



New Trends  
in Psychology

## Maternal Single Parent Family

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**Abstract:** Single parenthood following divorce often brings with it a decrease in the mother's involvement in her children's upbringing, as demonstrated in a study by Bawin-Legros. This is explained by the mother's emotional overload. Single parenthood is slowly turning from a stigma into a common feature, from abnormal to normal. The most consistent argument in this regard is that more than a quarter of families in Romania are single-parent families. When families become single-parent families as a result of divorce or separation of parents, the ties between the child and the parent with whom he or she does not live permanently tend to break down in a very large number of cases.

**Keywords:** single parent family; roles; children; parents; models; psychological effects

### Introduction

Single-parent families are families where children live with only one parent. This can happen as a result of divorce, parental separation, the death of a parent, the adoption of a minor by an adult, or a woman's decision to give birth to a child without being married or living with a man. In Romania, as in most countries in the world, most single-parent families are headed by women<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Study On The Evolution Of The Phenomenon Of Monoparental Families In Romania, Archived 6 December 2011, at the Wayback Machine. by the National Institute of Statistics.



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When a family becomes single-parent as a result of divorce or separation of parents, the ties between the child and the parent with whom he or she does not live permanently tend to break down in a very large number of case<sup>1</sup>.

This type of single-parent family is getting more attention from researchers because most single parents are women rather than men. Thus, the most common situations are those of divorce, with custody frequently going to mothers and less to fathers. This is why most single-parent families are made up of women with one or more dependent children.

As a result, the single mother is unable to perform efficiently and effectively at certain tasks (role overload). In the case of women with higher education and financial possibilities, the problems are fewer than in the case of those with lower education. Thus, the problem of absence from work due to child illness, school holidays and care and supervision of young children is more difficult for mothers with lower social status.

Dilation of the parental role has the effect of emphasising more authoritarian fathers in childcare. Another change in the family is the increased responsibility given to the first-born child over older siblings ('child parenting'). The single mother's stressful experience is generated by the fact that she has to participate in most of the family activities (domestic tasks, childcare, personal self-care time and social and recreational activities).

In conclusion, many single-parent families are headed by a mother - divorced and/or still young. This results in a number of changes in relationships with children, which can be seen in the weakening of the boundaries between the predictable roles of adult and child and which is reflected in a value of these roles. Many women find this status extremely stressful, but try to adapt in a variety of ways.

Often, the mother's sexual function is downplayed because lack of time and social preconceptions which, despite the fact that this is a common situation today, still persist, make it difficult to find a partner who will accept such a situation. The

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<sup>1</sup> ii See the Kruk Study which states, "Despite the existence of several possible options for resolving the custody issue through court orders in adversarial divorce and the numerous post-divorce parenting options, maternal custody coupled with the provision of a paternal visitation program for children continues to be the dominant structural arrangement for divorced families in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In addition, the reported rates of paternal disengagement after divorce in each of these countries are identical: half of non-custodial fathers gradually lose contact with their children. *Journal of Social Work/* Volume 39, Issue 1/ January 1994).

responsibilities of a single mother increase, both in terms of the family environment and the external, social environment, regardless of status - widowed, divorced or single.

Single parenthood following divorce often brings with it a decrease in the mother's involvement in her children's upbringing, as demonstrated in a study by Bawin-Legros. This is explained by the mother's emotional overload. After such a break, the capacity for 'parenting' is greatly reduced, resulting in poorer quality communication and lower emotionality.

Sometimes, the mother may "abdicate" the role of parent, trying to create a friendly relationship with the child, turning him into a kind of "partner". This is why, as Glenwick's 1986 study showed, she may demand a greater degree of maturity from the child than he can give. The child, in turn, assumes the role of confidant, totally inappropriate for his age. Problems will gradually arise because, with each living in a role other than the normal one, a situation will arise in which the conflicts between the two parents are imitated, even if it is now a question of mother and child. Pressured to take on the role of confidant-partner, the child will be punished, unconsciously, by the mother for the 'sins' of the former partner. Moreover, because the child is not at a sufficient stage of development to understand and express his conflicts and emotions, these can become frustrations that will mark him in the long term.

