



The Unseen and Unheard: The Economic Struggles After the Captivity in Finding Me by Michelle Knight

Joshna S John^{1*}, Dr. Susan Roy²,

^{1*}Research Scholar, (Reg No. 22213164012023), Department of English, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamilnadu, India.

²Research Supervisor and Associate Professor, Department of English, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli - 627012, Tamilnadu, India

*Corresponding author: Joshna S John

shanajoo1999@gmail.com

Abstract

The Research paper explores the economic and social challenges faced by Michelle Knight ensuing her break out from a decade of captivity, as elaborated in her memoir *Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness, a Life Reclaimed*. While her traumatic grievance is prominent, her post-captivity struggles, particularly economic reintegration, lack of institutional support, and emotional labour, remain significantly concealed and exceptional. By applying Feminist Economic Theory, the analysis reveals how trauma continues to shape her identity and economic marginalisation even after her physical rescue. Feminist Economic Theory critiques the gendered undervaluation of her emotional and survival labour; these frameworks highlight the structural barriers survivors face and challenge the societal narrative that freedom alone guarantees healing. It brings in the comprehensive understanding of survivor recovery, one that accounts for economic justice and systemic reform.

Keywords: Traumatic grievance, post-captivity struggles, survival labour, economic justice, survivor recovery.

Financial Instability Hindering Future Expenses

Pragmatic tribulations, especially financial inconstancy, are also strived with by the knight besides emotional distress. After years of captivity, she faces the overwhelming phase of rebuilding her life from nothing. Financial independence is one of the greatest hurdles she faces as she tries to provide for her son. The lack of education, work experience and support systems makes it difficult for Knight to initiate a stable and secure life for herself and her child. One of the most dejected aspects of Knight's economic hardship is her inability to save money or plan. Financial insecurity, the lack of savings makes it nearly impossible for Knight to build any long-term financial security. In her memoir, she expresses her concern about her inability to plan for her future and her son's "I kept worrying about what would happen if something happened to me. If I didn't have money saved up or any kind of safety net, what would happen to my son? It was terrifying not knowing how to protect him financially." (Knight, 219). This inability to save creates a profuse sense of vagueness and fear about the future. For single mothers like Knight, the pressure of not being able to create financial stability or plan for exigency is an unceasing origin of stress. This struggle reflects the extensive dispute of economic instability that many individuals face when they live without the competence to save for the future.

The Economic Toll of Incarceration

Economic hardship is portrayed as a cardinal theme of Michelle Knight's post-captivity life. After years of imprisonment, she faces the intimidating challenge of starting over with no savings, no career, and no support system and no durable origin of income. This economic struggle, in addition to her emotional and psychological scars, becomes a barrier to achieve stability for herself and her son. Her experience as a single mother trying to restore her life from zilch highlights the pervasive economic difficulties many individuals face after severe trauma, particularly those who do not have access to financial resources or a support network is forced to depend on welfare and government assistance to meet her basic needs. This financial strain contributes to her feelings of paucity as a mother, adding to the heaviness of guilt she already carries from her trauma. Knight expresses this frustration:

"I didn't know how to get started. I had no money, no skills, no support. How was I supposed to provide a future for him when I didn't even know how to survive myself?" (Knight, 199).

This passage highlights the ruinous financial situation Knight finds herself in after her incarceration, enhancing the difficulty of raising a child while trying to regain financial independence. The added pressure of providing for her son without the resources to do, enlarges her sense of failure.

One of the most consequential economic hardships Michelle faces is the total loss of her career prospects. While in captivity, she lacked the opportunity to work or gain experience in any professional field. As a result, when she is unchained, she finds herself with a vital gap in her employment history, making it nearly impossible to find a stable, profitable job. Her struggle to enter the workforce reflects the broader challenges many survivors of trauma face especially those who have been detached from society for prolonged periods. Knight notes:

"I didn't know how to build a resume or what skills to put on it. I had nothing to show for all those years—no education, no work experience. It felt like I was starting from zero, and it was overwhelming." (Knight, 201). Without any concrete work history, Knight's economic options are severely bounded she got low wages, basic jobs, which offer little defence or hope for progress. For many survivors of trauma, the lack of professional experience becomes a barrier to financial independence and economic stability.

Along with her lack of career experience, Michelle's captivity left her with no education. Having been isolated for years, Knight was unable to attend school or receive any formal education that could help her upgrade her economic endurance. This lack of education further restricts her ability to secure stable and reliable jobs. In addition, without vocational training or specialised skills, her job opportunities are often limited to positions that pay minimum wage or less, which provide only a basic income. Knight expresses her frustration with her lack of educational opportunities:

"I knew that education was important, but where do you start when you've been out of school for so long? I didn't know how to learn new skills, and it made me feel so inadequate." (Knight, 207). The inadequacy of education or training severely hampers Knight's ability to provide a better future for her son. She often feels like she's slammed in a loop of poverty, unable to break free due to the lack of resources to refine her skills or education. This represents a critical aspect of economic hardship for many survivors of trauma, particularly those who face systemic bound to education and career advancement.

