

Who Extends Supports To The Female Headed Household?*

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ABSTRACT

Social support within the family and community is important in overcoming deficiencies among single mothers. Female-headed household or single motherhood means shouldering family responsibilities alone and has greater likelihood of becoming poor. The objectives of this study are to examine sources and types of support received and expected by female headed household single mothers and their perception towards their support network upon becoming single mothers. A study that examines the social support or network of female headed household is vital in ensuring appropriate support provided by support providers can effectively enhanced their well being. Hence, they and their children will not be deprived of good future and opportunities. A total of 700 respondents participated in this study, which was conducted in northern, southern, eastern and central region of Peninsular Malaysia. Majority (74.5%) had sought and received support while 25.5% did not. Family members and relatives were the most support providers important to female-headed households. Financial aid, emotional support, motivation and support in term of guidance and advice were the four most important types of support to the female-headed household respectively. School, Pusat Zakat and Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat were the top three agencies where support was received. Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat, Pusat Zakat, Single Mothers Association was the top five support-expected agencies. Whereas, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, Pusat Zakat, School, Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat, Single Mother Associations and Baitulmal were the six top support-known agencies to provide support to female-headed households.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of single-parent families is not a concern issue; the number of single parent families that experience significant social and economic disadvantage is of importance (Cairney, Michael, Offord, & Racine, 2003). According to Morada (2001), female-headed households are households where a female adult member is the one responsible for the care and organization of the household or is regarded as head by the other member of the households. Ariffin (1994) suggested that there are two types of female-headed households, namely *de jure* that refers to when the male partner is permanently absent due to separation or death, and a woman is legally single, divorced or widowed. The second type is the *de facto* female-headed household whereby the male partner is temporarily absent due to many factors such as long-term work migration or refugee status. Another terminology used to describe female-headed household is single mother. Basically, single mother refers to a woman raising a child on her own without a husband or partner (Katz, 1991).

In Malaysia, female-headed household is better known as single mother. Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia defines single mother as a women when the husband passes away (as widow), a situation when she is divorced by the husband (as divorcee), the case when the husband went missing without any news for sometimes and also in a situation when the husband left the house without divorcing the wife (Dasimah, Puziah, & Muna, 2005), unmarried women adopted children and women whose husbands are working away from home for long period of time (Hew, 2003). The Malaysian population census of 2000 reported that there were 511,503 widows and 82,977 women who were divorced or permanently separated (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2000). However, these numbers were said to increase and it was estimated that there were 800,000 families in Malaysia in 2005 that were headed by women (Ministry of Women, Family and Development, 2006).

Social support is considered an important construct of social capital. Social capital is a concept that encompasses various dimensions of social resource such as social networks, community attachment and social support. Coleman maintained that "social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" and is productive of "certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (1988, p. 99). Whereas Putnam's social capital elevates the dimensions of the concept referring to "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (1995, p. 67). On the individual level, social capital refers to one's access to resources through reciprocal social networks (Dominguez & Watkins 2003; Portes, 1998; Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2003). The concept is important in explaining the role of informal networks, formal organizations toward providing social support as "not just in helping families survive but in advancing public policy" (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001, p. 1).

Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) examined the role of social capital in affecting the life chances of poor women including single mothers and families. They have used social capital measures, which included both relations within the family (e.g., family cohesion and activities between children and parents), and family links to the community (religious involvement, network ties, and perceptions of the neighbourhood). These measures certainly reflect multiple concepts, including community attachment and trust, informal and formal network ties, and social support. Thus, the concept of social capital is a useful tool for explaining and predicting on how families survive and the "importance of examining the ways that social and psychological embeddedness in family and community contexts influence the course of human development" (p. 590).

Social support and female-headed household

James, Schulz and van Olphen (2001) suggested the links among social capital and the other related concepts of social integration, social support, and community capacity by developing a model differentiating among organizations and organizational networks, social capital (trust, respect), social support (instrumental, emotional, informational), and social networks (size and density). Dominguez and Watkins (2003) explained that social support help individuals to cope with the demands of everyday life and other stresses, which in turn provide emotional and expressive support in needed.

