

**EFSI SEMINAR SERIES**

LECTURE 5

“Time to Comb My Hair:  
Self-Care for Single Mothers in India”

Self-care is a form of labour because it arrests the depletion that caregivers face, thus enabling social reproduction. The market economy understands self-care in individualistic ways, using it as a way to market wellness products. However, self-care must be viewed through the lens of the collective – how do caregivers build strategies and systems to care for themselves while also caring for others, thus building a feminist ethic of care where the self is equal to others? The challenges of depletion and disconnection may be particularly acute for caregivers, especially women, who operate outside conventional social norms. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities faced by single mothers in India in caring for themselves while caring for their children and others. First, I examine the demographic and time-use patterns of 12,963 single and 96,023 married mothers from the Time Use Survey of India 2024. Next, I discuss the hour-long interviews I conducted with fifteen single mothers, chosen through snowball sampling across India, examining questions of depletion and autonomy. Interviewees have spoken about their struggle to find time away from their paid work and their urgent and active care responsibilities. Through this time that they have carved for themselves, they have dealt with difficult health conditions, long daily commutes, stigma and even violence. As interviewees come from diverse age groups, occupations and socioeconomic backgrounds, they have rarely used the term 'self-care'. Instead, they have alluded to more matter-of-fact terms such as “the time to comb my hair”.



**SPEAKER**

**DR. RUCHIRA SEN**

Associate Professor  
Jindal School of Journalism and Communication

Ruchira Sen is an Associate Professor of Economics at Jindal School of Journalism and Communication. Her research interests are care work, gift economies and the history of economic thought. She teaches data journalism and introductory economics. Ruchira has a Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA and an M.A. and MPhil from JNU, New Delhi, India.

**WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2026 | 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM**

**O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY, SONIPAT-131001**