



## THE ROLES OF SINGLE PARENT

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### **Abstract:**

The phenomenon of single parents in these last decades has grown in many countries. The phenomenon of single parent mothers in Indonesia has increased since 2004 to 2006. Being a single parent in a household is not easy, especially for a wife who was left behind by her husband, either due to death or a divorce. It requires continuous and determined struggle to successfully raise children alone as well as fulfilling the needs for daily living for the family. A single parent mother has a great task as she has to fulfill two roles, both as a father as well as a mother. Therefore, this research aims to describe the double role of single-parent mothers, the self-adaptation process regarding fulfillment of double family roles by single-parent mothers, as well as coping strategies of single parent mothers in fulfilling her double roles in the family. This research was designed as a qualitative research. Research subjects included (a) young adult women whose age ranged from 24 to 39 years old, who works both as a housewife (domestic) as well as having a job in the public sector, (b) was a widow (due to spouse's death), (c) has a role as a single parent with child, and (d) has become a single parent for at least three years. This research used open interview method with a general guideline for the interview. Research results showed that all subjects experience the loss of their spouses negatively and tended to not have any preparation on becoming a widow initially. However, as time progressed, the four subjects were able to accept their role as single parents. Emotional focused coping strategies and problem focused coping strategies were commonly found to have a role in resolving problems associated with the role of a single parent.

**Keywords:** coping strategy; double role; self-adaptation; single parent; women

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The phenomenon of single parents in these last few decades has been occurring globally in many countries. The phenomenon of female single parents in Indonesia has increased from 10.47% in the year 2004 (6.43% was due to husband's death) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2004), to 10.46% in the year 2005 (6.67% was due to husband's death) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2005) and further increased to 10.77% in the year 2006 (7.7% was due to husband's death) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2006).

Single parent is defined as a parent who takes care of his/her children without the help of his/her spouse (Wikimedia Foundation, 2007). Single parent is someone who assumes the responsibility for protecting, guiding, and taking care of one's child by oneself or adopt a child by oneself (Corsini, 2002). A family with a single parent consists of one parent with dependent children, who live together in one household (Hamner & Turner, 1996). Most families with single parents are families with mothers as the single parent. Families with mothers as single parents are mostly formed due to the husbands' death, divorces, unmarried mothers, or teenagers who got pregnant out of wedlock (Feltey, 1995).

Being a single parent in a household was not easy, especially for a wife who was left behind by her husband, either due to death or a divorce. A determination is required to raise the children alone, while also still being responsible to fulfill the family's financial needs and to successfully take care of the children. Death is a fact in life, and accepting that fact is an unavoidable reality. Psychological sorrow faced by the ones left behind may include loneliness, desperation, and fear.

Various cross sectional reviews reported that single parents tend to suffer from economical and psychological difficulties, which eventually may disturb the children's development, such as in self-regulation, prestige, and antisocial behaviours (Kim & Brody, 2005). Reduced financial sources may be related to symptoms of depression and low self-esteem affecting single parent mothers (Brody & Douglas, 1997). Eventually, this condition may influence the quality of the relationship between mother and child, child's self-regulation and psychosocial adaptation abilities.

Single parents are demanded to work extra hard in order to fulfill the daily living needs of their family. On other side, single parents are also expected to provide time for their children to fulfill other basic needs of human, including safety, physical connections, honor, love and care, knowledge/education, social relationships, as well as spiritual needs, according to the theory Hierarchy of Needs (Abraham Maslow). Female single parents consequently must overcome a larger burden, as they should assume a double role, that is, to act both as a father and a mother. Individuals who assume double role may experience role conflicts, which more specifically defined as intra-role conflicts, which means a disagreement that occurs when there was contradicting or opposing expectations of the roles. For single parent mothers, this contradiction occurs when they were in a situation that necessitates them to choose whether to act as mother

for the children or to work as a breadwinner for the family (a role commonly assumed by the father).

Based on these narrations, it can be concluded that a single parent mother must assume multi-roles as a consequence for her status and in order to ensure the survival of her family. As single parents, a woman has to be able to combine her domestic and public tasks. She is expected to perform well both as a breadwinner publicly and as a caretaker for the children domestically.