The term social support generally refers to a network or configuration of personal ties where affect and/or instrumental aid is exchanged. It also focused on emotional caring as the defining characteristic of supportive relationships. Therefore, social support can be defined as verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience. Social support also connotes the feeling of belonging, of being accepted, loved and needed all for oneself and for what one can do. Bharadwaj and Wilkening (1980) used the term "social integration" synonymously with support. They called it a "need" for "expressive and affectual ties essential to maintaining the integrity of the self and the feelings of group solidarity" (p. 338). Whereas, Kahn (1979) defined social support as interpersonal transactions including "the expression of positive affect of one person towards another; the affirmation or endorsement of another person's behaviours, perceptions, or expressed views, and the giving of symbolic or material aid to another" (p. 85). Thus, Kahn viewed social support as having three basic functions: affect, affirmation, and aid.

A substantial body of literature shows that compared with mothers in 2-parent families, single mothers experience higher levels of depression or psychological distress and family stress and lower levels of social support (Benzeval, 1998; Lipman, Boyle, & Dooley, 2002, Lipman, Offord, & Boyle, 1997; Cairney et al., 2003; Davies, Avison, & McAlpine 1997). Ongoing financial stress represents

one powerful source of stress and has been shown to contribute to their elevated rates of distress and disorder relative to married mothers (Brown & Moran, 1997; Hope, Power, & Rogers, 1999). Stress for single mothers also extends beyond financial problems to include a variety of stressors associated with the demands and pressures of parenting alone. In Malaysia, financial is the main problem faced by female-headed household (Teh, Rajwani, & Fatimah, 2008) and the problem is even more severe for single mothers who were unemployed prior to being divorced (Wan Halim, 1990). Recent research has identified growing number of low-income single mothers who tend to be very poor and face serious barriers to achieving economic self-sufficiency-who left welfare without stable employment often referred to as "the disconnected" (Blank & Kovak, 2008). Still the same, decades later, possible factors previously identified in the literature indicated distal stressors such as childhood abuse and other early childhood traumas (Lipman, MacMillan, & Boyle, 2001) and chronic strains such as those associated with financial stress (Kahn, Wise, Kennedy, & Kawachi 2000). Collectively, these studies suggest that single mothers have higher rates of depression because of greater exposure to stress, both past and present. To sum, stress appears to play an important role in the accounting for differences in psychological well being between married and single mothers (Cairney et al., 2003).

Indeed, Cairney et al. (2003) found that single mothers experienced lower levels of perceived social support relative to married mothers. Considering single mothers only, Jackson (1988) found that perceived emotional support from family was related to lower depression while living with family members showed no association. Similarly, Green and Rogers (2001) study of single low-income mothers finding that emotional support, but not instrumental assistance, was related to lower levels of stress over time.

Sources of support

Several studies have been useful for understanding the nature of those sources that were perceived effective by recipients. The studies have been extensive, including inquiry into the types of providers sought, the importance of a shared context in determining who will be deemed helpful, and the unique role and capabilities of community caregivers. It was found that the number of close friends was positively related to the adjustment of divorced mothers. Chiriboga, Coho, Stein, and Roberts (1979) found that women and men relied on different types of supporters during marital breakups, whereby women tended to have a wider array of help givers than men (e.g., parents, friends, relatives, counselors, doctors, co-workers, children, neighbors, as well as the spouse). The research shows that some of the most effective supporters may be those who share a context with the person in need. For example, the experience of single mothers be best handled through support from others single mothers rather than family members and outside friends.

One source of support has been the support perceived from informal caregivers in the community who are outside of a person's normal circle of contacts or usually termed as 'weak links'. These people usually serve the needs of the public in a specific work related capacity, but are also in a position to offer advice, counsel, and information on community resources. Relationships with them tend to be inherently nonintimate. Generally, these people act as "community gatekeepers" (e.g., teachers and nurses).

