

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES-SOCIAL STATUS, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that pluralization of society and societal conditions have an impact on the modern family, its role and structure. Changes in the hierarchy of societal values and attitude of society towards family lead to significant changes in its structure and way of functioning. The image of the family consisting of father, mother and children has more often been replaced by the image of families with one parent and children. There are multiple causes of single-parent families (single parenthood) such as death, divorce, abandonment of the family by one of the parents, etc. The positions and attitude of society towards single-parent families is different and it's actually depending on the cause of their occurrence. The aim of this paper was to identify basic needs and challenges of single-parent families in Serbia. For this purpose, we have organized three focus groups with 18 single mothers (six in each focus group). The results are presented in the context of creating new policies for improving the position of single-parent families in Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

Today, with the general increasing trend of divorces, there are more and more single-parent families where the whole childcare is being carried out by one parent, usually mother. Regardless of the widespread of phenomenon and increased number of single-parent families, there is lack of research in our country and region dealing with this phenomenon. Determination of the term "single parent" is not clearly specified in Serbian legislation; even The Law on Financial Support for Families with Children² is missing glossary. In this paper, the term "single-

parent" is defined as a parent: *who lives alone with child, regardless of whether he/she receives or not child support. He is characterized as a single, because in court decision when child is entrusted to one of the parents, stands that "he/she is having independent custody.*

Conceptual determination issue is reflected in the term that indicates that parent alone, without the help of other parent, takes care of the child. Depending on the interpretation, it assumes that parent is: alone, independent, lonely, left to its own, single or in common law marriage.

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²The Law on Financial Support for Families with Children,
„Službeni glasnik RS“, br. 16/2002 i 115/2005.

Hence, this term would include several, according to the needs and problems, heterogeneous groups of parents: those whose partner have died, whose partner have not recognized paternity and those who have become single by court decision of independent custody. By the Dictionary of Social Work, single parent is a term that refers to the circumstances when only one parent, for objective or subjective reasons, is taking care of child or children. The objective reasons include: death of spouse, child/children custody to one of the parents after divorce, partner's illness, extended leave for serving the sentence, military service, etc... The subjective reasons include circumstances such as: child birth outside marriage or female artificial insemination providing that father is unknown. The fact that only one parent takes care of posterity may be aggravating only when one of the parents, even though he/she has capabilities, refuses to give financial support or otherwise participate in child support and education (Vidanovic, 2006).

Because of the lack of state concern and help, in some countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia...) single parents organize their associations. When it comes to eligibility on the basis of single parenthood, divorced parents do not have legal status of single parent if there is a legal decision to pay child support. However, they often face the same problems as single parents, especially when it comes to psychological and social aspects of these problems. The most common reason for father's absence from family is divorce. Having all this in mind, in this article the term "*single parent*" includes all parents who independently take care of child/children regardless of the causes of occurrence of single-parent families.

Since the single-parent families are very heterogeneous group within which not necessarily all are at risk of having the same rights or in meeting the same needs, and as they have quite different ways of coping with difficulties, the aim of this paper is to describe the position of single parents in Serbia by displaying theirs (parent's) rights and needs, self-perceptions of single parents, challenges and difficulties they are facing and social stigmas that are attributed to them. Based on the identified needs and priorities, the suggestions for improving the quality of life of single-parent families will be created.

Statistics

In last fifty years, the share of non-marital births in total births has significantly increased in all European countries. The same applies to Serbia, where in the period 1950-2008 the share of non-marital births has increased for 2.8% (from 8.0% to 22.8%) and their number for one fifth (from 13.141 to 15.747). Simultaneously, the total number of births within marriage has been reduced to one third – from 150 thousands in 1950 to 53 thousands in 2008 (Penev & Stankovic, 2010).

