



Navigating the Solitude: Exploring the Role of Psychological Capital and its Correlates among Single Working Mothers

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Abstract

Single motherhood, once seen as a deviation from societal norms, is now prevalent globally, presenting challenges such as financial hardship, limited work-life balance, societal stigma, role conflicts, and inadequate support systems. Despite the growing prevalence of single motherhood, limited research in this context underscores a pressing need to examine these dynamics. This study intends to analyze the relationship between Psychological Capital and its correlates among working single mothers in Kerala, with a focus on how Intimate Partner Violence, rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness influence psychological resilience and well-being. A sample of working single moms aged 20-65 from Kerala took standardized evaluations, including the Psychological Capital Questionnaire, Woman Abuse Screening Tool, Ruminative Response Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Subjective Happiness Scale. The study discovered significant associations between Psychological Capital and important psychological characteristics. Life satisfaction and subjective happiness have been found to be substantial positive predictors of psychological capital, while rumination had a negative influence. This study provides knowledge about the psychological struggles of working single moms in Kerala. Lowering maladaptive rumination and promoting happiness can improve psychological capital and overall well-being. The study indicates the need to design interventions and support systems for this demographic.



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Introduction

Single working mothers represent a growing yet less explored population that experiences unique

social and psychological difficulties. Handling professional duties, parenting, and household responsibilities often exposes them to intense stress,

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psychological fatigue and lowered life satisfaction. In such demanding circumstances, psychological capital- a positive psychological force constituting hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy(Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans *et al.*, 2007) emerges as an important factor in preserving psychological equilibrium and managing stress. Rooted in theories such as the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002), Psychological capital has been shown to foster well-being and lessen the burden of stress by reinforcing inner psychological resources (Gallagher *et al.*, 2009).

Single mothers often experience multiple intersecting challenges, including financial strain, social marginalization, and an inadequate support system. Prior studies indicate that single mothers experience elevated stress and role overload because of multiple family and work responsibilities as compared to married women(Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Murray *et al.*, 2001). In Kerala, India, single working moms struggle to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives because of ingrained gender conventions and cultural expectations. This pressure can impact their overall well-being and performance at personal and professional levels. Among the many challenges faced by them, Intimate partner violence(IPV) stands as a serious issue. IPV involves physical, sexual, emotional and controlling behaviours that impair women's self-esteem and coping abilities(García-Moreno *et al.*, 2005; WHO, 2013).

For single working mothers in Kerala, prior experiences of IPV may have long-lasting distress, weakening their resilience and life satisfaction. Rumination—the propensity to think about unpleasant situations repeatedly and inwardly—is another contributing element. It can disrupt psychological adjustment and increase stress levels (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Treynor *et al.*, 2003). Persistent rumination can magnify distress and obstruct psychological adjustment needed to regain confidence and optimism. According to positive psychology, subjective happiness and life satisfaction are important measures of well-being. Subjective happiness is an emotional component of life fulfilment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001), whereas life satisfaction (Diener *et al.*, 1985)

evaluates one's total life circumstances impacted by personal objectives and social expectations. For working mothers in Kerala, both constructs are shaped by social traditions, interpersonal support and financial autonomy. However, exploration of how psychological capital influences these positive mental health indicators within the Indian single mother population remains underexplored. Framed within principles of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational behaviour(Luthans, 2002), the present study explores the influence of Psychological capital and its correlates on intimate partner violence, rumination, subjective happiness and life satisfaction among working women without partners in Kerala. According to the study, a higher level of Psychcap functions as a psychological shield that enhances well-being and lessens the adverse effects of socio-psychological pressures, in accordance with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the theory of role strain (Goode, 1960). By emphasizing the lesser studied population within Indian society, this study aims to add to the knowledge base of how positive psychological resources promote coping strength, emotional contentment, and overall life satisfaction among employed single women.

Aim and Objectives

The present research examines the psychological well-being of working single mothers, focusing on crucial psychosocial determinants. There are two objectives of the study. Firstly, the study aims to investigate the association between intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and psychological capital among single working mothers. Second, the study analyses how intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction and subjective happiness alter the psychological capital of working single mothers.

Hypotheses

H1: Working single mothers have significant relationships with intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and psychological capital.

H2: Rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness strongly predict psychological capital among working single mothers.

Materials and Methods

The present study used a correlational research design to examine the relationship between psychological capital, intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction and subjective happiness among single working mothers in Kerala.

Sample

The sample comprised 50 working single mothers from numerous areas of Kerala. Participants were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Purposive sampling was employed to choose working single moms in Kerala. Although purposive sampling may limit generalizability, this approach was chosen because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the difficulty in accessing a single working mother as a population group.

