

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The family is promoted as an ideal community in which its members fulfill their needs, while for some people the family evokes fond memories, for others it is far from ideal. In the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the number of single-parent families has been constantly increasing. Single parenthood brings with it many emotions such as depression, sadness, frequent worries about the future, worries about whether they will raise their child well, and the like, and single parenthood also has positive sides, some of which are great closeness with the child, high satisfaction with children and parenthood, and a sense of parental self-efficacy. The parent faces the problem of explaining where the other parent is, unresolved housing issues, enrolling the child in kindergarten or school and feeling like a failure, etc. Lack of understanding from the environment affects the behavior of other people in society towards single parents, the ability of parents to face everyday challenges, attitudes and personal experiences of single parenthood, and virtual abuse.

Key words: *single parenthood, single mother, single fathers, queer parenthood, 21. century*

INTRODUCTION

The family is promoted as an ideal community in which its members fulfill their needs, while for some people the family evokes fond memories, for others it is far from ideal and has problems and obstacles, and children are exposed to various types of violence. Etymologically, the word family comes from the Latin word *familias*, which means a slave or servant in the household. Asim Peco points out that each family is a social entity in itself and requires a special conceptual definition. (Spahić, 2019; p. 95). Glen Vernon (Spahić according to Kukić, 2019, p. 96) defines a family as a relatively permanent union of a woman and a man, socially recognized by custom, morality, religion and law, while Philip Cohen says that a family consists of a group of people who are connected biologically, legally and emotionally, and with a place of residence.

Issues that were raised more systematically in the 1960s are relationships in marriage, the identity of a married woman and a woman outside of marriage. The importance of traditional marriage has begun to die out, although the changes are slow but noticeable in the decreasing number of children, the division of labor among family members, violence, etc. (Zaharijević).

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1. FAMILY DIVISION

A family can be heterogamous where there is a union of one man and one woman, polygamous where there is a union of one man and several women, or polyandrous where there is a union of one woman and several men, or homogamous where there is a same-sex union. Relationships can be arranged patriarchally or matriarchally. (Šiljak, 2019, p. 97).

The myth of the Amazons as untamable and ruthless women is an example of matriarchy. The Amazons were marked by the amputation of their right breast because it interfered with their ability to shoot arrows or throw spears, they were led by a queen and all decisions were made by a women's parliament, and their sexual life was marked by organizing annual festivals to which they invited men exclusively for the purpose of insemination. Today, it can still be found among the Mosuo, Yao, Miao and Tan in China, Berbers and Tuareg in North Africa and elsewhere (Aganović, 2012).

Matriarchy is therefore a family in which women are extremely respected, women led the division of labor in the household. Its decline occurs with the creation of surpluses in production. According to sociologists Engles and Morgan, matriarchy precedes patriarchy, which occurs when men take primacy over women with the original forms of property, and thus the "golden age" of women disappears. Patriarchal family refers to the type of peasant family with private agricultural property in which the principle of seniority rules, and roles are strictly divided and determined by biological criteria (Zaharijević, 2012).

1.1. Classical forms of family

The authority of the father was considered very important until the 19th century and he held all the strings in his hands while women maintained emotional relationships and before the formation of the bourgeois class, the European family formation corresponded to the described model. Under the influence of the bourgeoisie, marriage became a voluntary act, but it was still seen that spouses responded to each other's families that entered the in-laws' community (Zaharijević,).

Marriage since the 19th century includes love and sexuality together because before marriages were arranged, i.e. it was more of a property agreement and only a few married for love. During the 20th century, the sociological definition of the family was based on various theoretical starting points, starting from the fact that a social institution is responsible for various functions of individuals, community and society, and with the strengthening of individualism, there is an increasing diversity in the origin of the family and the emergence of gay orientation communities and single-parent families. We distinguish between two approaches, namely the functionalist approach applied by Talcot Parsons, where the two primary tasks of the community are socialization and the other is personality stabilization. (Šiljak, 2019, p. 97). The Marxist approach advocates the nuclear family and believes that the social approach is maintained through the regime of power and that the function of the family is to produce new members of society (Šiljak, 2019, p. 98).