This process of assuming double roles likely cause problems, especially to women who are left by their spouses, as the tasks that were usually managed by two persons had to be managed by one person. In regards to this possible conflict, the author was interested to study the adaptation process in assuming the double roles by single parent mothers in taking care, raising, and educating their children.

## **1.2 Research Purpose**

This research aims to describe:

- 1) the double role of single parent mothers;
- 2) self-adaptation process regarding fulfillment of double family roles by single parent mothers;
- 3) coping strategies of single parent mothers in fulfilling her double roles in the family.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Single Parent Mothers and Their Role**

#### **2.1.1 Definition**

Single parents are people who took full responsibility to protect, guide, and care for his children by himself or had adopted a child by himself (Corsini, 2002) or an individual who guide his children alone, without a partner/spouse, in a long and relatively permanent term (Ortega in Imelda, 2001). Families with single parents can be categorized based on the sex of the head of the family. Families with a father as a single parent were often formed due to death of the mother, negligence of mother, or refusal of custody by the mother. Meanwhile, families with a mother as a single parent may be formed due to death of the father, divorce, unmarried mother, or out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Single parent woman is defined as a woman who is responsible to protect, guide, and care for her children (either biological or adopted), without a spouse (a husband), in a long and relatively permanent period.

#### **2.1.2 The Role of Single Parent Mothers**

Single parents are forced to face changes in their life, including decreased financial resources, possible relocation, assumption of the new role and responsibilities, new interaction patterns between family members, as well as re-scheduling of routines and appointments (Hamner & Turner, 1996). A woman experiencing the death of her spouse (husband) or losing her spouse due to a divorce would later assume a new status and

role as a widow (Feldman, 2000), which may include being a single parent for her children, acting both as a father and a mother (breadwinner, head of the family).

As a single parent, a woman is still demanded by the community to fulfill his role as a mother, which includes the three demands of child development and care (Ruddick, as cited by Rollins, 1996), which included: a) ensuring the life of her children; b) taking care and helping her children to develop; and c) helping her children to socialize and develop good manners. However, to provide/fulfill the materialistic and physical needs for her children, single parent mothers must work to earn an income. For women who work out of her home (e.g. at an office), there will be additional consequences, such as: a) double workload, as she had to manage her tasks at work and also the domestic tasks in her home, as well as b) may be considered lacking emotionally as she may be lacking in time to spend for manual child care (Mansour, as cited by Ririn, 1997).

## **2.2 Self-Adaptation**

Dirgagunarsa and Dirgagunarsa (2003) defined self-adaptation as essential efforts in forming a life by an individual, using interactive patterns without substantial emotional pressure. Chaplin (1995) defined self-adaptation as a way for an organism to resolve a problem, as well as an effort to fulfill a need that can no longer be satisfied with the usual method. Self-adaptation also meant as an effort of an organism to create harmonious relationships with his physical and social environment. Self-adaptation was a dynamic process that aimed to change an individual's behavior so that a decent relationship may be created between the individual and his environment. Haber & Runyon (1984) further added that self-adaptation may be achieved when one was able to acquaint himself to the reality and was able to accept the reality as it was through some efforts to resolve the occurring problems. Fernald (1997) stated that self-adaptation was an ongoing process and was not a static or stoppable phase. According to Fatimah (2006), self-adaptation generally consisted of two aspects; namely personal adaptation and social adaptation. Personal adaptation was a person's ability to accept himself in order to create a harmonious relationship between himself and his surroundings. He fully declared himself as who he was, admitted his strengths and limitations as well as able to act objectively according to his personal condition and potentials. A successful personal adaptation is characterized by absence of hatred, absence of feelings of wanting to run away from reality or disbelief to one's potentials.

Based on these explanations on self-adaptation, it can be concluded that self-adaptation is an individual's behavior which involves an effort to change one's behavior in order to resolve certain demands, conflicts, pressure, or stress in one's life to create a satisfying relationship between individuals as well as between individuals and their environment.

