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### **Case Studies on the Problems of Single Mothers and their Children in Shillong City of Meghalaya**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This Case Studies on Problems of Single Mothers and their Children in Shillong City of Meghalaya has been designed to spell out the problems faced by the single mothers and their children. Single mother status is created in a number of ways, death of one parent, divorce, separation, desertion and Annulment.

Temperamental incompatibility, mutual distrust and neglect, lack of satisfaction in sex, impulsive behaviour, adultery, cruelty by husband and in-laws, addiction to alcohol and drugs by husbands are few reasons contributing towards breakdown of marriages caused by divorced, separation, desertion or annulment;

The researcher has planned the entire process of research work in such a way that it can focus on the social, family, psychological and economic problems of the single mothers and their children and at the same time it can suggest some strategies to cope with these said problems.

The researcher restricted her field of study only to the married Khasi and Jaintia single mothers living in Shillong city of Meghalaya. All the information regarding the research was collected from the married single mothers who are within the age group of 18 - 45.

The aim of the study is to highlight the socio-cultural and economic factors that determine the problems of single mothers and their children in Shillong city of Meghalaya. In order to understand and ascertain the in-depth conditions of single mothers, the researcher used checklist to collect the stories of 14 single mothers.

**KEY WORDS:** Single Mothers, Children, Problems, Case Studies, Experiences.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

These stories are intended to give an insight into some of the issues and problems that single mothers and their children are facing. Everyone has a story to tell. But most often these stories are never told, due to shame, embarrassment, and fear of tarnishing delicately maintains reputation. These case studies help to bring out lot of pain that otherwise remain hidden and unattended and would create awareness to others. These stories of 14 single mothers would inspire other single mothers who are in similar situations or help other single mothers learn from their experiences. It will also help people realize that it is alright to talk about family situations to those who care, because generally no one likes to talk about the painful side of family life for shame and embarrassment. Families are sacred. These single mothers and their children are traumatized, confused and become angry when this sacredness is betrayed for whatever reason by their own husbands and fathers. Fortunately some find their strength and the support to put back their life together and triumph over situations. Some in an over- eagerness to correct the situation end up more frustrated and make worse mistakes; some others drift for years carrying the scars, the guilt, the anger and the longing for what they could not have. These stories reflect all these- pain, despair, yearning, tenacity, hope, faith and tenderness.

### **CASE NO.1**

#### **EARLY MARRIAGE AND INSISTED BY ONE'S OWN MOTHER TO BE A SEX WORKER**

Struck by poverty persistently, there is no steadiness in the family and the support system that wheels this family was at stake. Unfortunately, a girl named Lila (name changed) had to bear the burden of a single mother as early as 17 years and education which is supposed to be a supplement for growth was however distant from her and she in spite of the uphill battle managed to accomplish up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Her mother regarded as an individual who could aspire her in moulding her sensations failed to do so as she was a single mother too. Reflecting back to the time when she was 16 years, at this young age she was married off to Ron during the year 2014 and they were blessed with a graceful daughter, but with time Ron shunned away from his responsibilities and no longer supported the family financially. Lila was disheartened by his acts as he only treats her as a sex object.

Lila never failed to look up to her mother, and in times of financial crisis when she resorts to her for help she would always refuse and would insist her to engage in sex work to support herself.

Lila was in a state of shocked and denied to commit such an act at the first instance, but due to helplessness in order to sustain herself and her daughter she force herself into sex work.

At the age of 17, Lila indulged herself into such a scandalous act and continues to do the same as a mean to earn money and job opportunities do not pave way for her. While she was struggling, she visited government institutions ransacking nooks and corners for schemes or jobs that could help her but atleast all doors were closed and she had to thrive on sex work. Since hopes were shattered, she stated that she is content with the kind of work she is carrying out after all she earns good amount that serves as a support to her daughter, mother and her siblings. She is confident with the work she is doing and moreover, she briefly stated about her work profile, where she mentioned that she visits her clients either at home or hotels and also travels away from Shillong to perform this task, she is entirely under the will of her clients and earns 2000 -4000 INR daily.