1.2. Contemporary forms of family

While the nuclear family is still the norm in most countries, it has been on the decline in recent decades as fewer and fewer young people are opting for the classic family form. In a nuclear family, both parents are employed and contribute to the household budget, but the number of children has decreased and there are more and more people who do not have children (Spahić-Šiljak according to Shmit, 2019; p.99), the high cost of living prevents a larger number of family members, and with the extension of life expectancy, spouses are

opting for a child in their later years of life. Due to the decline in the number of nuclear families, the number of single-parent families is increasing, and these are mainly mothers who take custody of their children, we also include widows and a large number of women who are not married but want to have a child and use sperm banks. We also have a shared household where two or more people decide to live together due to high living costs and loneliness (Spahić-Šiljak according to PEW, 2019, p. 99)

We also have blended families made up of members of two families where a man and a woman divorce their spouses and have children from previous marriages and decide to form a new family with children from previous marriages, then partner families where young people live in an extramarital relationship and have children together whose rights are the same as those of children born in marriage, and same-sex families where the gay population unites and is recognized as a legal community, and in some countries they can also adopt children (Spahić-Šiljak, 2019; p. 100).

From a sociological point of view, the democratization of the family is seen through the emancipation of women, although patriarchy is still there and persists in some form, and it has moved from the area of domination in economic, reproductive and sexual terms to areas where it is again close to power and decision-making (Zaharijević).

2. PROBLEMS OF SINGLE PARENTING

The family is promoted as the ideal of a community in which people fulfill their needs. For some people, the family environment evokes beautiful emotions, a shelter. The family is more than ideal and has its challenges. Marriage and family are institutions and have changed throughout history. In the past, the family was dominated by men, while today it is an equal community with the same rights and obligations. Glen Vernon defines the family as a socially recognized, customary, moral and legal permanent union of a woman and a man. The family has several functions, including sexual union and care for its members. The family can be heterogamous, polygynous or polyandrous. Since the 19th century, marriage has come to mean love and sexuality together, and in pre-modern Europe, marriage usually began as a property agreement. During the 20th century, the sociological definition of the family rested on different starting points. The strengthening of individualism has led to the breakdown of the traditional family, so the family now includes gay families and single-parent families.

In the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, the number of single-parent families has been steadily increasing. Despite a steady increase in recent years, the overall number of single-parent families remains high; worldwide, the United States has the highest rate of single-parent families at around a quarter of all families with children under the age of 18 (Jones, C. et al., 2022). There are 3 million single-parent families in the United Kingdom (US Census Bureau, 2021), representing 15% of families. The majority of single-parent households are headed by mothers, although there has been an increase in the number of single-father families over time. The proportion of single-father households in the United Kingdom has remained at around 10% of all single-parent families over the past decade (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

2.1. The emergence of single-parent families

Single-parent families usually arise through divorce or separation, or are formed by single mothers without a partner. A well-known model of family functioning has been determined

and there are two interrelated dimensions, namely cohesiveness and adaptability. While cohesiveness refers to the connection between family members, adaptability refers to the family's balancing act between reality and change. 'Parenthood is not an exclusively biological phenomenon, just as humans are not exclusively biological beings. Although single parenthood brings with it many emotions such as depression, sadness, frequent worries about the future, worries about whether they will raise their child well, and the like, single parenthood also has positive sides, some of which are great closeness with the child, high satisfaction with children and parenthood, and a sense of parental self-efficacy. Some single parents are well accepted in society, their environment shows them empathy and various forms of support (whether it is financial support or support in a way that helps the parent, for example, with childcare). On the other hand, some parents are not fully accepted and various stereotypes are attached to them (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2014).

