

# Survivability of Single Mother: A Study in Sepang, Selangor

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to explore the antecedents for survivability of single mother with the main objectives are exploring the relationship between the variables namely financial burden, employment struggle, mental pressure and social stigma toward single mother survivability and derive the main factor that affect their survivability. 200 respondents of this study are single mother lived in Sepang, Selangor. Purposive sampling technique was used with questionnaire as the instrument. Correlation and regression analysis were conducted, and the findings show that there is significant relationship between the variables and survivability of single mother with financial burden as the main factor. Hence, various parties such as authority, non-governmental bodies and community benefited from the study.*

**Keywords:** *Survivability, Single Mother, Financial, Employment, Mental Pressure, Social Stigma*

## INTRODUCTION

In a study carried out by Statistic Department (2013), a total of 831 860 of women in Malaysia were either widowed, divorced or permanently separated. After the trend, the rate of single parent families has been increasing continuously where the divorce has become a common solution for people in finding the final clarification towards the marriage problems. This statistic is aligned with the current trend of worldwide on the issue of single parent where there is tremendous increase in the rate of single parents due to the divorce has been common solution for the people in finding the final clarification towards the marriage problems. From the statistics, United States is the country that contributes to the highest rate of single parent families with at least 25.8% of the children living with just a mother or a father (Rampell, 2010). Besides, if we observed the trending rate of single parent families, the rate is dominated by single mother group because one third of the family worldwide were led by a single mother who did not have spouses because of death and divorces (Mitchell, 2013). The issue of mother rising children by their own occurred in earlier 1990s, which study conducted by Dooley (1995) found that this group expand from eight per cent to fourteen per cent of total population in Canada during 1973 to 1991. Baker (1994) and Bala (1991) found that the increment of number of single mothers less than 35-year-old more than stated by Dooley (1995) within the same period of study. As a direct outcome of this trend, Canadian mothers with children younger than 15

years of age have had particularly low family income (Sheppard-Le Moine, 2000). Sixty-two percent of single parent families headed by women live below the poverty line with both the mothers and children experiencing economic deprivation (Cohen, 1994). Children living with their mothers in Canada are five times more likely to live in poverty compared to children living with two parents (Sheppard-Le Moine, 2000).

They become the head of the family with at least one child under the age of 18 as their dependent child. Being a single mother portrays the responsibility that they must raise their children without any financial assistance or child maintenance payments from your ex-husband. Because of that, single mother families are mostly living in poverty even though some of them are from developing countries. This is evident in United Kingdom where majority of the single mothers did not receive any financial assistance to cope with their life (Gingerbread, 2016). According to Wall Street Journal (2013), children who live in a single-parent family, are more likely to live in poverty when compared to children that live with both parents' presence. Because of the limited capability and perceptions of society, single mothers are hardly to get a job to survive with their life and raise their child comfortably. This situation will lead them to poverty because they do not have enough income to meet the basic needs of the household.

In Malaysia, single mothers can be categorized as in two factors which are spousal death and spousal abandonment or divorce, where parenting is a tough job without spouse helping in a child's growth (UNDP, 2010). They also take the role as the head of the family from their husbands and being responsible to educate their children. In a situation where a mother who still hold the title as a wife but has been abandoned by their husbands, they are about to continue their life with their children alone without getting any support from their husbands (Faizah & Hazirah, 2013). The phenomenon of single mother is not a new issue in the society, therefore the status of single mother in Malaysia is found to be increasing from time to time because of certain reasons that can affect the quality of life of a single mother (Faizah & Hazirah, 2013).

A study carried out by the Statistic Department, a total of 831 860 of women in Malaysia were either widowed, divorced or permanently separated, thus those women, after becoming the single mothers, will face various challenges in their lives. The challenges and issues faced by the single mothers is not new, but almost every year media was reported the various problems of the single mothers in Malaysia. The problems include financial problems, family problems, the stigma or perception of the society and emotional and psychological problems among them (Hamid et al., 2010).

According to Kotwal and Bharti (2009), their suffering is most likely to come from financial problem rather than emotionally and socially as it is a crucial thing in continuing the life of a person. In addition, most single mothers are fighting for financial independence as they have to face the burden in raising their child while at the same time continuing their decent life and searching for suitable jobs for themselves (UNDP, 2010). Furthermore, challenges that single mothers might face is their participation in labor force (Ruggeri & Bird, 2014).