Seeing how much influence this status has on the mother, it's no wonder that the little ones become, in turn, confused and not easy to raise and educate. If, for example, the current situation is brought about by the parents' divorce, there are countless ways in which the child can react. They can become aggressive, sad, frustrated, confused, anxious, ashamed, rebellious, etc. The factors that influence their behaviour after their parents' divorce are very diverse: gender, age, temperament, the quality of their relationship with their parents and many others.

The child develops an inferiority complex towards those children who come from two-parent families, and this situation leaves deep scars that will continue to manifest themselves for many years after the child has left the parental nest, especially when it comes to social integration.

There are also shortcomings in the educational plan, because the mother, now alone, no longer has time to take care of him as she would have done when all the chores

were divided between two people. This situation is also caused by the lack of sufficient communication between mother and child, also due to lack of time.

It has been shown statistically that boys from single-parent families have a higher rate of deviant behaviour, caused by the inability to perform some of the functions characteristic of a two-parent family. Children from single-parent families also generally have social problems, caused not only by an inferiority complex, but also by a lack of paternal affection or an inability to learn habits that would normally be learned in a two-parent family.

In the study by Bawin - Legros (1988), it was shown that most behavioural problems (child abandonment, illegitimate births, dropping out or failing at school, personality disorders or delinquency) occur in families where children have been raised by a single parent. Psychological and relational traumas are often those that mark the life of a child who has experienced the divorce of his or her parents. In another study, it was shown that girls from families where the father was absent are more unconsciously attracted to the male presence around them than those from two-parent families.

For the child, the mother is the part of existence in which he finds the satisfaction of his needs and the relaxation of his tensions, pleasant stimuli, opportunities to “recognize himself through them” and to discover the meaning of the various situations in which he is involved. This situation has been very well formulated by Plaquevent: “In this first experience of life and love, everything is intimately blended into a unity that is at once essential and inimitable: the quenching of hunger and thirst, the rhythm of sleep warming and cooling, the security of the smile, the reassuring presence, allusions of all kinds, the music of the voice, and of the hands, and of the water, and of the skin, of the splashes, of the ambient air, of the humming. A whole symphony of movements in which the being inside and the images outside are in intimate continuity, in which nothing the child receives is yet distinct from its own existence. Everything is maternal. A maternal flavour is the first taste that life has, its primordial coloring, and it remains forever, like the background of a painting that nothing that is superimposed afterwards will be able to cover.”

Hanselmann believed that the absence of a father during childhood had the effect of suppressing the child’s desire for achievement, the desire to “become somebody”, and preventing the development of a professional ideal. He considered that a child without a father cannot acquire the self-confidence necessary to set goals and try to

achieve them, and that he becomes more aware of the supra-individual values which must condition his behaviour.

In these words, the structure of the child's personality remains deficient, especially in terms of its orientation towards a personal future and extra-familial realities. More recent work has to some extent confirmed this view. Thus, by comparing a large sample of difficult children with others who did not have behavioural problems, it was found that paternal deficiency was much more frequent in the former. Significantly more of them had lost their fathers either through death or leaving home.

Based on clinical observations, Isaacs was able to show that the death of the father is deeply felt by the child, that it is all the more damaging the younger the child is and the less able to form an objective idea of things. The father's absence is a feature of his role, but the child who no longer sees him coming home is deeply distressed; it is as if the father is causing him cruel frustration; "Daddy doesn't want to come and see me anymore?" asked a little girl who was told that her father had died. If the all-powerful being disappears, it means that this was his will, it means that he is distancing himself from the child and leaving him; in these circumstances, feelings of hostility and guilt are never far away and they will disturb the child's equilibrium all the more as the disappearing authority no longer offers reassuring protection. In reality, the most urgent task is to provide the child with a substitute for the father, which is perhaps easier psychologically than finding a substitute for the mother. There are two family models that a single mother can adopt. The first is the classic feeling of marginalization. The second, however, is the image of an alternative family, another way of living, perhaps more mature and closer to reality than the traditional one.

Single parenthood is slowly turning from a stigma into a common element, from abnormal to normal. The most consistent argument in this regard is that more than a quarter of families in Romania are single-parent families. It is the ideology adopted by the mother that forms the basis of a whole, on which the child's subsequent development depends, as well as the mother's mental health and satisfaction.

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