

Poverty Status in Single Mother Households: A Case Study of South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya.

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Abstract: *The pervasive issue of poverty is one among the many multifaceted challenges faced by single mother households. Single mother households are often found to be overburdened with the multiple responsibilities of the bread winner, the care giver, besides managing the overall welfare of the children and the household and a weak support structure which only worsens the plight of these single mother households and put them in abject poverty. The case of single mother households in South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya also sheds light of similar situations faced by single mother households across the globe. The lack of resources deters these single mother households from gaining access to even the basic requirements of proper housing, health care and education which are significant for the overall welfare and well-being of the individuals and the households. Although the children of these single mother households do contribute their meagre earnings to support the family, yet it is inadequate to meet the welfare needs and requirements of the households. Against this backdrop, therefore, the paper makes a descriptive analysis on the poverty status of single mother households using appropriate poverty measurement tools to show the vulnerability to and extent of poverty such households. These metrics accentuate the significant economic disparities and also the need for target-specific policies and support systems to uplift such families to ensure a justifiably equitable society.*

Key Words: *Single mothers, households, poverty status, South West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The phenomenon of single motherhood has become an increasingly prevalent and complex aspect of contemporary society, with profound implications for economic well-being (1). Single mothers face challenges of raising their children without a spouse and often find themselves disproportionately affected by poverty (2). This study delves into the intricate relationship between single motherhood and poverty, exploring the multifaceted factors that contribute to economic vulnerability within this demographic group.

Poverty remains a persistent challenge globally, affecting millions of households and impeding socio-economic development. There is complex dynamics between poverty and household well-being. The household structure has witnessed changes over the past few decades, whereby household structure has changed not just in their size and composition, but in the structure of the family. The prevalence of cases of divorce and separation is a major cause in the shift from a traditional household structure to single-parent households. Further, widowhood, cohabitation and teenage pregnancy also contributes to the increasing number of single-parent households, particularly those that are headed by single mothers. The family structure is the basic foundation of a social organization, whereby it influences the outcome of each individual (3). Thus, a change in the family structure is likely to affect the socio-economic outcomes of households, like changes in child outcomes, poverty, social status, and overall economic well-being of the household.

Single mothers navigate through a unique set of challenges, grappling with the responsibilities of sole parenting, limited support structures, and economic constraints. The intersectionality of gender and socioeconomic status places them at a heightened risk of financial instability, as they contend with lower wages and reduced employment opportunities (4). The absence of an additional income source in the household translates into a possible likelihood of the households to live below the poverty line. This prompts the need for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. Thus, understanding the factors contributing to the increasing situation of poverty among single mother households is essential for developing effective policies and support mechanisms.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY :

The unique and distinctive feature of the societal set up of Meghalaya is its matrilineal kinship system. The matrilineal system in the Khasi society gives importance to relationships within the matrilineal kin, where lineage, descent and inheritance are traced through the mother. The matrilineal system is deeply embedded in the cultural identity of the Khasis which shapes the family dynamics, socio-economic structure, and traditional practices of the people and the society. This network of family structure and relationships binds the families, the clan and the tribe into a socially cohesive whole. It is also found that in a matrilineal kinship system, the women enjoy freedom of mobility and autonomy over decision making and property rights (5) and the custody of the children usually falls on the mothers and the maternal clan. In cases where single mothers are the sole bread winners and care takers of their household, the clan and community provide social support in order to mediate a smooth transition and provide emotional support during the initial phase of the changed family structure (6). It may also be pointed that single mothers have the support of their family during difficult phases of their marital disruptions, indicating the strong social structure that takes up the responsibility of their family and clan. Yet, the single mother has to make her own decisions with regards to her household needs and raising her children. Nevertheless, the matrilineal system has a more flexible and less restrictive approach to divorce and separation compared to patrilineal norms prevalent in other parts of the world (7). Thus, although single mothers retain their social status despite marital disruptions, they do encounter economic challenges as a household head.

The state of Meghalaya comprises twelve districts. South West Khasi Hills District is one of the twelve districts which was created on 3rd August 2012 with its headquarter at Mawkyrwat. There are two Community and Rural Development (C & RD) Blocks within the district, namely, Ranikor Block and Mawkyrwat Block. The district is mainly inhabited by the Khasis, Garos, and the Hajong. As per Census 2011, the total population of the district is 1,10,152 persons with 48,583 male population and 47,097 female population, and the literacy rate of the district is 75 per cent.