Support network

A separate area of the literature has been discussion of the way support networks increase or decrease in size over time. For example, some stigmas such as divorce and mental illness precipitate the disruption of relationships and loss of network members. Rands (1981) found that an average of 41.5% of a person's contacts were dropped after a divorce or separation, probably due to family disapproval (Kitson, Moir, & Mason, 1982) and divided loyalties among friends (Wilcox, 1981). In terms of support from formal and non-formal organization, two decades later, Blank and Kovak (2008) computed that roughly 2.2 million women who head families do not support themselves either with welfare or with their own earnings. These women have on average 1.8 children each-translating to almost 4 million children who live in these severely economically challenged families.

Edin and Lein (1997) analyzed the survival strategies of single mothers in four urban sites. They identified three types of strategies: work (reported, unreported, and underground); networks (family and friends, men/boyfriends); and social service agencies (public and private). Clearly, family members and closed friends are significant people that single mothers network with for support.

In conclusion, the interrelationship between social capital and single parenthood experienced by female headed household need to be address accordingly. Therefore, a study that examines the social support or network of female headed household is vital in ensuring appropriate support that can be effectively enhanced their well being are extended by relevant parties.

The objectives of this study are to describe sources and types of support received and expected by female-headed household and their perception towards their support network upon becoming single mothers.

METHODOLOGY

Location

The study is conducted in the Peninsular Malaysia. The Peninsular was divided into four zones namely North, South, East and Central Regions. One state was randomly selected within each zone – i.e. Kedah, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan and

Selangor. The capital city of each state was chosen for the study (Alor Setar, Kuantan, Seremban and Shah Alam) as this present study focused on urban female-headed households only.

Respondents and sampling

For the purpose of this study, female-headed households with at least one child in primary school were chosen. The lists of female-headed households were obtained from primary schools within the capital city of each state. In each state, schools with higher concentration of female-headed households were selected until the list reaches a total of 250 (potential) respondents.

Respondents were approached by well-trained enumerators. Those who agreed to participate in this research signed an inform consent form. About 1000 (potentials) respondents (from the list) were approached, but only 700 respondents agreed to participate in the study, resulting an overall response rate of 70% (refer Table 1). The 700 respondents were then interviewed by enumerators using the questionnaires.

Table 1: Response Rate

Location	<i>n</i>	Response rate
Alor Setar	201	80.4
Kuantan	250	100.0
Shah Alam	131	52.4
Seremban	118	47.2
Total	700	70.0

Instrument

A set of pre-tested questionnaire was used for the study. The pilot test for this study revealed that reliability test for section A (Female Headed Profile) that include information on social support is .914.

Data analysis

Data were gathered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science. In addition, descriptive statistic was used to measure the objectives of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's characteristic

A total of 700 respondents participated in this study comprised of 625 (89.3%) Malay, 54(7.7%) Chinese and 21(3.0%) were Indian. Mean age of respondents is 42.07 (SD = 8.30). Mean age of respondents upon became female-headed households is 36.8 (SD = 7.75). Mean length of marriage before divorcee or death of spouse or missing is 13.97 years (SD = 7.84). Mean length of adjustment upon becoming female-headed households is 13.01 months (SD = 12.0). In term of control over life at present, almost all (90.6%) stated that they were in control. In addition, 72.3% respondents were satisfied with their present quality of life.

