CHAPTER - 2

METHOD

The present research aims at understanding the family life experiences and psychosocial well-being among adolescents in female headed single parent urban families. Results from the present study use data from an Indian and an American sample to expand our understanding of experiences of adolescents in single parent families across cultures. Further, the experiences of single mothers of these adolescents are also documented. The US sample has been made available using data of a study, entitled 'Parent Teen Project', carried out by Prof. Reed Larson, from the Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois, USA. The investigator carried out analysis of the available US data, for the present study, while on a Fulbright pre-doctoral grant to the University of Illinois.

Design of the Study

This study examined the family life experiences and psychosocial well-being among adolescents in female headed single parent urban families (widows/divorcees) in the city of Chandigarh. Additional data was collected from the two satellite towns of Chandigarh: Panchkula and Mohali. Data was gathered using purposive stratification, where applicable. A total of 350 adolescents and their single mothers were contacted in the first phase out of which 185 formed the final sample. Additional data that documented the experiences of 101 adolescents in mother headed single parent families in the United States was examined as a contrast. This study also analysed the quality of social support made available to single mothers and their adolescent children and their experiences across India and the United States.

In this chapter the methodology adopted for the Indian study is elaborated upon first, followed by the US study.
Indian Study

Sample

In the present study, the sample comprised of 185 adolescents and their single mothers from Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. Adolescents were in the age group of 10-18 years (M =14.70, SD =2.09). The selected sample was segregated according to the distribution as shown in Figure 1.

![Sample characteristics diagram]

Figure 1. Sample characteristics

Among adolescents from single parent families, there was a predominance of Hindu (N=101) and Sikh (N=81) families and only three adolescents were from Christian families. Mean age of the single mothers was 41.99 years (SD = 5.53). A high percentage of the mothers (78.4%) were employed (N= 145; n=60 divorcees, n= 85 widows) and had graduate level qualifications (N=78). Mothers were mainly occupied in the government service (N=57), as professionals (N=78), and were self-
employed as in business (N=10). The mothers were working for an average of 7.7 hrs per day (SD = 1.64).

The period of being single for the mothers was maximum in the 'more than five years' range (N=102) followed by 1-3 years (N=54), 3-5 years (N=18), and less than a year (N=11). The median family income was 50,000-100,000 rupees for the families with single women and their children.

Sample for the present study was selected from the schools by contacting students after obtaining consent from school Principals. Advocates were contacted in the District Court for additional addresses of the divorcees. Sample selection of the schools was based on stratified random sampling method. A list of all the high schools and senior secondary schools (Government, Public/private) located in Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali was obtained from the District Education Officers (D.E.O.) of the governments of Union Territory of Chandigarh, Haryana, and Punjab. Government schools are managed and run by the government either at the state or centre level. Public schools are managed and run by a managing committee with affiliation of courses/curriculum and recognition from the Director Public Instructions (D.P.I.) of schools or other relevant government organizations or department. Private schools are managed wholly by a managing committee or elected bodies.

The schools were purposively stratified into sectors (1-10, 11-20, 31-40, 41-50) in Chandigarh keeping in mind the geographic layout of the city that has North, South, East, and West zones. The purposive stratification thus, covered all the four zones of Chandigarh. Following this stratification, from each set of sectors, schools (Government, Public/private) were randomly selected regardless of the size of the zone. Additional sample was gathered from schools in Panchkula and Mohali in order to meet the requirements of the study. Total schools randomly selected for the final sample were 50 from Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. Out of 50, 23 were Government schools, 27 were public/private schools. Table 1 shows the final distribution of the schools.
Table 1
Final distribution of the schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of study</th>
<th>Set of sectors</th>
<th>Government schools</th>
<th>Public/private schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>21-30</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchkula</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohali</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

The final sample was gathered from 43 selected schools out of the initial list of 50 (seven refused to participate). An initial stage in the data collection procedure involved getting consent from school principals for conducting a study on students from single parent families. Students were randomly selected from the lists made of adolescents in single parent households. The families were contacted personally at their residence. To get addresses of additional families, especially in the case of the divorced single mothers and their children, advocates in District Courts were also contacted.

