

## The Impact of Stress Among Working Single Mothers

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### ABSTRACT

The literature indicates that stress can have an impact on individual performance. The world is now confronted with the “stress” phenomenon. Stress is now a part of human life, able to occur anywhere whether in daily life, the working environment or personal matters. It comes without expectation and adamantly goes away. There are a number of factors that contribute to the level of stress among single mothers. Among others are the family’s socio-economic profiles, work culture and the surrounding. Stress that occurs at work for single mothers is extremely disturbing life at home when they are actually not being able to separate the problems at the office from their responsibilities at home. However, every problem has a solution. The role and contribution of organizations and the community at every level either the public or private sector through various programs, training that promotes mental and physical strength that energize courage, can help single mothers to carry out their responsibilities in life.

**KEYWORDS:** Stress, Single Mother, Working Single Mother.

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### INTRODUCTION

Stress will be defined based on multidimensional concept and perceived vary by each individual. The challenge today to balance work and family responsibilities are becoming major sources of stress in families, especially for single parent families [6]. However, in these perspectives, stress will occur to single mothers. As part of any organization, any employee cannot avoid oneself in overcoming stress that can affect life. This is especially for individuals that do not have the ability to separate the problems at work from family matters and vice versa. Research signify that single mothers are more prone to stress. Single mothers are found to experience stress, especially subsequent to the lost of companion. This causes them to feel more depressed, especially when facing the working environment. This indirectly influences the work performance. Stress among single mothers will be further discussed by looking into the effects to their lives and a number of governing factors of their background that influence the stress levels they experience.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is part of human life and can occur anywhere either in daily life, at work or in personal matters. According to [7] which a renowned stress researcher, stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it where stress is pressure that involves the use of all the systems in the body that exceeds their abilities. People have less stress in their lives, both at home and at work when they have the skills necessary to put balance in their lives [6]. Stressed individuals often find it difficult to adapt in many situations and require effort to achieve equilibrium within themselves and their surroundings. Physical and mental stress cause a reaction that jeopardizes the stability of the body.

Stress as a state of physical or mental tension leads to changes in the automatic nerve system, while in [7] justified unspecific responses is not what you feel when you react to pressure either from the outside would consume yourself. Hence, stress that is a form of pressure, tensions as well as concern with outer and inner surroundings causes physiological, psychological, physical, expression and habitual changes. Single mothers on the other hand can be defined as a mother with at least one offspring as a result of divorce, unmarried parents, separation and death of companion [4]. Women to the status of single mothers enter a scenario where life is different due to the death of their husbands, divorce or separation that automatically shifts the load and responsibilities to their shoulders.

#### The Effects of Stress

There are numerous challenges and obstacles that occur in life. Being bold and courageous is the main asset that needed for every single mother. In addition, being able to comprehend the process that leads to stress and its effects will be able to help reduce the problem. In the effort to prevent stress, the ways of controlling and

reducing the causes of stress must be identified as eliminating it is extremely difficult. The reaction towards stress can be seen in many ways. Usually, the body reacts in two ways namely physiologically and through actions.

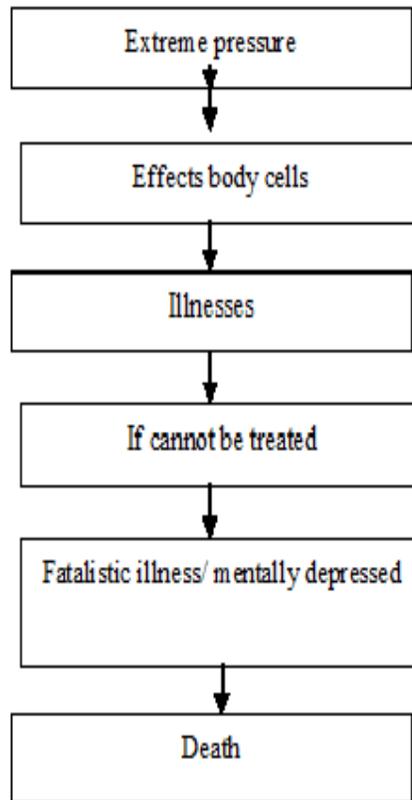


Figure 1: Reactions towards stress

### Physiological Reaction

This can be seen through the increase of heartbeat, high blood pressure, sweating hands, increase in the size of the pupil, sudden headaches, difficulty in swallowing, feeling choked, stomach pain and many other reactions. When these reactions occur, it shows that the body is attempting to cope either to defy or retreat from stress as shown in Figure 1.