2.2. Problems of single-parent families

The list of problems that single parents face is a difficult economic situation because they have only one financial income. Employers are aware that single parents have difficulty balancing work and private life, and it is possible that for this reason most employers do not want to employ single parents. Single parents are faced with prejudices from their environment, which are particularly pronounced towards divorced people and people who gave birth out of wedlock, and as a result, they are often exposed to judgment, ridicule, underestimation and are refused support, all of which leads to the stigmatization of children. Due to the difficult life circumstances and social pressure that single parents face, it is not surprising that they indulge in various vices under pressure. Children learn from the model of parental behavior, which has a negative impact on their development (Fišer et al., 2006).

The problem faced by a single parent is also raising a child of the opposite sex. The child will grow up without a model of how two adults can live together and complement each other's lives, and will never be able to replace the deceased, and in some situations the child will have no role model. Every parent worries about their child's health, their safety, is closely related to their child's education, their future, then worries about whether they will succeed in raising them as they imagined, and there are many other worries that parents deal with every day. Financial difficulties, fatigue, exhaustion, overwork burden single parents. A single parent does not share responsibility, so there is a large amount of care and responsibility that only one person has to experience, and to make it easier with a partner (Juil, 1995).

The parent is faced with the problem of explaining where the other parent is, unresolved housing issues, enrolling the child in kindergarten or school and feeling like a failure, etc. Lack of understanding from the environment affects the behavior of other people in society towards single parents, the ability of parents to cope with everyday challenges, attitudes and personal experiences of single parenthood and virtual abuse. There is a network that supports single parents, Samohrani, where single parents can find various information and associations. (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003).

2.3. Support for single-parent families

Support for single parents is divided into financial, material, emotional, moral and practical. Financial assistance (giving or lending money), practical assistance (helping around the

house, babysitting, various repairs at home, driving the child to school, etc.) and then emotional support (active listening, talking and showing empathy, friends as sources of help in the form of material support, support from the environment) according to (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2005).

The United States (23%) and the United Kingdom (21%) have the highest number of children living in households with single parents. On average, about 6.8% of children have the highest number of children living in households with a single parent. On average, about 6.8% live in households with a single parent worldwide. It has been recorded that India has 5% of single-parent households (Chavada et al., 2023).

3. SINGLE MOTHERS

There is an increasing number of families in which women are single mothers with children and the sole breadwinners of the family. Some studies conducted in show a connection between poverty and female foster care. Women from racial minorities are more exposed to poverty due to high unemployment rates, increased divorce rates, non-payment of alimony, high crime and delinquency rates, and they do not have the opportunity to pay for schools and kindergartens, which is why children are more exposed to crime and violence. There is also a difference between single mothers in developed countries and those in socially disadvantaged ones. In the West, despite more developed living conditions, men also avoid the obligation to pay alimony. In some countries, women cannot be the breadwinners of the family and must have a guardian, for example, India. Due to pressure and care for family members, they choose jobs that require less commitment and, accordingly, have lower incomes (Spahić, 2019; p. 135).

3.1. Destigmatization of single mothers

Single mothers are no longer a stigmatized group in our society. It is more natural for society to see a woman taking care of a child, taking them shopping, playing with them, etc., than a father. Throughout the past, the idea that women "must" have children in order to fulfill their role in life has persisted. Brajša (1995) says that mothers have always been recognized as having greater abilities in caring for a child than fathers. Fathers are not as capable of expressing their emotions. Researchers state that at that time in Croatia, slightly more than half of citizens stated that they believed that a woman should have children in order to feel fulfilled (Aračić et al. 2000). It is generally accepted that mothers are the ones who take care of children more than fathers, so when a mother is left alone with children after a divorce or the death of a partner, there is not much fuss. When it comes to caring for a child, some things have not changed. In some cultures, it is still completely normal for a mother to stay home with the children and take care of the household while the partner earns the family's living. However, some things do change.