The researcher puts forward the economic crises via **Feminist Economic Theory** further intensify our understanding of Michelle's struggles by pointing to the gendered nature of economic vulnerability. This theory argues that traditional economic models undervalue or completely ignore the labour women perform especially emotional and survival labour, which is often unpaid and invisible. Michelle's experience is emblematic of this. Before her abduction, she was already economically marginalised, a single mother living in poverty and experiencing abuse. After her captivity, the burden of rebuilding her life fell squarely on her shoulders. She had to heal, find work, build a support network, and advocate for herself often without institutional help.

Moreover, the media profited from her story, using it to generate headlines and public interest, yet Michelle herself had to struggle for financial autonomy. Her memoir and later public speaking engagements helped create some stability, but they also required her to repeatedly revisit her trauma. Feminist economists would argue that Michelle's post-captivity labour telling her story, advocating for others, and reclaiming her life is work. Yet it is rarely compensated or recognised in economic terms. This devaluation reflects a broader societal pattern in which the unpaid labour of trauma recovery especially among women is taken for granted.

Considering this theoretical framework, the title "The Unseen and Unheard" becomes a powerful indictment of the systems that overlook survivors like Michelle Knight. While society celebrates her bravery, it largely ignores the economic and structural barriers she continues to face. Her memoir is not just a story of surviving captivity it is also a story of surviving freedom. That freedom, it turns out, is riddled with invisible traps: poverty, institutional neglect, emotional labour, and the ongoing effects of trauma.

Michelle Knight's journey reminds us that recovery is not linear, and that survival extends beyond escape. Through Feminist Economic Theory, we understand the gendered and structural nature of her economic marginalisation. Together, these perspectives reveal a fuller picture of what it means to survive not just physically, but economically, socially, and spiritually in a world that rarely sees or hears the ongoing struggles of trauma survivors.

Affording Life: A Growing Struggle

The high cost of living is also faced by Michelle Knight, in addition to her inefficacy securing a stable job. As a single mother, she must manage daily expenses, such as rent, utilities, food, and childcare, all on a minimal income. The rising cost of elementary living essentials adds a redundant tier of pressure, especially when she has precise financial resources. In her memoir, she writes about the challenges of making ends meet:

"Every month felt like a struggle. I had to make hard choices between paying rent and buying groceries. And when something broke, like the car or the washing machine, I didn't know how I was going to pay for it." (Knight, 212). The ever-increasing cost of living compounds Knight's financial difficulties, preventing her from saving money or investing in her future. The strain of trying to meet basic needs while dealing with the trauma of her past creates an enduring sense of anxiety, particularly when she feels that she is always just one step away from financial crash.

Eventually, Knight took various low-wage jobs to support herself and her son. However, juggling the necessitate of work, motherhood, and personal recovery is a constant source of stress. The physical and emotional toll of working long hours in physically demanding or emotionally draining jobs leaves Knight exhausted, making it difficult to give her son the attention and care he needs. Many single mothers find themselves in similar situations, where the need to work more than one job to make ends meet means sacrificing time with their children and compromising their own health. Knight writes about her relentless exhaustion:

"I would work all day, then come home and try to be the mother I needed to be. But it was like I was running on empty. My body was tired, but my heart just kept pushing me to do more." (Knight, 215).

This exhaustion is a harsh reality for many single mothers who must balance the demands of parenthood with the need to work multiple jobs. Knight's experience demonstrates how difficult it is to maintain emotional and physical health while striving to provide for a child when resources are scanty. Likewise financial struggles, Michelle Knight also faces significant costs related to her legal and medical needs. After her captivity, she needs legal assistance to navigate her case and gain justice, which can be extravagant and tough to approach for someone with finite financial resources. Also, she

requires medical treatment for the physical and psychological consequences of her captivity, which count added layer of financial demands. Knight writes about the challenges of affording medical care: "After everything I went through, I needed therapy, but I couldn't afford it. I couldn't even get the right medications or treatment for my physical injuries because I didn't have the money. It felt like I was being punished again." (Knight, 213). The financial strain of medical tariffs further perplexes her potential to retrieve and rebuild her life. Medical costs for survivors of trauma, including physical rehabilitation and mental health support, can be exorbitant, and for someone in Knight's position, this can be an insurmountable barrier to healing. The lack of access to proper healthcare worsens the economic hardship she faces.