## **CASE NO.2**

### **A WIDOW WITH A WRONG OCCUPATION**

A 38 year old widow Alli (name changed) has 2 sons and 2 daughters and all of her children attend school. She works as a daily labourer and she did not receive any form of education since her parents passed away when she was little and none of her relatives were willing to support her in times of need. She works diligently to feed her children especially to give them education. She confronted a lot of problems while supporting them. She stays in a rented house and this added up to her problem because she has to pay the house rent, provide care to her children including the admission fees etc.,without any support.

She was previously engaged in varied jobs but she as a mother could not provide the best for her children so she took another path of working as a sex worker to earn money so as to enable her to support her children. She earns 1000 INR a day but there were times when she earns 2000 to 3000 INR a day due to rush of customers. When she fails to get client she takes up loan to support her children and repay it back when she earns. During the interview with her, she disclosed that she visited civil hospital for check up and medications and was being informed that infection pervaded her entire body. The doctor advice Alli not to continue with this job but she is not willing to discontinue because once she stops this work, she and her children will have financial crisis. She wants to get a good job with a good salary only then she will quit this present job.

### **CASE NO. 3**

#### **A RISK TO RISK MARRYING SOMEONE ELSE HUSBAND**

Shindrea (name changed), a teenage single mother was married to her boyfriend who was a married man with children. She was aware that he has a family of his own and if she marries him, the same might happen to her but she tried to ignore her conscience and proceeded with her marriage. By the time she realised that she was pregnant from him, she was already a depressed woman, because, her husband started to revisit his first wife and children. In spite of all the shame, hardship and pain she decided to continue with the relationship. However, he deserted her few weeks before her delivery.

Now the only source of support left was her family. Her family helped her to overcome this challenge and be a strong mother to her child. Because of the family support she managed to complete her graduation and get a job to support herself and her family. However, in spite of the strong family support she faces loneliness; the situation created an atmosphere for self pity and misfortune for her daughter to grow up as a child of a single mother and she longs for a male companion. She continuously beseech to the Almighty to get a better job and find a man who loves her and her child.

### **CASE NO. 4**

#### **ABUSIVE HUSBAND**

Renu (name changed) approached the Family Counseling Centre for help as advice by one of the concerned adult of her locality. She was a victim of domestic violence and abused by her husband. He however, left her and got married to another woman but forcefully took away the son with him leaving her daughter with her. The Counselor referred the case to CWC as she also wanted to take her son from her husband and nurture him. CWC passed an order to return back the son to his mother and the father will have to take responsibility to pay school fees and all necessary requirements related to education of children. The mother will have to take responsibility with regards to their health and hygiene, proper care and protection and healthy food. Renuka felt relief and content when she got back her son and she assured her best in taking good care of both the children along with the support of her family members.

## **CASE NO. 5**

### **A SHARE OUT OF HUSBAND'S PENSION**

Micheal (name changed) had been staying separately from her husband for almost 30 years. He left them and remarried. Micheal did not claim any maintenance from him. She has some petty business to support herself and her son. It was in the year 2014 in the month of August he came to her house asking her to go with him to his office to sign all the papers as he is going for retirement. He promised her that he will give half of the pension to her. After consultation with her son and her relatives, she went and signed the papers hoping that he will abide by the promise he made. After he retired and got the pension he remains silent and did not contact her to fulfil his promise. In the month of February, Micheal and her son approached the Family Counselling Centre and informed about this. The Counsellor had taken up the case and referred to Meghalaya State Women Commission. The case was settled within the Commission and her husband agreed that he will give INR 2,500/- p.m to his wife and will deposit in her account and on the event of his death, the pension will go to her and all the money he has got in the bank as he had given nominee in her name. This has made Micheal and her son very happy.