According to Mitstifer (2008), various social pressures are also claimed to be as one factor contributing towards the stress faced by single mothers. So, in this study, the readers will go through the hardships faced by single mothers that caused by various factors. Being a single mother, everything from the household chores until working late night must be done alone without a partner. That is why most single mothers suffer psychological and emotional problems while dealing with their own daily lives. According to Faizah and Hazirah (as cited from Hamid, Mottan & Tyng, 2010), single mothers tend to feel lonely and sad because there was no partner to share everything, to rely on and to be loved. They also do not have time

to recover themselves from the status change from married to single because of the need to work in finding the income for the families. The stigma and perception from the society also become the real challenges for the single mothers in their lives. According to Faizah and Hazirah (as cited in Crosier, Butterworth & Rodgers, 2007), they found that single mothers were having difficulties in getting social support compared to women who live with their husbands. This is because of negative perceptions and stigma from the society towards single mothers where they believe that single mothers' families will be experiencing more problems as no man or husband to lead the families. Thus, this paper outlines the factors that can affect the survivability as single mother.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Survivability of Single Mother**

The study made by Kotwal and Bharti (2009) shows that 88 per cent of the reasons for single parent families comes from widowed, 6 per cent from separation and divorce. The survivability of single mother can be described as i) women who are widowed or divorced, separated from their husbands; and are the main providers of their households; and having children who are not married and living in the same households ii) women who are the main breadwinner for the family but the husband are not capable to work because of terrible sickness and having children who are not married and living in the same households iii) Single women who are the main providers, obtain custody of someone else's children or having child out of wedlock (Noor Watee et al., 2017).

As mentioned by Montgomery County (2009) in their study, managing family without any help from the husband is one of the challenges that most single mothers need to face but not all single mothers feel that this is a kind of challenges towards them. In addition, as declared by some other researchers, most wives or mothers feel that being one is the most fulfilling roles which any woman did not agree to have it (Edwards & Duncan, 1996). Montgomery County (2009) further stated that the difficulties to get place in an organization are one of causes of poverty among them and it seems like other challenges are kept to their responsibilities. Being a single mother with the challenges to raise the children after the separation with the husband is something out of mind and even worst there is situation where the husband cannot be responsible enough towards the family because they dare to steal the wife's asset such as car (Biggs, 2005). In addition, as declared by some other researchers that most of the wife or mother feels that being one is the most fulfilling roles which any woman did not agree to have it (Rosalind, 2014).

Sussman and Hanson (2014) said that poverty is a critical problem faced by single mothers as they intended to identify whether those challenges make sense or not. This is happening when single mothers have difficulties in their financial, then leading them to poverty (Kotwal & Bharti, 2009). Other than that, as studied by Ruggeri and Bird (2014), single mothers also need to survive in order to get place in an organization which means in their employment opportunity, they have tons of barriers to participate or get involve in labor force and this is related much to full employment. They continue by stating that the difficulties in getting job can make single mother with younger dependent children to feel the impacts or risks of living in poverty (Ruggeri & Bird, 2014).

According to previous study conducted by Kotwal & Bharti (2009), single mothers also have the challenges in managing their emotional or mental depression. There is another researcher who stated the same when he found that many single parents were under stress and because of that, they tend to neglect their children (Mittstifer, 2008). Further study done by previous researchers has stated that various social

pressures are one factor contributing towards the stress faced by single mother. Other than that, single mother might constantly fall sick, create additional strain that may cause by the juggled responsibilities which they have to face and then, those stresses will influence the mother behavior towards their children (Mitstifer, 2008). In response to that, some researchers argue that public and private sectors need to give support for single mothers' survivability as to help them to overcome the barriers that they have encountered since those can create severe consequences towards the whole live of a single mother (Emma et al., 2015). There are also various perceptions towards single mothers which can be classified as myth as stated by Nelsen et al. (2012). The created myth is when children live among single parents and have no healthy relationship among themselves and that single mother was claimed to be inadequate to become a role model towards the children, so they need to remarry soon. However, Nelsen et al. (2012) found those perceptions as not true because 43 per cent of children from single parent family were lived happily and the percentage is almost similar with the children who live in perfect family. They also claimed that a single mother can still be a role model without the existence of a husband because independent single mother knows everything about how to develop their family through parenting classes that they have attended. Thus, those variables used in previous study are important and bring significant effects in Malaysia content in studying about the survivability of single mother.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Research design for the study was constructed based on quantitative cross-sectional design where only one sample of respondents was drawn from the target populations. Cross-sectional design has benefited researchers in a way where it permits researchers to compare various variables at the same time (Work, 2015). The data of this study were collected using questionnaires which were distributed to the single mothers lived in Sepang. The instrument used in the study is adopted from Montgomery Country (2009), Kotwal and Bharti (2009), United Nation Development Programme (2010), Rosalind (2013) and Ruggeri and Bird (2014). All the instruments were found as valid and reliable in past studies when studying matter relating to single mother.