## **2.3 Coping Strategies as a Form of Self-Adaptation**

### **2.3.1 Definition**

Coping consists of action-oriented, intraphysical efforts to manage (or overcome, tolerate, minimize, or decrease) internal or environmental demands as well as the conflicts within (Lazarus & Launier, as cited by Taylor, 2003). Coping is a process to attempt to manage differences between demands and resources in a stressful situation (Sarafino, 2002). Coping is not a one-time action, instead it is a collection of responses each time a certain situation occurs between the environment and an individual which influences both sides (Taylor et al, 2006).

### **2.3.2 Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies refer to various efforts, either mental or behavioral, to control, tolerate, lessen, or minimize certain stressful events or situations. Coping strategy is a process when an individual attempt to resolve and control certain stressful situation due to a problem by making cognitive or behavioral changes in order to feel secure within oneself (Mu'tadin, 2002).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) differentiated two types of coping strategies. Firstly, problem focused coping, which means an individual actively search for the solution of a problem to resolve the stressful situation or condition. In daily living situation, the use of problem focused coping strategy may include resigning from a stressful job, planning a new schedule for studying, looking for a medical or a psychological treatment, as well as learning new skills (Sarafino, 2002). Problem focused coping strategies consist of direct actions to change stressful situations or attempting to prevent or lessen possible outcomes from the events. The aim of problem focused coping strategies is to decrease the pressure from a situation or to increase an individual's resources to resolve the situation. Problem focused coping strategies may even be attempted before a certain problem occurs. This approach is defined as proactive coping (Aspinwall & Taylor, as cited by DiMatteo & Martin, 2002). Lazarus and Folkman (1988) dissected the problem focused coping strategy into three indicators; 1). confrontive coping, which means behaving assertively, involving aggression or risk taking to change certain situation, 2). seeking social support, which means looking for supports, either emotional or informative, and 3). planful problem solving, which means analyzing certain situation to create solution and to take direct action to solve the problem.

Secondly, the emotion focused coping, which means the individual includes efforts to control one's emotions in order to adjust oneself with the outcome of a stressful condition or situation (Sarafino, 2002). DiMatteo and Martin (2002) explained that emotion focused coping includes efforts to regulate or to decrease the emotional consequences (and social impacts) of stressful events. Emotion focused coping strategies consist of five indicators; (1). self-control, which means efforts to control one's emotion or to keep one's feeling for oneself, 2). distancing, which means creating cognitive attempts to release oneself from certain situation or to turn it into a positive event, 3). escape-avoidance, which means making a wishful thinking of a certain situation or making attempts to escape or avoid it, 4). accepting responsibility, which

means admitting one's role in a problem, and lastly, 5). positive appraisal, which means attempting to find the positive meaning of events by focusing on personal growth (Sarafino, 2002).

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This was a qualitative research using in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview method was chosen in order to be able to ask a number of questions to the research subjects, since the process of adaptation to double roles among single parent women had not been extensively explored yet. Moreover, the method was chosen considering the possible complexity of the experiences of the single parent mothers in adapting to the double roles.

In-depth interview also enabled the author to observe non-verbal expressions of research subjects while answering certain questions. Observation of non-verbal expressions was critical in this research as it might reveal either discrepancy or agreement between the answer and the expression of the research subjects.

#### **3.2 Research Subject**

Subjects included in this research was (a) young adult women whose age ranged from 24 to 39 years old, who works both as a housewife (domestic) as well as having a job in the public sector, (b) was a widow (due to spouse's death), (c) has a role as a single parent with child, and (d) has become a single parent for at least three years; the time period of three years was chosen to be able to evaluate a more objective evaluation regarding adaptation process and to avoid the mourning period. For research purpose, the time period also limited the number of subjects that can be included to ease the data collection process.

Other criteria such as education, ethnicity/race, religion, occupation, and residence were not specified. Total number of subjects included in this research was four.

#### **3.3 Research Period and Location**

The duration of this research was around two months, i.e. from May to June 2009. The interview was conducted at a previously agreed upon appointment location (which in this case, were all located at Jakarta). Research subjects were given the freedom to pick the time and place of appointment to ensure their comforts during the interview and would not feel disturbed. The places suggested were quiet and personal to ensure that the interview process would went well and to ensure the privacy of the research subjects.

