

The Act of Balancing: A Case Study on a Single Working Mother in Urban India

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the life of Rina Mehta, a 45-year-old single mother living in Pune, India, with her parents and 8-year-old son, Aryan. Rina works full-time as an academican at a well-known management institute and faces the dual challenge of managing her career and parenting responsibilities. The study highlights the key challenges Rina encounters, including financial strain, work-life balance, societal expectations, and career progression hurdles. It also examines the crucial role of her parents in providing both practical and emotional support, allowing her to navigate her responsibilities more effectively. By leveraging efficient time management, financial planning, and self-care strategies, Rina maintains her professional and personal equilibrium. This case study underscores the importance of a strong support system and effective coping strategies for single working mothers in India, offering insights into their unique struggles and resilience.

Keywords: single parent, working mothers, time management, societal roles, career choices

SINGLE WORKING MOTHERS IN INDIA

Parveen, S., & Yadav, S. (2016) talk about the financial train that single working mothers in India often face - costs associated with childcare, education, healthcare, and daily living expenses can be overwhelming for single mothers, particularly those with lower incomes or limited access to financial support.

Balancing professional responsibilities with parenting duties is a considerable challenge. Single mothers often struggle to find time for their children and household chores while fulfilling work commitments. This imbalance can lead to stress, fatigue, and a sense of inadequacy in both roles (Singh, R., & Kumar, P., 2017).

Radhakrishnan, S. (2018) focuses on the pertinent point of social stigma and judgment that single mothers in India frequently encounter. The absence of a partner often results in single mothers being perceived as less capable or responsible.

Many single working mothers look towards their extended families for support and understanding as they try to manage their personal and professional lives. Living with parents or other relatives can provide much-needed assistance with childcare and household duties, allowing single mothers to pursue their careers with fewer stressors (Verma, A., & Sharma, M., 2019).

Kapoor, N., & Bhattacharya, S. (2020) talks about how government policies and organizational support mechanisms, such as flexible work hours, parental leave, and childcare facilities, can significantly alleviate the burdens faced by single working mothers. However, access to such resources varies widely, and many single mothers remain unaware of the support available to them.

Iyer, P., & Rao, S. (2021) talk about how community networks and peer support groups offer emotional and practical assistance. Engaging with other single mothers through support groups or community organizations can provide a sense of belonging and shared understanding, reducing feelings of isolation.

Chatterjee, A., & Gupta, R. (2017) delved into the emotional and behavioural outcomes of children of single working mothers. Their research indicates that these children often experience higher levels of stress and may struggle with identity and self-esteem issues. However, the presence of a strong support system can mitigate these effects. Despite the challenges, children of single working mothers can achieve high educational attainment. The resilience and determination modeled by their mothers often inspire children to excel academically and pursue ambitious goals (Singh, P., & Kaur, J., 2019).

Dutta, M., & Mukherjee, S. (2020) talk about the changing attitudes towards single mothers in urban India. There is a gradual shift in societal attitudes towards single motherhood in India. Increasing urbanization, higher levels of education,

and greater participation of women in the workforce are contributing to more acceptance and support for single mothers. Media representation and advocacy efforts also play a crucial role in changing perceptions.

About RINA

Rina Mehta is a 45-year-old single mother living in Pune, India. She has an 8-year-old son, Aryan, and works full-time as an academician at a well-known management institute. Rina holds a master's degree in business administration apart from many others and is also now pursuing her doctoral degree in the hope of having better career opportunities. After her divorce five years ago, she moved back to her parents' home for support. They live in a spacious apartment in a well-connected neighbourhood.

A NORMAL DAY

Rina's day starts at 5:00 am. She prepares breakfast, both tiffins and gets Aryan ready for school. By 6:50 am, the school van comes to pick up Aryan, allowing Rina to devote one hour to the physical wellbeing and report to her institute by 9:00 am. Her work hours typically run from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, six days a week; but she sometimes the academic work demands attending deadlines or reporting to work on Sundays. After reaching home at 5:30 pm, in the evening, she helps Aryan with his homework and spends quality time with her parents and son.

THE SITUATIONS

Balancing Work and Parenthood:

- **Morning Routine:** Rina juggles between her job responsibilities, her trying to fit in her exercise schedule and ensuring Aryan's school readiness.
- **Work Commitments:** Deadlines or holiday work reporting often interfere with her time with Aryan. Its at such times that parent's guilt kicks in.
- **Older Parents, Young Child:** This is sometimes a catch 22 situation for Rina as there are very few activities or outings all of them can do together. Moreso, she is mostly in a guilt of being a financial burden on her parents, and not being able to contribute much to finances. However, she also knows that living with her parents gives Rina emotional stability and a reliable support system, and a healthy environment for her growing up boy, which is much needed. She also feels that she is available both for her parents and her child as the need may arise.

Financial Management:

- **Shared Expenses:** Although living with her parents reduces some financial burdens, Rina contributes to household expenses, Aryan's education, and extracurricular activities. There are times when money is a struggle but with good financial advice, she is mostly being able to manage the expenses.
- **Savings and Future Planning:** Rina aims to save for Aryan's future education and save some for her old age, adding to her financial pressures within the limited salary.
- **Social and Emotional Well-being:** It irks Rina when people make statements like "not settled" or "how will the child grow up without a father". She has her group of supporters who have stood by her in thick and thin. Her parents and sibling are her biggest emotional anchors. As she is completely caught up in bringing up her child, she somehow does not miss the presence of a man in her life or schedule. This may also be triggered due to her past experience.
- **Societal Expectations:** As a single mother, Rina faces societal judgment, which can be emotionally taxing. Always trying to pose as a strong person can get exhausting sometimes. Over the years, however, she has mentally trained herself to avoid statements from external environment to hamper her life and mental peace.
- **Parenting Stress:** Balancing the demands of her job with the emotional and time needs of Aryan can be overwhelming. Sometimes, being an older mother, the lack of energy to match that of a kid gets worrisome for her. And that doubles when she thinks of 20 years in future or so.

Career Progression:

- **Professional Development:** Rina aspires to further her career but finds it challenging to allocate time for additional courses or certifications. Given she is a late bloomer in the race of career progression, she many times gives up on a promising future in the field. Also, she does not want to compromise on the time she needs to give Aryan, thereby, limiting her time for professional achievements, outstation opportunities etc.
- **Perception at Work:** She occasionally feels her colleagues and superiors view her as less dedicated due to her family responsibilities. Sometimes, there are judgments about her character - she is thought to being flamboyant. Many a times, the divorce is taken as her lack of dedication towards relationships and therefore is casual towards her work.

Conclusion

Rina Mehta's case highlights the unique dynamics of a single working mother living with her parents in India. While she faces challenges in balancing work and motherhood, the support of her parents and sibling provides significant relief, allowing her to focus on her career and Aryan's upbringing. Rina's story underscores the importance of a strong support

system, effective time management, and financial planning in navigating the complexities of single parenthood and professional growth.

Questions:

- i. What do you assess can be the triggers that send her on a guilt trip and how should she address such situations?
- ii. Is there a need today for a progressive society towards single mothers / parents? Do we need some policies in place to create a more sustainable environment for single parents? Mention any one such policy that you think would support single working mothers / parent.
- iii. How does the emotional and practical support from her parents' impact Rina's ability to balance her work and personal life?
- iv. How does she plan to achieve a balance between her professional ambitions and her responsibilities as a mother?

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