In the period 1968-2005 in Europe, the percentage of children living with one parent has risen from 6% to 16%, the largest percentage of these children (90%) live with their mothers. In European countries, women are dominated in single-parent families, mostly in Portugal (94%), while the highest percentage of single fathers (about 20%) is in Denmark, Luxembourg and Finland (Stankovic & Penev, 2010). In Croatia, 83% of single-parent families are families consisting of mothers with children, while fathers with children count only 17% of single-parent families. The Nordic countries and France have the highest number of single-parent families. Countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, UK, Germany and Austria are among the countries with an average level of prevalence, while in Ireland it is significantly less. However, in southern Europe, cohabitation is not spread in such an extent. Among persons in the age group 30-39 years, cohabitations represent half of all partner communities in Sweden; one third in Finland, Denmark and France, and in UK, the Netherlands and Austria one quarter. Every fifth unmarried couple of this age group is cohabitation in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Ireland and Luxembourg, while in Portugal and Greece it's every tenth (Kiernan, 1999; Kasearu, 2007). In Serbia, the number of single-parent families is unknown as it involves several different categories, which have already been mentioned above. Namely, the existing data shows that the proportion of single mothers with children is 12%, but it does not show why they are considered as single mothers. During the 1990's, the category of single mothers in Serbia has increased for about 50%. The increase in this category was affected by the increase in divorces. In the period of 1971-2002, the divorce rate has risen from 1.2% to 1.4% in central Serbia (Bobic, 2004).

The increase in number of single-parent families (mothers with children) have been caused by significant increase in non-marital births which was registered in 1990's. In the period from 1991 (13.5%) to 2001 (20.2%), the significant increase in non-marital birth was reported, and according to this every fifth child in new millennium was born outside marriage (Bobic, 2004).

Eligibility on the basis of single parenthood

Depending on the country, single mothers are two to three times more likely at risk of poverty than in average population and if we want to prevent transmission of poverty from one generation to another, improvement of the status of these families is of vital importance. These data shows that, there is a large number of single parent families, but the largest number of them in Serbia are women (Bobic, 2004). However, to a certain extent there are some data about single mothers, but single fathers are social group that has been very neglected and invisible so far. They say for themselves that they feel "invisible", lonely and socially excluded (Raboteg-Saric & Pecnik, 2010).

Single parents in Serbia are eligible to number of rights on the basis of single parenthood. One of these rights is the right to increased child allowances by submitting request to municipal administration for child care in their place of residence (<http://www.cekos.rs/rešenje-ocenazusima-za-dečiji-dodatak-od-13-08-2012-godine>, December 2012). In majority of cases, Centers for Social Work (CSW) do not record single parents as specific category of users, but like all other citizens who can be entitled to social welfare system if they meet certain conditions. Depending on income, single parents are having right to cash social assistance, allowance for care and assistance of another person and increased allowance for care and assistance of another person, free meals at public kitchen, and the city of Belgrade provides regular financial support, scholarship for students, as well as regular financial support for women victims of domestic violence after leaving the Safe House. According to the Law on Social Protection², if one parent is not working but

taking care more than 15 years, for a child who se needs for care and assistance of another person, enable them increased allowance, by the general regulations of pension system, can get special allowance in the amount of minimum pension, which also applies to single parents. When it comes to eligibility to any financial assistance, all income must be taken into consideration, including child support, and if it's not paid, it is necessary to submit proof. Along these material support, in Belgrade non material support, such as counseling and psychological support, is available to single parents. Since this is a service that is provided on the local level, it's missing in many municipalities. It is obvious that eligibility is on the basis of materially vulnerability, and not on the basis of single parenthood, which is the biggest problem for single-parent families. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Article 66)³ states that single parents, as well as families and children in general, are having special protection. Unfortunately, it is missing legislative operationalization of this provision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Mouvement Mondial des Meres (MMM), nongovernmental organization which is in cooperation with EU working on representing the needs and interests of single parents, there is consensus between interviewed women, that motherhood was irrevocable and profound change in their lives, which was for most of them was experience they were not adequately prepared for. However, all spoke about the immense joy of motherhood, and agreed that it is worth all the trouble.

Three major problems faced by single parents and which transcend national, cultural and socio-economic differences are:

- 1) Reconciliation of family life with professional life,
- 2) Social recognition and affirmation of motherhood and family labor,
- 3) More time for taking care and commitment to children.

²The Law on Social Protection, „Službeni glasnik RS“ br.24/2011.

³The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, „Službeni glasnik RS“ br. 98/2006.

Reconciliation of family and professional life of mother is seen through: the need to adjust the working hours with children school work (corporate managers, flexible time schedules), and most emphasized the necessity and importance of making certain financial decisions that would allow them to spend more time with their children. Eighty percent of mothers wanted to be with the children until the child is at the age of three or even until the child begins to go to school. When children reach school age, and while they are in their teens, mothers want to have the ability to opt for flexible hours or work part-time, which would be in line with school classes and children's responsibilities.