### **Sampling**

The sample size was derived from the total population or subset. The scope of the study is about survivability of single mother in Sepang which consists of widowed and divorced single mothers. The number of sample size was 200 respondents from Sepang area. The amount of sample size fit for statistical analysis requirement that being used in this study which are Pearson Correlation and Standard Enter Regression Analysis provided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 21). The sampling technique used were purposive and supported by convenience sampling. This technique has involved the selection of units that was easy to accessible and primary resources were used to analyze. Purposive sampling was chosen because of small population of 200 single mothers that lived in Sepang. The list was derived from Welfare Department. In this case, researchers keep to the research ethical and integrity guidelines to ensure the list of names given by authority keep as private and confidential and for academic purpose only. Thus, this population was the targeted sample for this study to ensure that it meets the requirement of statistic and binds to the methodology used in the study.

## FINDINGS

### Normality test

Test of normality is the major element as distributional factors that can affect the findings in order to determine the normality of the variables. The normality test will also determine the normal distribution of the sample or groups of data. Other than that, it can be tested mathematically or graphically. A value of between +2 and -2 can be considered as the data is normally distributed (Field, 2009).

**Table 1: Test of Normality**

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Remarks
Survivability of Single Mother	-0.705	1.164	Normal
Financial Burden	-0.294	-0.509	Normal
Employment Struggle	-0.699	0.844	Normal
Mental Pressure	-0.317	0.322	Normal
Society Stigma	-0.719	0.571	Normal

The table above shows the result of normality test in this research study. It consists of Survivability of Single Mother as the dependent variable and Financial Burden, Employment Struggle, Mental Pressure and Society Stigma as the independent variables. All these variables are tested using skewness and kurtosis which means, to determine the normality of the study, the value achieved must be in between ( $\pm 2$ ). As shown in Table 1, all variables are normally distributed since all values are in between ( $\pm 2$ ). To get the value of normality, the researchers must first fulfil the assumptions in the normality test.

### Descriptive analysis

**Table 2: Profile of respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	130	65.0
Unemployed	70	35.0
<b>Number of Children</b>		
1-5	149	74.5
More than 5	35	17.5
No child	16	8.0
<b>Age</b>		
<20	2	1.0
21-30	27	13.5
31-40	57	28.5
>40	114	57.0

<b>Income Level</b>		
<RM 1,000	95	47.5
RM 1,100- RM 2,000	56	28.0
>RM 2,000	49	24.5
N:200		

The employment status has been categorised into two which are employed and unemployed. The data shows that the majority of 130 respondents with the percentage of 65.0 are employed and the rest of the respondents which total about 70 respondents with the percentage of 35.0 are unemployed. The other demographic of respondents is the number of children. As shown in the table, most respondents who have children within one to five children is 149 with the highest percentage of 74.5, followed by 35 respondents who have above than five children with the percentage of 17.5.

The respondents who have no children consist of 16 respondents with 8 per cent. Furthermore, the other demographic is the age of the respondents. The table shows that most respondents are at the age of above 40 with the highest percentage of 57 per cent, and then followed by 57 respondents who aged 31 years until 40 years in which the percentage of it is 28.5. The second least respondents who aged 21 years until 30 years that consists of 27 respondents with the percentage of 13.5 and the most least respondents come from the group aged under 20 years and consists of 2 respondents and the percentage allocated is 1 per cent. The last demographic of the respondents is made based on their level of income. Based on the table shown, the most respondents come from the group that owned below RM1,000 which consist of 95 respondents with the percentage of 47.5 and then followed by the respondents who owned RM1,100 until RM2,000 which consist of 56 respondents with 28 per cent. The most least respondents come from the group who owned above RM2,000 which consists of 49 respondents with the percentage of 24.5.

### **Testing of hypothesis**

H<sub>1</sub>: There are significant relationships between the Independent Variables (Financial burden, Employment struggle, Mental pressure and Social stigma and Dependent Variables (Survivability as single mother)

According to Coakes (2013), correlation is referred to as linear fashion where it will indicate the relationship between different variables and there are also few assumptions that need to be fulfilled as to determine whether the variables have relationship among each other or not. In this study, the assumptions for correlation includes five elements which are related pairs and measurement scale which had been conducted in research design. The other three elements are normality, linearity and homoscedasticity testing which are shown in the appendices in this report. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is conducted to measure the connection between two continuous variables in this research study which is also called as simple bivariate correlation (Coakes, 2013). Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is used to determine the result of the correlation.