Inclusion criteria

The research comprised single moms who work and live in Kerala. Participants aged 20 to 65 years were enrolled. Participants who are currently employed. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were included.

Exclusion criteria

Participants who were non-single mothers were excluded from the study. Participants below 20 years or above 65 years of age were excluded. Participants residing outside the state of Kerala were excluded. Participants diagnosed with a serious mental health issue were excluded.

Measures

Socio-Demographic and Personal Data Sheet

A socio-demographic data sheet developed by the researcher was used to collect relevant background information from the participants.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ)

Luthans *et al.* (2007) created the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) to assess psychological capital. The 24-item scale evaluates four aspects: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, using a 6-point Likert scale. The overall PsyCap score is calculated by averaging the items. Cronbach's alpha values for the entire scale ranged from .88 to .89, whereas subscale reliabilities varied from .66 to .85. The scale exhibited strong discriminant and convergent validity.

Woman Abuse Screening Tool (WAST)

Brown *et al.* (2000) employed the woman abuse screening tool (WAST) to determine intimate relationship abuse. It has eight items, featuring two in short form (WAST-SF) and six extra questions on physical health, sexual health, and psychological abuse. Responses are graded on a scale of three. It possesses good internal reliability ($\alpha = .801$ to $.95$), concept and discriminant validity, and a strong association ($r = .96$) with the abuse risk inventory.

Rumination Response Scale (RSS)

The Rumination Response Scale (RSS), established by Nolen-Hoeksema (1991), evaluated brooding, contemplation, and depression-related thoughts on a 4-point Likert scale. The tool has high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .88 to .92. It additionally exhibits strong concurrent and discriminant validity, as evidenced by correlations with the Beck Depression Inventory ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and the Response Style Questionnaire ($r = .81$, $p < .001$).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), established by Diener *et al.* (1985), assessed life satisfaction. This 5-item scale with a 7-point Likert answer style shows strong internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from .79 to .89. Test-retest reliability ranged from .80 to .84. The scale has high construct validity and differentiates between clinical and non-clinical individuals.

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

Lyubomirsky and Lepper's (1999) 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) with a 7-point Likert scale was used to measure subjective happiness levels. The scale covers both absolute and relative self-reports of happiness. Internal consistency across different populations has ranged from .80 to .94, and the scale shows good construct validity.

Procedure

Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and a good rapport was built before data collection. Informed consent was taken from all participants, and standardized questionnaires were provided with guidance. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Cultural Adaptation and Validation

All instruments were translated into Malayalam and reviewed by Bilingual experts to ensure language accuracy and cultural fit. Necessary revisions were made to maintain the intended meaning and clarity without altering the original meaning of the items.

Results

The samples' demographic profile is evenly split across age groups, with 50% in young adulthood and 50% in middle adulthood. The majority identified as Muslim (52%) and reported residing in urban areas (84%), with nuclear family structures being

most common (90%). In terms of education, 52% of the participants were graduates. Employment data showed that 60% were working in the private sector, and 74% reported a monthly income below ₹20,000. Regarding marital status, half of the participants (50%) were widowed, followed by 32% who were divorced, and 18% who were separated. The primary reasons for marital separation included the death of a partner (44%), financial difficulties (20%), and experiences of partner violence (12%). Family size distribution showed that 44% had one child, 24% had two to three children, and 8% had four children.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Sub-variable	N	N (%)
Age	Young adulthood	25	50
	Middle adulthood	25	50
Religion	Hindu	17	34
	Muslim	26	52
	Christian	7	14
Family type	Nuclear	45	90
	Joint	5	10
Locality	Urban	42	84
	Rural	8	16
Education	10th grade	5	10
	+2	5	10
	Graduate	26	52
Nature of the job	Government sector	11	22
	Private sector	30	60
	Self-employed	9	18
Monthly income	<20,000	37	74
	20,000–50,000	9	18
	50,000–1 lakh	4	8
Marital Status	Divorced	16	32
	Separated	9	18
	Widowed	25	50
Reason for Separation	Financial issues	10	20
	Domestic violence	3	6
	Partner violence	6	12
	Second marriage	6	12
	Partner's death	22	44
	Alcohol addiction	2	4
Number of Children	Extra-marital affair	1	2
	One	22	44
	Two	12	24
	Three	12	24
	Four	4	8

Table 2 shows the association between psychological capital, intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness. Results indicate that higher rumination tends to relate to lower level of psychological capital ($\beta = .289, p < .05$). On the other hand, life satisfaction ($r = .371, p < .01$) and subjective happiness ($r = .326, p < .05$) were

found to have positive links with psychological capital implying that individuals who are more satisfied and happier tend to possess greater psychological strength. These findings support Hypothesis 1 (H1), showing that psychological capital is significantly connected with these psychological factors.