## **CASE NO. 6**

### **TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Duhrit (name changed) 18 years old deserted wife is a mother of 1 year old girl child. Since, she is the youngest in the family she is staying with her mother [single mother] and her eldest brother as her eldest sister is outside the state. Their father passed away 13 years ago.

When she was 16 years old and studying in class 9, she felt in love with her Hindu Nepali classmate. After three months of courtship they got into physical relationship when they were out for a party. It was only when she was in the 5<sup>th</sup> month of her pregnancy period that her mother and her family members started to recognize her strange behaviour and body changes and they decided to take her to the hospital for check-up. The report was positive and her pregnancy was confirmed. Her mother was unprepared to accept the situation, she was not at all happy with the happening, one reason it's because of Duhrit's young age and she wanted her to grow up and complete her studies, the other reason is that the husband is neither a Khasi nor a Christian and she was too young to be a mother and a wife. However, they decided to accept the baby.

When the child was 5 months old, her family made a visit to her husband's family with the new born child. But, surprisingly the husband denied that the child is his and claimed that she must be getting that child from another man. It throbbed her and her family member to hear these words

from him, a person who once when they were in a courtship tried his level best to win her heart, showed how much he loved her, needed her and made loads and loads of false promises. Earlier she even thought of running away with him if her mother failed to accept him. But there, the same person whom she loved, cared and trusted so much rejected her and her child in front of all his and her family members. He was hurting not only Duhrit but her whole family. Filled with pain and resentment she threatened him that she will go for DNA test to prove him and everyone that he is the father of her child, which she did and she was proven right, and she also threaten to sue him if he still dare to deny that he is not the father of her child. Her eldest brother who loved her very much burst into tears, seeing her loved ones getting hurt because of her, she felt like committing suicide.

It was from that day onward, her mother restricted her from calling him, meeting him or keeping in touch with him, she was not even allowed to use a cell phone. However, her love for him was still strong; she has a cousin sister who was always there for her at that time of pain and sorrow, who tried to get her in touch with her ex- husband. They tried calling him but ignored and rejected calls was what they got in return.

It took her half a year to recover and start living her life once again. Only then she started thinking about getting a job to support herself and her child, to continue with her studies and to give the best to her child. She is happy with her single life presently, with the moral and financial support of her family. However, being a mother, she does not want to depend on her family members. She wanted to get a good job to support herself and her child. The other challenge is her single life status which makes her feel lonely and misses her husband. Though she got many proposals, she is still not ready to accept or think about loving another man as she still loves her ex – husband and she doesn't want to hurt anyone.

Subsequently, she plan to complete her studies, get a good job to support herself and her child and may be get a good man who is ready to love and accept her and her child. But she is adamant enough not to go back to her ex – husband. Currently he is trying to call her but she hardly entertains him. She is happy with her life and does not need his company any longer.

## **CASE NO. 7**

### **FATE OF A DESERTED WIFE**

Rila (name changed) 35 years old is a mother to her only daughter. After being deserted from her husband, she earns her living by working as a domestic worker. From the time she married her husband she led a life filled with sorrow and anxiety. Though her husband was a government employee, he was irresponsible and a drunkard. He had many extra-marital affairs. Though he earned

sufficient money, he spent almost all his earnings on drinks and women. All these factors lead to disturbance in her family, but she never wanted him to leave her and her daughter as she was a stay at home wife and dependent on him financially.

However, after two years she had no choice when her husband disappeared and abandoned her and her daughter. When left with nothingness, she was compelled to go from door to door in search of a job so that she can feed herself, her daughter and pay the house rent.