In term of educational background, majority (64.7%) completed secondary school and none at tertiary level. As for house ownership, majority (52.7%) own a house and 47.3% stated that their house was rented. Majority (89.6%) live in a landed property such as bungalow, terrace or semi-D while 10.4% live in a high-rise building. As for income, mean of respondent's income is RM898.84 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Respondent's Characteristics

CHARACTERISTICS	(n = 700)	%
Race		
Malay	625	89.3
Chinese	54	7.7
Indian	21	3.0
Education attainment		
Primary school or less	164	23.4
Secondary School	453	64.7
Colleges	83	11.9
Tertiary		
Type of house		
Landed property (bungalow, terrace, semi-D)	627	89.6
High-rise (flats, apartment, condominium)	73	10.4
House Ownership		
Own	364	52.7
Rent	331	47.3
Respondent's income	898.84	
Household income	891.35	

Respondents were also asked on background of their single motherhood. This present study showed that majority (53.1%) of single mothers is widow; about 41.6% are divorcees, with 5.4% separated. This present findings found quite similar pattern as to the reason for being single mothers in Dasimah, Puziah and Muna (2005) study whereby widow 69.2%; divorcee 25%; 4.4% husband went missing and 1% were left by husband. Teh et al. (2008) also showed quite similar pattern whereby 45% were widow, 35% divorcee and the rest are separated or unmarried single mothers.

Sources of Support

As presented in Table 3, in term of seeking support or help when the support was needed, a total of 510 (74.5%) respondents stated they had sought help, whereas 175 (25.5%) respondents had responded that no support was sought from any parties. Wan Halim (1990) outlined five psychological impacts that are commonly experienced by single mothers in Malaysia i.e. guilt, depression, anger, loneliness and low self-esteem. It is understood that these single mother need to get support in getting back to their balanced life before being single. Girdano, Everly and Dusek (2005) mentioned three main stressors experienced by single mother i.e. role changes to becoming 'sole caregivers'; economic stressor, whereby standard of living change as face with economic hardships that serve as a constraint more often for female single parents than for male parents; and changes in life style and social activities i.e. adjustment in family living standard due to downward economic mobility. All these stressors can be buffered by getting support from family members, friends and members of society.

As for the source of support, a total of 364 (53.1%) respondents had sought assistance from relatives, followed by 63 (9.2%) respondents who had acquired assistance from specific agencies. There were 43 (6.3%) and 40 (5.8%) respondents who had sought assistance from their neighbors and other individual, respectively. Girdano et al. (2005) stated that social support is usually defined as the existence of people on whom we can rely, people that let us know that they care about, value, and love us. It is evident in this research that supports from relatives have been sought by majority of the respondents. Putnam's (1995) definition of social capital enlightens this phenomenon whereby network and social trust will facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit whether with relative and community where support were solicit by the single mothers.

Findings of this research showed that 12.1% respondents seek out social support from individuals and neighbors who are outside of a person's normal circle of contacts, which are termed as 'weak link'. Interestingly, this group of people played an important role in giving support to the single mothers. This people are in favour by the single mother in seeking advice, counseling or getting information. Clearly, the interpersonal coping resources whereby being supportive has less to do with the 'kinds' of support provided and more to do with how people interact with and relate to one another.

Hew (2003) in her research on 231 urban and rural single mothers in Sarawak found that majority (70.6%) of her respondents returned to live with their parents, grandparents and siblings after their marital dissolution. This indicates that closed relatives are a primary source of support to single mother especially during the initial period of being single whereby they have to cope with the adaptation process of being a single mother

Table 3: Sources of Support (n = 685)

Sources	n (%)
Relatives	364 (53.1)
No Support	175 (25.5)
Agencies	63 (9.2)
Neighbourhood	43 (6.3)
Other Individual	40 (5.8)

Types of Support

Specifically, there were six types of support listed in this research, which include financial aid, motivation, emotion, shared-strength, time, and guidance and advices. Additionally, for each types of support received, respondents were asked (1) to quantify the numbers of support-provider (2) to state their personal relationships with support-providers and (3) levels of satisfaction toward support-providers for each category of support.