Contacts were first made with the subjects (adolescents and the single mothers) by telephone or personal visit in cases where telephone facility was not available. Subjects were informed regarding the main objectives of the study. Appointments were taken from those who volunteered to participate in the study. The parent gave consent for self and the adolescent to be a part of the project. Total number of addresses received for the study was for 350 families (275 addresses received from schools and 75 from courts). From the initial list of sample
received, 235 families were contacted (185 families through schools and 50 families through courts) out of which 185 gave their consent (see Figure 2). The common reasons for dropout among the families were related to the busy schedule of the parent, lack of interest in the study, adolescents not living with the guardian, and remarriage of the parent. The schools who refused to participate (N=7) cited maintenance of confidentiality as requested by the single parent as the main reason.

Introductory home visits were made to the families who had given their consent. Consent forms, requesting the participants' signatures, were given to the parent describing the purpose of the study. Participants were also assured of the confidentiality of their responses. In the second home visit, the respondents were given a packet of questionnaires to complete. The packets were given individually to the family members to ensure confidentiality. The packets contained questionnaires related to the family life experiences and well-being responses of the adolescents and the parent. Each questionnaire was carefully explained to the individual participants and there was an option given of filling out the questionnaires either in Hindi or English for certain questionnaires. In instances where only the English form of the questionnaire was available the questions were clarified with the participants for ease of language. Some of the respondents felt comfortable in filling the questionnaire in front of the investigator while others preferred to fill on their own. Telephone reminders were given to respondents and, in some cases, home visits were again made to clarify certain problem areas.

The third home visit was made to conduct interviews with the adolescents regarding their experiences in a single parent family setup. Their responses were noted down verbatim. A fourth home visit was undertaken to interview the single parent. The parent's interview was related to the experiences and extent of the social support available. The fifth and final visit was made to collect the complete set of filled questionnaires.
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS CONTACTED (N=50)

43 gave consent | 7 refused to cooperate

TOTAL SAMPLE IDENTIFIED (N=350)

275 from schools | 75 from courts

185 families contacted | 50 families contacted

170 gave consent | 45 gave consent

140 participated in the study | 45 participated in the study

FINAL SAMPLE (N = 185)

Figure 2. Stages of Data Collection
Two of the families who shared their experiences for the present study on family life experiences and psychosocial well-being among adolescents in female headed single parent urban families.
Problems faced during data collection. There were certain problems that were faced by the investigator during the data collection stage due to the challenging nature of the project. Firstly, it was difficult getting the contact addresses of single parent families initially from the school authorities due to the sensitive nature of the project. The objectives of the project had to be clearly outlined to the Principals in numerous visits in order to explain to them the importance of the work.

Secondly, another major problem faced in the data collection stage was the change in residential addresses of a number of families from the records that were obtained from the courts (N=25) and from the schools. Therefore, the number of persons to be contacted got limited. Thirdly, many families, when contacted, refused to be a part of the study since many times, especially in the case of the divorced mothers, the mothers had not revealed their single status to outsiders and felt it was not appropriate for them to be a part of the study. Also, in some cases the telephone numbers of the list of single parent families obtained had changed. Therefore, home visits had to be made even to get the consent, thus, adding on to the time pressure. Finally, during the data collection stage itself, there were dropouts among the families since some felt that they lacked interest in the study and also some families felt that they could not devote enough time to the project.

Strengths associated with the research project. This study provided the researcher a unique opportunity to interact with adolescents, single mothers, and their families and observe them in a natural family setting. In many instances the women and their children felt a certain amount of catharsis by discussing their inner feelings with a neutral, outside person. The most positive aspect for the investigator, in being associated with this study, was the ability to observe and reflect on the resiliency that many families displayed after being through a stressful situation. The wide spectrum of emotions, both positive and negative, that some families showed during the course of interviews was a learning experience for the investigator in furthering the understanding of human nature.
Assessment measures

In order to understand the family life experiences and psychosocial well-being of the adolescents and their single parent, the respondents were administered with questionnaires that gathered information relating to their personal background and their perception of well-being and family environment, among other variables. The following section provides details of the various questionnaires administered and the interviews conducted with the adolescents and their single parents.