#### **3.4 Data Collection**

Research instruments used in this report included: (a) stationeries, such as pencils, ballpoints, papers, notebooks, maps, clips, etc, (b) recording device, such as tape

recorder, (c) equipment for data analysis, such as computer and folder maps, as well as (d) interview guidelines and informed consent forms. This research used open interview method to obtain as much in-depth information as possible from the research subjects. However, the interview was still conducted according to a rough guideline to ensure that all the important points, which would be analyzed for research purpose, were covered.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis technique employed in this research was the inter-subject analysis. The author conducted an analysis on each subject to discuss aspects that were studied in this research. First, the experiences of each subject was described for each aspect, then concluded and compared to gain an overall description as well as evaluating the corresponding and opposing data. Lastly, the resulting data were then compared to the existing theories to gain a deeper insight regarding the issue.

The author attempted to discover patterns of interest, which may be useful for intrasubject and intersubject analysis, as the outcome of this research.

## **4. Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 Characteristics of Research Subjects**

#### **4.1.1 First Subject**

The first subject was named "Ge". "Ge" was a 34-year-old woman who was  $\pm$  163 centimeters tall and whose weight was around  $\pm$  55 kilograms. "Ge" was born at Jakarta. The subject had fair skin and curly hair. "Ge" had 3 children, one 8-year-old daughter and two twins sons, both aged around six years old.

"Ge" was originally a housewife, whose last education was from a Secretarial Academy with a 3-year diploma degree. Three years ago, when "Ge" was 31 years old, her husband passed away from a heart attack. After asking for help from various sources, "Ge" managed to land a job at a private company, which ran in the telecommunication sector. "Ge" had been working as administration staff for two years and five months. Her unpleasant experiences as a widow further strengthen her spirituality as a moslem.

#### **4.1.2 Second Subject**

The second subject was named "An". "An" was a 37-year-old woman, whose height was  $\pm$  160 centimeters and weight was  $\pm$  60 kilograms. "An" was born at Jakarta and had three children, two sons and one daughter. "An" had brown skin and short hair.

"An" had a bachelor degree in economics. "An" was invited by her friend to work for an insurance company. Her skills enabled her to obtain a prestigious position and soon afterwards, "An" was able to become the assistant of marketing manager in a relatively short period. When her husband passed away due to traffic accident during work, "An" had become a marketing manager. Supported by her belief to God, "An" was able to accept her husband death. Her independence helped "An" to responsibly

made decisions. As a single parent, "An" perceived herself as more than capable to educate her three children while still maintaining her career.

#### **4.1.3 Third Subject**

The third subject was named "Rin". "Rin" was a 39-year-old woman, whose height was  $\pm 165$  centimetres and weight was  $\pm 55$  kilograms. "Rin" had two children; both were girls and aged 15 and 12 years old. "Rin" had fair skin and short hair.

With a degree in language, "Rin" attempted to apply for work as an employee and assumed the role of the breadwinner in her family. After her marriage, "Rin" kept her job and her income was able to lessen the financial burden of her family, as her husband's health cost was quite substantial. "Rin"'s husband needed hemodialysis to maintain his health. "Rin"'s husband passed away at the age of 42 as he was late for his routine dialysis. At the moment, "Rin" had just turned 35. "Rin" had been working as an employee of a private company, which ran as fertilizer distributor, for 10 years. "Rin" was a moslem.

#### **4.2.4 Fourth Subject**

The fourth subject was named "Sus", a 37-year-old woman with brown skin and black hair. "Sus" had a 10-year-old boy.

"Sus" was 32 years old when her husband (41 years old) died due to chronic diabetes mellitus. Before her husband's death, "Sus" was a housewife. After his death, "Sus" worked as a sales promotion girl, as she was only a senior high school graduate without no other skills. "Sus" worked as an effort to fulfill the needs of her family.

### **4.3 Role as Single Parents**

"Ge" initially felt that it was very hard to become a single parent. "Ge" suddenly became a single parent when her husband passed away due to an illness. As far as she knew, her husband had never had any serious illness. As a consequence of choosing not to remarry after her husband death, "Ge" had to assume the responsibility for providing protection, guidance and care for her infant children, whose aged was 5 and 3 years old.