As opposed to the structural view, the functional aspect refers to what individual service provider do. A functional view of social support argues that there are specific types of support that are beneficial in specific types of situations. This present study presented respondents with five types of support and found that financial aid (536, 76.6%) was rank first, followed by emotion support (330, 47.1%), motivation (304, 43.4%), guidance and advice (294, 42%), shared strength (277, 39.6%) and support in term of time (256, 36.6%). It is evident that instrumental support in term of financial was ranked the most important support that majority (76.6%) respondents have received. Interestingly this trend has not change much whereby the ongoing financial concern represents a powerful source of stress that contribute to single mother's elevated rates of distress and disorder relative to married mothers (Brown & Moran, 1997; Hope et al., 1999). Teh et al. (2008) in their study on 548 female-headed households in Peninsular Malaysia found that 53% of them admitted that they faced financial problems after becoming single parents. Further analysis pointed out that 44% said they had just enough for their daily expenses, 27% did not have enough while the remaining 25% stated they had enough and 5% had more than enough.

Numbers of Support-Provided Individual

As presented in Table 4, the findings indicated that numbers of individual given support in form of emotion (M = 2.55, SD = 3.22) was top ranked, followed by shared-strength (M = 2.43, SD = 1.98) and motivation (M = 2.35, SD = 3.23). Meanwhile, the numbers of individual given support in term of time (M = 2.13, SD = 1.7), guidance and advices (M = 2.12, SD = 1.72), and financial aid (M = 2.11, SD = 1.36) was ranked as the bottom-three.

Table 4: Numbers of Support-Provider Individual

Types of Support	<i>n</i> (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Financial Aid (<i>n</i> = 536)					
1 to 5 persons	523	2.11	1.36	1	10
6 to 10 persons	(97.6)				
≥ 11 persons	13 (2.4)				
	-				
Motivation (<i>n</i> = 304)					
1 to 5 persons	289	2.35	3.232	1	50
6 to 10 persons	(95.1)				
≥ 11 persons	13 (4.2)				
	2				
Emotion (<i>n</i> = 330)					
1 to 5 persons	309	2.55	3.22	1	50
6 to 10 persons	(93.6)				
≥ 11 persons	13 (4.2)				
	2 (3.7)				
Shared-Strength (<i>n</i> = 277)					
1 to 5 persons	260	2.43	1.98	1	15
6 to 10 persons	(93.8)				
≥ 11 persons	15 (5.4)				
	2 (.8)				
Time (<i>n</i> = 256)					
1 to 5 persons	246	2.13	1.7	1	15
6 to 10 persons	(96.1)				
≥ 11 persons	9 (3.5)				
	1 (.4)				
Guidance And Advices (<i>n</i> = 294)					
1 to 5 persons	281	2.12	1.72	1	15
6 to 10 persons	(95.6)				
≥ 11 persons	12 (4.1)				
	1 (.3)				

According to Girdano et al. (2005), the structural view of social support concern on how many friends, colleagues, or family relationships that one has where support can be gathered. As noted by this finding, respondent have between 2-4 individual who they can refer to when needed. Evidence in this study shows that social capital that provides support in term of emotion was seen as an important element. The availability of more individual in giving emotional support means a lot to single mothers.

Support-Providers' Relationship

In the aspect of support and support-providers' relationship (see Table 5), findings revealed that family relationships were among highest percentage across all types of support followed by relative's relationships. More than 70 percents respondents stated getting support from their families for all types of supports listed. However, there was relatively low percentage exhibited by the respondents in the various supports received from the community, formal and non-formal agencies relationships. Interestingly, 10.5% respondents who stated getting emotional support had received it from their ex-husband. Teh et al. (2008) found that 20n percent of their respondents still have some contact with their ex-husband. Clearly, notion of attachment and trust as described in the dimension of social capital act as resources to single mothers when support is needed.