Single mother households are prevalent in the district, especially among the younger age cohorts which leads to serious implications on the well-being of such households. Considering the dearth of studies conducted on such households particularly on the district in question, the paper attempts to make an in-depth on the poverty status and standard of living of single mother households in South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya with the aim of addressing the issues associated with single mother households and also attempt to draw a picture for a better understanding on the economic well-being or otherwise of such households.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

3.1 Single Motherhood and Poverty:

Magnuson and Smeeding (8), suggests that single mothers engaged in low paying jobs and are prone to poverty and hardship as their income earnings are insufficient to meet the requirements of their household. Therefore, they chose to reside with their parents and other family members and rely on financial support from their family, friends as well as the maintenance that they get from their estranged husband to support the household.

According to Raymo et al. (9), single motherhood is prevalent among those with lower educational attainment. The low level of educational attainment, lack of skills and qualification only impedes the single mothers of better employment opportunities. As such the poor income earnings affects the household welfare and well-being and puts them in extreme poverty situation.

According to Damaske et al. (10), the single mother households are burdened by the constraints of the multiple roles and household responsibilities that they have to take up. Moreover, the findings of the study indicate that the lack of feasible job opportunities and part-time employment and the absence of a spouse causes the single mother households to be in an economically disadvantaged position resulting in the higher incidence of poverty in such households.

3.2 Poverty Status and Household Well-Being:

According to Weiss (11), marital disruptions cause loss in household income. This loss can only be compensated through the income earnings of the household head. Therefore, in lower income households where the single parent is unable to earn higher income, household consumption and expenditure is reduced. Further, lower income households remain in poverty due to the inability of the single parent to earn higher income, thus affecting the well-being of the household.

Haq (12), suggests that households experience poverty and vulnerability when they encounter a loss in livelihood, particularly, those that are dependent on agriculture. The loss in livelihood results to shocks in household well-being, and increases the chances of poverty and uncertainty in the future.

According to Majid and Malik (13), the incidence and severity of poverty in households is higher in households where the household head had lesser educational attainment. The low level of education would enable household members to engage only in jobs with low wages. Further, findings suggest that poverty is severe in rural households compared to urban households, subsequently leading to lower economic well-being in rural households.

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT :

As evidenced from various studies carried out on single mother households, it can be said that such families or households are prevalent across the globe. Further, such households are found to prevail both in the rural as well as in the urban areas. Single mother households which resulted out of marital disruptions and discord or out of wedlock is found to affect the well-being of the households. This situation is found to be much worse in rural areas across the country. Therefore, poverty status is an important indicator of the economic well-being of the household by examining the incidence and magnitude of poverty and at the same time elucidate the effect of changes in household structure on the well-being of the households.

5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY :

The objective of the study is to examine the poverty status of single mother households in the South West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

6. METHODOLOGY :

To analyze the study, a primary survey was carried out to collect data and information on single mother households in South West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya with the help of a structured schedule that looked into the income, expenditure, health, education among other indicators. A representative sample of 300 single mother households have been purposively selected from each of the two Community and Rural Development Blocks of the district, namely, Ranikor Block and Mawkyrwat Block. A total of twenty villages from both the blocks were randomly selected, taking ten villages from each block for the purpose of the study and 15 households were purposively selected from each village as representative samples. Further, in order to understand the status of poverty, the poor has been defined as those households with an annual income of Rs. 52,280 and a monthly per capita income of Rs. 4,440 for each household unit with a household size comprising of 5 members has been estimated using the Tendulkar method of estimating poverty based on the state-specific poverty line given by the Planning Commission in the Poverty Estimates for 2011-12 which was fixed at Rs. 888 per capita per month in the rural areas of Meghalaya.

Further, the sample households were categorized into five income classes, adopted from the income categorization of the Ministry of Rural Development, which have also been adopted in the works of Thomas (14) and Tariang (15). Moreover, households were categorized as 'non-poor' for those with a monthly per capita income of Rs. 4,440 and above. The 'poor households' are those with a monthly income between Rs. 3,331 to Rs. 4,440. The 'poorer households' comprise households with a monthly income of Rs. 2,221 to Rs. 3,330. The 'poorest' households comprise those with a monthly income of Rs. 1,111 to Rs. 2,220, and households with a monthly income below Rs. 1110 were classified as 'destitute'.

In order to understand the economic well-being of the households and their poverty status thereof, appropriate poverty measurement tools or money-metric measurement of poverty such as the Head Count Ratio and the Poverty Gap Ratio have been adopted.

The Head Count Ratio (HCR) is widely used in India as an effective tool in measuring the proportion of population below the poverty line. It can be expressed as,

$$H = \frac{q}{n} \quad (1)$$

where, q is the number of poor people below the state-specific poverty line and n is the total number of population.

The Poverty Gap Ratio (PGR) measures the depth of poverty and intensity of poverty among the poor. It can be expressed as,

$$g = [z - m/z] \cdot H \quad (2)$$

where, z is the poverty line calculated as per the state-specific poverty line, m is the mean income of poor households and H is the computed Head Count Ratio.