Balancing Parenthood with Financial Strain

Financial insecurity, along with trauma is also experienced by Knight as a single mother. The daily insistence of motherhood such as nurturing her child, providing shelter, and meeting his emotional needs are made even more demanding by her impotence to provide financial security. Knight's experience remarks the challenges faced by many single mothers who must stabilise the commitment of parenthood with the distress of financial instability. Parenting demand more than just financial resources for basic needs it involves the emotional, physical, and logistical support to guarantee that a child has opportunities for growth and success. However, when financial resources are stretched thin, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents like Knight to provide their children with extracurricular activities, quality schooling, and emotional support in a stable home environment. Knight reflects: "I wanted to give my son everything he deserved, but I couldn't afford things like field trips or the little extras that other kids got. I felt like I was failing him in so many ways." (Knight, 218). These hidden costs things like birthday gifts, school supplies, and even the time to spend with a child are often fronted but are incredibly important for a child's development. The inability to provide these things due to economic hardship can affect a child's well-being and contribute to feelings of guilt and inadequacy for the parent. The financial strain Michelle Knight faces after her release from captivity is one of the most profound hardships she endures. Alongside the emotional and psychological toll of her trauma, Knight must navigate the practical difficulties of parenthood as a single mother, all while rebuilding her life from scratch. The challenges of achieving financial independence, securing stable employment, and managing daily expenses while providing for her son create a difficult balancing act. Knight's story sheds light on how financial instability, compounded by the scars of her past, affects her ability to fulfil her role as a mother and create a stable environment for her child. Upon her release, Knight faces the harsh reality of having no money, no stable job, and no way to support herself or her child. After years of captivity, she is deprived of education, work experience, and savings, making it nearly impossible to achieve financial independence immediately. Without any assets or resources, Knight is forced to rely on welfare and other forms of government assistance just to meet her basic needs. For a mother like Knight, this dependency on external support highlights the instability of her situation. She shares her struggle:

"I had nothing. No home, no job, no way of taking care of myself or my son. I had to rely on food stamps, and sometimes, that just wasn't enough." (Knight, 202). This remarks the sensitivity of many single mothers who face unforeseen grief. In Knight's case, her captivity has left her with few directions for independence, making her feel confined in a system she never desired to be part of. The ceaseless reliance on extrinsic help is a daily prompt of her financial limitations and adds to her feelings of inadequacy.

In Pursuit of Stability Amid Uncertainty

Indeed, Knight starts to work, she faces the objection of dwelling a solid and reliable life for her son. solidity goes beyond just economic assets it also comprises an intact and receptive environment where her child can propagate. However, the financial insecurity she faces makes it rigorous to setup any abiding sense of stability. For Knight, her trauma has ruined her sense of persistence, and this sense of instability often dispatch her attempts to generate an assured life for her son. She shares her fears "I wanted to give him everything - everything I never had—but it felt like I was constantly struggling just to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table." (Knight, 208). This instability is not just about financial strain, but also about the psychic toll that it takes on Knight as a mother. It is rigorous for her to provide emotional security when she is constantly worried about her financial future. For Knight and many single mothers in parallel state, the impotence to generate a perception of stability for their children is an evolving origin of stress and anxiety.

Inspite of the economic obstacles she faces, she tries to stabilise the want of motherhood with the deficiency of resources she has available. The psychological strain of wanting to provide a better life for her son, yet knowing her limitations, creates a deep sense of frustration and guilt. Knight expresses her internal conflict: "I wanted to be the mother he deserved, but I just couldn't do it all. I felt like I was always falling short." (Knight, 211). This pressure to be a perfect mother while struggling financially creates a sense of inadequacy and self-doubt in Knight. It reflects the broader struggle of many single mothers who feel that they must juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, often at the cost of their own well-being. The emotional weight of trying to do everything for her child, even when resources are scarce, becomes a significant burden.

As Knight continues to face day-to-day struggles, Long-term financial security remains an elusive goal, and she worries about how she will support her son as he grows older. This anxiety about the future is a source of constant stress, especially as she grapples with the uncertainty of not knowing if she will ever be able to escape financial instability. Knight writes about the future:

"I kept thinking about what would happen when he got older. How would I put him through school? How would I make sure he had everything he needed? The thought of the future scared me because I didn't know how to plan for it." (Knight,

220). For Knight, and many single mothers facing financial difficulties, the anxiety of not having a clear financial plan becomes a constant source of worry. This worry complicates their ability to focus on the present and the well-being of their children.

Conclusion

Michelle Knight's experience balancing parenthood with financial strain is an example of the profound difficulties faced by single mothers, particularly those who have endured trauma. Her memoir highlights the multifaceted challenges of trying to rebuild one's life while raising a child, from the emotional and psychological toll of trauma to the practical realities of financial instability. For Knight, the constant juggling of multiple responsibilities working multiple jobs, managing household finances and caring for her son was a daily struggle that many single mothers can relate to. Her resilience, despite the overwhelming odds, provides a powerful testament to the strength required to overcome adversity and to continue striving for a better future for her child. Michelle Knight's economic hardships reflect the systemic barriers and personal challenges many survivors of trauma and single mothers face when trying to rebuild their lives. The combination of lost work experience, lack of education, high living costs. Her story illustrates the stark reality of economic hardship that persists long after the immediate crisis ends. Knight's journey highlights the importance of addressing these economic disparities to create pathways for financial independence, stability, and well-being for individuals who have been affected by severe trauma.

This expansion offers a more comprehensive view of Knight's economic hardships, including additional challenges like medical and legal expenses, the hidden costs of parenting, and the broader impact of systemic financial instability. The title "The Unseen and Unheard" reflects the economic hardships and social isolation Michelle experienced after her rescue challenges that are often ignored or underestimated in discussions of trauma recovery. Through the lens of Critical Trauma Theory and Feminist Economic Theory, we can examine how Michelle's post-captivity economic struggles are shaped not just by her past, but by societal systems that fail to support marginalised survivors.

Works Cited

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