Table 2: Correlation among Psychological capital, Intimate partner violence, Rumination, Life satisfaction and Subjective happiness

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological Capital	110.46	12.29	—				
2. Intimate Partner Violence	14.20	4.54	.119	—			
3. Rumination	44.94	10.55	-.289*	.339*	—		
4. Life Satisfaction	24.78	7.12	.371**	-.392**	-.472**	—	
5. Subjective Happiness	17.48	3.81	.326*	.299*	-.078	.113	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3: Regression analysis by using psychological capital as the criterion and rumination, life satisfaction and subjective happiness as predictors

Predictor	R	R ²	R ² change	β	F	Significant
F change						
Rumination	.289	.083	.083	-.289	4.358	.042*
Life satisfaction	.371	.138	.138	.371	7.658	.008**
Subjective happiness	.326	.106	.106	.326	5.712	.021*

Table 3 presents the regression analysis using psychological capital as the criterion variable and rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness as predictors. The results show that rumination significantly predicts psychological capital ($R^2 = .083, F = 4.358, p = .042$), indicating that it accounts for 8.3% of the variance in psychological capital among working single mothers. The negative beta value ($\beta = -.289$) shows that as rumination increases, psychological capital tends to decrease. Life satisfaction explains 13.8% of the variance in psychological capital ($R^2 = .138, F = 7.658, p = .008$), suggesting a stronger contribution compared to rumination. The positive beta coefficient ($\beta = .371$) indicates that higher life satisfaction is associated with higher psychological capital. Subjective happiness also significantly predicts psychological capital, explaining 10.6% of its variance ($R^2 = .106, F = 5.712, p = .021$), with

a beta value of ($\beta = .326$), indicating a positive relationship. Although effect sizes are modest, each predictor contributes to understand differences in psychological capital among single working mothers, supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2).

In summary, each predictor, rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness, significantly contributes to explaining individual differences in psychological capital, supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2).

Discussion

The present study examined psychological capital and its correlates among working single mothers in Kerala, with a focus on intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness. The findings are interpreted in relation to the study's objectives and hypotheses, with reference to relevant theoretical perspectives and previous

empirical studies. The first objective explored the relations between intimate partner violence, rumination, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and psychological capital. While a relationship between intimate partner violence and psychological capital was hypothesized, the results did not support this. This is in line with previous research indicating that although experiences of partner violence can impact mental health, the presence of personal resilience and coping strategies may buffer its effects (Seepersad *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, occupational background emerged as a relevant factor, echoing prior studies that emphasize the role of work-related satisfaction and balance in psychological outcomes (Gallagher *et al.*, 2015). Although occupational background was not formally explained in the study, initial observation suggested that women with stable or flexible jobs tended to report high levels of life satisfaction and psychological capital. This shows consistency with existing literature emphasizing the role of employment quality in psychological well-being. In contrast, rumination showed a clear negative association with psychological capital, underscoring how persistent negative thought patterns can deplete psychological resources and hinder resilience (Nolen-Hoeksema *et al.*, 2008). The observed positive links between life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and psychological capital reinforce the notion that overall well-being and the experience of positive emotions are foundational in fostering psychological strengths (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). Overall, the findings show that psychological well-being among working single mothers is influenced not just by individual characteristics but also by social and cultural pressures such as traditional gender roles, financial stress, and social judgment. These factors may influence how women express happiness, satisfaction, and resilience in their everyday lives.

The association between intimate partner violence and increased rumination suggests that exposure to such violence can lead to heightened cognitive distress, as also noted by Bakaitytė *et al.* (2022). Furthermore, lower levels of life satisfaction among those experiencing intimate partner violence support previous findings that such experiences negatively affect one's quality of life (Hui & Constantino, 2021). An unexpected finding was a weak positive association between intimate partner violence and subjective happiness, which may be

interpreted as a sign of adaptive coping or emotional compartmentalization, a phenomenon explored by Sere *et al.* (2021). In the Indian sociocultural context, especially in Kerala, this trend reflects social conformity and resilience, where women express positivity and show optimism in difficult times, uphold dignity, and maintain family balance. Additionally, the inverse relationship between rumination and life satisfaction reinforces the detrimental impact of repetitive negative thinking on well-being, consistent with Zheng *et al.* (2019). These findings collectively illustrate the interplay between negative experiences and cognitive patterns and their influence on psychological resources.