### Reactions Through Behaviors

A person who is stressed will show unnatural behaviors. The behaviors may come in the form of defensive acts, dysfunctional acts or expressive acts. We respond by showing aggressive behaviors such as shouting to the one who causes the stress, punching, throwing things, hurling files and other aggressive acts to release anger. These acts may provide temporary relief. Sometimes, these acts of anger are shown to someone who did not commit any wrong doings including children, wife or husband at home. When a single mother is stressed at the office but did not have the opportunity to release her anger to a particular person especially the boss that caused the stress, she will be prone to lose patience easily at home by a slight mistake on behalf of her family members. She may act by scolding or hitting her kids or other family members to release her frustration. Subsequently, she will feel guilty and becomes moody, leading to the elevation of stress.

Figure 2 shows that when stressed occurs unexpectedly; often the body will experience shock by shivering, being fatigued, paleness, weak or suffer a heart attack. For a certain period of time, the body will attempt to treat the damage to develop resistance and this takes time. The body will become exhausted and loses energy. Single mothers in this situation can fall ill, lose rationality and eventually expire.

### Defensive Acts

When life is serene, we will feel comfortable because the body functions normally. However, when confronted with an unexpected problem, then stress will emerge at a sudden. A body that is shocked will cause the mind to be disturbed due to lack of sleep, eating less or insufficient rest. Despite the effort to develop resistance, these reactions are sometimes non-containable. If the stress-causing problem cannot be overcome and

prolongs, the body will become exhausted and weak that eventually leads to illness and require medical attention. Other defensive acts may be manifested through eating sleeping pills, running away from home or by having excessive sex. In fact, many single mothers are trapped in this situation and eventually leads to regret.

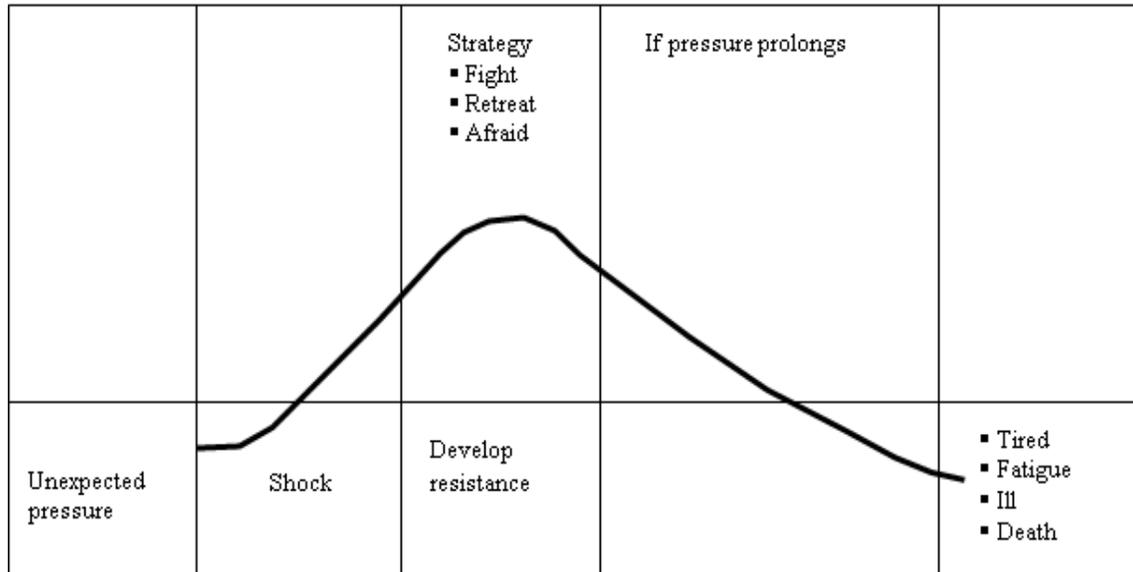


Figure 2: Body Reactions towards stress

**Dysfunctional Acts**

This type of action causes a single mother to act almost like a person who has lost her mind. For example, she may experience the lack of hearing sensitivity, becomes forgetful, unclear or stammering speech, suffers from amnesia or secluding herself from other people and refuses to go out due to irrational fear. Other reactions include becoming extremely moody and suicidal.

In her job, a single mother may be a madly attached to her work by giving her fullest attention at work and this may temporarily make her forget about her stress. Ample of time is used to carry out her work, which sometimes may threaten her health. Single mothers also like to work extra time because by working, they feel as if they can forget their problems.

**Expressive Acts**

This type of action is shown through the development of new habits such as nail or lip biting, winking of the eyes, pulling off hair, unable to stay still, fidgeting and the urge to always do something.

In the working environment, a manager can see whether his employees, especially among the single mothers are experiencing stress or not, through changes in their behavior. Sometimes, these changes are subtle and cannot be clearly realized. Hence, before punishing a worker especially single mothers through disciplinary measures due to her behavior that jeopardizes the stability of the organization, the manager must be more acute to what is happening among his workers by observing and scrutinizing the signs of stress. This can be identified by the decline of quality in the worker’s performance.