Subject "An" had never expected of becoming a single parent after her husband died three years ago. However, "An" did not have much trouble in assuming her new double-role as she was quite used to dividing her time between work and home (family).

For the third subject, "Rin" becoming a single parent was still a difficult situation for her, even though she had had previous preparations on becoming one, should the situation arise. "Rin" knew that her husband had a chronic heart disease, which often exacerbated. Her husband had been diagnosed with heart disease for over ten years before his death. Assuming the role of a single parent was not easy for "Rin", and it was especially hard for her to provide protection for her children, aside of providing care for her youngest child.



Meanwhile, for “Sus”, becoming a single parent was a completely unpredicted event. Even though she knew that her husband had diabetes, she did not expect him to pass away in a relatively young age.

It can be concluded that for all four subjects, assuming the role of a single parent was not a desirable situation. However, it was unavoidable. Before becoming single parents, not all for women had a job. For the women who applied for jobs after becoming single parents, their burden felt especially heavy as they had to adjust both to their work situations and their new double roles. The subjects admitted that their responsibility to take care of their children lessen to some degree as the children grew up.

#### **4.4 Difficulties as Single Parents**

Initially, “Ge” had financial issues as she had no savings due to her husband job as a TV series actor. During the early period after her husband’s death, “Ge” admitted that she often felt great sorrow. However, as time progressed, “Ge” felt that she could fulfill her role better as a single parent.

“An”, who worked as an employee at an advertising company, explained that as a single parent, she was responsible to provide economical, psychological, and social needs of her children. As her schedule at work was flexible, she was able to occasionally bring her work home, which enabled her to interact with her children. “An” admitted that she also faced problems, both financially and psychologically, and felt that she could not replace the position of her husband in the eye of her children. However, she always tried to think positively and to trust God in her efforts.

Aside of economy and child care issues, other problem that may be faced by the subjects was loneliness, especially during nighttime, before and after work, as shared by “Rin”. To solve her financial problems, “Rin” asked for help from her family and her late husband’s family, she opened a small shop at home to sell groceries, as it would enable her to work while also taking care of her children. Eventhough she sometimes felt that her burden was heavy; she insisted that the she may not complain in front of her children, although she often cried alone. “Rin” also admitted that she often had to be tough when hearing her neighbours gossiped about her not having a husband and accepted the situation as a challenge.

The fourth subject, “Sus”, admitted that since she originally did not have a job, it was hard for her to provide the daily needs of her family. “Sus” explained that she realized that her burden might not be so heavy since she only had one child. However, she was used to depending on her husband and she had not much savings since her husband was a public officer who received monthly wage, although she admitted she also received some pensions from the government. To help fulfill the needs of her family, “Sus” once tried to work for a friend who had a traditional craft business; unfortunately, the business sustained too much losses and “Sus” eventually lost her job.

The experiences of the research subjects varied according to each individual’s family situation. However, in overall, all four subjects faced similar problems, as they all became single parents without prior preparations. All subjects especially felt

troubled during the initial period of becoming single parents. Some subjects, like "Ge" and "Sus" assumed the role of a single parent as they had no other choice. However, the two other subjects showed that they were willing to assume the role sincerely without much complain as they were prioritizing their children.

#### **4.5 Adaptation Process as Single Parents**

The first subject, "Ge", remarked that instead of receiving supports when her spouse passed away, the paramedics simply told her that as she was still young, she could still marry another man, which eventually anger "Ge". "Ge" admitted that she felt mentally pressured, especially as people around her often thought negatively towards widows. After the death of her husband, "Ge" realized that she had to financially support herself and her child, and although, initially felt burdened, she currently had accepted her status as a form of responsibility.

The role of mother for a female single parent is more prominent compared to other two roles, namely providing security and securing financial needs. However, "Rin" did not think that the two latter roles were less important than her role as a mother. Personally, "Rin" put the needs for her children first, especially their daily living needs and education. "Rin" also tried to always provide nutritional food and fairly divide her attention between her children, especially for her youngest child (at the time, the child was 5 years old). As a widow, "Rin" often had to take difficult decisions and to remain calm and patient even though people around her, especially other women, often thought of her negatively. "Rin" admitted that she often felt lonely especially during nighttime. However, "Rin" stated that she would continue to do her best for her children as her children were gifts from God. "Rin" explained that sometimes she still found it hard to divide her time fairly between work and family. When she was busy with work, "Rin" always attempted to communicate with her children, even though it was only by phone calls.