Background information. Demographic profile of the respondents was gathered using a background information form. Both English and Hindi versions of this form were made available (see Appendix 1 and 1a) and the parent filled this information. The form gathered details regarding certain select demographic factors such as age, gender, birth order, family type, family size, education, occupation and employment of parent, marital status of the parent, period of marital status, and annual income. Additional questions were asked regarding the parent's working hours (if employed), hours at home, the child's daily schedule, work delegation in the family, and joint and social activities carried out by the family. The questionnaire also addressed issues related to the single parents' ability to handle academic pressures of their children.

Measures of mental health and well-being

Developmental Psychopathology Check List for Children (DPCL) (Kapur, 1995). The DPCL was administered to assess the mental health status of the adolescents. The parent filled the questionnaire and both English and Hindi version of this checklist was made available to the respondents (see Appendix 2 and 2a).

The DPCL is validated against a well-known western tool, the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) developed by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1983). This has been done because of some of the problems encountered in the use of CBCL in India by Kapur, Barnabas, Reddy, Rozario, and Uma (1995) such as the inapplicability of
certain items in the Indian scenario and the cutoff points recommended for the US sample.

The DPCL assesses syndromes relevant in the Indian context and takes into consideration age and gender differences, developmental history, and temperament along with psychosocial correlates such as family interaction, stressors, and social support. The checklist with 124 items includes sub-categories of developmental history, developmental problem disorders, psychopathology (hyperkinesis, conduct disorders, learning disorders, emotional disorders, obsessive compulsive neurosis, somatic disorders, and psychoses), psychosocial stressors, temperamental profile, and supportive factors. The checklist is meant to be used with children and adolescents.

The subject (parent) is asked to mark 'present' if the item response is positive and mark 'absent' if the item response is negative (except from item six to ten of the checklist). 'Present' scores are added for each of the sub-categories and they are compared with cut off scores available for the first nine sub-categories. Higher scores above the cut off value are indicative of mental health problems among adolescents. The interclass correlation coefficient of the entire checklist is 0.965 (significant at 0.001 level). It also has satisfactory inter-rater reliability and validity.

**PGI General Well-being Measure (Verma & Verma, 1989).** The scale contains 20 items and was administered on the adolescents and the parent. Both English and Hindi versions were made available to the respondents (see Appendix 3 and 3a). The scale consists of statements pertaining to well-being, life satisfaction, feeling of belongingness, and emotional stability. High scores are indicative of positive feelings of well-being among the subjects.

Reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .98 (Verma, Dubey, & Gupta, 1983). The test-retest reliability was .91 for the English version and .86 for the Hindi version.
Bell Adjustment Inventory (Bell, 1962). The adolescents completed the Bell Adjustment Inventory, which is a measure of an individual's perceived life adjustment and contains 200 statements (see Appendix 4). The inventory provides six measures of personal and social adjustment namely, home, health, submissiveness, emotionality, hostility, and masculinity-femininity. The inventory also provides separate norms for boys and girls (see Appendix 4a). Higher scores indicate unsatisfactory adjustment. The sub-categories show high reliability in the studies carried out by the author: home adjustment (r=.89), health adjustment (r=.80), submissiveness (r=.89), emotionality (r=.85), hostility (r=.83), and masculinity-femininity (r=.84).

Self-esteem Inventory (SEI) (Coopersmith, 1986). The SEI measured evaluative attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family, and personal areas of experience. The adolescents filled out the School Form (58 items) (see Appendix 5) and the parent filled the Adult Form (25 items) (see Appendix 5a).

To arrive at a total self-score, the number of self-esteem items were summed and the raw score multiplied by two for the school form. For the Adult Form the total raw score was multiplied by four to make a parallel with the total score of the adolescents. High scores corresponded to high self-esteem for both the parent and the adolescent. The reliability of SEI reports a coefficient of .86.