Further, the poverty measurements in the study have been computed for single mother household income as well as for total household income which includes the income earnings of children living in the household. The reason for including the children's income as part of the total income of the household is considering the participatory role that those children play in meeting the household needs and requirements.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Descriptive Statistics on Poor Households Across Income Groups

A descriptive analysis on the poverty status of single mother households across villages and blocks of South West Khasi Hills District, based on single mothers' income under Ranikor Block depicted the highest number of poor households in Mawpyllun village at 93.3 per cent, followed by Umpung village at 86.7 per cent, and Nongktieh village at 80 percent respectively (Table 1). On the contrary, the highest number of poor households under Mawkyrwat block was in Mawthawpdah village at 66.7 per cent, followed by Mawthong village at 60 per cent, and Sakwang and Phutjau villages at 46.7 per cent respectively.

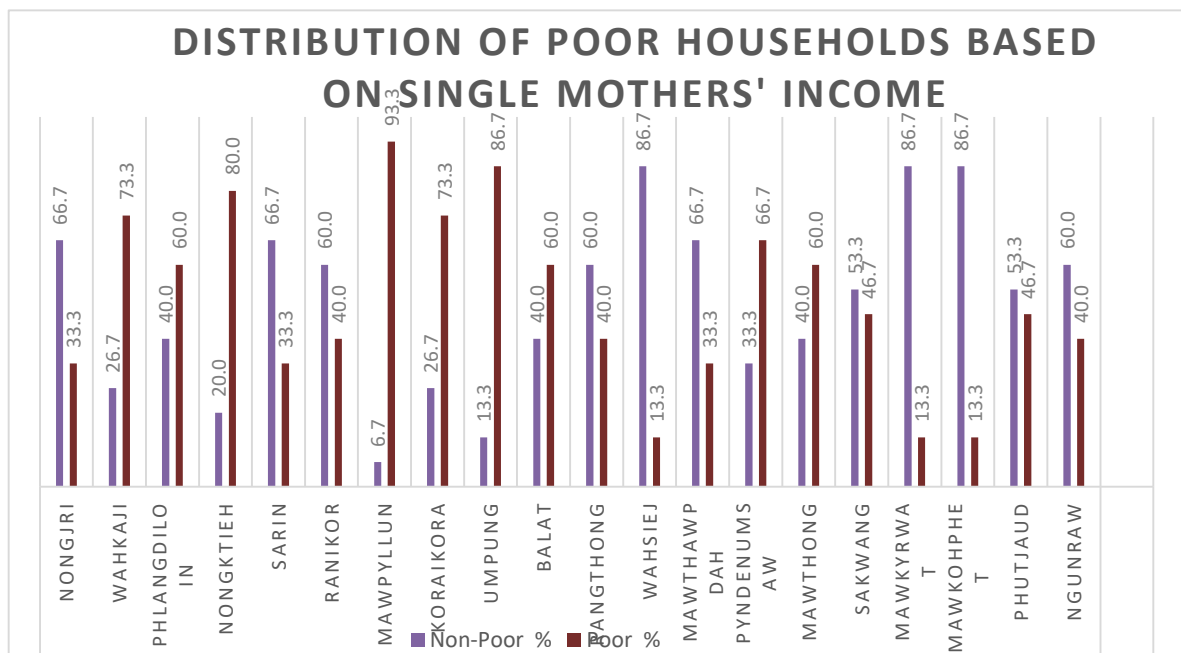
Blocks	Villages	Non-Poor	Poor	Total Households	% of poor households
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	10	5	15	33.3
	Wahkaji	4	11	15	73.3
	Phlangdiloin	6	9	15	60.0
	Nongktieh	3	12	15	80.0
	Sarin	10	5	15	33.3
	Ranikor	9	6	15	40.0
	Mawpyllun	1	14	15	93.3
	Koraikora	4	11	15	73.3
	Umpung	2	13	15	86.7
	Balat	6	9	15	60.0
Mawkyrwat Block	Rangthong	9	6	15	40.0
	Wahsiej	13	2	15	13.3
	Mawthawpdah	10	5	15	33.3
	Pyndenumsaw	5	10	15	66.7
	Mawthong	6	9	15	60.0
	Sakwang	8	7	15	46.7
	Mawkyrwat	13	2	15	13.3
	Mawkohphet	13	2	15	13.3
	Phutjau	8	7	15	46.7
Ngunraw	9	6	15	40.0	

Table 1: Distribution of poor Households across villages and blocks based on single mothers' income

Source Based on Primary Survey

The distribution of poor households in the district based solely on the single mothers' income give us an insight on the status of single mother households in the district (Fig. 1). It is evident that out of the twenty sample villages, there are six villages namely, Nongjri, Sarin, Wahsiej, Mawthawpdah, Mawkyrwat and Mawkohphet villages where the percentage of poor households is only between 13 to 33 per cent, in contrast to the rest of the villages with a high percentage of poor households. This, therefore, implies that when the sole income of single mothers is considered, there is every likelihood that the households would be caught in extreme poverty thus affecting the well-being of such households.