After being deserted, she is adamant not to remarry again. She decided to bear all the pain of raising her daughter alone without any support neither from her husband nor her family. She works hard day and night without much of a leisure time just to be able to earn and give her daughter the best she could. Rila, besides spending quality time at her workplace, she would spend her extra time performing all the household duties keeping aside her tiredness and need of rest. She feels pity for herself and her daughter, she feels loneliness and unequal from time to time but she never allows these feelings to take control of her. Her daughter is her only source of hope and motivation and she wants to stay strong and healthy for her daughter.

## **CASE NO. 8**

### **A WIDOW WHO NEVER INTEND TO REMARRY**

Alis (name changed) 44 years old single mother is a mother of 4 boys and 4 girls. She has 10 siblings; 7 girls and 3 boys, her mother passed away when she was 16 years of age and her father too passed away when she was 34 years of age. Alis could complete only her primary education due to family hardship. She took over the business left by her parent's when she was 16 years of age along with her elder sister and that taught her how to run and manage by herself later in life. After reaching 18 years of age she started to handle the business alone until she gets married along with her husband.

The marriage of Alis was a love marriage. She was busy handling her work, as she took over the business started by her parents, and when she turned 24 years of age, she started to think and feel that it was the right time for her to show intimacy and closeness towards someone. Then with time she met her boyfriend (husband) who was from a good reputable Christian family. And it was at this time when she accepted him, they started to know each other well. They were in a relationship for 2 years and when she turned 26, they received the sacrament of Matrimony.

Her husband was a school dropout because his father passed away, so due to poverty his mother could not afford his schooling anymore, he has to leave his education aside in order to give a little support to his family. After leaving his education, he did not sit idle at home but work as a cow

rarer until he reached 15 years of age and later he started working as a motor mechanic in a local automobile workshop and this continue to be his major occupation. With this he earned a living and supports his family until he attained the age of 26 where he took Alis as his wife and join her business till his death.

Alis was left behind by her husband because of the natural death befell on her husband and this happen in the year 2010. After the death of her husband, Alis being a single mother was sad and filled with melancholy mood all over the times as she had to look after and raised her 8 children, being a single mother she has to play a double role in her life. She has to be a mother and a father at the same time; she took the step of being a Pillar of the family. She feels that this was a heavy burden for her as she has to support her children and uplift their dreams in educating them and fulfilling their basic requirements in their day to day life.

Alis was a hardworking women right from her childhood, She always believe and have the faith that life is all a journey but not a destination, In her journey she accepted high and lows, ups and downs in life, but with prayers, strong hopes and dedication towards her work she prayed that her children will live by good moral values and be good in life. Till then she was happy as her children obeys and respect her into which they still value the family teachings and do good in their studies so that they will be able to shine and fly with beautiful colours one day in life. Alis was very much happy with her single life along with her children and her family as a whole. She decided to stay only with her children and she will always keep promises and abide by the norms and vows taken during her marriage in the church when she received her Sacrament of Matrimony.

## **CASE NO. 9**

### **A WIDOW WHO LOSS HER HUSBAND DUE TO CANCER**

Mecca (name changed) a 45 years old widow lives with her two children. She works as a government servant at PHE. Her son is presently working as a Government servant and her daughter is still studying. Her husband died in the year 2006. He was diagnosed with cancer and was under treatment and the family lost him on that very year. It was a love Marriage and they had to worked together to support the family and for their children's education. When her husband died, the children were still studying. It was a very hard time for her as she had to take care of her children all alone, their education and the household needs. She had to work on other business in order to earn more to provide for her children and other needs. However, her suffering ends after few years of her husbands' death when her son got a job and this had helped her as he could support the family.