The second subject, "An", had it differently. Fortunately for her, her job allowed for flexible working time so she was still be able to care for her children, prepare their food, as well as observing their education. As a widow in a relatively Asian country, "An" thought that even though she was a single parent, she must not neglect her duties as a woman, meaning that she must still fulfill the expectation that women should do the domestic works at home. "An" fought to maintain the stability of both her job and her family so that no one would be able to look down on her family. She also tried to provide love and care for her children both as a mother and also a father.

Contrary to "Rin" and "An", when she first became a widow and a single parent, "Sus" felt ostracized from the activities in her community due to her status. Even though she assumed the position as the head of the family, her community rarely invited her to events such as local community leaders meeting or election. "Sus" was initially offended but as time progressed, she had started to accept the condition.

In a patriarchal country like Indonesia, the opportunities for women to build a career and work in public sectors remained limited due to community perceptions regarding role division between men and women. Patriarchal communities often

limited women to domestic works, regardless of the education level of the women. Therefore, a female single parent was still expected to fulfill a certain role, which was to take care, to educate, and to help provide the needs of the family.

All four research subjects had their own priorities in fulfilling the role of both a breadwinner and a mother who must always be available to provide love and care. The four subjects admitted that it was hard to decide to fulfill both roles by themselves. However, for all subjects, their children became their priority in life and influenced their decision whether to stay a widow or to re-marry one day. The subjects stated that they were touched when their children told them that they missed the presence of a father and were willing to let their mother re-marry.

#### **4.6 Characteristics of Self-Adaptation According to Haber and Runyon**

Haber and Runyon (1984) described a few markers of an effective self-adaptation, including:

(a) proper perceptions regarding reality;

Subject "Ge" was unable to accept the reality that her spouse had passed away. Meanwhile, although "Rin" did not experience dilemmatic state like "Ge", "Rin" had initially felt responsible for her spouse death as she felt that she had failed to maintain her husband health while being aware of his heart disease. On the other hand, subject "An" was able to accept her husband's death fairly well and quickly assumed her role as a single parent. However, the fourth subject, "Sus" was also unable to accept the change in her living conditions and was not ready to assume her role as a single parent.

(b) able to overcome stress and anxiety;

It was difficult for "Ge" to accept the reality and her anxiety was shown as she worried about her life. For "Rin", the condition was different as she was able to be grateful for her job and her income. She was prepared to be both a father and a mother for her children. Meanwhile, "An" assumed her role as a single parent without excessive anxiety or stress. The fourth subject, "Sus" also showed anxiety regarding her new role as a single parent; especially as she worried about her status as a widow and that she would be unable to provide for her children financially. However, after the initial two months of physical and mental breakdown, "Sus" claimed that she was finally ready to be a single parent.

(c) able to remark themselves positively;

"Ge" perceived herself and her condition negatively and thus was unaware of the balance of her own strength and weakness. "Ge" felt that her weakness inhibited her from achieving things in her life. Meanwhile, "Rin" had a fairly positive remarks about herself. She felt that she must be able to continue living without her husband and stated that she became more diligent and energetic at work as she thought of her responsibility to her children. "An", on the other hand, perceived her role as a single mother as additional cause to show her independence and skills both at work and as a parent. Meanwhile, "Sus" initially doubted herself. She stated that she had neither special skills nor adequate education as she only graduated from senior high school. However, she eventually saw other people rose from their condition and started to

apply for jobs, even though she had to face numerous rejections until she was able to work at a friend's company.

Among the four subjects, subjects "An" and "Rin" had similarities as they both showed positive image of themselves and their abilities to assume responsibility as single parents due to their spouses' death. Meanwhile, "Ge" and "Sus" tended to see themselves as someone without any abilities. These differences may be due to individual potentials or abilities. Obtaining higher education and more extensive knowledge, as ones acquired through employment, enable the first two subjects to judge themselves more positively.