Figure 1: Distribution of poor households across villages based on single mothers' income



Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 2 depicts the distribution of poor households across villages and blocks of South West Khasi Hills district. The poor households have been distinguished by looking at the total income of the single mother households based on the combined income of the single mothers and the children. The highest number of poor households under Ranikor Block is found in Nongktieh village with 46.7 per cent poor households followed by Koraikora village at 33.3 per cent, and Phlangdiloin village with 26.7 per cent poor households. On the other hand, the highest number of poor households under Mawkyrwat Block is found in the villages of Ngunraw with 40 per cent, Mawthong with 33.3 per cent, and Rangthong, Mawkohphet and Phutjaud with 13.3 per cent respectively as compared to the non-poor households. Therefore, it is observed that when the total household income is taken into consideration, the number of poor households were found to be much less. It may be pointed here that older children of single mother households are compelled to take up work in order to earn an extra income in support of their mother and the household. However, only a proportion of the income earned by the children is contributed towards household expenses, and maintenance of the households.

Table 2: Distribution of poor Households across villages and blocks based on total household income

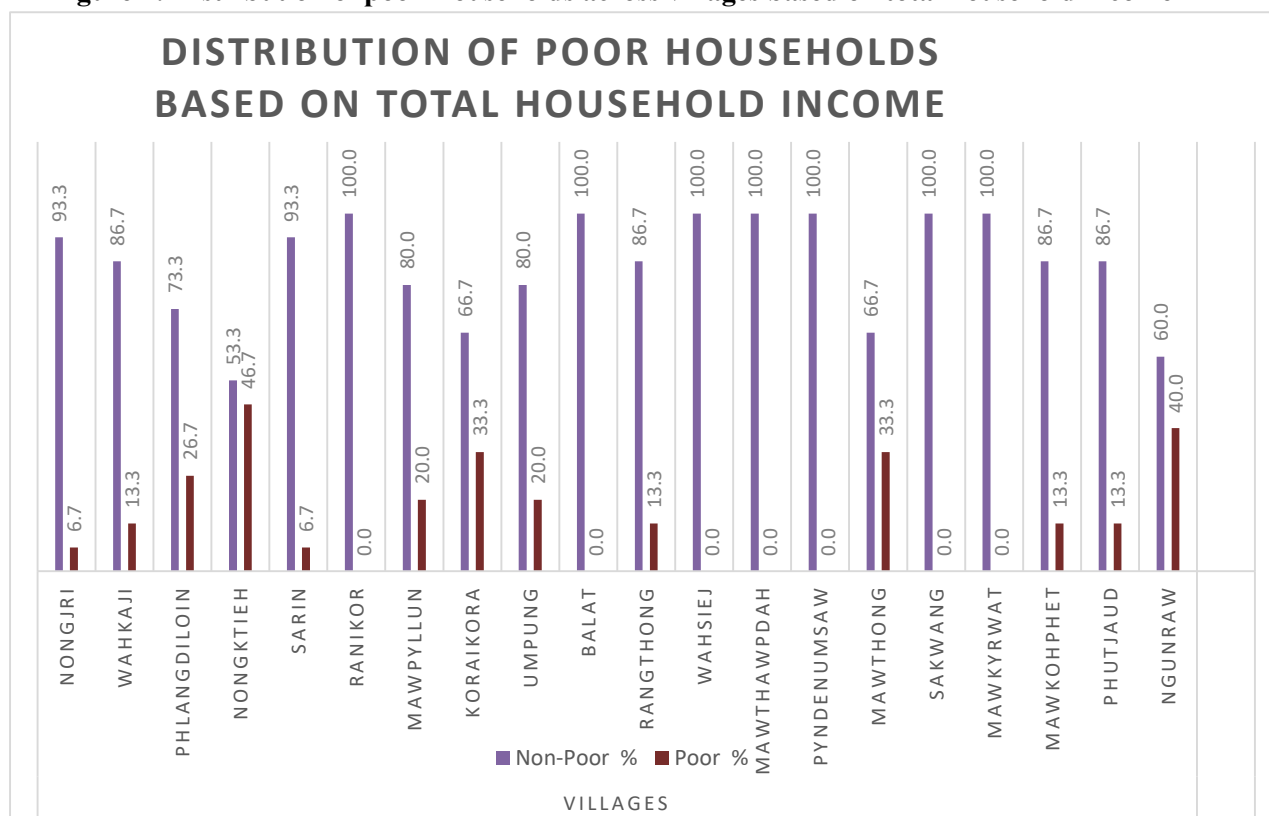
Blocks	Villages	Non-Poor	Poor	Total no. of Households	% of poor households
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	14	1	15	6.7
	Wahkaji	13	2	15	13.3
	Phlangdiloin	11	4	15	26.7
	Nongktieh	8	7	15	46.7
	Sarin	14	1	15	6.7
	Ranikor	15	0	15	0
	Mawpyllun	12	3	15	20.0