The second objective was to identify predictors of psychological capital. Rumination emerged as a significant negative predictor, indicating that negative thought patterns play a crucial role in undermining psychological strength. Further, both life satisfaction and subjective happiness served as positive predictors, suggesting that individuals with greater emotional well-being are more likely to exhibit resilience and psychological capital. These outcomes resonate with prior literature that identifies positive affect and life contentment as key components in the development of personal strengths (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005; Nolen-Hoeksema *et al.*, 2008). The idea that rumination, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness are important determinants of psychological capital has been substantiated by several empirical investigations. For example, Li *et al.* (2024) observed that among nursing students, greater levels of rumination were inversely connected to psychological capital, suggesting that persistent negative thoughts might drain internal psychological resources. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that psychological capital is positively correlated with life satisfaction. According to Shan *et al.* (2022), people who were happier with their lives had more psychological capital, which was partly explained by their lower levels of rejection sensitivity and attachment avoidance. Additionally, in professional settings, subjective happiness has been shown to be a good predictor of psychological capital. According to another study by Doe and Smith (2019), flow experience acted as a partial mediating factor in the association between psychological capital and job satisfaction. Collectively, these results provide credence to the idea that psychological capital is highly predicted by rumination, life

satisfaction, and subjective happiness, highlighting their psychological significance for groups dealing with ongoing stressors like working single mothers. In sum, this study highlights the complex interrelations between personal experiences, cognitive patterns, and psychological resources among working single mothers. It underscores the importance of addressing rumination and promoting life satisfaction and happiness to enhance psychological capital in this population. Overall, the findings revealed that personal traits and broader cultural and societal factors determine psychological well-being among single working mothers. Gender norms, monetary pressure, and social disapproval may also influence how women experience and express happiness, resilience, and satisfaction.

Conclusion

Drawing from the overall results, this study offers insights into the psychological landscape of working single mothers in Kerala, highlighting the role of Psychological Capital, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness in enhancing well-being, and the negative impact of rumination. The findings stress the need for context-specific interventions to support this population. By identifying these mental patterns, future efforts can focus on enhancing psychological endurance and belief in one's ability to uplift and empower single working mothers in their personal and professional lives.

Implications

The findings suggest that although intimate partner violence (IPV) was not significantly related to psychological capital, interventions targeting IPV among single mothers could indirectly enhance their psychological well-being and resilience. Given the strong negative association between rumination and psychological capital, programs focusing on cognitive-behavioural strategies and mindfulness may help reduce rumination and strengthen psychological resources. Additionally, the positive relationships found between life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and psychological capital indicate that efforts to promote gratitude, goal setting, social support, and strengths-based approaches can improve well-being in this group. Findings also reflect how working single mothers "navigate solitude" by relying upon inner strengths and independent coping approaches. Programs

and initiatives such as culturally informed guidance, counselling, and employee well-being programs, which address stress management and counter societal bias, can further foster psychological capital and empowerment among single mothers.

Limitations include the regional and occupational homogeneity of the sample, reliance on self-reported data, exclusion of non-working single mothers, and the cross-sectional design. Given the small size (N= 50) from a single state, the results should be viewed as preliminary rather than applicable to a wider population. Broader and more diverse samples are needed for stronger conclusions. Future research should include non-working single mothers to better represent this population and explore additional variables such as coping mechanisms, social support, cultural influences, and socioeconomic status to gain a more nuanced understanding. Comparative studies across different regions or cultural contexts would also be valuable to identify contextual differences affecting mental health. Although regression analysis was performed on a limited sample size, it aimed to identify early prediction patterns rather than establish a cause and effect link. Therefore, findings should be considered as suggestive rather than conclusive.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

This statement incorporates all datasets produced or examined throughout this research study.

Ethics Statement

The research study was approved by the appropriate ethics committee of Central University of South Bihar,

with the registration number CUSB2207112020, and Ethical guidelines were followed when conducting this study.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from every single participant involved in this research study.

Clinical Trial Registration

This research does not involve any clinical trial.

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Author Contributions

- **Linusherin Saleem:** Data collection, Writing-Original draft.
- **Akash Kumar:** Conceptualisation, Literature review, writing – review & editing.
- **Nishi Srivastava:** writing – review & editing.
- **Renu:** Review of the Manuscript
- **Chetna Jaiswal:** Supervision, Guidance, and Final approval of the Manuscript.

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