Table 5: Types of Support-Recipients and Support-Providers' Relationship

Support-Providers' Relationship	Types of Support					
	Financial Aid (n=543)	Motivation (n=304)	Emotion (n=333)	Shared-Strength (n=276)	Time (n=254)	Guidance and Advices (n=294)
<i>Family</i>	389 (71.6)	238 (78.3)	257 (77.2)	214 (77.5)	201 (79.1)	222 (75.5)
<i>Relatives</i>	56 (10.3)	20 (6.6)	-	30 (10.9)	-	21 (7.1)
<i>Ex-husband</i>	2 (.4)	-	35 (10.5)	-	22 (8.7)	-
<i>Ex-husband family</i>	10 (1.8)	2 (.7)	4 (1.2)	3 (1.1)	3 (1.2)	4 (1.4)
<i>Non-relationship individual</i>	23 (4.2)	28 (9.2)	23 (6.9)	19 (6.9)	16 (6.3)	21 (7.1)
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	17 (3.1)	9 (3)	11 (3.3)	9 (3.3)	9 (3.5)	17 (5.8)
<i>Community</i>	1 (.2)	2 (.7)	1 (.3)	-	1 (.4)	2 (.7)
<i>Formal agencies</i>	43 (7.9)	4 (1.3)	2 (.6)	-	2 (.8)	6 (2)
<i>Non-formal agencies</i>	2 (.4)	1 (.3)	-	-	-	1 (.3)

As suggested by Kahn (1979), social support that underlines social capital connotes the expression of positive affect of one person toward another. Finding from this study showed that relatives also play an important source of support where single mother could go and seek help. Data showed that 10.3% respondents seek support from relatives for financial aid, 10.9% for shared strength, 7.1% for guidance and advices and 6.6% for motivation. In term of support received from formal and non-formal agencies, 8.3% respondents stated that they have received financial aid from both parties, whereas, 2.3% received guidance and advices.

Satisfaction toward Providers and Support Received

With regard to the level of satisfaction, majority of the support-recipients were moderately satisfied for motivation (83.2%), time (82.6%), emotion (79.4%),

shared-strength (77.3%), guidance and advices (74.1%), financial aid (71.1%) that were given by the providers (see Table 5). On the other hand, there were less than 2% and 6.5% who reported as 'very unsatisfied' and 'unsatisfied' in regards to the motivation, emotion, shared-strength, time, and guidance and advices which they had received except for the financial aid (14.1%). In addition, approximately 10% respondents reported very satisfied in term of different types of supports they received from the providers (refer Table 6).

Table 6: Satisfaction toward Provider and Support Received

Types of Support	Level of Satisfaction <i>n</i> (%)			
	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>
Financial Aid (<i>n</i> =523)	8 (1.5)	66 (12.6)	372 (71.1)	77 (14.7)
Motivation (<i>n</i> =304)	1 (.3)	19 (6.3)	253 (83.2)	31 (10.2)
Emotion (<i>n</i> =326)	1 (.3)	7 (2.1)	259 (79.4)	59 (18.1)
Shared-Strength (<i>n</i> =270)	3 (1.1)	8 (3)	200 (74.1)	59 (21.9)
Time (<i>n</i> =247)	2 (.8)	9 (3.6)	191 (77.3)	45 (18.2)
Guidance & Advices (<i>n</i> =288)	3 (1)	6 (2.1)	238 (82.6)	41 (14.2)

Support-Provided, Expected and Known Agency

Prior works suggested that single mothers suffered disproportionately higher rates of physical and psychiatric illness as compared to their married counterparts (Kahn et al., 2000; Lipman et al., 2001). Thus, this study also asked respondents to identify (1) agencies where support was received or provided (2) agency where support was expected or support-expected agencies (3) and support-known agencies. Interestingly, as presented in Table 7, findings reported that schools (44.7%) were listed on top of the support-provider agencies list. Meanwhile, Pusat Zakat (23%) and Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (15.9%) were ranked second and third. It is interesting to note that school has been an important support provider for the single mother as it relate to the educational goals of their children.

On the other hand, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (40%) was listed as the most support-expected agencies as perceived by respondents. Similarly, Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat (27.6%) and Pusat Zakat (27%) were second and third. Since Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat is a department under Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat, it can be concluded that majority (67.6%) respondents expected support from the ministry. It is interesting to note that 23.3% respondents expect support provided by the Single Mother Association as this consists of individual who share similar need and concerns with them. Teh et al. (2008) in their study on single mother in Peninsular Malaysia also noted that majority of them suggested setting up a club like Single Mother Association that could help them.