		Koraikora	10	5	15	33.3
		Umpung	12	3	15	20.0
		Balat	15	0	15	0
Mawkyrwat Block		Rangthong	13	2	15	13.3
		Wahsiej	15	0	15	0
		Mawthawpdah	15	0	15	0
		Pyndenumsaw	15	0	15	0
		Mawthong	10	5	15	33.3
		Sakwang	15	0	15	0
		Mawkyrwat	15	0	15	0
		Mawkohphet	13	2	15	13.3
		Phutjaud	13	2	15	13.3
		Ngunraw	9	6	15	40.0

Source Based on Primary Survey

The distribution of poor households in the district is depicted in Fig.2 which shows the status of the households when the total household income, that is, the single mother's income and her children, are considered. It is observed that out of the twenty sample villages, seven villages namely, Ranikor, Balat, Wahsiej, Mawthawpdah, Pyndenumsaw, Sawkwang and Mawkyrwat are found to be better off with no poor households. This implies that when total household income is considered, many households that were previously found to be poor, are much better off with the income support provided by the older children which reflects and improvement in the well-being of such households. Therefore, it is important to note that the change in the category of households falling into or out of poverty is determined by the number of older children that are capable of engaging in the labour market.

Figure 2: Distribution of poor Households across villages based on total household income



Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 3 presents the village-wise distribution of various income groups based on single mothers' income across the two blocks. In Ranikor block, it is observed that households in seven villages, namely, Wahkaji, Phlangdiloin, Nongktieh, Mawpyllun, Koraikora, Umpung and Balat village belong to the 'poor income' category with a higher proportion of the households falling below the poverty line. Similarly, in Mawkyrwat block, Pyndenumsaw and Mawthong villages have a higher proportion of households in the poor income categories. The villages with the highest proportion of poor households is in the Koraikora village under Ranikor block and Phutjau villages under Mawkyrwat block with 26.7 per cent of households in the 'poor' category. Among the 'poorer' category' around 40 per cent of the households are found in each of the villages like Mawpyllun and Ranikor villages under Ranikor block respectively. Similarly, there are 26.7 per cent of 'poorer' households in each of the villages namely, Pyndenumsaw village, Mawthong village and Ngunraw village under Mawkyrwat block. Further, in the 'poorest' household category, under Ranikor block, the village of Nongktieh has the highest proportion of households at 46.7 per cent. Similarly, under Mawkyrwat Block, the villages of Mawthong and Phutjau have the highest proportion of households at 13.3 per cent respectively who fall under the 'poorest' income category. Lastly, the proportion of 'destitute' households is highest in the village of Balat under Ranikor block with 26.7 per cent of 'destitute' households, and in the villages of Rangthong and Sakwang under Mawkyrwat block with 20 per cent of 'destitute' households respectively.

Table 3: Distribution of Poor Households across Income groups of single mothers' income

		Household income class based on Single mother's income											Total	
		Non-Poor		Poor		Poorer		Poorest		Destitute				
Blocks	Villages	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Ranikor	Nongjri	10	66.7	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	15	100	
	Wahkaji	4	26.7	2	13.3	5	33.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	15	100	
	Phlangdiloin	6	40	3	20	3	20	2	13.3	1	6.7	15	100	
	Nongktieh	3	20	2	13.3	1	6.7	7	46.7	2	13.3	15	100	
	Sarin	10	66.7	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	2	13.3	15	100	
	Ranikor	9	60	5	33.3	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	15	100	
	Mawpyllun	1	6.7	2	13.3	6	40	4	26.7	2	13.3	15	100	
	Koraikora	4	26.7	4	26.7	1	6.7	3	20	3	20	15	100	
	Umpung	2	13.3	2	13.3	6	40	4	26.7	1	6.7	15	100	
	Balat	6	40	1	6.7	3	20	1	6.7	4	26.7	15	100	
Mawkyrwat	Rangthong	9	60	2	13.3	1	6.7	0	0	3	20	15	100	
	Wahsiej	13	86.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	15	100	
	Mawthawpdah	10	66.7	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0	1	6.7	15	100	
	Pyndenumsaw	5	33.3	0	0	4	26.7	3	20	3	20	15	100	
	Mawthong	6	40	2	13.3	4	26.7	2	13.3	1	6.7	15	100	
	Sakwang	8	53.3	0	0	1	6.7	3	20	3	20	15	100	
	Mawkyrwat	13	86.7	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	1	6.7	15	100	
	Mawkohphet	13	86.7	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	1	6.7	15	100	
	Phutjau	8	53.3	4	26.7	1	6.7	2	13.3	0	0	15	100	
Ngunraw	9	60	2	13.3	4	26.7	0	0	0	0	15	100		