Although single parents who take care of their child alone find that harder than those who share responsibilities, they all have the same needs though, the same experience of importance in parental role, the same need for recognition of responsibility and time to fulfill their role. Loneliness in parenting, time pressure and lack of money often creates more stress and greater insecurity, which has a domino effect on children. According to the EC report on child poverty, single parent families are at the biggest risk of poverty in the EU, and by far the largest part of single parent families are those with single mothers (COM, 2010)

In economic terms, the appeal of single-parent families in all countries of the EU refers to the need for financial compensation for parenting function performance. Understanding and recognition of economic value of unpaid family labor would lead to financial compensation by building a system of pensions and part-time work. This proposal would contribute to a greater involvement of fathers, which is, the main condition for the improvement of singlemothers in general, and especially divorced or mothers who got separated.

Besides legal, in the world there are various forms of institutional support to single parents. The problem of single parenthood can be solved by "networks" of counseling for parents and parenting schools. So, for example, in Stockholm (Sweden), in every bigger municipality there is a family center where various experts (psychologists, social workers) are providing counseling support to single-parent families.

Given the above-mentioned problems in defining categories of single parents, research dealing with the aspects of Single Parents in Serbia is largely missing. According to data from comprehensive

research, single parents and their children are at greater risk than the rest of the population. Research of the economic security and parenthood (Fackson, Bentler, Franke, 2010) found that employment and adequate wages are main preventive factors when it comes to the life satisfaction of parenting (Hoffhian & Youngblade, 1999). According to the data of various researches the most vulnerable families are the one whose members have insecure employment, single parents and marginal groups who mostly consist of women (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

Numerous studies (Fackson, Bentler & Franke, 2010) has also shown that single mothers are at higher risk of depression and depressive symptoms in relation to the total population, especially if they are unemployed and economically dependent on the help system.

The Social Inclusion and the Serbian Poverty Reduction and the World Bank, as part of the research impact of the crisis on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, identified the following issues for single mothers in Serbia:

- staying out of work and less abilities to find a new job, the problem about education and child care costs, health care, lack of benefits when applying for kindergarten;
- insufficient protection by the state in the following areas:
 - 1) Lack of mechanisms to collect alimony or to obtain child support in some cases (when men are changing jobs or having private businesses) can take a long time, even up to two years;
 - 2) If they are unemployed it is very hard for them to find preschool institution, and if their child does not attend day care they are not able to work at all;
 - 3) Mothers complain that they are often faced with blackmail and exploitation at different levels, because they are perceived as unprotected (Ipsos, 2009).

Research of the impact of poverty and temporary jobs on single mothers (Cherlin, 2009) has shown that the non-standard working hours proved to be a factor which increases family conflict (Staines & Shoulders, 1983), increased parental stress (Joshi & Bogen, 2007) and reduces joint family activities (Staines & Shoulders, 1983). Research (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002) has shown that the presence of social support networks and flexible working hours enable single mothers to find a partner, and reduce parenting stress.

Societal attitudes and self-perception

Family structures can often have the potential for stereotyping and labeling people (e.g., not married mother, a single father). Research on students, teachers, nurses and social workers are found and determined that the family structure is a social category to which stereotypes are being created. Ganong et al (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies of stereotypes associated with family structure. It was found that people who were considered to come from a nuclear family (married adults, children from two parent families) are evaluated more positively than those who were considered to come from other types of families (adults who were not married, children from single-parent families). In the eighties, they argue that the nuclear family, consisting of mother, father and children is perceived as functional and "normal", while all other forms of stereotyped family as dysfunctional. It was especially positive image of motherhood in the context of the traditional nuclear family than in other contexts. The stereotype of the divorced mother is dyed with their perceived failure in the area of marriage and family life, while unmarried mothers are observed even deviant, difficult to meet the demands of parenting, family relationships and life in general (Ganong & Coleman, 1995). Recent research also found negative stereotypes about people from unconventional families. For example, in relation to the parents who are married, single and divorced parents are described as the one who have a poor family relationships in greater extent and poor parenting skills: They are mostly perceived as irresponsible, selfish and impatient (Bennett & Jamieson, 1999). Some studies point to differences in social attitudes toward various subgroups of single parents with regard to gender or how they became single. Bennett and Džemison when examining the different groups of parents in the UK have confirmed the existence of stereotypes about married, divorced and unmarried parents who are identified in the previously described studies in the United States (Ganong & Coleman, 1995).