3.2. Numerical representation of single mothers in society

Statistics on single parents by gender show that there are more women than men who are single parents. Among single parents worldwide, single mothers make up the vast majority at 84.3%, while single father households account for 15.7%, indicating that women bear the primary responsibility for raising children and the economic survival of the family. The prevalence of single fathers is low, as men are more likely to remarry and leave their

offspring in the care of their mothers or other female relatives. A number of reasons have been cited for single mothers to establish their own homes, such as divorce, separation from their spouse, widowhood, male migration, intimate partner violence, abandonment, the search for independence, and or social (Chavada et al., 2023).

3.3. Stigma of single mothers

Single-parent families have long faced criticism, not least because of the long-standing assumption about children's perceived 'need' for a father. Furthermore, concerns are often expressed about children's adjustment and parents' ability to cope with single parenthood, particularly after parental separation or divorce. Research over the past few decades has shown that the decline in well-being of both mothers and children found in some studies can often be attributed to factors related to the divorce, rather than to single parenthood per se, and in particular to the financial difficulties that can follow divorce or separation. In addition, difficulties among children in single-parent families have been found to be related to the mental health of the parents, rather than to single parenthood. It is also important to note the significant impact of parental conflict, especially long-term conflict, on child adjustment. Longitudinal studies have shown that increased difficulties in children following parental separation often decrease over time. However, it has also been shown that single-parent families tend to receive less social support than two-parent families. It is important to note that not all single-parent families experience the challenging circumstances that are sometimes encountered after divorce. The path to single parenthood may play a role in the level of social support received, the experiences of financial strain, and the adjustment of the parent and child (Jones et al., 2022). Single mothers by choice, who decide to enter parenthood on their own, often through assisted reproduction, first became a subject of research several decades ago. Single mothers and fathers by choice are sometimes referred to as single mothers and single fathers.

4. SINGLE FATHERS

4.1. Families of single fathers

Only recently has research begun to examine single-father families. The limited literature to date that has examined same-sex gay and heterosexual men who pursue fatherhood as single parents suggests that these fathers tend to be highly educated and have high incomes. Like single mothers, single fathers start their families either through adoption or assisted reproduction. Access to either of these pathways to parenthood for men varies greatly across countries. For example, in much of Europe, men do not have access to surrogacy. While non-commercial surrogacy between men is permitted in the United Kingdom, parental orders for single men—which transfer legal parenthood from a surrogate to an intended parent—only became legal in 2019. Surrogacy is more readily available through clinics and agencies in the United States, although having a child in a country other than their own often presents fathers with many practical and legal challenges. Single fathers often undertake extensive paperwork to gain legal recognition as the father of their child, which is emotionally taxing and time consuming.

4.2. Distinguishing between single fathers and mothers

Social discourse on parenting roles and psychological theories have contributed to assumptions about fathers' parenting abilities, often positioning fathers as breadwinners and as 'secondary' in parenting to mothers. Bowlby's attachment theory and his early writings on the role of maternal love and mothers as primary caregivers set the stage for a focus on motherhood and mother-child relationships in psychological research. However, in recent decades, increasing attention has been paid to fathers. Overall, findings on the quality of parenting and the impact of parents on child adjustment suggest that there are many more similarities than differences between mothers and fathers, and that fathers have the same capacity for quality parenting as mothers. Nevertheless, fathers, especially those in the primary caregiving role, also face greater stigma and lower social support than mothers.

4.3. Numerical representation of single parents

About 2.6 million families in the United States are headed by single fathers. Much of the research has focused on comparing parents in partnerships with single mothers. Single fathers may have several advantages that work in their favor. According to a 2013 Pew study, single fathers are more likely to live with a partner who is living out of wedlock (41% vs. 16%). Single fathers are generally better off than single mothers in terms of education, income, and poverty. There are many resources for single fathers, such as the National Parent Hotline, the NRFC, Facebook and other online groups, etc.

4.4. Support for single fathers

The National Parenting Hotline offers information for single fathers.

The Fatherhood Project connects fathers with support and education. The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse or NRFC provides, facilitates, and disseminates research and information to encourage and strengthen the father-child bond. The DadTalk Blog section of the website includes parenting tips. The National Fatherhood Initiative aims to expand parental involvement by addressing many of the challenges and stereotypes that men face. Finally, there are support groups for single fathers scattered throughout the country. Groups of single fathers consult with each other on Facebook groups and other networks, and global networking occurs. (Zapata, 2020).