Note. N = 300 single mother households

Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 4 presents the village-wise distribution of various income groups based on total household income across the two blocks. It is observed that when the children's income is taken into consideration, majority of the households move away from the poor categories of income towards non-poor category. The total household income, therefore sheds light on the significance of additional income sources in single mother households to enable these households to move out of the poverty threshold. From the table, it is evident that the highest proportion of 'poor' under Ranikor block is in Koraikora with 26.7 per cent poor households, while under Mawkyrwat block, the villages of Rangthong, Mawthong, Phutjau and Ngunraw has 13.3 per cent poor households. Secondly, the highest proportion of 'poorer' households is in the villages of Wahkaji and Phlangdiloin under Ranikor block with 13.3 per cent of households under this category and

in the village of Ngunraw under Mawkyrwat block with 26.7 per cent of households falling under this category. Thirdly, the highest proportion of ‘poorest’ households is in the village of Nongktieh under Ranikor block with 26.7 per cent of households falling under this category. Thus, when total household income is considered, it is observed that many households improve and shift above the poverty line, whereby a larger proportion of households fall under the ‘non-poor’ income category in both the blocks.

Table 4: Distribution of Poor Households across Income groups of total household income

		Household income class based on Total Household Income										Total	
		Non-Poor		Poor		Poorer		Poorest		Destitute			
Blocks	Villages	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ranikor	Nongjri	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Wahkaji	13	86.7	0	0	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Phlangdiloin	11	73.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Nongktieh	8	53.3	2	13.3	1	6.7	4	26.7	0	0	15	100
	Sarin	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Ranikor	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Mawpyllun	12	80	0	0	1	6.7	2	13.3	0	0	15	100
	Koraikora	10	66.7	4	26.7	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	15	100
	Umpung	12	80	1	6.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	15	100
	Balat	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
Mawkyrwat	Rangthong	13	86.7	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Wahsiej	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Mawthawpdah	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Pyndenumsaw	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Mawthong	10	66.7	2	13.3	3	20	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Sakwang	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Mawkyrwat	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Mawkohphet	13	86.7	1	6.7	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	15	100
	Phutjaud	13	86.7	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100
Ngunraw	9	60	2	13.3	4	26.7	0	0	0	0	15	100	

Note. N = 300 single mother households

Source Based on Primary Survey

The significance of the income contribution made by the children in single mother households is likely going to have long-term implications for the well-being and welfare of the children and the household. It can help to bring about economic stability and material well-being in the household in terms of their gaining access to healthcare services, education, improved mental health and social support. Therefore, financial resources of a household can impact the long-term economic stability of the household. A financially stable household can ensure better outcome for the children of such households through increased opportunities for better education and career advancement for the children which is crucial for breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

In both the blocks of the district, the contribution of children’s income has improved the income situation of the households. It is also observed that the first-born children are usually likely to be engaged in the labour market in order to provide additional income for their households (Table 5). It is also observed in Table 6, that a large proportion of the first-born children acquired education only up to the primary level. This low level of educational attainment is attributed to the increased responsibilities that befall on the first-born children in single mother households which forces them to drop out of school to support the family. Further, a larger proportion of male children are engaged in the labour market (Table 7), particularly in the non-government sector compared to female children. Moreover, a large proportion of working children are in the age cohort of 19 – 30 years while about 8.59 per cent of working children fall under 18 years of age (Table 8). Therefore, this implies that children in single mother households are compelled to enter the labour market even at a young age in order to obtain additional income for their household.

Table 5: Working children in South West Khasi Hills district

	Work Status of children		Total
	Govt. & Semi-govt.	Non-govt.	
First Child	12 (8.51)	129 (91.49)	141
Second Child	2 (2.60)	75 (97.40)	77
Third Child	1 (4.35)	22 (95.65)	23
Fourth Child	0 (0)	9 (100)	9
Fifth Child	0 (0)	5 (100)	5
Sixth Child	0 (0)	1 (100)	1
Total	15	241	256

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 6: Educational level of working children in South West Khasi Hills district