The relationship between variables is determined for having a mutual relationship by using the range of ( $\pm 1$ ). If it is within the range of ( $\pm 1$ ), this means that they have relationship, but the difference is either it is a strong or weak relationship.

**Table 3: Pearson correlation analysis**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 Survivability of Single Mother	-				
2 Financial Burden	0.683**	-			
3 Employment Struggle	0.194**	0.314**	-		
4 Mental Pressure	0.487**	0.675**	0.488**	-	
5 Society Stigma	0.512**	0.683**	0.314**	0.496**	-

N:200 \*\*:sig.  $p < .05$

Table 3 shows the result of the analysis that related to the presence of the relationship and the levels (strong and weak) of relationship among the derived variables. The strongest relationship among the variables is between survivability of single mother as the dependent variable and financial burden as the independent variable which indicates the result of the  $r=0.683$ . Therefore, the researchers can conclude that financial burden give large contribution to the survivability of single mother. This has been followed by society stigma as the independent variable which contributes 0.512 of the correlation values in surviving factor of a single mother. Moreover, the relationship between dependent variable (survivability of single mother) and the third variable (mental pressure) indicates that they have moderate relationship because it shows that  $r=0.487$ . Finally, the weakest relationship is found to be between survivability of single mother and employment struggle in which both variables contribute 0.194 of the correlation values. From the result, the researchers know that employment struggle as the independent variable did not affect single mothers in surviving their own lives.

### Determining the main factor

According to Campbell (2008), regression can be defined as a statistical technique intended to determine the linear relationship between two or more variables. The value of variable can be determined based on the other variable's value. Regression involves dependent variable and independent variable which consists of two or more variables. In the study, regression was used to derive the main factor that can lead to the survivability of single mother by analysing the standardised beta coefficient value. The result of Durbin-Watson where its value is 1.860 and lies between the ranges of 1-4 is evident to test for the assumption of independence of residuals in multiple regression. Thus, we can conclude that the assumption of independence of residuals is not violated because the Durbin-Watson value for this study is within the acceptable range. Next, we need to test for the assumption of outliers by using Mahalanobis values. In this study, there are 8 values of Mahalanobis which greater than the critical chi-square value which is 13.8, with the highest value of Mahalanobis in this study is 20.8044. However, these outliers had been treated through statistical technique thus it does not give any effect towards this study and the regression output did not affected too.

**Table 4: Regression analysis**

Variables	Standardized $\beta$
Financial Burden	0.593**
Employment Struggle	-0.053
Mental Pressure	0.068
Society Stigma	0.089

R Square	0.474
F	43.905
Sig.	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Durbin-Watson	1.860

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N:200  
DV:Survivality of single mother  
\*\*:sig. p<.05

Based on Table 4 above, financial burden has the regression value of 0.593, which presenting it as the most significant variable in this study. On the other hand, the variable of employment struggle has the value of -0.053, which proving that it does not have any significant impact in this study. The other two variables which are mental pressure with the value of 0.068 and society stigma with the value of 0.089 also showing that both variables as not significant. The regression value of the variable financial burden is 0.593 or 59.3% which shows the strength of the relationship between financial burden and survivability of single mothers. From this result, the independent variable of financial burden is seen as the most affecting factor for influencing the survivability of single mothers. For the value of  $R^2$ , it is intended to prove the conceptual framework as well as to show the strengths of those independent variables towards the dependent variable. From Table 4, the value of  $R^2$  is 0.474 which means that the strength of framework used in the study is 47.4% in explaining the survivability of single mother. For the F-test, its value is 43.905, thus it shows that the test is highly significant and proves that there is a linear relationship between the variables. Significant value for the variables also shows the value of 0.000, which means that it is highly significant.