Camera (Kammer, et al. 2010) has analyzed how women construct the identity and adapt to the image that society has of them. She has analyzed the discourses that construct subjectivity stigmatizing single mothers and came to the conclusion that under certain conditions, women adapt or resist

to such an image. The study of the cultural context of single mothers were investigated, and the marginalization of issues that affect the formation of identity and self-perception single mothers (Josephson, 2002; Richardson & Taylor, 2008). This research deals with impacts, i.e. analysis of the impact of social policy on vulnerable groups, and policy sensitive to the needs of these groups (Murphy, Hunt, Zajiček, Norris & Hamilton, 2009).

The purpose of the research

Main assumption of this research was that the needs of single parents in Serbia and the world is not different, but the options for meeting those needs vary from state to state. The aim of this study was to identify the main problems of single-parent families and gather suggestions for improving their position in society. In order to influence policy-makers to engage single-parent families in legal regulations as vulnerable group, which would provide eligibly on basis of single parenthood? The expected differences in self-perception dimension, because it is considered socially and culturally specific. Positive or negative self-perception points to support or stigma that society attributes to single parenthood.

METHODOLOGY

In order to gain deeper insight into the position of single mothers, three focus groups with single mothers have been organized. Guide for focus group was created based on the analysis of relevant legislation, results of previous researches and interviews with representative of Association of single mothers, Zemun. At the end of focus groups parents were asked about their needs and support needed to improve their life situations. This question was important because the aim was also to communicate attitudes and perception of single mothers and present them to policy makers and other researchers, as well as to empower users through active participation.

Participants were selected on the basis of mother's income and education, with the support of the Association of Single Mothers, Zemun. Income was taken as a criterion for the formation of focus groups because it is an important factor in determining support from social welfare institutions, and also determines the level of support that mother can provide in raising a child.

Also one of the goals was to identify available support to parents in relation to financial situation. Insufficient income increases the number of working hours of parents, which negatively influence the quality of life of single parent families. The assumption is that a lack of material resources contributes to negative self-perception of parental capabilities and competencies. Therefore, we hypothesized that mothers with different level of income face different problems, and therefore they need different types of formal support.

Association informed its members about the research and asked them to sign up for the focus group. There were three groups: low income (who cannot meet basic needs), middle income (who can meet only basic needs) and high income (who provide for all their needs). Total of 18 mothers participated in focus groups, 6 mothers per group. Focus groups were carried out during November 2011 in the office of the Association.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus group results will be presented by the topics that were dominant for all three groups:

1. Specific difficulties that single-parent families are faced with
2. The needs of parents
3. Self-perception and marginalization

Specific difficulties that single-parent families are faced with

Single parents in all three groups stressed the *economic situation* as the most important problem of single parenthood. In the low-income group, which mainly consists of single mother with primary school education, financial situation is shown to be extremely difficult and existentially threatening. They have expressed uncertainty when it comes to meeting their basic needs (nutrition of children, paying taxes/bills).

Mother (55), unemployed, four children:

“Every month I face the same situation, I don’t have a roof over my head and if I do not pay the rent, landlord will kick me out, and if I do pay the rent, I don’t have enough to provide food for my children...”

In the focus groups with middle income families, financial situation has been characterized as difficult for several reasons. The dominant reason

is that the other parent does not pay child supporter they pay part of what is supposed. A certain number of participants stated that a problem is that former partners abuse financial aid (by not paying alimony or paying it irregular), thereby trying to control their lives even after separation. Economic problems are especially accentuated for parents who have more children and whose children suffer from a chronic illness. As one of the reasons for financial problems they also pointed out the inability to reconcile family and professional life, which is why they were unable to hold a steady job. Frequent changes of job and lack of time did not allow them to advance and get well paid job. Only the parents who are living in an extended household with their parents had slightly higher financial security.

All parents have also stressed lack of in situation a land informal support as a very important problem. In this case, most difficulties were expressed by mothers with the lowest income. They pointed out that they have no institutional support, that they perceive that employees of the CSW condemned them for their choice and that they do not sufficiently inform them about their rights.