(d) able to express emotions/feelings;

Subject "Ge" stated that she often was unable to express her emotions and instead kept her feelings and thoughts for herself. Meanwhile, "Rin" commented that she once was unable to control her emotion and feelings when she had to went out of town for work while her child was sick. "Rin" expressed her emotions by crying and was unable to complete her works, delaying the project, and caused problems at her company. Subject "An" admitted that she had also cried, however, she was also able to express joyfulness e.g. when her child achieved the first rank in his class. Similar to "Ge", "Sus" also preferred to handle her emotions alone.

These descriptions showed that out of the four subjects, there were two subjects ("Rin" and "An") that were able to handle their emotions better. These differences may be caused by experiences during their teenage and young adult years as well as individual independences, as both "Rin" and "An" already had their own jobs before becoming single parents, which may influence their maturity regarding process of thoughts and decision making.

(e) able to build good, meaningful interpersonal relationships.

"Ge" admitted that she preferred to be alone rather than sharing her emotions to others. Meanwhile, as a marketing staff, "Rin" naturally interacted with many people from various backgrounds. This eventually helped "Rin" as she received considerable supports, including offers by her neighbor to watch her children while she was away. Subject "An" also reported similar response; she stated that even though she was a widow, her friends did not change and instead offered to provide supports and share their experiences whenever needed. On the other hand, subject "Sus" spoke differently. She stated that she only had few friends, especially after becoming a widow. However, she admitted that she had a best friend who was able to provide emotional support.

#### **4.7 Coping Strategies**

Subject "Ge" commented that initially she was unable to accept her condition. However, eventually she was able to adapt and accepted her role as a responsibility. Her job as well as supports from her siblings, family, and friends helped her to resolve problems in her early days as a single parent. "Ge" also added that once she accepted her role, she realized that she wanted to continue her late husband wish, which is to provide higher education for their children.

Meanwhile, subject “Rin” expressed that in the beginning she often complained as she felt tired and overburdened because she had to work as well as take care of the children herself. However, as time progressed, “Rin” was able to adapt and remain lively despite her status. Having a job and a steady income also helped “Rin” realize that she could overcome her difficulties. During the interview, it was discovered that “Rin” more often managed her stress by being alone instead of complaining to others. “Rin” admitted she met her children’s teacher more often than her friends even though she also admitted that she had lots of friends.

“An”, however, was able to comprehend her state as a single parent well. She believed that she was able to become both a mother and a father for her children. She commented that she knew she must be tough and that is necessary for women to be independent.

Finally, subject “Sus” admitted on having been easily angered as she felt upset due to the sudden change in her living condition, although she often felt remorse for being easily annoyed.

**Table 1:** Analysis Summary of the Four Subjects

	“Ge”	“An”	“Rin”	“Sus”
<b>Role</b>	initially difficult to accept the role as single parent; since choosing not to remarry, had assume the responsibility of providing safety, guidance, and care for two infants; felt great sadness which eventually was able to overcome	assuming the role as single parent was not difficult as she was able to divide her time between family and work; held herself responsible financially, psychologically, and socially for her children	the role as a single parent was tough but had to be accepted; the role was especially tough as she had to provide safety as well as care by herself for her young child	the role as a single parent was unexpected
<b>Difficulties</b>	experience financial difficulties as she had no savings and spouse used to work as actor for TV series	felt that it was difficult to assume the role of two persons; felt that a father figure was still irreplaceable; able to have flexible working time as an advertising staff	economy, child rearing, loneliness especially at night and before-after work	had no job, thus no income to fulfill daily living needs; felt that as Asian, a female should still fulfill a role in the community; stated that there were more disadvantages in being a widow
<b>Adaptation</b>	felt mental pressures as people often think negatively towards widow;	quickly accept her spouse death; realize that even though living alone with three children	she was unable to accept her spouse death for quite some time as she felt she was	the process was long as subject was initially unable to accept the change and to live as single