	Educational level				Total
	Up to Primary level	Up to Secondary level	Up to Higher Secondary level	Graduate or higher	
First Child	63 (44.68)	34 (24.11)	30 (21.28)	14 (9.93)	141
Second Child	34 (44.16)	25 (32.47)	14 (18.18)	4 (5.19)	77
Third Child	10 (43.48)	6 (26.09)	3 (13.04)	4 (17.39)	23
Fourth Child	2 (22.22)	6 (66.67)	1 (11.11)	0 (0)	9
Fifth Child	2 (40)	3 (60)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5
Sixth Child	1 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1
Total	112	74	48	22	256

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 7: Distribution of gender among working children in South West Khasi Hills district

		Work Status of children		Total
		Govt. & Semi-govt.	Non-govt.	
Gender	Male	4 (2.88)	135 (97.12)	139

	Female	11 (9.40)	106 (90.60)	117
Total		15	241	256

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages
 Source Based on Primary Survey

Table 8: Age group of working children in South West Khasi Hills district

		Work Status of children		Total
		Govt. & Semi-govt.	Non-govt.	
Age Group	Below 18	0	22	22 (8.59)
	19 - 30	11	189	200 (78.13)
	31 - 45	4	29	33 (12.89)
	Above 45	0	1	1 (0.39)
Total		15	241	256

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages
 Source Based on Primary Survey

7.2 Village-wise estimates of Poverty in South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.

In order to understand the incidence and magnitude of poverty and the status of single mother households in the district two important poverty indices such as the Head Count Ratio (HCR) and the Poverty Gap Ratio (PGR) have been used based on the single mother's income on one count. In another count, the income of the children belonging to those single mother households have been considered for estimation of poverty.

It has been observed that the incidence of poverty of single mothers' income is high with HCR showing to be above 50 per cent in 7 villages under Ranikor Block, and 2 villages under Mawkyrwat Block (Table 9). The high HCR reveals the poverty status in single mother households of the district, which indicates a prevalence of poverty and hardship in these households.

Table 9: Head Count Ratio across Villages and Blocks computed based on single mothers' income

Blocks	Villages	HCR (Village level)
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	33
	Wahkaji	73
	Phlangdiloin	60
	Nongktieh	80
	Sarin	33
	Ranikor	40
	Mawpyllun	93
	Koraikora	73
	Umpung	86
	Balat	60
Mawkyrwat Block	Rangthong	40
	Wahsiej	13
	Mawthawpdah	33
	Pyndenumsaw	66
	Mawthong	60

	Sakwang	46
	Mawkyrwat	13
	Mawkohphet	13
	Phutjaud	47
	Ngunraw	40

Source Based on Primary Survey

Likewise, the HCR was also computed based on the total household income which included the income from working children (Table 10) and found that in both the blocks of the district, there is a low incidence of poverty with HCR of less than 50 per cent. Further, only one village under Ranikor block and one village under Mawkyrwat block had a HCR above 40 per cent. Therefore, the results obtained from Table 9 and Table 10 showed a decline in the number of households that fall under poverty particularly with the financial support from working children which improves the situation of these single mother households.

Table 10: Head Count Ratio across Villages computed based on total household income

Blocks	Villages	HCR (Village level)
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	6
	Wahkaji	13
	Phlangdiloin	27
	Nongktieh	47
	Sarin	7
	Mawpyllun	20
	Koraikora	33
	Umpung	20
Mawkyrwat Block	Rangthong	13
	Mawthong	33
	Mawkohphet	13
	Phutjaud	13
	Ngunraw	40

Source Based on Primary Survey

In order to understand the depth and intensity of poverty in single mother households, the Poverty Gap Ratio (PGR) has been calculated for single mothers' income, as well as total household income which includes the income earned from working children of the household. The PGR based on single mothers' income as observed in Table 11, is highest in the villages of Nongktieh with a PGR of 45.48 and Mawpyllun with a PGR of 44.53 under Ranikor block. Likewise, the villages of Pyndenumsaw and Sakwang has a PGR of 40 and 34.17 respectively, indicating the villages with the highest PGR under Mawkyrwat block. Thus, when we consider only single mothers' income, it is observed that these households experience severity poverty because of the significant and substantial income shortfall of these single mother households.

Table 11: Poverty Gap Ratio of Households across Villages based on single mothers' income

Blocks	Villages	PGR (Village level)
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	12.93
	Wahkaji	33.39
	Phlangdiloin	24.72
	Nongktieh	45.48
	Sarin	18.88
	Ranikor	7.72
	Mawpyllun	44.53
	Koraikora	36.83
	Umpung	39.82

	Balat	36.73
Mawkyrwat Block	Rangthong	23.49
	Wahsiej	2.75
	Mawthawpdah	12.19
	Pyndenumsaw	39.99
	Mawthong	24.72
	Sakwang	34.17
	Mawkyrwat	7.14
	Mawkohphet	7.14
	Phutjaud	12.98
	Ngunraw	12.23

Source Based on Primary Survey

Similarly, the PGR which measures the magnitude of poverty (Table 12) indicated that the villages of Nongktieh and Mawpyllun experience the severity of poverty with a high PGR of 21.3 and 10.24 respectively under Ranikor block, while Ngunraw and Mawthong villages under Mawkyrwat block record a PGR of 12.23 and 7.73 respectively. Although the depth of poverty had significantly reduced with the contribution of the children, the PGR in both the blocks is no doubt still considerably high due to the low earnings capacity in rural labour markets.

