely interventions. Caution only needs to be taken in interpreting the symptoms in context of the life circumstances of the children.

- It is very crucial to provide counseling and guidance to the children during the proceedings of divorce and after the divorce to make the transition process comfortable for the children. Family casework counseling with a family practitioner is a service that is highly recommended, especially via government services in order to make the services more affordable with a wider outreach.

- There is far greater need for the participation of families, community, and non-governmental organizations to work towards a greater facilitation of removal of ignorance and a change of attitude towards the single parent families at the grass roots level. The families need to be made aware of, and educated about, the various social policies and family legislations that can affect them directly or indirectly, so that they can utilize their benefits and be cautioned against exploitation. Helping single mothers to
assert and defend their basic property rights can be achieved through public activism within the existing legal and policy framework.

- Subsidized and appropriate health care, social security, minimum low cost housing, socio-economic independence, and vocational guidance to the children are some of the further suggestions made for the single parent families in the Indian context.

- Malhotra (1998) highlights the need to evolve appropriate models of intervention typically for the developing countries as opposed to replicating programs from the western countries. The author stresses on the need to develop methods of intervention that are rooted in the socio-cultural and philosophical traditions of a country.

**Recommendations for future research**

The findings of the present study have certain limitations since they are based on a limited, voluntary group of an urban sample of single parent families. The findings are also not based on a longitudinal data in order to be able to provide concrete and conclusive interpretations. Certain recommendations for future research on single parent families based on my findings and the issues pertaining to the findings from similar studies are enumerated below:

- Results from my study and a few other studies in the Indian context reveal that the impact of single parenthood may not be entirely negative as is projected in many findings. With relevant data that is drawn from varying socio-economic strata in India, a more conclusive statement can be made.

- There is a requirement for greater need based intervention programs that have direct applicability for the target group. Further analysis, evaluation, and follow-up of intervention programs will help in understanding the areas requiring maximum input.
- Many studies on single parent families have an urban sample, especially with divorced women. There is need for a clearer picture with regards to the rural sample and more village studies need to be conducted to understand the aspects of single parenthood in totality.

- A greater need for research that has a multidisciplinary focus needs to be undertaken in order to understand the various factors that inhibit or promote the well-being in single parent families.

- A need for comprehensive long-term research programs on single parent families is suggested so that the varied factors that influence the dynamics of single parent families over a period of time can be understood. Also a focus on longitudinal studies on adolescents in single parent families will help researchers in the Indian context understand more about their transition to adulthood.

- Analysis in terms of causal and precipitating factors in the larger system and within the family – macro level and micro level analysis – will help in greater understanding of the single parent families in India.