## DISCUSSION

Financial burden is a norm where most single mothers cannot afford their living cost, fulfill their basic needs (foods, clothing and shelters) and personal expenses (Kotwal & Bharti, 2009). In a developing country like Malaysia, most single parents facing financial hardship to survive themselves and their children who grew up in isolation (Faizah & Hazirah, 2013). Single mothers feel like they are having a life crisis or burden when they are not ready to bear the responsibilities of their husbands after they had been separated or left (Kotwal & Bharti, 2009). As the head of the family (after being a single mother), single mothers also faced the challenges to commit with multiple responsibilities not only in term of money but also educators and managers for their children (Aziz et al., 2013). The researchers agree with the findings ad this has been supported in the study conducted by Kotwal and Bharti (2009) where they recorded forty-two per cent of single mothers as having difficulties to maintain their previous standard of living. Financial burden can also make more female-headed families to be found in the higher poverty risk group than the other couple families (Churchill, 2012). This can be justified when one study has confirmed that the changes of family structure such as divorce are by far the primary cause of incipient spells of poverty among single mothers and most women entering welfare dependency because of divorce, particularly those women whose family's income was in the bottom half of the income distribution (Churchill, 2012). On top of that, as reported by UNDP (2010), after divorce proceeding are finalised, the husbands refuse to pay for the children support and this can lead to the financial burden towards the ex-wife to raise their children (Zarina & Anton, 2012). If they have lack of assets accumulation, this will make most single parents facing financial hardship for survival and their children who grew up in isolation (Faizah & Hazirah, 2013).

According to Emma et al., (2015), they found that the inability to find caretakers for the children is among the major reasons that explains why single mothers are unemployed. In addition, they have to

leave the chances to be employed because they are left with no choice but to stay at home as they have conflicts in finding the caretakers for their children (Semuels, 2015). According to Zarina and Anton (2012), for a mother who do not have any young children may not face the same difficulties as young mothers encounter when the caretakers' issue has restricted them from working as they need to take care of their children. The researchers agree that the difficulties in eyeing for child care is one of the reasons that lead single mothers to get trapped in employment struggle. This is parallel with the finding from the study by Ruggeri and Bird (2014) as they stated that the major barrier for a single mother to get employed is because they must look after their children and that is why they are only able to work as part timers. As mentioned by Montgomery County (2009), not all single families who get low income can afford child care for their children and faced the struggle of taking care their children that below the school age and this will limit the employment option for the mother (Ezawa, 2016).

According to Kotwal and Bharti (2009), when women become single mothers, their emotional will be affected because of the changing of their status from married to single. They need to go through a lot of new situations and because of that they were continuously facing pressure from many aspects including the society. The new situation is where single mothers need to play important role in numerous responsibilities. For instance, they must start thinking of bigger responsibilities to provide financial earnings, handle the households and raise the children where those duties are typically carried out by both fathers and mothers in every family. Hittner (1998) has stated that mental pressure can happen to single mothers who are working when they are loaded by excessive responsibilities in meeting life needs (as cited by Aziz et al., 2013). They wake up and rush to their workplaces, send and pick up their children from nursery and they do household chores until late night. They do not even have time to rest and recover themselves from the status changes. Without sufficient support from closer family or friends, single mothers will be left feeling exhausted, devastating, guilty, depressed and even annoyed of their own children and the world (La, 2014). Most single mothers also believed that mental pressure is occurred due to the condition of economic hardship and also worries about children and their future (Kotwal & Bharti, 2009). Every single mother will bear more pressure thinking and worrying about the future of their children especially when there is no father figure to monitor and control them. Everything is left for the single mothers to take care of it. According to Mayor (2013), single parents bear the pressure of those tough responsibilities, thinking of where their children should go to schools, which friends are okay, or when a child is mature enough for a new privilege or responsibility. The emotional burden can wear the single mothers down in a hurry. The mothers complained about loneliness, distress and sadness and found it difficult to handle the responsibility of child-care and to establish a routine for their children, alone.

According to Diyana Isahak, (2009) the society always gives a bad perception towards single mothers. They view single mother as a person that cannot run a household perfectly when compared to a normal family. Because of their status as single mothers, divorced single mothers are being labelled as careless women that do not have any good in taking care of their husbands. Because of that, they were divorced by their husbands, but society still thinks that single mothers should be blamed when they were being divorced by their husbands. Everything that single mothers do, it will never be good as what married women do (Mayor, 2013). The stigma of the society towards single mothers become worse from day to day (Moss, 2014) and according to Rusyda Helma et al. (2011) and Siti Fatimah (2011), stigma or bad perception of society towards single mothers has created more difficulties for them to play their role effectively within the society.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study had outlined the antecedents that affect the survivability of single mother. Financial burden, employment struggle, mental pressure and society stigma are found to be having significant relationship towards the life of a single mother. From the evaluated data, the researchers know that the financial burden attribute give the biggest contribution in ensuring survivability of the single mothers in Sepang as compared to the other attributes that being tested. Hence, the study had fulfilled the research objectives and hypothesis had been answered as stated in findings section.

Thus, the findings may be used by several parties in helping the single mothers to go through their daily life. This includes the authority as the policy makers, the non-governmental bodies and the community to work together in helping the single mothers for life survival.

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