For single mothers who are responsible in making decisions, when stress occur, they will find it difficult to come out with any decision because the focus of the mind has shifted to their problems in life as they are the ones who have to bear the responsibility of attending their family needs. If the stress prolongs, the body will work extra time to treat the damage hence causing it to breakdown.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on [9], the data were analyzed and it shows a significant relation between the background of single mothers, namely income and the number of children with the level of stress. Single mothers that make large earnings are less prone to stress compared to single mothers with meager earnings. Hence, single mothers are advised to increase the amount of their earnings to reduce stress.

Meanwhile, low level of socio-economy and interpersonal relationship caused by divorce extremely disturbs life and lead to stress. Things will become more complicated when the single mother is not well educated and faces economic discomfort during the early stage of marriage. Single mothers are secluded people. They have to bear the load of family matters single-handedly. Thus, single mothers are more prone to stress that

may cause major health complications. Things are worse, especially for single mothers who are working. Stress among single mothers may indirectly influence their performance in work.

Almost half of marriages in the western countries end with divorce and more than 40% of the children live with single guardians [3, 5]. This increases the pressure in life that causes stress among single mothers, especially for working single mothers. Low level of education among single mothers is also one of the factors that leads to stress. According to [2], unemployed single mothers and those whose education levels are low are more easily depressed due to poverty. However, they are able to get jobs to sustain their family. Single mothers are mostly ignored due to the perception saying that single mothers do not contribute to the nation's development.

Stress among single mothers is stronger among those who have big families as the responsibility becomes more difficult. In addition, single mothers in this situation are more prone to suffer stress compared to single mothers with fewer responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the elaboration and discussion on stress among working single mothers, a number of proposals are brought forward for further discussion in future studies:

- i. Organizations could provide programs to elevate the self concept that will enable single mothers to reduce stress. This was supported by [8] who found that low level of education and economic difficulties lead to stress (Figure 3).

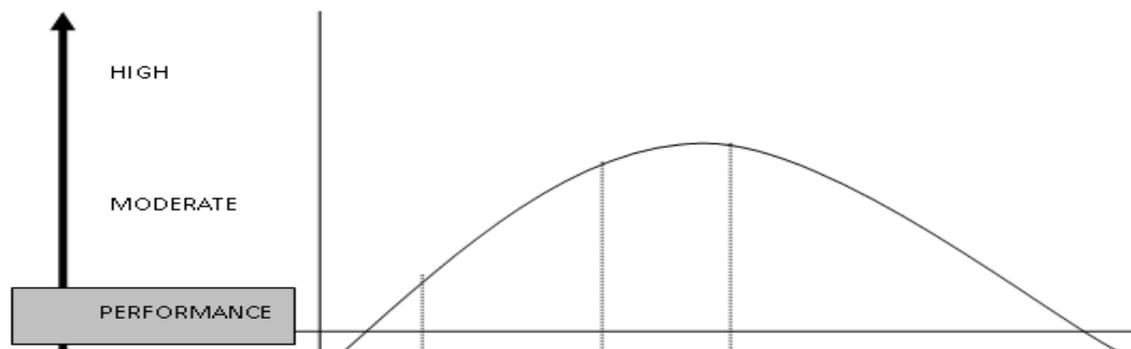


Figure 3: Relationship between work performance and stress

- ii. As there is a significant relation between the number of offspring and the level of stress that forces single mothers to work hard to support their families, organizations are urged to give opportunities for single mothers to improve their economic levels by providing loans, entrepreneurship programs, etc. Organizations can be pioneers such as Tenaga Nasional Berhad, Malaysia that provide help for working widows after the death of their husbands.
- iii. Single mothers whose husbands die while working in an organization will be given the attention and taken care by organizations such as Hyundai Motors Industry in South Korea by providing accommodation and education for the children. After completing their education, it is up to the children to either work with the company or work with other organizations. The fact is the productivity in South Korea is always par excellent and patriotism can be instilled simultaneously. However, there are local organizations that have taken the approach of hiring widows of their deceased employees with suitable positions to ensure their ability to survive economically.
- iv. Religious faith and practice can strengthen the will to survive and move on. Islam that decrees the need to perform prayers 5 times daily as well as additional prayers can provide peace and serenity. Reciting the Quran and words glorifying Allah also helps to strengthen the will to survive in facing problems in life.
- v. Single mothers require undivided support from those who are important and close to them. However, the support and loyalty received from peers must be truly sincere.
- vi. Programs to increase mental health must be undertaken by working organizations to help all workers, especially single mothers to avoid them from experiencing stress as stress can affect productivity. Developing mental and psychological strength is also a useful technique to positively charge the mind. The use of self counselling has been proven to reduce stress. Single mothers need to learn to love themselves, fill their time with beneficial activities and seek professional help from counselors, etc. Counselling sessions can help single mothers reduce stress.

Finally, single mothers are able to overcome stress at work by acquiring support from all parties which starting with themselves [1]. Good relationships with colleagues through respect and collaboration also will help and they also need to wisely separate personal matters from work of learning and practicing good management.

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