## **CASE NO. 10**

### **EXTRA MARITAL AFFAIRS OF THE HUSBAND**

Society plays a vital role in shaping an individual to live in tranquillity with other individuals or groups. A society can build as well as break an individual. In a certain case it was found that society is held responsible for creating an environment that failed to support a single mother of 25 years name Suzan (name changed). Suzan a Christian woman coming from a family of seven members with four siblings and she has completed her graduation and further, tied the knot on grounds of love in 2012 with a man from her locality, her husband works as police official but unfortunately these couples separated after 3 yrs of marriage as she came to know that her husband was having an extra marital relationship with another woman from his work place. Suzan is also employed as a teacher in an SSA school but her earnings could not run the family and is somehow dependent on her husband to sustain herself and her child. But with the separation and with the status of a single mother she finds it difficult in bringing up her child as she has to take care of everything and their economic background is quite low. With her background and the separation with her husband crafted numerous gossips within the society and the community people scorns her and her child, moreover Suzan cannot retain within her remarks from her neighbours as they interfere with the relationship she had with her husband not knowing the factual truth but instead hold her responsible for the separation accusing her of having an extra marital affair in the absence of her husband.

## **CASE NO. 11**

### **UNWILLING OF THE HUSBAND TO GET THE MARRIAGE REGISTERED**

Emi (name changed) is a teacher by profession and a mother to her only son. When she met her husband, he was financially unsound. So she rescues her husband and his sibling from their economic crisis since his parents passed away. As his confidence in himself and his economy grew, their relationship deteriorated. She was no longer what he needed and he turned to abused her emotionally. He had extra marital affairs with few women as he found her no longer attractive. In spite of this fact Emi forgave him and desire to continue with their relationship. She however, convinced him to get their marriage registered in the church but he refused on grounds that he still wants a girl child and due to complication she won't be able to conceive again.

Emi realised that her relationship with him will reach nowhere, it will be good for the both of them to be separated for the good of her son and herself. However, he resists her decision and was not willing to be separated at first. It was only after few attempts she succeeds in her plan.

Since she is economically independent she doesn't remember facing any financial constraint. Emi stated that she is contented with her present status, she is doing well and manage to take good care of her son. Besides being economically independent, Emi, also received strong support from her siblings. She feels that it is important for any single mothers to be economically independent, mentally and physically strong to be able to continue with their motherhood happily and successfully. She also stated that the other reason why she is contented with her status may be because she has only one child and her child is very respectful and obedient. But for single mothers with many children, who are economically dependent, and those who are not mentally and spiritually strong, their condition might not be the same. Emi feels that living only with her son without her husband makes her happy as she is free from all psychological abused which she confronted earlier. She is well off without her husband around and wants to maintain this status and not to remarry.

## **CASE NO. 12 DIVORCE ON GROUND OF ADULTERY**

Mary (name changed) entered into a marital relationship in the year 2002. Thereafter, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2002 their marriage was legalized and solemnized according to the Indian Christian Marriage. They thereafter lived and stayed together as husband and wife and have three issues out of their wedlock. In the first few years of marriage they live peacefully and enjoyed the company of being together. But after the lapse of time he starts to change his attitude and behavior towards his wife Mary and this leads to confusion and misunderstanding between them as husband and wife.

She was very surprised with the change in his attitude and behavior he always find faults to quarrel with her without any rhyme and reasons and tortured her both physically and mentally. Mary as a good loving wife try to settle matters for the wellbeing and future of their 3 minor children but her husband turn a deaf ear and still shows his attitude towards Mary. Though Mary made all efforts to safe the marriage but all her efforts were in vain as her husband deserted her in the year 2011 and he committed adultery. After the commission of adultery Mary's husband and his mistress are living openly as husband and wife in a rented house. The said adulterous act committed by Mary's husband has made Mary's desire to dissolve the marriage according to law. Hence on account of adultery and desertion committed by Mary's husband has become no longer possible for them to remain legally wedded.

Mary stated that the act of her husband committing adultery has cause great mental hardship to her and this is a fit case to dissolve the marriage. She further stated that there is no likelihood that they will re-unite again due to said adulterous act of the husband.

Therefore, it was on October 2014, Mary file a petition for dissolution of Marriage under Section 10 (i) and (vi) of the Indian Divorce Act, 1869. She submitted that due to the adulterous act committed by her husband she is entitled for the dissolution of marriage and to separate the marital relationship as husband and wife between them by the Court. The court favors Mary in which justice was given to her.