5. QUEER PARENTS AND ASSISTED PREGNANCY

The natural need of every living organism is reproduction and an emotional need. People spend a lot of time finding a partner and having children. In addition to the evolutionary need, LGBTQ parenthood and single parenthood is also an emotional journey for members of that sexual orientation. For heterosexual couples, infertility is an obstacle. However, for LGBT people and people who want to live a single life, they certainly cannot conceive or have children in traditional ways. LGBT couples and single people who respect the legal laws in their country can have children through artificial reproductive technology (ART) (Banerjee, 2020).

5.1. Establishing queer parenting

In recent years, and notably due to legal changes in access to reproductive technologies worldwide, a small but growing number of single people are actively choosing to start a family and become parents themselves from the start (Jones et al., 2022). Murray and Golombok conducted the first study directly comparing 27 heterosexual single mothers who conceived using donor sperm with 50 heterosexual partnered mothers who also conceived using donor sperm. There were no differences between the two groups of mothers in parental well-being and most variables assessing the quality of parenting, including warmth, but single mothers showed slightly lower levels of interaction and sensitivity with their very young children. However, these differences were small, and the authors suggest that the presence of a partner may have helped the mothers in a couple spend more quality time with their child at this early stage. At a follow-up visit two years later, single mothers experienced greater joy and showed less anger toward their young child, and their children showed lower levels of emotional and behavioral difficulties compared to children whose mothers were partners (Jones et al., 2022).

It is possible that, after deciding to use donor insemination and becoming single parents, single mothers felt more positive about this phase compared to partnered mothers, who used donor insemination after a period of struggling to conceive and who are less open about their journey to parenthood with others. More recent research, including a multimethod, multiinformant, longitudinal study of single mothers compared to married mothers in the United Kingdom, all of whom used donor conception to conceive their child, yielded similar findings—that mothers and children fared well both in infancy and middle childhood. Both phases of the research showed that family functioning, such as the level of parental stress, was more important in predicting child adjustment than the number of parents in the family. Notably, single mothers who choose to be single parents generally reported lower levels of financial hardship, in contrast to mothers who became single due to divorce. Studies of single mothers document that mothers carefully consider their network of friends and family before embarking on a journey alone, and that they often have close ties to their parents and other family members, who can help with childcare. Although less research has investigated LGBTQ+ single mothers, one longitudinal study found equivalent parenting quality and child adjustment when comparing lesbian single mothers to heterosexual single mothers. (Jones et al., 2022).

5.2. Single queer mothers

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network of friends and family before setting out on their own, and that they often have close ties to their parents and other family members, who can help with childcare. Although less research has investigated LGBTQ+ single mothers, one longitudinal study found equivalent parenting quality and child adjustment when comparing lesbian single mothers to heterosexual single mothers. Despite the positive findings of research on single mothers and their children, research has also highlighted problematic portrayals of single mothers in the media, which primarily serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes and secondarily do not represent the results of empirical research on this type of family (Biblarz, 2010).

Lesbian couples and other LGBT couples who do not have a partner for sperm use sperm from a donor, and an egg from the chosen member of the couple is obtained. Through IVF (In Vitro Fertilization), in which sperm and eggs are fertilized outside the human body in a petri dish, conception is achieved. The fertilized egg is then implanted into the chosen female member of the couple. For a lesbian couple, one female member may donate the egg, and the other may carry the pregnancy. This is not done for medical benefit, but for the emotional satisfaction of the two women. There can be different types of donors. With anonymous donors - the woman or couple does not have the identity of the donor. Many couples or women prefer to have anonymous donors to eliminate the possibility of being prosecuted for rights to the child. The clinic will keep a record of the donor because once the child comes of age, he or she may demand to know his or her genetic father. In accordance with the clinic's rules and the parents' curiosity, some non-identifying information may be disclosed to the parents. In addition, the donor has the same willingness to remain anonymous as the parents' choice.

