



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT KOZHIKODE



Working Paper

IIMK/WPS/723/OBHR/2026/13

May 2026

**From 'Single' to 'Singlehood': Life Course Perspective
to Develop Five-Dimensional Framework to Capture Single Lives**

Prapti Aggarwal ¹

K Unnikrishnan Nair ²

All rights belong to their respective authors.

Please contact the corresponding authors, if you would like to access the full paper.

¹ Doctoral Candidate, Organizational Behaviour and Human Resources Area, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, IIMK Campus PO, Kunnamangalam, Kozhikode, Kerala 673 570, India

² Professor, Organizational Behaviour and Human Resources Area, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, IIMK Campus PO, Kunnamangalam, Kozhikode, Kerala 673 570, India; Email - unni@iimk.ac.in, Phone Number - 0495-2809247

From ‘Single’ to ‘Singlehood’: Life Course Perspective to Develop Five-Dimensional Framework to Capture Single Lives

Abstract:

Singlehood is increasingly visible across societies, yet it continues to be defined largely through binary categories, particularly marital status. Such classifications provide limited understanding of the diversity and changing forms of contemporary single lives. Current relationship arrangements create conceptual ambiguity around who may be considered “single” and how singlehood should be understood. This article develops a five-dimensional framework to examine singlehood through legal status, social recognition, personal-psychological self-definition, temporality, and spheres of life. The first three dimensions are used to conceptualise relationship status at a point in time, while time and spheres of life extend this understanding by locating singlehood within life-course processes and broader social contexts. Together, these dimensions provide a more contextual understanding of singlehood as both relationship status and lived experience. The framework generates eight configurations of relationship status and accommodates movement across categories over time and across domains of life. The article contributes to ongoing discussions on conceptualising singlehood and provides a structure for organising existing literature and identifying future areas of inquiry. Implications are discussed for research, policy, and organisational contexts where experiences of singlehood remain insufficiently understood.

Keywords: Singlehood, Family Theory, Life-course Perspective, Relationship Status, Conceptual Article.



भारतीय प्रबंध संस्थान कोषिकोड
Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode
Globalizing Indian Thought

Research Office

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode IIMK Campus P. O.,

Kozhikode, Kerala, India,

PIN - 673 570

Phone: +91-495-2809237/ 238

Email: research@iimk.ac.in Web: <https://iimk.ac.in/publications>