Table 12: Poverty Gap Ratio of Households across Villages based on total household income

Block	Village	PGR (Village level)
Ranikor Block	Nongjri	0.59
	Wahkaji	5.68
	Phlangdiloin	7.24
	Nongktieh	21.3
	Sarin	0.69
	Mawpyllun	10.24
	Koraikora	5.95
	Umpung	7.24
Mawkyrwat Block	Rangthong	1.29
	Mawthong	7.73
	Mawkohphet	2.75
	Phutjaud	1.29
	Ngunraw	12.23

Source Based on Primary Survey

6.3 Estimates of Poverty in South West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.

The HCR and PGR computed at the district level provide insight into the prevalence and intensity of poverty in single mother households in South West Khasi Hills District. Table 13 indicates a HCR of 50 per cent when the sole income of single mothers is considered, while a low HCR of 14 per cent when total household income is considered. Likewise, the PGR based on single mothers' income is 23.86 while PGR is only 4.12 when income is combined with the children's income. At the block level, HCR and PGR is relatively lower in Mawkyrwat block compared to Ranikor block, when these poverty indices were computed based on single mothers' income as well as total household income. Therefore, the figures of HCR and PGR indicates a larger proportion of the population in poverty and a greater depth and severity of poverty in single mother households of the district.

Table 13: HCR and PGR at district and block level

Poverty Measures	Single mothers' income			Total Household income		
	Block level		District level	Block level		District level
	Ranikor	Mawkyrwat		Ranikor	Mawkyrwat	

HCR	63	37	50	17	11	14
PGR	30.05	17.66	23.86	5.78	2.48	4.12

Source Based on Primary Survey

7. Conclusion :

Single mother households serve as a compelling sight into the evolving landscape of family structures, reflecting the dynamic shifts in societal norms and household demography. The increasing prevalence of single-parent households headed by the mothers challenges the stereotypical notions of the ideal family, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of family units in response to societal changes. Additionally, single mother households provide insight into the challenges and inequalities faced by women, particularly in terms of economic opportunities and support systems. While single mother households illuminate the changing family structure, these households also emphasize the diversity of family experiences and the importance of recognizing and respecting various familial arrangements (16).

The low income of single mothers in the district of South West Khasi Hills causes the high incidence and severity of poverty in their households. Low income is a pervasive issue afflicting single mother households, often resulting in entrenched poverty (17). Further, limited financial resources constraints access to quality upbringing of the children. Moreover, additional income from children plays a dual role in the complex interplay of economic dynamics, serving both as a potential source of support and, paradoxically, contributing to the high incidence of poverty within these households (18). While children may become additional earners, their contributions are often limited by age, educational attainment, and labour market opportunities, creating a nuanced financial landscape for single mother households of the district. This supplementary income from the children, while helpful, may not be sufficient to pull the entire family out of poverty, given the inherent limitations on the earning capacity of young individuals. Further, with higher educational pursuits and a focus on personal development, employment and income become more resistant to fluctuations in economic conditions. (19). Also, the need for children to contribute financially also emphasizes the economic struggles faced by single mothers. Rather than experiencing the typical trajectory of dependence and support within a family structure, children may find themselves shouldering financial responsibilities prematurely. Therefore, this highlights the broader issue of economic vulnerability within single mother households and the potential impact on household well-being and children's outcome.

The high incidence of poverty in single mother households in both the blocks of the district is rooted in the systemic issues such as gender wage gaps, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of accessible support systems in spite of the potential additional income from their children (20). Further, the dependence on supplementary income from children can be a symptom of the broader economic challenges faced by single mother households rather than a sustainable solution.

To conclude, the intricate interplay between single motherhood and poverty stresses on the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy initiatives to create a more equitable society, keeping in mind the challenges faced by single mothers, especially in the rural areas such as limited employment opportunities, low educational attainment, and low-income earnings, which contribute to a higher prevalence of poverty in households headed by them. Further, the headcount ratio and poverty gap ratio in the district, reveal the extent of economic vulnerability and emphasize on the need to overcome economic barriers. Likewise, addressing the economic struggles of single mothers and their children requires comprehensive strategies that would enable these households to have social, economic, and financial stability. Thus, with financial stability, single mothers would be able to invest in education and skill development for their children, eventually breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

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