Measures of family life experiences and parenting styles

Family Environment Scale (FES) (Vohra, 1997). The scale was administered on the adolescents and the parent. English and Hindi versions were made available to the subjects (see Appendix 6 and 6a). The scale contains 98 items measuring seven different dimensions namely, competitive framework, cohesion, expressiveness, independence, moral orientation, organization, and recreational orientation. The raw scores were converted into standard scores with a ten-point range. Separate norms were available for the adolescents and the parent.
The stern of 1-3 indicates a low score, 4-7 indicates average score, and 8-10 indicates a high score. The test-retest reliability as measured by the author from several studies for the seven dimensions were .78 for independence, .79 for competitive framework, .80 for expression, .81 organization, .82 moral orientation, .82 recreational orientation, and .89 for cohesion. The factorial validity of the scales varied from .77 for expression, .79 for organization, .80 for moral orientation, .80 recreational orientation, .82 for independence, .83 for cohesion, and .84 for competitive framework.

Adolescent interview. A self-formulated open-ended interview format was used to assess the adolescents' experiences of being in a single parent family (see Appendix 7). The areas that were included to gain a better understanding of their experiences were namely, emotional, academic and vocational aspirations, friends, social relationships, and financial aspects. The emotional aspects also covered areas related to the quality of relationship that the adolescents perceived with their parent and siblings and whether they felt any observed differences in the relationships with their family members after the demise/separation of their one parent. An initial pilot study on 20 adolescents highlighted the areas that needed revision and also suggested several additional questions. The questions were formulated after a peer review.

Measures of school adjustment

School Adjustment Inventory (Bhagia, 1968). The School Adjustment Inventory is a 165-item inventory in Hindi and was administered on the adolescents (see Appendix 8). The inventory consists of five categories covering all the main aspects of school life namely, academic matters (A – the extent to which the students are satisfied with their studies), schoolmates (S – the extent to which the students have social interaction with fellow students at the school), school administration and general environment (G – how far a student is satisfied with the school administration), teachers (T – the extent to which the students like their
teachers, their treatment, and personality), and self-satisfaction at school (P - satisfaction with 'self' at school and personal qualities like regularity and punctuality). 'Yes', 'No' and 'Question mark' are the options given to the subjects for each item to respond on. Letter grade norms are given (see Appendix 8a) and high scores indicate better adjustment at the school.

The test-retest reliability coefficient as given by the author is .96. Correlation co-efficient between categories and total scores varies from 0.70 to 0.91 showing marked internal consistency of the categories with the inventory. The validity coefficient is 0.69.

**Scholastic achievement.** Scholastic achievement includes the percentage marks of the last exam taken by the adolescent. For this, previous class report cards were collected from the respondents. The report cards indicated the marks scored in the final examination and also a cumulative report of the previous two terminal examinations taken during the academic year. The total of the three examinations added on to the final score for the academic class.

**Perceived availability of social support to the single parent families**

**Social support interview**

A self-formulated interview format was used with the single parents to illicit information on their perception on the availability and the extent of social support from family, friends, relatives, and state (see Appendix 9). The areas that were taken into consideration were emotional (people most likely to extend support, satisfaction with the amount of support, advantages and disadvantages of being in a nuclear/joint family), financial (financial adjustment made after becoming a single parent, people most likely to extend financial support), and state support (awareness regarding the availability of state support, experiences in approaching the services, and suggestions regarding areas of required state support).
Coding procedure

Once the data was collected the coding formats were prepared for the background information, the adolescent interview, and the social support form. A team of investigators comprising of faculty members, graduate, and doctoral students from the Department of Child Development, Chandigarh worked out the coding categories. Disagreements were discussed and consensus reached.

US Study

Sample

Data of the US study provides a profile of the experiences of adolescents and their single mothers in mother headed single parent families. The quality of social support made available to these families and the extent of interaction that the adolescents had with their fathers is also reported.