Mother (20), pregnant with a child:

“When I have been in CSW to get help, they had told me they cannot give me any money and that it is my own fault that I have many children without resources to care for them ...”

Single parents with middle income are not satisfied by their relationship with professionals and cooperation with institutions of social protection, primarily because the law does not adequately recognize single parents as group that need social support in order to meet their needs. Mothers with high income similarly pointed out that they lack institutional support in the form of services that are tailored to the needs of single parents. They also describe their relationship with professionals as fair, although they think that CSW did not help much because legislation, do not recognize needs of single, so they are practically invisible. The reason for this difference regarding relationship of professionals toward single mothers can be explained by the marginalization of single women with low income and basic education on the one hand, as well as a lack of information of these women about their rights, leading to false expectations of professionals.

As only non-institutional support, single parents recognize support from their parents, relatives and friends, but they also report that they rarely use this kind of help. The main reasons for low informal social support from parents, mothers with low incomes identify high workload of their parents, illness or old age. Help from friends is lacking mostly because they were often moving.

Mother (55), unemployed, and four children:
"Everything depends on me, and I'm not sure I can do it ..."

For single parents with medium income, support of friends is rarely used for fear that they will not be able to repay this assistance which may eventually affect their relationship. The group of mothers with high income was heterogeneous regarding reasons for lacking informal social support, but unanimous in attitude that they would use it if it was available.

Poor financial situation is main reason for concern and fear of single parents. They point out that their biggest fear is that they will not be able to pay their bills and feed their families. Parents with the lowest income even fear that state authorities do not take away the children, due to lack of funds. Related to this fear is the need for mechanism that will assure support of other parent in caring for child needs. A certain number of parents in all three groups stated loneliness and the fear of failing in parenting as possible difficulties.

Single mother (30), employed, higher income, higher educated:

"Whenever I go to the birthday parties and the events with my child I'm alone, all the other kids come with their mom and dad, and mine is always only with me. I feel that my child is missing a father figure and a someone who is going to share the parenting with me ..."

The needs of parents

Single parents in all three groups similarly verbalized their needs and agreed that their needs are no different from the needs of other parents, but that they need more support from the government and relevant institutions. As the most important, they identified the need for the introduction of rights regarding single parenting. The differences mainly were in the following: lower-income parents demanded more financial secu-

rity, in particular through the ability to actualize privileges from their tenancy status, more information on rights, free legal advice and representation in court over child support implementation, better treatment from professionals and benefits in terms of education, access to medical care and development of children (free checks, medicines, books, equipment for school, help in clothing and free meals at school).

Middle-income parents also requested rights regarding their single parents' status and formulated them as the need for a higher standard of living. Better standard for them means: organizing services where they could leave their children for babysitting while at work or in order to have some time only for themselves. This service should be either free or by a beneficial price, because their financial situation does not allow them to pay the full cost of an extended stay.

The advantage in getting a job based by single parent status is the second right that the entire group stressed out as significant, and also the release from night work and flexible working hours. According to The Labor Law (Article 91)⁴: "a single parent who has a child under seven years of age or a child with severe disability can work overtime or at night, only with his consent in writing". Thus, the legislation protect single parents from night work, but only if they have a child under the age of 7, and parents' attitude is that this measure is necessary in a much longer period for the child. Middle-income parents also stressed the fact that child allowance should be paid to children regardless of their financial situation, financial situation of the family, so it would be a measure of support for single parent families.

Single mothers of the third group formulated rights on the base of single parent status primarily through the creation of professional psychological support and counseling where they could turn for help. No parent (in any of the focus groups) did use counseling services and / or psychological help. The only kind of support and help was psychosocial support through the Association and it was evaluated as very useful. However, in a group of parents with middle and lower income need for advisory assistance was not recognized as extremely important.

⁴The Labor Law, "Sluzbeni glasnik RS", 54/09.

Low-income mothers have pointed out that because of the difficult financial situation and commitments (work) they do not have time to go to counseling, while middle-income parents pointed out that the assistance of professionals does not mean much and that they feel more comfortable in self-help groups, like the Association, because they share the same concerns and problems, they feel a better understanding and that they can help each other with their experience.