With regards to the most known support agencies, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (38.6%) was ranked the highest, followed by Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat (22.7%) and Pusat Zakat (24.6%). In brief, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat was the most recognized agency who had provided the support, known to provide support and is expected to give support to single mothers.

Dasimah et al. (2005) in their research on lower income single mother in urban centers found that less than 10 percent of the respondents were getting financial assistance from Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri and Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat. The present research yielded better percentage of respondents who have received assistance from Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, a government body set to help this group of people.

Table 7: Support-Provided, Expected and Known Agency (n = 700)

Agencies	Support-Provided Agencies	Support-Expected Agencies	Support-Known Agencies
Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita	14 (2)	193 (27.6)	159 (22.7)
Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat	111 (15.9)	280 (40)	270 (38.6)
LPPKN	3 (.4)	86 (12.3)	47 (6.7)
PRPT	13 (1.9)	83 (11.9)	91 (13)
MARA	6 (.9)	95 (13.6)	57 (8.1)
Others Government Agencies	8 (1.1)	42 (6)	27 (3.9)
District Officer	2 (.3)	29 (4.1)	12 (1.7)
District Office	3 (.4)	29 (4.1)	13 (1.9)
People Representative	23 (3.3)	59 (8.4)	46 (6.6)
Pusat Zakat	161 (23)	189 (27)	172 (24.6)
Baitulmal	35 (5)	104 (14.9)	108 (15.4)
Religious Society (Church)	17 (2.4)	35 (5)	37 (5.3)
Single Mother Association	33 (4.7)	163 (23.3)	147 (21)
Community/Neighbourhood	23 (3.3)	35 (5)	37 (5.3)
JKKK	26 (3.7)	57 (8.1)	71 (10.1)
School	313 (44.7)	142 (20.3)	162 (23.1)
Employer	22 (3.1)	21 (3)	23 (3.3)

Changes in Support Network

In view of perceived-social network, majority 509 (75.3%) respondents felt that there were no different of social network before and after they became single mothers (see Table 8). Only 11 (16.4%) respondents perceived that their current social network have increased, while 56 (8.3%) respondents reported a decline in social network. This implicate that role of social capital has not changed much and need to be viewed as positive phenomenon. This showed that single mother

has learned to survive and just accordingly to the new status impinged upon them. Teh et al. (2008) noted that about half of their respondents mentioned that they were closer to their children after being single mother. They also found that the younger single mothers felt that their life has got worst after their divorce. This may be due to financial stress upon becoming head of the family at younger age. This is supported by Zhan and Pandey (2004) whereby older single mothers were economically better off than younger single mothers.

Table 8: Perceived-Social Network (n = 676)

Social Network	n (%)
Increased	56 (8.3)
Decreased	111 (16.4)
No difference	509 (75.3)

CONCLUSION

Social capital includes certain available resources that are perceived as important to an individual whether it is in term of material or not. It has been found repeatedly that social capital found within the family itself and among closed family members are very significant in contributing to individual's well being. Social capital also encompasses important social psychology concepts such as social resource, social network and social support.

Social support affects individual that include female-headed households. As such, social support has been found to influence their abilities to cope with newly found way of living. Social support includes perceived and actual or received resources available for single mothers to acquire when it is needed. Generally, it connotes the existence of people, or group of people or an agency whom they can rely and to and extent that they could feel cared about and valued regardless they will seek assistance or not. Financial support was the most important support needed and expected by them. Family members and relatives play a significant role in extending support that include financial aid, motivational support, emotional, sharing strength, time and giving guidance and advice. Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat together with its Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat is the most known-support agency and the most support-expected agency. However, school and Pusat Zakat were the top two support-provided agencies where support was received.

Findings of this study were limited to female-headed households living in urban area in Peninsular Malaysia only and must not be generalized to all female-headed household in Malaysia. They were recruited via the schools where their children went for schooling thus delimits those who have no children or children that have finished secondary school.

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