For the US study, mothers and adolescents from 101 single parent households took part. Data were collected from central Illinois, including families from small and mid-sized towns. Among the single mothers, 94 mothers were employed, working a median of 40 hours per week (range=4-60 hours) and reporting a median income of $25,000 per year (range $3900-$70,000). Seventeen of the families were African-American, two were Native American, one was Hispanic, and 81 were European-American. Divorce as a cause of single parenthood was reported in 81 of the families – occurring a median of 7.0 years ago (range 0.2-17.0 years). The age of the mothers ranged from 29 to 57 years (M= 42.7, SD=5.5). The adolescents were in the age group of 10-19 years (M = 14.28, SD= 2.14); 47 were male (24 aged 10-13, 10 aged 14-15, 13 aged 16-19), and 54 were female (22 aged 10-13, 15 aged 14-15, 17 aged 16-19). Thirty-eight children were the only children in the household.
**Procedures**

The families were recruited through newspaper and radio ads, fliers, and organizations dealing with divorced families. The participants took part in an interview and filled out a set of questionnaires. Each participant received $20 and the family received a bonus of $15 for the week's participation on a larger time use study, the Experience Sampling Method.

**Assessment Measures**

**Background Information.** The adolescents provided information on their personal background through a self-formulated student questionnaire (see Appendix 10). Details included information on the demographic background of the single parent families.

**Adolescent Interview Form.** The adolescents responded to queries related to their academic performance, their current living arrangements, contact with their biological fathers, coordination between mother and father, important adults in their life, and their relationships with the mothers (see Appendix 11).

**Adult Questionnaire.** The mothers filled out an 'Adult Questionnaire' that provided information on certain demographic variables such as age, employment, educational qualification, and race. The mothers also provided information on their family finances before taxes, the availability of state support, payment of child support by the ex-partner, and financial difficulty, if any faced by the mother (see Appendix 12).

**Mother's parenting style.** Both adolescents and mothers rated the mother's parenting on a shortened version of the Children's Reports of Parental Behaviour Inventory (CRPBI; Burger & Armentrout, 1971; Margolies & Weintraub, 1977) (see Appendix 13 and 13a). The present scale is the one used by Larson and Gillman (1999) who took data from a prior study to choose the 12 most strongly loading item for each scale. This instrument includes three scales: acceptance vs. rejection, firm
control vs. lax control, and psychological control vs. psychological autonomy. Cronbach’s alphas for the shortened scales were .84 (mother) and .92 (adolescent) for acceptance; .71 (mother) and .80 (adolescent) for firm control; and .85 (mother) and .89 (adolescent) for psychological control.

**Feelings Inventory (Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Inventory) (Weismann et al., 1977).** Both the mother and the adolescent completed this inventory (see Appendix 14). This 20 item set inventory was designed to measure the current level of depression with an emphasis on the affective component. The statements pertained to asking the respondents the extent of the feelings that they might have experienced in the past one week (such as in the past week ‘I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me’; ‘I felt depressed’; ‘I talked lesser than usual’).

**Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974).** Mothers and the adolescents responded to the feelings of conflict, cohesion, and emotion in the family through this inventory (27 items each rated on a three point scale) (see Appendix 15).

**Data Analyses**

The Indian data has been analyzed keeping in focus the objectives of the study and taking gender of the adolescents, family structure, and marital status of the mothers as the independent variables. The dependent variables were the scores obtained from the questionnaires of family life experiences and well-being of the adolescents. For analyzing the mother’s data, marital status of the mothers and the family structure were taken as the independent variables and the scores obtained by the mothers in areas related to their family environment and well-being were taken as the dependent variables. Qualitative data, from the interviews conducted with adolescents and the mothers, was carried out by formulating categories and taking into account differences in the quality of experiences as perceived by the mothers and adolescents by taking the marital status of the mothers as the independent variable.
The data was analyzed by computing means and standard deviations. Group differences were analyzed by applying General Linear Model Multivariate Analysis of Variance. Pearson's correlation was applied to understand the association between select variables and percentages were also computed to present the results of the qualitative data.

The American data was analyzed by computing means and standard deviations and presenting a percentage profile of the adolescents and the mothers. Further, bivariate correlation was carried out between select variables to determine an association between them.