Mother (42), unemployed, widowed:

"In this group we all became friends. We think of each other, congratulate each other's birthdays and share our troubles... Our women do not like institutions, we have all experienced the inconvenience, they are like some gendarmes who judge us and work for the government, not for us ..."

Single mother (30), unemployed:

"Here (at the Association) we all have similar problems, and when you hear someone else's, and you see that the others are struggling and that you're not the worst, and all of them listen to you and give advice, and no one condemns..."

Mothers in the third group were also asking for employment benefits, and their greatest need is steady work, because it would provide security and stability for them.

Self-perception and marginalization

One of the topics of conversation was how they perceive themselves as single parents, and whether they feel that they are condemned or in any way marginalized by their environment for being single parents. In the low-income group mothers said that they feel marginalized only by professionals in the CSW. They said they had experienced condemnation and embarrassment, that they were seldom heard and given some support.

Unemployed (50), single mother of four children:

"They look at me like I'm happy that I'm in this situation and as they give me the money out of their pockets, saying to me: "Why did you give birth to so many children when you do not have means for supporting them. If you have no money, we'll put the children in foster care"

In the middle-income group parents were at different ages, and the basis on which they become self-supporting, and therefore gave different answers. Widows said they have never been discriminated against and that the environment for them has always been benevolent and willing to help them because of their position. Divorced women are perceived differently reaction environment on their site, but did not describe the feeling of serious marginalization or experience shame, humiliation and inferiority. The greatest condemnation of the environment was experienced by women who have given birth out of marriage. In addition to the experience of loneliness in parenting, they often mentioned the environment condemnation. The issue of marginalization was mostly apparent in the youngest group of single mothers with middle-income:

27 years, had a child with 17 years:

"I'm the youngest mom at PTA meetings and there I felt the contempt the most and was looked askance by other parents ..."

Most of the mothers who gave birth out of marriage in all three focus groups, said that because of the condemnation of society and the autonomous child care *"do not have a life, a partner, have a few friends and difficulties to make new friends"*.

Regarding that there are different responses to the question of marginalization from the parents with basic and parents with middle-and upper-income (which is related to education and belonging to different social groups), also their perspectives on over coming discrimination differ too. Low-income women reported that professionals should be more sensitive to their position and do not condemn, while the parents of middle and upper-income emphasized that personal attitude has allot to do with the experienced marginalization and discrimination of the environment. They said that it is important that they feel confident and good, because that is the only way to be able to prevent negative attitudes and convictions, and be a good role model for their children. About this issue the parents in all three focus groups were most supportive. Those who feel discriminated against are encouraged, empowered, supported and advised on how to over come this situation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMANDATIONS

Given the challenges they face, and because of the different positions and the grounds on which they became self-supporting it is important to point out some recommendations that, at different levels, could promote position of single-parent families.

Firstly, it is necessary to improve living standards of single-parent families - improve economic situation of single-parent families, to ensure the effective realization of alimony and provide employment and vocational adjustment with parental roles.

Then there are recommendations with respect to information about rights and the availability of support:

- Single parents should be informed about their rights and possible forms of assistance
- Ensure availability of professional psychological help for single parent and child,
- Provide counseling and practical support to socially isolated single mothers,
- Encourage the establishment and operation of the association for single parents.

In institutions that provide assistance to single parents (CSW, counseling for marriage and family, etc.) is especially important for professionals to nurture non- judgmental attitude towards clients and to engage them in the decision-making process in regard to their future. In this way it supports the family and prevents children entering the social welfare system as children without parental care. Creation of new counseling and support services governmental and non-governmental organization would provide support to parents throughout Serbia. This service could help both psychologically and organizationally, by searching for networks and resources to help parents cope even without additional financial aid from CSW which often is not enough. Eligibility on the basis of delivering the priority of single parents in employment and protecting them from being fired from work, would engage wider community, especially employers, to become more sensitive to the needs and problems of this social group.

At the level of community it is necessary to sensitize society to the problems of single parenthood and prevent the spread of marginalization and discrimination of single-parent families. In addition, it would be useful to encourage premarital, marital counseling and post -divorce counseling that would help to separate the partnership role from parental, and although the partnership is ended, parents could

preserve their parental roles.

Neglect of the public interest in single-parent families is evident by the small number of research on the subject both in Serbia and in countries in the region.

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