### **CASE NO. 13**

#### **ABANDONED WITH TWO DAUGHTERS**

Being a graduate, she chose a boy for herself and married him with her parent's consent. They had two daughters in three years. When her second daughter was five months old, she realized that her husband was not in love with her anymore. Being an army man he was always outside to perform his duties. But even when he comes for his holidays he was not interested to spend time with her and his daughters. Instead, he would spend his holidays with his ex- girlfriend. When Rita (name changed) tried to talk about it, he would threaten to leave her and stop visiting her for months. Rita was depressed with her husband reaction and deeds, she tried to apologise with no false of her own. However, their marital relationship doesn't last long. Since her husband decided to abandoned her and settle down with his ex- girlfriend. Rita had no income apart from that of her parents. She decided to earn, and study further. She started giving tuitions, but had to leave her daughter at her parents at such times. She has now finished her masters and teaches in a school. She stresses the importance of education in order to be self reliant. She is prepared to stay single and take good care of her daughters.

### **CASE NO. 14**

#### **DISAPPEARANCE OF A HUSBAND**

Avila (name changed), a 40 year old single mother has a daughter and they both works as daily labourers. Avila is illiterate but she did try to educate her daughter. Sadly, her dream to make her daughter educated and become self dependent is in vain, when her daughter keeps on failing and remains in the same class for almost three years. Rita's daughter decided to discontinue her studies and help her mother. With no choice left Rita started to take her daughter to work along. Though both of them are working their income is in sufficient, they live from hand to mouth. Yet, in spite of this hardship, Rita is adamant not to remarry. She prayed that her daughter would not have to go through the pain and suffering that she is going through each new day. She does not have any one by her side to help her in times of trouble as her mother is old and her sister is also single mothers and are financially unsound. Looking back Rita stated that, she married her husband when she was a

teenager; he too works as a daily labourer. She also stated that they stayed married for half a year, the moment she informed him of her pregnancy he disappeared and he was never seen again. From then she had to shoulder the responsibility with little help from her mother and siblings. But at present both her mother and sister cannot help her anymore.

## **CONCLUSION**

Single motherhood has been the hardest thing most single mothers have ever had to do. It's been daunting, frightening, and frustrating. But it's also been positively challenging. They have grown as an individual in ways they never expected. And it's extraordinarily rewarding seeing their children unfold as they help guide them.

Yes, the fight for respectable existence is a hard one for most single mothers in Shillong. Since they are divorced, separated or deserted, it is assumed that they are craving for a man in their life or that will grab the first opportunity that comes along. Failing to remember that there are many single mothers who are happily bringing up their children and excelling in doing so.

Self pity is another issue which most of the single mothers have to undergo from time to time, especially when they are fresh out of their single status and when there are happy couples around. The reaction of people regarding the status of the divorcee and those who got separated or deserted in the society changes overnight. There are people who feel for them, their children and family. There are also many who includes even their own family sometimes, blame them for their status, call them women of no morals, threaten to take their children away, even call them incapable of handling their children because of their status.

And for the single mothers who are sex worker are easy target for gossip and discrimination; they don't get the due respect. Quite many of them, got beaten up, threaten and punished by their husband's wives and community people. It's not only a case of turning deaf ear to the gossip; it is also about answering uncomfortable questions which are sometimes downright rude. People also believe them to be of low character and do not even care to know the root causes that compels these single mothers to take up this job. As discovered from these case studies, interaction and discussion. Poverty and abandonment of husbands are the main causes that push these women to sex work. Majority of the single mothers stated that there is a drastic change in their economic status after the marital dissolutions or death of their husbands. Playing both roles of a father and mother is challenging for them. Therefore, for their welfare and the welfare of the entire community, they long for the support and assistance of the government.

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