Known donor – can be a family member, friend or the donor must be a friend of the woman/couple for this purpose. The clinic usually does not have to hide the identity, and it is the woman or couple who brings a family member/friend with them. Known donors are currently more sought after as women, and couples prefer to have sperm from individuals whose background, genetic background and other necessary information are known. The existence of a known donor provides reassurance to the woman and the couple (Banerjee, 2020).

Two key factors considered important for the positive adjustment of parents and children are the mental health of the parents and social support. These factors are part of the multifaceted concept of psychological well-being that not only constitutes positive mental health, but also includes, for example, support and positive relationships with others. Regarding the psychological well-being of parents in different family structures, it remains the case that primary care fathers, and particularly single fathers, face stigma and negative social attitudes, which can have a negative impact on parental well-being, as well as indirect effects on the functioning of the extended family. In particular, research on minority stress has shown that the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people can lead to higher levels of stress, which in turn is associated with health problems both physical and mental. Moreover, despite increased legal recognition of LGBTQ+ parents and more accepting social attitudes, homosexual fathers through adoption or surrogacy have reported experiences of stigmatization in recent research (Biblarz, 2010).

5.3. Single queer fathers

A study of single fathers in particular found that increased stigma was associated with lower sensitivity of gay and straight single fathers to their children. However, the study did not compare the experiences and well-being of fathers with those of mothers, so it is not

yet known whether single fathers face greater challenges than mothers in the same position. Given this, it is important to pay attention to the range of influential factors, including but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, age, financial circumstances, and country of residence, that are likely to shape the experiences of single fathers. To achieve this, adopting an intersectional lens is appropriate.

Another important aspect of this is that LGBT couples and singles may even face situational infertility. Situational infertility is whether someone is legally obligated to have children without a partner or with their designated partner. LGBT people, particularly transgender people, may suffer from sterility or reduced fertility (Banerjee, 2020).

Findings from a study of same-sex male couples who used surrogacy to start their family suggest positive outcomes for both parents and children. A study conducted in the United States that compared 40 same-sex male couples through surrogacy with 55 same-sex female couples who conceived their children using donor sperm found that children aged 3 to 9 were well-adjusted in both types of families and that children in two-father families experienced lower levels of internalizing behavior than children in two-mother families. In a cross-sectional study in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France, no differences in parental well-being were found between same-sex male couples who used surrogacy, same-sex female couples who used sperm donation and heterosexual couples who used IVF to conceive a child. Similarly, a study in Israel of same-sex male couples who used surrogacy to start their own family found no differences in their psychological well-being compared to heterosexual fathers or homosexual fathers who had a child in a heterosexual relationship, but fathers in same-sex couples through surrogacy expressed greater satisfaction with life and parenthood. These studies show that, in a variety of contexts, fathers in couples who use surrogacy to start a family and their children fare well. Despite this, little is known about the psychological well-being of single fathers who use surrogacy as a route to parenthood (Murray, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The natural need of humans is sexual reproduction, but also the establishment of emotional relationships. Throughout history, marriage has not only been an emotional union but also a property union. In the 19th century, it became a property and emotional union, and people invested their time in finding a partner with whom to start a family. Life circumstances sometimes separate people from classic unions, whether through the death of a partner, divorce, etc., and new forms of families develop, such as single-parent families with a male or female head of the family, and queer single-parent families.

With the advancement of medicine, it is possible to have a child with the help of artificial insemination or an egg donor, which is also supported by legal norms. Along with evolutionary necessity, LGBTQ parenthood and single parenthood are becoming possible for every person who wants to experience it, whether they are heterosexual couples or homosexual couples, infertile, LGBT, or people living alone who cannot conceive or have children in traditional ways.

LGBT single-parent families and single mothers and fathers can now receive adequate support, which was not the rule in the past, which makes it easier to raise children growing up in such families and reduces the burden on these parents.

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