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	initially felt that being a single parent as a burden (had already accepted the role as a responsibility)	would be hard, the children should still be able to grow well and able to reach their own future	responsible in not being able to control her spouse's health; she came around after realizing her child still needed a parent's love and care although there was only one parent left	parent
<b>Characteristic</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. unable to accept her spouse's death;</li> <li>2. unable to accept the role as single parent, manifested by anxiety;</li> <li>3. percept self negatively;</li> <li>4. unable to express her emotions and feelings;</li> <li>5. express emotions by being alone</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. unable to accept her spouse's death;</li> <li>2. assume her role as single parent without much anxiety and stress;</li> <li>3. able to accept her role as single parent and think positively of her life events;</li> <li>4. able to control her emotions, joyful and sad feelings well;</li> <li>5. receive supports from friends</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. unable to accept her spouse's death;</li> <li>2. grateful for the fact that she had her own job and income;</li> <li>3. had positive remarks for herself, able to continue living without her spouse existence;</li> <li>4. unable to control her emotions and feelings, especially when she had to leave her sick child to work, express her emotions by crying;</li> <li>5. her job as a marketing staff (the obligation to interact with people) help support her condition</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. able to accept her spouse's death;</li> <li>2. expressed anxiety towards her role as single parent;</li> <li>3. difficult to assess her own condition, living with limited skill and education lack of awareness on her role and responsibility;</li> <li>4. express emotions by being alone;</li> <li>5. very limited friends, lack of interpersonal relationships</li> </ol>
<b>Coping Strategies</b>	ask and receive supports from siblings, family, and friends; accept her condition and realize that she has to fulfill her husband's wish to enable the children to achieve higher education from them	-	express assertiveness; manage stress by self-control; attempt to find positive meaning from events by focusing on personal growth	attempted to escape but finally able to think positively; managed stress by self-control; attempt to find positive meaning from events by focusing on personal growth

## 5. Conclusions

Research results showed that all subjects experience the death of their spouses negatively and tended to not have any preparations in being widows as well as single parents. However, as time progressed, all four subjects were able to assume their roles as single parents.

All four subjects that had been interviewed stated that the role change into single parent forced them to assume the responsibility both as a breadwinner to fulfill the economical needs of the family as well as still providing time to fulfill the psychological needs of the family, which included providing care, at-home-education, as well as compassions. However, other roles such as providing safety for the children could not be optimally fulfilled by all four research subjects.

There were variations regarding how the subjects assume their roles, reflected from characteristics of self-adaptation, which not all were fulfilled. The characteristics were composed of whether the subjects had the proper perception of themselves while working as a single parent, able to overcome stress and anxiety when facing problems at work, able to appraise themselves positively as single parents, proper control on emotions, as well as having adequate interpersonal relationships with coworkers, friends, neighbours as well as other parents at children's school environment. This variation might be affected by individual characteristics, as well as mental readiness, emotional maturity and parenting patterns in the family.

Regarding coping strategies employed by research subjects, it was found that emotional focused coping strategies and problem focused coping strategies had a role in helping to resolve problems related to the role of single parents.

### 5.1 Recommendations

As the phenomenon of single parent increases, researches using qualitative approach are needed to describe other aspects of the growing phenomenon, such as to evaluate the resilience aspects or the parenting patterns in the families of single parents, as well as how to respond to the negative public stereotypes of widows in order to help reform the false misconceptions with a positive mindset.

Single parent mothers should adapt to both domestic and public environments as well as accepting the reality of her new role as a single parent, should be able to overcome stress and anxiety, to think positively of herself, to control her emotions well, as well as develop meaningful relationships with people around her while maintaining self-introspections that all humans are imperfect to prevent jealousy, pride, ego, and envy from developing. Meanwhile, children of single parents should provide continuous social supports for their mother and consider their mother as friends they could depend on. Children should minimize their expectations of their mother and realized that their mother is still a parent that they need to respect and love more than anyone else. Therefore, single parent mothers would be able to better fulfill their double roles in the community. As a community, we should also avoid making negative judgments upon widows, in order to help eliminate negative stereotypes of widows.

Communities, agencies or institutions can also periodically publicizes information regarding of situations faced by single parents on mass media or televisions in order to increase awareness and help direct public opinion in a positive way.

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